

Life Group Notes

Series: God is closer than you think

Open to All!

Isaiah 56:1-8

To begin

'At the grand opening ceremony for Disney World Florida, a junior employee expressed his sadness that Walt Disney's death meant he had not lived to see the brand new theme park. One of his managers overheard and shot back a famous reply: "Didn't live to see it? Didn't live to see it? Believe me, Walt Disney saw this theme park. It's the only reason that you and I are standing here!" (Quoted by Phil Moore in *Straight to the Heart of Isaiah*)

Some of us may have been to one of the Disney Worlds. The vision became a reality. Isaiah 56-66, a vision is laid out for a new city that God wants to build. In this series, we'll be looking at how God wants us to be a part of making that vision a reality!

Questions for discussion

1. Have you ever had experience of being the odd one out? What does it feel like? For what did you long?
2. Isaiah speaks of two categories who had experience of being the odd one out: the eunuch and the foreigner. They were forbidden from Temple worship and excluded from the assembly of the people of God (see Deut 23:1-14). Effectively, the people of Israel were holding up 'No Entry' signs to certain types of people. How do have churches – today and through the ages – held up 'No Entry' signs?
3. Take a look at the story of Rahab (Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-23; cf Matthew 1:5). Did she deserve to have the 'No Entry' sign taken down for her? Why or why not?
4. What encouragement does our reading give to the eunuch and the foreigner who have felt and been excluded? What might this say to us about the welcome we give in our church?
5. Isaiah 56 says to those who have been excluded that they can belong. What does it say about their subsequent need to believe? What promises are there for those that do so?
6. In Acts 8:26-40, we find the story of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch. How does his encounter with Philip (or rather with God) begin to fulfil the hopes of Isaiah 56:1-8?
7. How have the 'No Entry' signs been taken down for us to enter God's kingdom? Did we deserve it? (See Romans 5:6-8; Ephesians 2:4-10).
8. How can we be more welcoming as a church?

To conclude, you may like to read the Church Notice that Tim shared on Sunday:

"We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, gay, confused, filthy rich, comfortable or dirt poor. We extend a special welcome to wailing babies and excited toddlers.

We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or just growl quietly to yourself. You're welcome here if you're 'just browsing', just woken up or just got out of prison. We don't care if you're more Christian than the Archbishop of Canterbury, or haven't been in church since Christmas 10 years ago.

We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60, but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome keep-fit mums, football dads, starving artists, tree-huggers, latte sippers, vegetarians, junk-food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps or don't like 'organised religion'. (We're not that keen either!)

We offer a welcome to those who think the world is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell or are here because granny is visiting and wanted to come to church!

We welcome those who are inked, pierced, both or neither. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down their throat as kids or got lost in the town centre and wound up here by mistake. We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, doubters ... and you!"

Pray that we might be a church that is open to all: that all might know that they can belong, believe and become what God wants them to be, as they are welcomed among us.

Tim Edworthy

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