

### CHARLES KIMBANGI

Welcome back to the second session in Invited. I hope you've been enjoying the daily devotionals which take you through the Book of Acts and trace how the gospel goes out from Jerusalem to the very ends of the earth. Today our theme is 'Everyone's Invited' and we will be looking at how God has always had a plan to invite people from all nations to His table. Today I've got Andrew Wilson with me. Andrew is the teaching pastor at Kings Church and he has also written several books including 'If God, then What' and 'The Life you Never Expected'. Andrew, it's great to have you here and it's great to have you as part of the team at Kings. I'm going to ask you some questions, let's dive straight in. First of all, lots of people think that the Old Testament and Jesus' ministry was all about the good news going out to the Jews. Can you explain how God has actually had a plan for a diverse people.

### ANDREW WILSON

I think I would start the journey at Genesis 12 which is right near the beginning of the first book of the Bible where we have God calling Abraham, who is the father of Israel and the father of the Jews in the end, but he gets called and gets given this mission to be a blessing to all nations. God calls him to leave your land and go into a new land I am going to show you which is the land of Israel but I am going to bless those who bless you and in you all the families of the earth are going to be blessed. So it's a strange passage because what it does is say – I have chosen this nation to be a means of blessing to every nation. There you have both the uniqueness of Israel and the extension of God's global mission to include every nation on earth, so there's a plan for diversity right at the beginning of the Bible, but it comes about through a very unique people. As you read the Old Testament it does focus mainly on the Jews but it focuses on how the Jews are intended to be preserved and given this calling and mission to reach every nation. And then what you see in the ministry of Jesus is that although His mission is mainly to the Jews, at the end of His gospel, at the end of Matthew particularly He stands up and says 'now you need to go out into all the world and make disciples of all nations'. When you get to the very end of the Bible you find every tribe and nation and people group and colour all singing songs to the same God, so it's a diversity story, but through the means of this very particular people and I think that is very important to bear in mind particularly when it comes to some of the tricky issues the early church had to deal with in the first generation because they've

got a lot of people thinking 'we're the special ones' but no you are only the special ones because you've been chosen as a means of blessing everybody.

### CHARLES KIMBANGI

That's really interesting because you mentioned the early church there, this series is based on the book of Acts and in the book of Acts which is about the gospel going out and various people included can you tell us what the early church was like in the book of Acts and this issue of diversity.

### ANDREW WILSON

Yes, it's an issue the early church was entirely Jewish so pretty much all of Jesus' disciples were Jews. You have 120 people at the start of the book of Acts, by the end we don't know how many there are but there may well be in the low 10s of thousands, certainly in the many thousands. So you've got a huge process of expansion but initially the church is Jewish and then what happens is that as Acts progresses we find people who are on the fringes of Judaism so converts to Judaism or people who are called 'God fearers' so those who respect Israel's God and are interested in Judaism but are not themselves ethnically Jewish and a big turning point is when you start getting proper Gentiles who join the church. When that happens the church has a lot of big questions to face because there is now an ethnic diversity coming in to God's people really for the first time because you do have gentiles who join Israel in the Old Testament but they join very much as outsiders attaching themselves to Israel. The challenge the church has to face is are we doing that now or are we saying you are a Gentile (you and I are Gentiles) we can have the same status and the same access to God as the people who have always been here and that question dominates the book of Acts. In many ways that's the main question that Acts is wrestling with is how do we understand the status of these new people who have joined and not been circumcised and do not trace their line right back to Abraham and so people like you and me are all outsiders, almost everyone in the western church in the west today would be an outsider in that context. The early church are in effect saying how on earth do we do that given we have always been a Jewish people. It's fascinating watching some of the things that have to be ironed out in the first few years.

## CHARLES KIMBANGI

An essential character in the book of Acts is the apostle Paul. What motivated him to go out and preach the gospel to other people when before he was persecuting the church?

## ANDREW WILSON

Well, he has this quite famous conversion story and I think for him the fascinating thing about conversion, when you and I were converted it meant I used to, I either didn't believe in God or I worshiped another god and I start worshipping the real God. But for Paul his conversion is not like that, you would say he's always been trying to follow Israel's God but he is converted in a sense from a belief that people who are preaching Jesus is risen from the dead are opponents of the real God to believing, no, I need to become one of those people I was persecuting. At the same time he gets that conversion experience of who Jesus is and that Jesus is alive, he also gets this dramatic commission to go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles, he's the most shocking person that could ever have happened to because he's about as zealous for the Torah, the Jewish law as you could be. Because he was persecuting Jews, he's not persecuting Gentiles, so when he gets commissioned to go to the Gentiles you think that is the most outrageous person God could have chosen. It is, in a sense, from the revelation of God that he goes but as he goes you realise he lives this fascinating life where he's passionate about the Jewish people and always, in almost every town he goes to he starts with the Jews and then eventually says 'oh fine I'll go and preach to the Gentiles as well'. So he's got this commission to the Gentiles but he never loses his passion for the Jewish people. It's that same both/and, right back in Abraham, to say that God is interested in this particular people doesn't contradict the idea that he is now here for everybody. So Paul is such a wonderful example for us because he doesn't jettison his ethnic heritage in order to become a missionary. He doesn't say 'oh, I just going to become vanilla, I'm not going to have any Judaism about me, I've just got to become bland'. He's like 'I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews to reach the Jews and become like them to reach the Gentiles'. And I think that when it comes to thinking about diversity in the church today is a massive thing, you don't have to disregard who you are and your heritage to go on mission and reach people like you.

## CHARLES KIMBANGI

Going now to what we experience today, clearly there was a lot of hostility between Jews and Gentiles in the early church. How does that specifically relate to us today in our context?

## ANDREW WILSON

I think there's a lot of ways the early church focused on the issues of hostility and diversity in the early church which are incredibly helpful because I think in many ways the hostility issues that they faced were greater in some ways than the ones we do. The reason I say that is because you have thousands of years in the case of Israel of them not just regarding that they are superior to other nations but actively believing that the means by which they were called to do and be was to be unlike the Gentile nations. And that was reflected in everything, it was reflected in their diet and whether or not the men had foreskins, it was incredibly prescriptive, right down to what clothes you could wear. So it was a very strong sense of identity that couldn't be compromised and so when you find Paul declaring in Ephesians chapter 2 that He Himself is our peace because He made the two one and He's abolished the dividing wall of hostility. If that was true for the relationship between Israel and the Gentiles it can certainly, and must certainly be true of relationships today, which are complex. You look at parts of the world today, Jews and Palestinians, that's a complex ethnic issue. Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, that's complex, and black and white in many parts of the world, that's complex. Muslims and Hindus in India. So you have a lot of areas where that takes a lot of work. Turks and Armenians or whatever, where you say this is significant but in a way there is no ethnic clash that has been harder to resolve or required more theological work than that between Jews and Gentiles in the first century. So when you read Ephesians and you think, He's smashed the wall in Christ, it's gone, all men have become one. You think, if that applied to them, it applies to everybody.

## CHARLES KIMBANGI

And Paul talks in Ephesians chapter 3 v 10 about how the manifold wisdom of God has been made known through the church. What did he mean by that?

Well, manifold is a beautiful word because it kind of means multi-coloured in a way. Manifold is an old rich sounding word. In the Greek Old Testament when

they translated Joseph's many coloured coat they used this word (?Greek word) and in the New Testament they used poly(?Greek word) which means multi many coloured. So an incredibly rich word trying to talk about the fact that the wisdom of God expressed through the church was always intended to be a massive range of colours, almost like when you are looking at a colour palate, it's meant to have every little nuance and shade. I think that reflects the heart of God from Genesis right through to Revelation, the people of God are meant to be truly global and truly diverse. Actually it's not diverse enough for Paul to say, we have Jews and Gentiles, he adds, it's Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, Greeks, Scythians, Barbarians, everybody. And in our world we would say it's not just black and white it's absolutely every race that needs to be integrated, every colour, every shade, every language, every dialect even. And so that sense that God's wisdom is so broad and so rich that it's meant to be expressed through every kind of human community is a massive theme for Paul and, as you know, not just Ephesians, Galatians, Romans, everywhere, and so a massive theme for us to say how do we work this out in a local church where God has called us to express that kind of wisdom in our daily lives and in our community.

### **CHARLES KIMBANGI**

It's a beautiful picture of everyone being invited to God's table, of everyone being invited in and that being shown in the church. Could you pray for us now that we would see more diversity in our church but also in the church universal and that many people would come to know Christ.

### **ANDREW WILSON**

Father, thank you so much for your manifold wisdom, multi-colour wisdom, the diversity, the people you have integrated in Christ. Thank you even for the people watching this now and the massive range of lives and backgrounds and stories that we represent and we are so thankful that is what you have accomplished for us in Christ by dying to destroy the wall of hostility that separated people. I pray that as a community and everyone watching this we would increasingly come together and be able to express that multi-coloured wisdom of God until that day when people from every tribe and tongue and nation are gathering round Your throne and singing of how worthy You are because of what You have done for us. We thank You and would ask for your help, In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **CHARLES KIMBANGI**

Everyone is invited to God's table, lots of things to think about and discuss. I hope you really enjoy your discussion groups now and we'll see you next time.

INVITED