

Before next time...

A. People tend to think there are two **ways to relate to God** - to follow him or to reject him. In fact, there are three ways: **religion, irreligion or the gospel.**

In irreligion people think they don't need God, they can get by on their own - in other words *they* are their Saviour.

In religion people may look to God as their helper or teacher or example but by doing good or performing certain rituals they think *they* will save themselves.

But **the gospel** says, you need to repent of your sins AND your religion - both are ways of avoiding having to trust in *Jesus* as your Saviour.

QUESTION: What do you think about this?

B. **Martin Luther** (the Reformer) used to say that **'religion is the default mode of the human heart'**. We might believe that we cannot be put right with God by anything we do and only Jesus can by his death for us on the cross. BUT we continue to drift back into thinking that if we pray more, or give more, or do more at church, or dress up on a Sunday etc etc God will love us more or think we really are special.

QUESTION: How true is this in your experience?

C. Once upon a time there was a gardener who grew an enormous carrot. He took it to the King and said "I want to present this as a token of my love for you." The King was touched and knowing the man's heart said, "You are clearly a good gardener, so I will give you a piece of land next to yours which I own. You can have it as a gift." The gardener was amazed and went home rejoicing. But a nobleman overheard this and thought, "If that is what you get for a carrot, what if you give the king something better?" So the next day he brought a handsome black stallion to the king and said "I want to present this as a token of my love for you." The king knew the man's heart and said, "Thank you," and took the horse and dismissed him. The nobleman was angry. Why had the king done this? The king came to him and explained, "The gardener was giving **me** the carrot, but you were giving **yourself** the horse." If we give God things in the hope that they will earn us blessings then we are not really doing anything for God but ourselves.

QUESTION: Why might we think like the nobleman?

Session 1 City The World That Is

Bible Study

In 586 BC Jerusalem was invaded by the Babylonians and the leaders of Jewish society were taken off into exile to live in Babylon. God spoke to Jeremiah, the prophet, who wrote a letter to the exiles.

- Read together Jeremiah 29:1-14

1. What does God tell the exiles to do with regard to Babylon? How do you think they would have felt hearing this?
2. How might God's people have chosen to live instead?
3. What did God want for his people (v11)? How would that happen though, according to v7? Why would that have been a surprise?
4. What was the purpose of the exile (v11-14)? Why do you think God's people needed to hear this?
5. What do these verses tell us about i) God? ii) His purposes for his people? iii) His purposes for the pagan Babylon?

Watch the DVD

Use this space to jot anything down you find helpful from Tim Keller

Tim isn't just thinking of cities per se, he defines the 'city' as 'any place of density, diversity and cultural energy', so in that sense Leyland is a 'city'.

1. Was there anything from the DVD which was new to you, or which you thought was particularly striking? Anything you were not sure about?
2. How do you view the town/area where you live? What emotions come to mind? What do you value about it?
3. Tim said
'you are going to find people of no religion, people of other religions, and people with deeply nonChristian lifestyles, and you're going to discover that many of them are kinder, deeper and wiser than you. You will also find that many of the poor and broken are much more open to the gospel of grace and more dedicated to its practical outworking than you are.'

Has that been your experience? You might like to think of examples.

4. It is often said that Christians have little impact on the world around them. Is that right? Why do you think this is?
5. The Hebrew word that Jeremiah uses for 'prosper' means more than just material well-being. It means 'to be healthy'. The idea is growth in all dimensions. What types of growth within us as a group of Christians could prosper the places in which we live?
6. In what ways can we as Christians just settle for living a life that simply resembles Leyland (ie we copy the way others live)?
7. In what ways can we retreat from or remove ourselves from Leyland or the place where we live?
8. Try and think of ways in which you and/or your Growth Group could seek INSTEAD to serve and love Leyland or the place where you live, as God intended his people to in Babylon?

Spend time in prayer

- *pray that through these studies we might be able to help each other to live out the gospel in our community*
- *pray for the particular concerns of each group member*
- *jot these down, and pray for each other during the week*