

Race, Cross, and the Christian

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[0 : 00] A couple of years ago, I was sitting with one of my girls watching a documentary in Africa, and you've got all the animals and stuff like that. They're kind of fascinated by that. And at one point of the documentary, it showed a tribal group, an African tribal group, colorfully dressed black people doing some activity, I don't know, dancing or something.

I'm not really sure exactly what it was. But at that point, my daughter jumped up off the lounge, ran over to the TV, and pointed at the people and said, I know those people. And I'm like, well, no, I don't think that's quite true.

And she was at it, yes, I have. Those people play drums. And really? I really couldn't have any idea what she was talking about. And then Nat calls out from the kitchen and said, yeah, they had an African drum troupe come through kindy in this last week.

And so it's the first time she'd ever seen a black person. When she was at kindy, she was fascinated by that. And she talked about it for some time after this TV program. And of course, seeing the black people on the TV, she just assumed they were the same people.

And naturally, what black people do is they play drums, which is partly true. But they're not the only ones who play drums. Ian Francis played drums as well. Another time, one of my girls, who was learning a little bit of Mandarin at the time, was fascinated by different languages that people speak, asked a member of our Cantonese congregation whether they spoke Cantonese.

[1 : 32] And the answer was, yes, I do. And then, after a bit of a pause, came the qualifying question. So, you speak Cantonese and normal?

And the gentle response was, no, I speak Cantonese and English. Out of the mouths of babies. I could keep going on with stories like that.

We notice difference from a very young age. Our prejudices begin early. We work on the assumption that our way of thinking, our way of doing is normal.

And other people are not normal. They are just different. Now, on one level, it can be intriguing. At worst, it becomes rampant racism, which demeans and segregates.

And so, over the next five weeks, as Sam has said, I'm going to take a look at a very complex issue, race and ethnocentricity. That's our topic for the next five weeks.

[2 : 34] And to kick us off, I've got a bunch of stuff that I want to say by way of orientation before we get to the Bible. So, firstly, defining racism and ethnocentricity is not easy.

In most cases, they are used interchangeably, which is basically what I will do throughout this series, unless I say, no, no, no, when I say racism, I mean like this. That's quite specific about it. But generally, I'll be using them interchangeably, but they are different. Racism is an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races.

So, in that definition, I'm thinking of race primarily. I'll talk about this probably more next week when I talk about race a bit more.

Is that race is primarily in terms of physical features. Racism is therefore making judgments based on physical features.

[3 : 46] So, the focus of that particular definition is both the heart and behavior. The heart that believes that one race is more valuable than another race is a sinful heart and that sin is called racism.

The behavior that distinguishes one race is more valuable than another is a sinful behavior and that sin is racism. It is always wrong to treat a person with disrespect on the basis of their physical appearance.

That's it. You know, always wrong. No qualification to that at all. Ethnicity is a little different. It's a term that's used to stress the cultural rather than the physical aspects of group identity, such as

language, dress, food, customs, values, and sometimes religion.

The two are different, although they are connected. Ethnocentricity is when I say my ethnic group is the most valuable ethnic group and the way we do things is the way things ought to be done.

That is, I'm normal and you're not if you don't do it my way. That's ethnocentricity. So the two are different, racism and ethnocentricity, but they are connected.

[5 : 13] Where it is always wrong to judge a person on their appearance, I think we are biblically and morally bound to value some aspects of ethnicities over other aspects of ethnicities.

And where that valuing is rooted in biblical teaching about good and evil, that should not be called racism at that point.

There are aspects of every culture, such as mine, which are sinful and need of gospel transformation. Secondly, why I think this series is important for us.

I think it's important because Australia has always struggled with multiculturalism. As a multicultural society, Australia on the one hand has been remarkably hospitable towards migrants from different cultures, although there have always throughout our history been outbreaks of racial prejudice against the latest wave of migrants.

The traditional Australian attitude towards migrants from other cultures and particularly people from different races is that they have come here to become part of the Australian way of life.

[6 : 35] And that therefore means that they should be assimilated as quickly as possible. That's our thinking. The Australian psyche is we live in the greatest country in the world, apart from the United States, which says it's the greatest country in the world, but we live in the greatest country in the world.

And if you want to come to be part of this country, you're coming here to be part of the Australian way of life. You know, we are so ethnocentric.

We don't even register that people might want to come to this country because they're escaping a war-torn country, for instance, and we just happen to be the closest one or the cheapest ticket or something like that.

It doesn't even come into our way of thinking. We just think the Australian way of life, that is why the whole world wants to live here. And what that means in translation is that you are welcome, we welcome you, providing that you are prepared to embrace the Australian way of life and its values, providing that you make the learning of the English language the top priority when you come, that you don't rob Australians of jobs or other opportunities like education.

That's been in the papers recently on the North Shore. Providing that you leave all of your racial and cultural tensions behind and don't import any sort of prejudices and conflict.

[8 : 03] We've got enough of our own. Providing that you are basically assimilated. However, there is some tolerance for the preservation of harmless ethnical customs and behaviours.

We can put up with some things. You are welcome, provided you import your food. You are welcome that you do not lower the Australian standard of living by imposing too much strain upon the urban infrastructure and upon the welfare system.

Therefore, assimilation is the key to a successful immigration program. Migrants should become as invisible as possible, as quickly as possible.

We even had a term for it, the term new Australians. It was in vogue back in the 1950s and 60s, new Australians. And it implied that the goal of assimilation, of immigration, was assimilation.

That is, you are now Australian. So dump all of your cultural heritage. You're Australian now. And so while we might be hospitable and welcoming, we struggle to embrace and we significantly push back on any people group that comes here and doesn't assimilate.

[9 : 30] Why would you not want to assimilate? We struggle with that concept. I see traits of that general Australian attitude at St. Paul's.

When I first came to St. Paul's six and a while years ago, I remember speaking to a number of long-termers who said, the Chinese are taken over. They didn't just mean Chatswood. That had already happened. They were referring to here at St. Paul's.

The Chinese are taken over St. Paul's. And so I want us to be thinking about this issue for our holiness and because our church obviously is living in a very diverse neighbourhood.

I think racial struggles are an ever-present issue and I believe that we need to keep our finger on the pulse in terms of racial harmony for the glory of God, for the sake of the gospel of where we are.

Now, I don't think that it's an explicit discrimination. As Sam just said, if you're a white person, yeah, I'm not racist.

[10:40] It's an implicit discrimination. It's an inadvertent discrimination is what happens. And so I want us to even be aware of that so that we're a church that treasures Jesus together for the joy of all people.

That's the last bit of our mission statement. All people. Thirdly, by way of orientation, I don't think I'm the best person to speak on this topic.

I wrote our core values, core values like treasuring Jesus together, but I'm acutely aware of my own failure in this issue.

I grew up in a country town dominated by white Australian rural culture. There we had a few aboriginals that I engaged with at school.

There was the Greek family that owned the cafe and the Chinese family that owned the restaurant, the Chinese restaurant, that is. And, you know, that's probably a little bit oversimplistic, but you get the picture.

[11:45] You know, I grew up in a monocultural place as a camo-wearing, gun-toting.

You know, I've eaten the national emblems. And, you know, I wouldn't exactly call me a redneck, but maybe you would. I, you know, I now wear, I wore a pink shirt this morning.

So, you know, so I think, you know, but I've never, I've never worn a swastika armband. I've never regarded myself as neo-Nazi or anything. I never had a shaved head or anything like that.

I've never done that. I've just been monocultural. And so my way of doing things is the way of doing things. That's where I was. And so gradually, you know, being introduced that there are more people in the world than the 8,000 people in Narrabri has been, you know, quite a big exposure of things over the time.

And so my kids are growing up in a very different background than what I grew up on. But let me say that growing up where I did, I grew up, when I look back on it now, is I realized I was a racist through and through.

[13:03] I still am. Been working on it since 2005. And I might get to that at one point in this next four weeks, what happened in 2005.

And I grew up a racist, particularly towards Aboriginals. That was the cultural group that we bucked against the most, where I was. You know, we didn't have many Greeks or Chinese, so they, you know, didn't care.

But Aboriginals. And when I think of the jokes that I told and the demeaning way that I treated them and spoke about them, I don't really feel like I should be up here saying this on this topic.

There are those amongst you, and probably I would say more likely amongst the younger generation who have grown up like my kids will in a very diverse kind of world who are probably more advanced in your thinking, in your practice, in this than I am.

You know, let me just pause at that point. This is sort of point number four, but I'll make it point number three. I, in the next bunch of weeks, are going to say some wrong stuff.

[14:15] I'm going to say some silly stuff. I'm going to say some racist stuff, and I'm not even aware of it. Okay? Just be aware of that. It won't be deliberate.

It will be inadvertent, because I'm learning in this stuff. And so if you need to, take a chill pill before you come to church.

Okay? I'm going to say some stuff, but for some of you, you're going to go, Steve, you've just gone too political. And for some of you, it's just like, hang on a bit, you haven't gone political enough. You know, affirmative action is what we need.

Let's, for some of you, I'm not going to be biblical enough. Some of you, I'm going to be too biblical. Some of you, I've just missed the point altogether. Just, if you need to, take a chill pill before you come to church.

I'm not sure if that's an actual thing that you can buy, but you know the point. The one thing I've got going for me is that I'm the senior minister of this church.

[15:22] And when it's my burden, as it is, I can influence it to become your burden. And it is my burden. I wrote, Treasuring Jesus Together.

And that is my burden. Fourthly, this is a hot issue right now. And I think that in terms of our wider society, I mean, the newspapers even this weekend, I think that the Christian faith has got something very significant to say to our society on this issue, although I'm not convinced that they

will listen to us, the church.

Australia's Race Discrimination Commission has said a couple of weeks ago that this is the most volatile time of the past 30 years for racial tension in this country. And I want to say the Christian faith has got a contribution to make.

In fact, I want to say the contribution to make to this issue in a secular society. But I also acknowledge that the institutional church has an awful track record in such a way that no one might in fact want to listen to us.

I'll give you an example of what I mean by a great contribution to the Christian faith. The Christian faith has got a great contribution to make. W.H. Auden, he was one of the most influential writers of the 20th centuries in the English-speaking world.

[16:50] I want to clarify that from my group. 20th century. He was converted from intellectual secular humanism to Christianity in 1940 in one event.

He went to a movie theater in Manhattan where he saw a movie produced by Hitler's Third Reich. The movie followed the Blitzkrieg through Poland and it was a propaganda piece by the Third Reich of their great victory in Poland.

And in recounting the incident, he said that there were many German immigrants who had come to the U.S.

sitting in the theater with him. Now remember, this is pre-the U.S. being involved in World War II. And so, showing the movie is probably neither here nor there in some ways. And he's sitting in the movie theater, watching the movie, and he says, whenever a Polish person was brought onto the screen, normally carted around by a Nazi German, the audience would call out in one voice, kill him!

[18:08] Kill him! Kill him! And Auden was so shocked by the response of these Germans in this movie theater that he walked out stunned.

And one question ran through his mind. What response can my enlightened, secular humanism give to that evil?

To those who cry out for the blood of innocent man? And what he saw at that moment was the bankruptcy of his secular humanism, and he began to sense that the only answer to this evil can be found in God.

He was convicted of God's holiness, his own sinfulness, and he became a Christian in 1940, not long after that event. And so here's a man who sees an ethnic hatred happening, person to person, ethnic hatred, in such a way they're wanting to kill.

And he gropes around in his system of thought, his system of secular humanistic thought, which leaves God out of the picture and puts all the answers there in front of him as a human being, and thought of an, to come up with an explanation as to how can you deal with this evil, how can you fix this evil?

[19:39] And he makes his way away from secular humanism to the Christian faith because he said, God's the only answer. And having said that, there are people making the exact opposite move in the exact opposite direction because of the awful track record of the institutional church on this issue.

They're making their way into humanism because they look at the church and go, well, they've got nothing to contribute here. It's nice to hear the story of people like Auden's move into Christianity as a solution to racism, and yet there are others who are moving away from it because there have been so many professing Christians Christians and churches who have long held membership in the church and denominations and the Ku Klux Klan at exactly the same time.

That is, the church has a terrible track record in supporting racism, and so what do you do when you find stories that give you comfort that Christianity's got something to contribute? In fact, I want to say the solution to ethnic pride and other stories that show you that Christianity was part of the problem.

What you do is you go to the Bible and ask whether they got Christianity right or whether, on the other hand, they got humanism right and Christianity wrong.

And when I ask those questions, I don't see that secular humanism has got any answers to this solution, although I want to say that secular humanism, which is the dominant philosophy of our culture in which we live here in Australia, it has a bunch of great aims.

[21:27] It does want to see people as equals. It does want to promote a selfless morality and the equality of all people. It desires a more humane society.

Secular humanism is behind gay marriage and the equality of all people and everyone have love. That's secular humanism. But I'm not convinced that they can deliver on what they want, on a more equal humanity when you embrace at the same time an atheistic evolutionary theory that suggests that humans came from lower life forms.

It's not a big jump when your foundational view of the human race is simply that we have come from lower life forms.

It's not a big jump from there into racism. All you need to do is to describe all the differences around the world as well those people are less evolved than I am.

Those people have got a little way to go. They're somewhere partly between monkeys and people. That's all you need to do. And that's exactly what has happened throughout history.

[22 : 46] That's exactly what Hitler did with the Germans. He was a great fan of Friedrich Nietzsche. So while I agree with some of the outcomes, I don't think that secular humanism has got the framework that enables it to deal with racism.

Having said that, I go to the Bible and I see a totally different thing than the version of Christianity that supports racism and ethnic pride. And so I think we've got to be honest, frankly, right up for the front, be honest about our history as part of the institutional church and say that we have blown it over and over and over again on this issue.

Almost every people group has got a story to tell of the failure of the institutional church and I don't think we need to fight that. I don't think we should fight that. I think all we need to say is to say, I know and I'm sorry not all those who profess to be followers of Jesus are followers of Jesus and those of us who are followers of Jesus like me are so imperfect that I'm going to blow it again and again and again.

But can we please at the very least let the Bible and Jesus have its say here. And so that's what we're going to do over the next five weeks. That's all introduction to the series.

So let's go to the Bible and dig into it. One more point before I do that. For those of you who got your sermon scorecards with you and particularly waiting for me to get to Jesus I'm not going to get to Jesus in a hurry tonight.

[24 : 25] So just relax put your scorecard down or put it up. I'm not going to get to Jesus tonight in any big way but this is a five part series and each bit's building on the next bit.

Jesus is going to dominate probably from next week onwards he will dominate but he's there and all the framework's there.

Okay. We're going to start with creation then look at the fall then look at redemption and then we're going to look at the consummation of all things. The unfolding Bible story we're going to look at how race fits in with that.

Okay. Let's get that clear. Let's dive in. We're going to begin today with creation and I will get to Jesus eventually but what we see today is a very significant point in dealing with racism and ethnic pride.

First man and woman created the image of God. Genesis chapter 1 verse 27. Now in case you're thinking I'm just starting my sermon now just relax. That was all all the introductions part of it.

[25 : 24] Okay. It's all part of it and we're going to get there real quick. Okay. God created man in his own image in the image of God he created him male and female he created them.

That verse is utterly profound and significant and full of implications on this issue of racism and ethnic pride. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God.

Subsequent human beings born from Adam and Eve are also in the image of God. Genesis 5 verse 3 says when Adam had lived 130 years he had a son in his own likeness in his own image and he named him Seth.

The words likeness and image there in Genesis 5 are the same two words that are back there in Genesis chapter 1. The point is the image of God keeps going on and on and on and on and on. The first pair Adam and Eve are not the only ones in the image of God. Those who come from them are also in the image of God and the implication is the unity of the human race.

[26 : 28] That's the implication. Every human that flows from Adam and Eve is created in the image of God and there is no human that doesn't flow from Adam and Eve. That's the biblical premise right there from the beginning of the Bible in Genesis chapter 1.

Now I don't want to go into all the detail of what it means to be in the image of God. We could argue till we are blue in the face about rationality and morality and free will and all these other things that

would distinguish us from the monkeys and dogs and cats and other stuff like that and unfortunately the Bible at this point doesn't put a big footnote underneath to say just to clarify what I mean by the image of God.

Possibly a better thing to do rather than pick one of these wonderful human traits is to say that all of them whatever they are are designed to image forth God in a way that no other created being can. That's what it means. We display we image forth God we mirror God in a way that no other created thing can. What that means is being made in the image of God is not just a status it's a mission. It has a purpose attached to it. That is for the glory of God. Human traits like God that display His glory that's what they're there for.

[28 : 02] And so rather than argue about the details let's take it as a mission to mirror God to live in such a way that when people see us they see a reflection of the character of the quality of God and that is a huge calling.

The extreme dignity of human beings above all other creatures is for the sake of magnifying the majesty of God.

And I think that's the point of Psalm 8 which was read out to us right at the beginning by Gary. It begins with O Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth.

And it ends in the same way in verse 9 O Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth. God is majestic. They're the bookends of Psalm 8.

There's the beginning there's the end. That's what it's all about. It's about the majesty of God. And so it's interesting about how the rest of the Psalm fits into that theme.

[29 : 09] You have set your glory above the heavens from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger when I consider your heavens and the work of your fingers the moon and the stars which you have set in place what is man that you are mindful of him the son of man that you care for him and what's the answer to that question in Psalm 8 you made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour or a better translation you have crowned him with glory and majesty and then the psalmist goes on describing the uniqueness of man you made him ruler over the works of your hands you put everything under his feet all flocks and herds and the beasts of the field the birds of the air the fish of the sea all that swim the paths of the seas that's the mandate from Genesis 1 coming out there to created and exercise dominion over the created order but the psalm having described the majesty of man the psalm doesn't finish with oh Lord how majestic are people he did say that a bit earlier but that's not the point of the psalm the psalm ends with oh Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth the psalm ends with a point of praise to God which means the point of our subordinate majesty the majesty that sits under God's majesty above all the other creation of the world all the creatures the fish and the birds the point of it all is for the praise of the majesty of God that's why we're made in the image of God is for his glory and his majesty his praise which means at the very least that if you demean and belittle anyone created for that end you demean

God you rupture his purpose for all people creating his image to show him as majestic and so this creation doctrine of the image of God even apart from redemption in Jesus has massive implications for example the horror of unjustly destroying or harming another human being in Genesis 9-6 whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed for in the image of God has God made man there's a sermon there in and of itself to do with capital punishment abortion and euthanasia all there and the point there is taking the life of another man is not to show you how invaluable a human life is is to put the value of human life as there's only one thing that can be done for a person who deliberately takes the life of another person that is for their life to be taken now that's the principle trying to work out how to do it justly that's another matter all together I won't kind of get into that bit the image of God has massive implications for the way we speak to another human being James chapter 3 with the tongue we praise our Lord and Father and with it we curse men who have been made in God's likeness and he ends it there with how can that be you cannot speak to another human being like that because of the image of God and both of those arguments are straight out of creation apart from redemption in Jesus the image of God has massive implications for racial pride and ethnocentricity in Acts chapter 17 which is read out to us Paul makes the common origins of human beings the ground of equality and the end of ethnic arrogance Paul is here he's in Athens he's speaking to the Athenians and they were very very proud people they had two classes of people the Athenians and everyone else they were all

barbarians that's what they regarded cavemen sort of stuff you know barbarians that was everyone else everyone else was lower than what they were and Paul gets one sermon to this group and what does he say to them

I'll pick it up in verse 24 the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by hands and he is not served by human hands as if he needed anything because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else from one man he made every nation of men why does he say that I mean he could have said a thousand things to him why does he say this from one man he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth and he determined the time set for them and the exact places where they should live see what he's doing Paul walks in here to these Athenians and he says you Athenians you think you're so special you think that you have got some unique origin they thought they popped out of the soil like carrots they weren't connected to anyone else you think that the barbarians are so inferior to you

I got something to tell you you and the barbarians are you hate you've got the same daddy and God decides where you're going to end up and God decides how you're going to look and he's going to decide the way you're going to talk you're all connected what's God's goal in making all this diversity God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him just like W.H. Auden did though he is not far from each of us for in him we live we move and have our being and some of our own poets have said we are his offspring a glance against the claims of racial superiority Paul here asserts the unity of all people it is fundamental to his theology he's using this theology here to undermine pride and arrogance and segregation and superiority and oppression and instead to turn it around see the common origins of all people the unity of all people and especially the unity of all people under God

[36 : 13] God wants all people to be unified in their seeking of him through the Lord Jesus so my point today is that the Christian doctrine of creation itself apart from redemption in Jesus makes a very significant contribution to dealing with racism and ethnic pride God himself this is what we're going to look at more as we go in the weeks God himself affirms it by coming to his creation in the person of Jesus Christ the image bearer of the father in such a way that he says you see me you see God he is the image bearer of the father he goes to the cross to right all of our wrongs to bring us together in unity but that's for another day friends for us right now really simply the diversity at St.

Paul's is really really obvious there is always a threat that this diversity could fracture us rather than create a marvellous gospel unity St.

Paul's mission statement says it exists to know Jesus treasure Jesus and represent Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people the all people is deliberate our mission statement is represented visibly in our church logo it represents a racial diversity people from every tribe and language and people and nation at all different stages of being united together around Jesus so we're going to get to Jesus around Jesus that is our mission it's our mission now because that is our future together for all of eternity but that's week five let me pray and exactly so we pray we pray we pat remember we pray we pray we pray we had our ■enti rib