

Sojourners & Foreigners

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[0 : 00] I'd be grateful if you grab your Bibles. Also, if you've got the St. Paul's app, that would be particularly useful for you this morning. I've got lots of things to run through.

And if you don't have the St. Paul's app, pen and paper will also do. You just might want to just write down heaps of different references as I go through. Let me pray.

Gracious God, Lord, every one of us are dealing with the issue of the fall from Genesis 3, where we have rejected your glory, your majesty, your purpose for our lives and chosen it for ourselves.

One of the enormous consequences of that has been throughout the history of your world from that moment, prejudice in the heart towards other people. Lord, we pray that that might be your conviction upon us this morning as we look forward and towards in the coming weeks of Christ being the solution to that.

So, Lord, give us tender hearts to ourselves, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. It was November 2005.

[1 : 18] I was in Alice Springs, the centre of our country here, on the invitation of the Bible Society to be the main speaker at event.

It was an event to raise awareness for their ministry to remote areas of Australia and in particular to Aboriginal communities and the necessity for the word of God to be translated into various languages for those Aboriginal communities that might have God's word in their own hand.

The plan was I would speak at an event in an aircraft hangar with the Bible Society plane behind me on the Friday night.

Saturday was a free day to explore and then Sunday I was to preach in a local church. A friend of mine came along with me for the trip.

We, in fact, spent the Saturday exploring many parts of the outback, which in those days had no speed limits and I didn't realise you could get a Corolla up to 190 kilometres an hour, but it turns out you can.

[2 : 31] Then we came back, dropped off the hire car and we spent the evening in the main part of Alice Springs and then we walked back to our hotel.

It was pitch black along this pathway which wove its way along the riverbank, dry riverbank in Alice Springs. We noticed as we were heading back to our hotel, we were the only white guys around, in fact, we were the only people around, until we noticed a group of about 20 Indigenous Australians, Aboriginals in the riverbank drinking what it appeared to be drinking alcohol and then we walked up, we noticed that and the upper cross on the right-hand side was more of a slummy area of Alice Springs and we were noticing quite a lot of commotion, a lot of yelling going on in that area.

And let me just pause there for a moment. I think it's fair to say that in that moment, both of us were a little bit nervous. We were fully aware of our whiteness at that point, if you like, that this was a moment that both of us had experienced previously.

It is fair to say that I grew up marinating in a culture of prejudice towards Aboriginals, even as I said last week, that I still had friends who were Aboriginals.

It came, that prejudice came from the rhetoric of the culture, but also my own negative experiences at both school and in the workforce.

[4 : 27] You could say my friend's experience was even more acute than mine. He spent a good part of his childhood growing up in a town in New South Wales called Walgett and it's a very troubled place in terms of race relations.

So in this moment, on this Saturday evening in 2005, both of our prejudices came to the surface. And as we walked along the path, I said to him quietly, do you see the group down on the left?

He said, yeah, I see them. And then he said, what about the one on the right that's now coming out of the slum?

It's about 20 Aboriginals of all sorts of generations coming out of the slum area. And in that moment, both of us came up with what we would call an escape plan.

What are we going to do if things deteriorate? As both of us had personally experienced in the past. We both experienced it. We noticed that as we walked along the riverbank that this group that was coming from the right was going to intersect us on the pathway unless we either started walking slower or we started speeding up.

[5 : 46] And we were sort of hoping on one level that they would notice the two white guys. Walking along in the pitch back in an area that you don't see any of the white guys in Alice Springs.

And then they did see us. And as it was very obvious, as we approached, this group was going to come to the, almost hit us on the pathway.

And as we almost hit, as we crossed, the lead elderly Aboriginal lady put her arms out like that. And she stopped the group. And they all stopped, all pulled up and allowed us to walk through. And as we walked through, she said, good evening, gentlemen.

We turned and said good evening to her, to the group, and walked on in silence for about another 20 metres. And my friend said to me, how bad do I feel?

[6 : 56] I went, yep, absolutely. God used that moment to expose something of the sin of racial prejudice that lurked in my heart.

And it did not escape my moment, my attention, even that night, that the night before, I was speaking at an aircraft carrier with the Bible open, imploring the people there to put their resources and finances behind gospel ministry to remote communities in this country, and prejudice lurked in my heart.

There was a disconnection between what I knew to be right and good and part of God's purposes and what still was lurking in my heart.

I was treated with more dignity than what I afforded them in my mind and in my heart in that moment. And it was a long way from my starting point last week where I said all people have one origins by divine design.

And the implication of that last week is the dignity, the extreme dignity of all human beings. The creation doctrine, the view of creation, the Christian view of creation does in contrast with every other philosophical system in our world, in that sense.

[8 : 41] And particularly, the underlying system that's operating in our society at the moment of atheistic evolutionary theory that's broadly accepted as fact in our secular society.

Charles Darwin's Origin of Species gave rise to the separation and the classification of plant and animal species. Enormously helpful in so many ways.

A breakthrough in so many ways. Unfortunately, it flowed over into categorising humans into a hierarchy which arranged them according to evolutionary advancement.

Now, that's not to say racism didn't exist before Charles Darwin's Origin of Species. I'm not saying that. But I do agree with what Stephen Jay Gould wrote on this issue between the connection, the connection between racism and evolutionary theory.

Now, Gould was an evolutionary biologist himself who significantly opposed creationism and he hated Christianity.

[9 : 59] Hated Christianity. And he wrote, biological arguments for racism may have been common before 1850.

That is, before Darwin's Origin of Species. But they increased by orders of magnitude following the acceptance of evolutionary theory which he himself did.

And that's where I think the problem is. As I said last week, it is difficult to deliver as our secular culture wants to do on the equality of all people when at the same time you explain the differences in terms of some people groups being less evolved than others.

And as we saw last week, the Bible knows nothing of the hierarchy of races as evolutionary theory does. In fact, the biblical view is there is one race.

One race. The human race made in the image of God. And yet, as I said last week, while the Christian faith has got enormous to contribute, there's blockages here for people accepting it because of the failures of the institutional church over the years.

[11 : 23] And one of the most serious and damaging interpretations of the Bible on this whole issue of race is in Genesis chapter 9. So if you've got Genesis chapter 9, go there quickly with me. Genesis 9 verses 18 to 27. It's at the end of Genesis 9. As I said, Noah and his family settling down into life after the flood.

Noah plants a vineyard, drinks a little bit too much of the vino, and ends up lying naked in his tent. His son Ham, right, Ham, sees his father's nakedness, thinks it's a joke, goes and tells his brothers about it.

And when Noah finds out what his youngest son has done, he pronounces a curse on Canaan, who is Ham's youngest son.

So Genesis 9, 25. Cursed be Canaan, the lowest of slaves he will be to his brothers. He also said, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem.

[12 : 40] May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth. May Japheth live in the tents of Shem and may Canaan be his slave.

Now throughout the last 20 centuries, numerous Christians, Jewish and Muslim writers have connected the curse of Ham, their curse of Canaan, to black Africans in particular.

This text became the standard text in defence of slavery in England, the southern states of America and apartheid in South Africa.

That is, because they translated the name Ham as black or burnt, the curse was applicable in their view for all black people.

They also concluded that Ham's brother, Japheth, represented white people and therefore God commands the slavery or the subjugation, if you like, of black people by white people.

[13 : 54] Now, I won't go into all the details. There's extensive details around this, but simply to say, you've got to do some fancy, I mean some really fancy dance work with the text to come to that kind of a conclusion.

I mean some really, really fancy work. But some people have done it because I believe in the end it has supported a particular prejudice.

Now, I'm glad we've got the Bible and God's perspective on the history of humanity and the Bible does not relate to our racial or ethnic differences in terms of lower life forms or in terms of God having favorites, but in terms of sin.

As we read there in Genesis 5, our rejection of God. You see, on that night in Alice Springs in 2005, my prejudice, my sinful heart was the problem.

Not the government, not institutions. My prejudice, my sinful heart was the problem. But it doesn't just identify sin as the core problem of racial prejudice and ethnocentricity.

[15 : 20] Like in terms of the Bible it doesn't just identify that, but it also reveals a solution for us as we will pick up in the next couple of weeks as well. You see, the Bible sees the fracturing of all relationships due to the rejection of God in Genesis 3.

I think it was fantastic what Zoran said when he got up here and talks about his role supporting God's work of reordering a disordered creation. God did create order out of chaos and sin in Genesis 3 made everything back into chaos again.

That's the consequence of sin. A disordered creator, a creation. Adam and Eve were created in God's image to display his majesty and when they rejected God and his purpose and wanted to make it all about them, everything broke.

And consequences was that all relationships were smashed. Before sin, they were both naked and felt no shame.

No shame. Naked and no shame. There was intimacy and acceptance. And neither of them, I'm assuming, were supermodels or anything like that.

[16 : 44] They felt no shame for the other. And as soon as they rejected God, they ran for clothes.

They hid from God's presence. A barrier immediately went up between Adam and Eve.

Judgmentalism came in for the very first time. Assessment came in for the very first time.

Shame and self-preservation kicked in. From the moment they reject God, the unity of humans in the image of God became mirrored by the unity of sin.

Romans 1 is the Apostle Paul's version of the fall of humanity, making clear that all of humanity is contaminated by sin.

It's an ugly picture of sinful behavior. Read it when you go home. It's an ugly picture. And then he says our unity in this is explicit in Romans 3 23 all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

[17 : 54] You see the Bible's picture here is that the unity that we have as sinful people rejecting God is not because we sin but because we're already sinners by nature.

One of the most I think the Bible's most important passage on this issue is Romans 5 verses 12 to 19. Write that one down. It explains right there that Adam's sin right at the beginning brought to the entire human race that flows from him which is all of us both sinful natures and God's judgment and condemnation for it.

Every single human being from Adam is connected to his sin by nature. We are born into this world with sinful natures that trace back to Adam's sin.

So Romans 5 12 sin came into the world through one man and death through sin and so death spread to all people because all sinned.

We are born with inner lives that are directed towards ourselves and what we want and not directed towards God and what he wants.

[19 : 21] and because we have inner lives bent away from God and as the great church reformer Martin Luther said a German theologian said we are curvedly into ourselves.

Our sinful nature means we are curved in towards ourselves and because we are curved in towards ourselves right from the moment of conception when we are old enough to know right from wrong we act in sinful ways.

We sin because we are already sinners. Perhaps a helpful way to think about that would be an apple tree, not specifically an apple tree, pick on any fruit tree if you like.

Ask yourself the question whether a tree produces, an apple tree produces apples because it's an apple tree or does the tree become an apple tree when it first produces an apple?

That's not a chicken and egg thing, all right? Talking about its very nature. The reality is an apple tree can grow for many many years before it produces its first fruit and when it does finally produce apples we'd say that tree is producing fruit in accordance with its nature.

[20 : 47] Psalm 51 5, surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. We are sinners by nature who show themselves to be sinners by choice.

Now, everyone who is a parent knows this to be true from experience. I didn't have to teach my children, I've not had to teach one of them to say no, to disobey my directives, to throw food on the floor, to pinch, to poke out the tongue, to throw themselves on the floor to kick and scream. Didn't have to teach any of them, although there have been times when I've joined them in the throwing myself on the floor kicking and screaming thing. Didn't teach them any of those things, and if those of you are prejudiced, neither did that, so it didn't come from her either. they did get it from me, but didn't teach it. Same as my parents didn't teach me any of those things, but I did get it from them.

I, like my parents before me, have spent my time trying to correct that which comes by nature.

There is a solidarity in being created in the image of God for the glory of God, and solidarity in all of us falling short of God's glory because of our sin.

[22 : 18] And we see this solidarity in sin and its consequences being played out in this racial ethnocentricity terms in Genesis chapter 10 and 11.

So if you've got your Bibles, flick there fairly quick. Genesis chapter 10 is the so-called table of nations.

And Genesis chapter 10, the one point that Genesis chapter 10 makes, or the one point I can find in any way that it makes, is that it stresses the common origins of all people.

That's what Genesis 10 does, the common origins of all people. And the relationship between Genesis 10 and 11 is also very significant because the generational account of the common origins of all people in the original language begins at chapter 10 verse 1 and it ends at chapter 11 verse 9. That is, the Tower of Babel account in chapter 11 explains how and why people spread out and fill the earth with all their different languages.

[23 : 33] even though we have a common origin. It reveals that the division into different people groups with different languages was a consequence of sin.

Verse 4, come, let us build, let us build a city, build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens purpose, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the whole face of the earth.

The Tower of Babel is a collective attempt by humanity to do what Adam and Eve attempted to do in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3.

God and make a name for ourselves. Let's do it together. We've got numbers now. Let's do it together. And God's judgment on them was to forever hinder their working together. He scatters them, confuses their language as an act of judgment.

[24 : 54] judgment. And so taken together, Genesis 10 reveals our unity as one blood together under God's blessing.

And Genesis 11, our diversity into many languages and groups under God's judgment. judgment. And the foundational problem here is the human heart that wants to reject God.

The Bible doesn't just tell us why we have racism and ethnic pride, it also gives us a solution to it too. Genesis 10 and 11 sets the stage for the great plan of redemption that begins in Genesis 12. It's the hinge of the Bible that holds the Bible again. In Genesis 12, it's the promise to Abraham. The Lord said to Abraham, leave your country, your people, your father's house, or to go to the land, I will show you, I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you, I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

[26 : 22] Tower of Babel, let's make a great name for ourselves. Let's storm depose God. Genesis 12, God says, no Abraham, I'll make a great name out of you and through you and your great name, all nations of the world will be blessed.

God's call on Abraham here is a direct response to the disastrous situation described in Genesis 3 to 11. This is the turning point of the Bible that drives the rest of the biblical narrative.

This is the introduction to God's spectacular plan of redemption for all people, a plan that culminates in Jesus. God's focus on Abraham in this moment is not exclusive, but to use this one individual and his descendants to bless the entire world.

The purpose of God in choosing Israel was to witness to the universal power and love of God for all people. Even in the Old Testament you see that again and again and again, God's plans for all the nations is amazing in its scope and its vision.

This God, the God of the Bible, is not a racist in any sense. He does not have favorites in any sense. The choosing of Israel was not for ethnocentric purposes, but for universal redemption.

[27 : 54] But Israel, oh, curvedly in on itself with its heart, failed consistently in living for that purpose.

They took the role, ultimately, of being racially, morally superior. They consistently forgot the reason God chose them.

And it was still the case when Jesus enters the scene in the New Testament. But with his coming, the coming of God himself in human flesh, with him coming, a radically new way of defining what the people of God is, arrives, namely faith in him.

Faith in Jesus trumps ethnicity and heritage. And over and over again, you see this in the Gospels. story of the good Samaritan, Luke 10, the healing of the ten lepers, and only the foreigner is the one who comes back with humble gratitude in Luke 17.

The healing of the Syriaphonician's daughter in Mark 7, the worshipping of the wise men from the east in Matthew 2, and in Luke 4, as we just had read out to us by Flora, Jesus tells a story taken from 1 Kings 17 in the Old Testament.

[29 : 21] It's a story about God's passing over all the ethnic Jews to bring a miraculous blessing to a foreign Gentile from the land of Phoenicia.

And the second story from 2 Kings 5, again, the point is, of all the people in the world that God might have chosen to heal of leprosy, he chooses a foreign king, a Syrian, not a Jew.

And so when they heard Jesus tell that story, what did they do to him? In that very moment, they attempted to kill him.

Ethnic pride ran deep. And the point that Jesus was making is that he is the end of ethnocentricity and racial pride.

He says that he has come to redeem people from every ethnic group, not just one or a few. God's plan of redemption, which starts with the promise of Abraham, finds his fulfillment in the life, the ministry, the death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[30 : 40] And we're going to talk more about on that next week. But for now, let me give you a taster. Galatians 3 verses 13 and 14. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. That is, he redeemed us by his death on the cross. And then it continues on. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.

The plan of Abraham gets worked out in Christ and his death on the cross. With Abraham, God set in motion a plan of redemption that overturns every curse for everyone who receives the blessing of Abraham.

And that blessing is the forgiveness of sin, forgiveness for our rejection of God, the acceptance of God, the adoption into his eternal family, whatever your racial, ethnic group is.

And it all comes through Jesus Christ, the descendant of Abraham. As Matthew 1-1 tells us, Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham. God's redemptive plan has always been to save and bless people from all peoples of the earth and to unite them together with him as his people through his son Jesus.

[32 : 22] And it's remarkable, in fact, that 2,000 years later, the geographical spread of the Christian faith, as I've said before, is virtually identical on every inhabitable continent in the world.

world. That is very unusual. That is, the point is, Christianity hasn't appealed just to one or two racial groups, ethnic groups, cultural groups.

It has equal appeal across the board. And the main point of today has been to show us that the source of racism, ethnic pride, is a sinful human heart.

Racial prejudice runs deep in every single human heart. That's my point. We are all unified in it. Our problem is not primarily biological, it's not evolution, it's not people's interpretation of the Bible, it's not politics, it's not institutions, it's not governments, it's the heart.

[33 : 40] Your heart, my heart, that's the problem. It's the sin and the prejudice in the heart. I need a new heart in order to see all people made in the image of God and in just as much of a need of God's great plan of redemption through Jesus as I am.

racism. So as we tackle this issue of racism and ethnocentricity, I think it's so much more essential for us to go deeper than just the attitudes and the behaviours of racism.

Much of the talk about racism and ethnocentricity in our world at the moment has to do with the behaviours and the attitudes, but not the root cause. If we don't go deeper into the reason why people are racist and why you and I are therefore, then the impact of that will be quite simply an increase in racism, an increasing prejudice and pride.

It will be too easy, as many do in the secular world, to conclude that racists or those who are indifferent to racism are just morally inferior.

There we go. That's making an assessment of someone else's heart. And therefore, if they're morally inferior, they are worthy of being judged.

[35 : 27] They're worthy of my prejudice. And that is incredibly dangerous. Those who denounce racism can feel morally superior and lose the sense of the common fall of sinfulness.

The only way to deal with racism and prejudice and ethnocentricity is to see all of us as complicit in it.

I was watching the Winter Olympics last night. Not much else on at the moment. And there was one event that I was watching where four snowboarders race down this circuit together and jump and crash and all other things.

Really, it was very exciting. And at the start, they're lined up behind these gates and they launch themselves off as soon as the gate falls. And immediately that happens.

Up on the screen, they've got all the competitors there. Up on the screen comes reaction time. How fast they reacted to the gate dropping. Some are faster than others.

[36 : 35] But they all have a reaction time. They all have a reaction time. No one's standing there going, oh, gate's gone. There we go. No one's doing that.

They all have a reaction time. Some are faster than others. All of us have a prejudice in their heart. It takes just seconds for the most part for that sin to rise itself as we externally assess another individual as they cross the road in front of us.

And we've categorized them already. We see something on television. We see an interaction and we categorize it already of what it is.

Racism is just one of the poisonous, destructive manifestations of something that absolutely every single person is doing in their heart. All of us have a prejudice heart.

It takes just seconds. It's so strange how we can call out structural racism but be okay with a prejudice and a resentment that lingers in the heart towards others.

[37 : 43] God's God's love. It's so strange that we can call it in the first four or five of our sermons in this is to lay out a world view.

eternity according to the Bible coming from the creator God. It begins with the creation of all things by a merciful God including making people in his image.

We have sinned against him and we have marred that image and we will see in the coming weeks that this worldview, the God himself comes into his world in the person of Jesus Christ to restore that image, to bring us back into the fold of God's people and we will see that God's final goal is the unity of all kinds of people from all nations and people and languages and ethnic groups in perfect love with one another and their God.

Naked. I think we're in heaven going to be naked. Naked and no shame, no judgment, no assessment and joy for all eternity.

And so many times we lose sight of that as Christians and therefore our prejudice lingers on. But there's another big story running around in our culture that significantly influences this issue on racism and I think you've got to hear about it.

[39 : 17] It too is a world view, make no mistake. It wants you, it gives you a way to read the world, to understand the world. It tells you how to live and how to treat people. It's a world view.

And this particular world view, the main foundation of it is it runs from oppression to liberation. And it divides the world into two main categories.

All people are either in the dominant group that oppresses or the marginalized group of the oppressed. Breaks the world up like that.

And as such, its goal is that we either need to divest ourselves of power to seek the liberation of others or we need to acquire power personally and liberate ourselves and to do that primarily by dismantling all social structures and institutions that we think oppress.

Others, scholars in the Western world have called it cultural Marxism, another version of it. Where we wipe out any other alternative view.

[40 : 32] It's called critical theory and its subset in the issue of race is critical race theory. And we are exposed to it in a secular world like ours even if we don't know the titles and the names associated with it.

It separates the world into those who should be ashamed of their race and culture even if you're not complicit in directly doing involved in it. You should be ashamed of yourself just purely because you're white.

That in itself is racism. And those, on the other hand, who are therefore justified in their racism and ethnocentricity as they seek personal liberation and the liberation of their group.

That view, critical race theory, is becoming dominant in the Western world. And it's connected to all sorts of issues to do with sexual ethics and gender and other things like that.

And I have to ask the question because I see it on Facebook. Incredibly, those who are committed to critical race theory, how prejudiced they are towards anyone who does not agree to them.

[41 : 54] How on earth does that bring an end to racism when prejudice against another individual is okay if I've categorised them as part of a majority group?

Now, this series is not about politics. This series is about checking your sinful prejudice heart.

If we're going to be a church that is aligned with God's mission, his vision, his goal to bring all people into his kingdom forever in joy, united in Christ, then racial pride and ethnocentricity must end.

And it ends when the gospel breaks my heart. Thank you. Thank you.