

Race, Cross, and the Christian

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[0 : 00] Evening all, let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you that you have not left us alone, as we've seen the last couple of weeks, in the solidarity we have, not just in our image of you, but solidarity in our sin, which puts us at odds with you and puts us at odds with one another.

We thank you that you have worked to solve that problem. We've sung about it tonight. I pray that that reality of what you've done for us in the Lord Jesus might become very real for us personally and will impact radically not just our relationship with you, but our relationship with one another as well.

And we ask it for your glory. Amen. We're into week number three on our series of racism and ethnocentricity. And racial pride and ethnocentricity has a long and a bloody past.

I'll give you just a few examples. The Holocaust in Germany caused the death of up to 11 million Jews between 1933 and 1945. 1.5 million Armenians died at the hands of the Turks from 1915 to 1923, a further 750,000 Assyrians during the same time at the hands of the Turks and a further 1 million Greeks at the same time, again at the hands of the Turks.

Racism and ethnic cleansing was a motivating factor that saw 3 million casualties in the Cambodian genocide, another 1 million dead in Rwanda in 1994, Soviet slaughtered 250,000 Polish people in 1937 to 1938, and another couple of hundred thousand Poles by the Ukrainians less than a decade later.

[1 : 56] Getting a little bit closer to home, between 1824 and 1908, white settlers and native Mounted police in Queensland killed more than 10,000 Aborigines who regarded them as vermin and sometimes even hunted them for sport in the same kind of way that I would treat a wild pig in regarding it as vermin and hunted for sport.

That's on our own country here in Australia. Now racism in our country has become a little bit more civilised, if I can use that term very broadly. You're probably aware of the vilification of AFL player and prominent Aboriginal Adam Goodes recently.

There have also been a number of Reclaim Australia rallies in capital cities around this country. And in the past week, Eddie Maguire, the president of the Collingwood AFL team, was accused again of racism.

He had previously joked, apparently because of a brain freeze or a brain snap or a no brain at all, I can't remember, that he likened Adam Goodes to King Kong or that he could play a part in the movie King Kong.

And so in Maguire's most recent controversy, he referred to the Victorian sports minister, John Aaron, as a soccer-loving Turkish-born moosey.

[3 : 24] Now, I want to suggest to you that it is naive to think that a prime minister making a public apology or laws against racial vilification or a general move in the direction of equality and freedom for all people or the acceptance of political correctness results in any way in the end of racial pride or ethnocentricity.

The issues are deep. We had a new couple here at church this morning. Three months ago, they escaped from Syria. And I spoke to them this morning.

They are literally here, refugees escaping. They went home. Their house was bombed. It's just levelled. And I said to them, I talked to them about the issues at Syria, and they said, it is very complex.

There is no easy answer to the racial tensions there at all. And I think an answer to it is something that we want.

In fact, something that we need. When Reclaim Australia marched in Sydney recently, more people turned out to march against Reclaim Australia than actually for Reclaim Australia.

[4 : 50] That is, there was more people turning out to march against racism, as they see it portrayed in Reclaiming Australia, than, in fact, the Reclaiming Australia group.

Now, the Christian faith is not at odds with our secular society at that point. We saw two weeks ago that one of the foundational biblical truths is that all people are made equally in the image of God. There is a solidarity in our image of God, but there is also, as we saw last week, a solidarity in our sinfulness, in our rejection of God. Since Adam, right from the very beginning, rejected God, we have all shared in Adam's sin, and likewise, we have, by choice, rejected God.

But the choices that we make reject God. And so this solidarity sets us not just up against God, but against one another because we put ourselves at the center of the universe.

It becomes about us rather than about God. And so we need to be really careful as we deal with this situation of racial pride. We need to be really careful of not coming up with just simplistic solutions.

[6 : 06] On the TV program Studio 10, Jessica Rowe this week said that she thought that the term Moosey was racist and offensive, and she questioned Eddie Maguire's intelligence, something that a few people have done apparently over the time.

She said, If he is not smart enough, and I don't think he is, to moderate his language, depending on the sort of forum he is in, he has to take the flack for it.

Hear what she's saying? Just control your tongue, Eddie. Depending on where you are, just be careful about what you say.

Now, don't hear me wrong. First of all, let me say, the assumption there is, if he doesn't say it, then he's not a racist.

I want to, I think it's a good thing, I think it's a great thing to control your tongue. In fact, I think it would be great if we all practice it a little bit more, or let me just say myself, it would be great if I control my tongue a little bit more, and I think it's a fantastic thing, and we're going to see it in our next series in James when we get there, but the problem is significantly deeper than just controlling the tongue.

[7 : 25] This week, I was driving to a ministry seminar on Thursday morning, and I had the job of driving the seminar leader to the venue.

And so we're driving along, this guy is in his early 70s, he's a very well-respected Christian leader from the United States, and we were driving along, and all of a sudden, boom, we hit traffic, we just stand still.

And I knew that I needed to take a left turn up ahead, and so I put my blinker on, and I just started to sort of move across. And as I moved across, there's a car behind me that just kept pushing up, pushing up.

And I'm like trying to go across a little bit further, and as we're doing this, I'm talking to this ministry guy, and we're talking about the gospel, talking about all sorts of wonderful things, and I'm at the same time trying to get across, and this guy comes up, and he just keeps, and I'm thinking, he's breaking the law?

You know, my nose is in front of his, he's got to give way. If he ran into me, it's going to be his fault, and it's going to be his insurance claim, and that sort of stuff, but you kind of don't want your car to get run into, and so I'm pushing him across, and this guy just kept coming up, kept coming up, kept coming up.

[8 : 43] He just kept pushing across and across, and he's waving at me through the window, you know, mouthing obscene things at me, and I never said a word.

I just kept talking to this guy about ministry and stuff, and even as we were driving along here, at one point he said, I don't think that guy is going to let you in. I said, no, no, I don't think he is, but you know, that's okay.

Now, what came out my mouth was nothing. What was in my heart was something, and what was in my heart if my children were in the back seat?

Remember last week, I said that by original sin, my children have learnt things. I didn't teach them. I didn't teach them to throw tantrums, anything like that, but there are some things I have taught them, and if they were in the back seat at that particular point, one of them would have piped up and said, oh my goodness, look at that idiot.

That is something, I don't blame original sin for that, that's something they've learnt from me. Over time, they've learnt that one from me. That's what was in my heart at the time.

[9 : 56] I was fuming at that guy, but I never said a word. You see, political correctness might be a start, but it doesn't deal with the core issue.

A sinful heart bent away from God and bent away from other people. That guy wanted one car space and I didn't want him to have that car space.

We were both as bad as one another. It's interesting that as you turn to the gospel and ask Jesus often makes the hated foreigner the recipient of God's blessing or the hero of his stories.

As I said last week, Jesus is the end of ethnocentricity and we'll see it today. One of the best examples is what Sam just read out for us in the Good Samaritan in Luke 10.

So if you've got your Bibles, flick to Luke chapter 10. In verse 25, a lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to receive eternal life and Jesus asked him, well, what does the law say?

[11 : 09] And so he says, well, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus says, yeah, that's right.

That's right. Just do that. But, verse 29, it says, he wanted to justify himself. And so he asked Jesus, yeah, but, you know, when you say neighbor, what do you mean by neighbor? who is really by neighbor? He's looking to justify himself, verse 29, that is, he's looking for a loophole in the law.

He's looking for Jesus to affirm his thinking and his actions as being righteous, as, yeah, you've done that already. You see, the Jews of Jesus' time interpreted the neighbor here, which comes from Leviticus 19, as other Jews.

At a stretch, it could include some foreigners who have sort of converted to Judaism or are serving, you know, the country and that sort of stuff, but it certainly didn't include Samaritans or other foreigners.

[12 : 38] And so, Jesus tells this mainly Jewish audience this story. The story is possibly the most socially charged story that Jesus ever tells.

There's this guy traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. It's a fairly main road. We're meant to understand that this is a Jewish man traveling this road. The man gets robbed, he's stripped, he's beaten and left for dead.

And then by chance, his fate would have it, as it would happen, a Jewish priest comes wandering by. This is a Jewish pastor, right?

This is a Jewish pastor and so, the thinking is, surely he is going to help his brother in the ditch. But no, the priest couldn't be bothered.

He walked, in fact, on the other side of the street to stay well away from him. and pretend he doesn't exist. Didn't go near him. And Jesus goes on and says, well, now a Levite comes by.

[13 : 40] So, we've gone from the pastor to the lecture of the theological college. And again, you would think that this guy is going to stop and help his brother in the ditch.

But he likewise does not bother. He walks on the other side of the street. And then Jesus says, well, along comes the Samaritan. You know it's going to be the third guy.

Along comes the Samaritan. And at this point, at the hearing, these Jewish crowds gather and they hear the word Samaritan and they go, Samaritan?

What's a Samaritan doing in the story? You see, Jews and Samaritans, their tension ran over a long period of time.

Samaritans were despised. They were not to be associated with. The majority of Jews in Judea and Galilee hated Samaritans.

[14 : 43] And by the time of Jesus, the animosity between these groups, these two groups, had been growing for several hundred years and it exploded into violence and murderous violence in the first century.

And so, what is a Samaritan doing in this story? As it turns out, he's the hero. He sees the injured Jew, his enemy on the side of the road.

He goes over to him and he has compassion on him. He cleans up his wounds. He treats his wounds. He puts him on the back of his donkey, takes him to a local motel, checks him in, makes sure he's well cared for, hands over his credit card and said, charge to my account anything, any expenses and I'll pick it up.

And by the time Jesus finished telling this story, his audience would have had their jaws on the ground. This is not possible, Jesus. The Samaritan was an unthinkable hero.

So imagine I got an invitation to speak at a Reclaim Australia rally because they thought I was some redneck and once upon a time and I happened to tell the story of an Australian SAS trooper who was blown up by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan.

[16:17] He's lying there on the side of the road. Along comes an Australian army medic sees him on the side of the road, pretends he doesn't see him and walks across and misses him altogether.

And as the guy's there bleeding on the side of the road, along comes another Australian military personnel. This time it's a Padre, a chaplain and he too walks past and ignores the guy standing there.

And the next person who walks up is a Taliban freedom fighter with his AK-47 still stuck to his back. Sees the guy on the side of the road, sees that it's an SAS trooper sent there to kill him and he bandages up his wounds, he puts them on the back of his donkey, he takes them to a safe place, he pays for all his medical expenses, he even sends a chunk of money back to his family in Australia to cover his lifetime military pension.

What do you think the reception would be? Jesus says to this lawyer, just do that.

Just go and do that. Just do what he did. Treat your worst enemy just like that. Now remember, this is going back to the original question that the lawyer asked about how he might have eternal life and so when Jesus says, just go and do that, he isn't saying give it a try and see how it goes.

[17:57] He isn't saying do at least once in your life if you can. He's saying live and act and love and serve and think and sacrifice like this good Samaritan all of the time then you can have eternal life.

All of the time for your worst enemy. Go and love and serve and sacrifice people who belittle you, who curse you, who marginalize you, who ridicule you, who hate you, berate you, ignore you, demean you and would even kill you.

And then that's it. That's the end of the good Samaritan. Go and do likewise. And it's, we just left hanging there.

And so you go, so is the answer to racial pride and ethnocentricity just try harder? Work a bit harder?

Just be nicer? See, Luke was inspired by God to write what comes next. One scene ends with his lawyer, the next we're in the living room with two sisters, Martha, the elder sister and Mary, the younger.

[19:23] And in classic birth order, Martha, the older sister, is getting busy with dinner preparations and Mary, the younger sister, is sitting on the floor at the feet of Jesus.

And Martha is a little annoyed. She's busy making stuff happen. She's got stuff boiling on the stove and there's things in the oven and she's trying to staff the dishwasher at the same time.

You know, she's got food all over her and she is wanting Mary to give her some help here. And in short, she runs to Jesus and says, tell Mary to get up and help me.

And Jesus' response to Martha is, no, no, I'm not going to tell her to move at all. So let me come to the chase here. In the second scene, who looks the most like the good Samaritan?

Martha. Martha does. Not Mary. Mary's the bad Samaritan. She's not doing anything. Martha is busy doing all the good stuff, all the preparations.

[20:36] Mary is, you're doing nothing, Samaritan. And Martha is going and doing and serving and preparing and Mary is doing nothing. She's just sitting at the feet of Jesus and going, oh, Jesus, I just love you.

Do you know what I think is going on here? I think the lawyer should have responded at the end of when Jesus just left it hanging. The lawyer should have responded, I can't do that.

I can't do that. And Jesus would have said, I know. That's the point. I know.

And if you were there or I was there, he would have said, Steve, you can't do it either. And 5pm, you can't do it either. The barrier that exists between us and God and us and others that racial pride and ethnocentricity is a consequence of is not fixed simply by holding your tongues in some contexts.

The problem is sin. The problem is our heart. We need someone to deal with the dividing wall of hostility. Romans 5 leads me to believe that Jesus is, in fact, the Good Samaritan who comes and who does what we cannot do.

[22:10] You and I are, in fact, not the Good Samaritan. We are the man beaten, bruised, robbed, left for dead on the side of the road. We are cut off from God and we are dead in our transgressions and sins.

Ever since Adam decided to rebel against God, we have walked in the ways of Adam. Now, it might not seem fair that that's our state.

When you and I look at the carnage that's in this world, the carnage of human history and the racial genocide and the cancer and the suffering and the divorce and the greed, the fact that over there in Number 7 View Street, for some strange reason, the weeds grow faster than I can kill them, it's all Adam's fault if you look at Genesis chapter 3.

And every time I weed the garden, it's so easy to get angry with Adam because God picks a champion for the head of the human race and this champion blows it and ever since he blew it, our world has been messed up and there is something in that that makes me feel like it's unfair.

That is, how could Adam have been so stupid? It feels unfair because I think that instead of it was you know, Adam and Eve, if it was Steve and Eve, I wouldn't have been as stupid as Adam.

[23 : 55] And yet the reality is, even though it feels unfair, I've joined him in his choices all of my life and God understands that.

God understands that it seems unfair that because of Adam and his sin, that the whole of human race has been headed in a trajectory away from God and away from one another.

And so God picks another champion in Romans 5 to do what is unfair to him, to God.

At the cost of the life of his own son, God reconciles up to himself his worst enemies. This is how Romans 5 puts it. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man, someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[24 : 58] Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall be saved from God's wrath through him? For if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?

Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. For if by the trespass of one man, that's talking about Adam and what he did in Genesis 3, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for everyone, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for everyone.

For just as through the disobedience of the one man that many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man that many will be made righteous. everyone on this planet is included in that text because Adam is the father of everyone.

Every person you meet of any ethnicity is facing what that passage talks about, either death in Adam or life in Christ.

[26 : 30] Everyone. That's it. this is a global text. Don't miss that. This is the defining reality for every single person you will ever meet.

This is not, the Christian worldview here is not a wimpy worldview. It stretches over all of history, over all of the earth, to profoundly, it profoundly affects every person in the world and every headline on the internet.

The spectacular sin of Adam, which we all suffer the consequence with, of, and agree with, is not as great as the spectacular grace and obedience of Christ and the gift of eternal life in him.

Indeed, God's plan from the beginning was that Adam, as the representative head of mankind, would be a kind of Christ as the representative head of a new mankind.

Verse 17 puts the matter to you very personally. So this is it for you. If you're someone sitting here and you don't know Jesus, verse 17 puts it very personally and very urgently to you right now.

[27 : 46] Where do you stand on this? For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigns through that one man, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Christ Jesus?

Notice the words very carefully and very personally. Those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness. Those words there are precious words for sinners.

The grace is a gift. The gift is free. The righteousness of Christ is free. And so I call on you tonight.

Will you receive it as the hope and treasure of your life? And if you do, you will reign in life through the one man Christ Jesus. Jesus. Jesus has reconciled you to God.

And in Ephesians 2, which Sam also read out, it's a description of how the death of Jesus reconciled us to one another across racial lines.

[29 : 02] Ephesians 2, if you want to go there in your Bibles, Ephesians 2 verse 11, is a description of the division between Jews and Gentiles. Verses 19 to 22 of Ephesians 2 is a description of the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles together.

Now keep in mind here, the division between Jews and Gentiles, it's not small, it's not simple, it's not shallow. It is huge and complex and deep. It was religious, it was cultural, it was social, it was racial.

The divide between Jew and Gentile was as big or bigger than any divide on the face of the human world today. And so what happens between verse 11 and verse 19 that brings about this reconciliation?

There it is. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died and he died by design. You see it there in the word blood in verse 13, second half verse 13, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

You see it in the word flesh in verse 15, abolishing in his flesh the enmity. And you see it in the word cross in verse 16, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross.

[30 : 22] And the rest of this text is Paul's explanation of how the blood of Christ, his death in the flesh on the cross removes the enmity between God and Jew, God and Gentile, and Jew and Gentile.

All the dividing walls have been broken down. And therefore, by implication between every ethnic group of Christians who are in Christ, from many different blood lines, through the blood of Jesus, we have been brought into one blood line.

God ordained the death of his son to reconcile alien people groups together to each other as one body in Christ.

Friends, Christ died. There's massive implications for the death of Christ. Here's one. Christ died to take pride away from our hearts towards all other people, whatever their race might be, and whatever their status in Jesus might be.

Racial tensions are rife with pride. The pride of white supremacy, the pride of black power, the pride of intellectual analysis, the pride of anti-intellectual scorn, the pride of a loud verbal attack, the pride of a despising silence, the pride that feels secure, the pride that masks fear.

[31 : 49] Where pride holds sway, there is no hope for the kind of listening and patience and understanding and openness to correction that mature relationships require.

The gospel of Jesus breaks the power of pride. It reveals the magnitude and the ugliness and the deadliness of it, even as it provides deliverance from it.

Jesus' death on the cross for our salvation is pure devastation for pride. pride. Nick read it out to us, I'll read it again. For by grace you've been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing, it is a gift from God, not a result of works, so that no one can boast.

Jesus saves us by grace alone, so that we would boast in him alone, and that verse shatters pride. imagine what ethnic and racial controversies would look like if all the participants were dead to pride and deeply humble before God and each other.

Imagine what it would look like for us as a church if we took seriously our core value written on the wall out there called humble authenticity. God's plan is not just that the gospel will go to all peoples, but that all peoples would be brought together through the gospel to form one people in Christ.

[33 : 29] And God is calling the peoples of this world to share in a community that includes their worst enemies and reconciles them with those who worship and live in other ways than them.

And if this is the design of God, then we will not display and we will not magnify the cross of Christ better than by more and deeper and sweeter ethnic diversity and humble unity in our worship and our life together at St. Paul's.

The gospel demands that it gets proclaimed to all peoples of all ethnicities, but it also demands that all old culturally driven worldviews regarding racial prejudices be completely abandoned by the new people of God.

And we're going to explore that a little bit more in the coming weeks. Amen.