

# Charred Casualties of Idolatry: Lynching and the Church

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Preacher: Malcolm Foley

[0:00] We're going to go ahead and start. Good morning. So it's a real joy to have Malcolm Foley with us this morning and his wife, Desiree Foley.

So Malcolm and Desiree were members here at Trinity for a few years, 2012 to 2015. Right, Malcolm? Did I get those dates right? Yes, sir. So Malcolm was here doing a Master's of Divinity at Yale Divinity School. During that time, he was also a pastoral intern here at Trinity and just a good friend.

And so he's currently doing his Ph.D. in American History at Baylor University. And what he's going to be teaching on this morning is going to be sharing some of what he's been working on and researching and studying and writing about at Baylor.

So I'm going to get out of the way and let Malcolm take over. So Malcolm, thanks for being here, brother. We're glad to have you here. Let me open us in a word of prayer and we'll start. Father, thank you for the opportunity that we get to be your people, to gather around your word, to gather in your spirit, to gather around our Savior Christ.

God, would you bless this time, this morning, as we look at a dark moment in our history and as we look to you, Lord Jesus, in the gospel for how we might live faithfully in response.

[1:12] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Good morning, brothers and sisters.

So it's an honor to be before you this morning, but it's also sobering because our material this morning is grim. What you're going to hear is some of the worst that humanity has to offer.

And one historian has noted that anyone who does lynching research must have a strong emotional constitution because such work erodes one's faith in humanity. Well, I want to start off this class by affirming wholeheartedly that my faith does not lie in humanity.

Because if it did, I would have given up a long time ago. No, my hope remains in a God who reached down to save a sinful humanity. A God who, while we were yet sinners, sent his son to die for us.

But it's that same God, however, who has continued to guide and care for his people in the midst of brutal evils. And particularly the African American church is an excellent example of that. I'm also firmly of the opinion that evil is not defeated when we look away from it.

[2:20] As Christ's death and resurrection were the most successful full frontal assault on sin that this world has ever known, so also we as those united to that same Christ and as partakers of that same Holy Spirit must look evil in the face, determine its root, and pluck it out.

So we're going to stare evil in the face this morning. And take a look at some of the ways that some pastors responded to that evil. So first of all, what is a lynching?

In short, it's come to mean extra-legal killing of an individual at the hands of a mob. But what we're talking about in American history after the late 1880s is what the Equal Justice Initiative rightly calls racial terror lynchings.

To understand that, I want us to turn to a particular one. And so we're going to begin on the evening of June 21st, 1903, in Wilmington, Delaware, in the sanctuary of the Olivet Presbyterian Church.

A black man, George White, has just been accused of raping and murdering a white woman named Helen Bishop. And he has been arrested, currently sitting in jail, being held without bail.

[3:30] Pastor Robert Elwood, for this night's sermon, chose 1 Corinthians 5, 13 for his text, which reads, Therefore put away from among ourselves that wicked person, referring to the guy who's having sex with his stepmom.

Here's a bit of that sermon. Oh, honorable judges, call the court, have a speedy trial, establish a precedent, and the girls of this state, the wives of our home, and the mothers of our fireside, and our beloved sisters, will not be sorry.

And neither will you. And honorable judges, if you do not hear and heed these appeals, and that prisoner should be taken out and lynched, then let me say to you, with a full realization of the responsibility of my words, even as Nathan said to King David of old, after his soldiers had killed Uriah, thou art the man, so I would say to you, the responsibility for lynching would be yours for delaying the execution of the law.

If the judges insist that the trial of the murderer of Miss Bishop be delayed until September, then should he be lynched? I say, yes. Miss Bishop's father was also a pastor, and he responded with an open letter to the town, asking that they not, quote, try to atone for one crime, no matter how hellish, by committing another, imploring the town to let the law take its course.

But the matter was out of his hands. The night of June 23rd, two days later, a crowd of several hundred approached the jail, demanding admittance. The guards fought them off with water hoses, but they would not be deterred.

[5:05] As they beat upon the iron doors, the chief of police yelled, the first man that comes into this corridor will be killed. The leader of the mob responded with a sledgehammer in hand, then you had better kill me for the first one.

They breached the jail and approached the cell, and as they approached the cell, yells were heard from the crowd, saying, don't hurt him, hang him. Don't hit him, burn him at the stake.

Take him to the place where he murdered Miss Bishop, for we have driven a stake there and will burn him. They took him out of the jail and brought him to a secluded spot. There he was bound in ropes from his shoulders to his feet, was affixed to the stake under which there was a pile of straw, and the torch was applied to the straw.

Newspapers tell us this, the flames leaped up and licked the man's bare hands. He was held erect by one of the lynchers until his clothing was burning when he was pushed into the bed of the fire.

He rolled about and his contortions were terrible, but he made no sound. Suddenly the ropes on his legs parted, and he sprang from the fire and started to run, and a man hit him with a piece of fence rail and knocked him down as willing hands threw him again into the flames.

[6:22] He rolled out a few times, and each time they pushed him back in, shouting and cheering. There are two things that one must understand about this story. First, it's not anomalous in its broad strokes.

Between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and 1950, more than 4,000 black men, women, and children were killed by white mobs. When people think about lynching, they generally think about the rope and hanging.

But the story of lynching is a story of castration, mutilation, and perhaps most disturbingly, burning people alive. Perhaps even more disturbingly than that, as illustrated by this story that I've just told, there were white pastors who advocated for such things, suggesting that torturing and burning a human being alive was an act of divinely sanctioned justice.

I jest with my colleagues that if my research focused on white pastors during this period, I would actually be depressed. After all, the material is dark enough. To compound a profoundly unjust distortion of the gospel, on top of that, is to witness some of the worst of humanity.

But thankfully, those were not the only voices in this conversation. Many have fallen into the trap of believing that lynching actually worked, that it actually cowed particularly black churches into silence, because of fear.

[7:42] But that is not true. Black pastors did indeed speak out, and that's actually the focus of my research. So I'm going to lay out a few examples of these responses, and then we'll think through kind of what that means for the church today.

So the first of these responses comes as a response to that lynching that I just narrated. It comes from an AME pastor who got national recognition because of the sermon that he preached soon after this lynching.

Here are the words of Reverend Montrose W. Thornton. With a court, law, and officers of law in the white man's hands, the despised Negro can expect no mercy, justice, or protection.

The Negro is unsafe anywhere in this country. He is the open prey at all times of barbarians who know no restraint and will not be restrained. There is but one part left for the persecuted Negro when charged with a crime and when innocent.

Be a law unto yourself. You are taught by this lesson of outrage to save yourself from torture at the hands of the blood-seeking public. Save your race from insult and shame.

[8:51] Be your own sheriff, court, and jury. And here's the kicker. Die in your tracks, perhaps drinking the blood of your pursuers. Yes, you heard that correctly.

Die in your tracks, perhaps drinking the blood of your pursuers. If a lynch mob is after you and you're innocent, you won't survive. So, what Pastor Thornton tells his congregation is, take as many with you as you can.

And don't be surprised by that. Because when one lives in a culture where one's life is constantly in danger, when someone could be killed merely for being accused of a crime or for being related to or near someone who's been accused of a crime, one way to affirm your dignity as a human being, and this is one of the things that pastors were kind of figuring out how to do, one of the ways to affirm your dignity as a human being is to advocate for armed self-defense.

This is one of the options. And if anyone would appear to be entirely justified in pitching self-defense as an option, it must be a community that's faced with the prospect of unjust death on all sides.

Like David Walker, the abolitionist in the early 19th century, and Malcolm X after him, Thornton encouraged black communities not to accept the predominance of domestic terrorism in American society.

[10:11] But self-defense was not the only option provided in African-American theological and political thought. In 1899, a lynching took place that in many ways changed the future of African-American intellectual history.

Sam Hose accused of raping a white woman when what really happened was that he killed his employer in self-defense after his employer came at him with a gun because he asked for back pay that he was owed and because he asked for time off to help his ailing mother.

Those requests were essentially an insult to his employer, for him to say that his employer owed him something.

It's an insult, punishable by death. So he was caught by a mob. They cut off his ears and fingers, castrated him, chained him to a tree, doused him in kerosene, and burned him alive.

And as the fire began to die, trains from... This happens around noon in Georgia. As the fires began to die, trains come in from Atlanta and more than 2,000 more people come in to look through the ashes for charred bones and body parts, taking pieces of the chain that bound him, taking pieces of the tree to which he was chained, all to take souvenirs.

[11:30] And an afternoon soon after that, within two days, W.E.B. Du Bois was on his way to see Joel Chandler Harris, a prominent author, and to see an editor of the prominent newspaper at the Atlanta Constitution because he heard that this lynching was about to happen.

Before he got to that office, he learned that Hoes had already been, quote, barbecued and that his knuckles were for sale in a grocer's window a few blocks ahead. Later, thinking back on this moment, he wrote, I did not meet Joel Chandler Harris nor the editor of the Constitution, but walked home in a distracted state of mind realizing that one could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist while Negroes were being lynched, murdered, and starved.

W.E.B. Du Bois, the activist, perhaps the most prominent black intellectual of the early 20th century, was essentially born on that day. And he would go on to be instrumental in the founding of the NAACP, which would eventually mount significant anti-lynching campaigns.

But that day shocked more than just W.E.B. Du Bois. It also shocked a pastor who also ended up being one of the co-founders of the NAACP, whose name was Francis Grimke.

Grimke was the nephew of Angelina and Sarah Grimke, the well-known northern abolitionists and early advocates for women's rights. A few weeks after Hoes' lynching, Grimke preached three sermons on lynching to the 15th Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., with the mob killing of Stephen as his text for Max.

[13:01] In summary, Francis Grimke's three sermons focus on lynching's causes and its remedies. Because these sermons are a revelation of lynching's true nature and an affirmation of black humanity.

Like Ida B. Wells, the single most important human being in the history of anti-lynching activism, Grimke recognized that the narrative that was offered by southern apologists was a false one.

So lynching as a phenomenon, if you look before the 1860s, well, really before the 1880s, it affected white and black populations in almost comparable numbers.

But in the late 1880s, the number of white people being lynched drops and the number of black people being lynched skyrockets. Why might that be the case? Well, it's a culmination of a trend that begins immediately after the end of Reconstruction.

A trend called redemption. When white southerners take back political power over the South. And so when southern whites were asked why black men were lynched across the South, the answer that they gave was consistent.

[14:11] And the answer was this. Well, it's because black men rape white women. Listen, after Sam Hose was burned alive in 1899, a note was left on a tree near his corpse that said, we must protect our southern women.

Grimke, however, and others were not convinced. Looking at the statistics and also not buying the narrative because it's a ridiculous claim to make, Grimke, like Wells before him, found that people were lynched because they broke the codes of Jim Crow.

Yes, some were accused of rape. Some were accused of rape because they were in a consensual relationship with a white woman. But when they were found out, they were accused of rape.

Some were accused of rape because they bumped the shoulder of a white woman. Some were accused because they looked at a white woman. Some were accused of rape as an afterthought to whip up a crowd with no evidence at all.

As a response, Grimke was clear in his sermon saying, it is all accepted as true. And insofar as it is accepted, the North as well as the church is guilty of condemning the Negro upon charges which have never been substantiated according to the method of civilized society.

[15:23] The alleged Negro rapist is entitled to a fair trial. And until he has had that trial, to kill him is a flagrant injustice, a monstrous wrong. Never ought we to accept the verdict of a mob against any man, white or black.

The reasons for lynching were instead clear to Grimke. He affirmed that lynching's primary purpose was not justice. It was order. And order in the minds of white communities was keeping black communities in their place.

And so what did Grimke think was the remedy to this way of thinking? Grimke's answer, which was one among many, including self-defense and others, but what he said was education, social, political, moral, and religious.

So what Grimke called for was an educational campaign that was both destructive and constructive, destroying the edifice of white supremacy and constructing a framework that allowed full civic participation for African Americans.

This educational campaign would have to systematically dismantle the assumptions that black people were voiceless chattel, only valued for their worth to the economic system. In his words, the southern white man needs to be educated into a recognition of the fact of the Negro's manhood or humanity, into the habit of thinking of the Negro as a human being and not as some lower form of existence that puts him beyond the ordinary civilities of life.

[16:48] As people had been educated to think that black people were inferior, so they had to be educated in African American humanity, apparently.

But who was to do this work? Grimke began with the explicit belief that anti-lynching work had to begin in the church. In fact, in Grimke's mind, one ought to expect to look to ministers of the gospel because they're supposed to be God's representatives fighting for justice and common humanity.

If anyone ought to be on the front lines and if anyone had the resources to actually justify their presence on the front lines, it had to be ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Grimke laid out ample scriptural evidence for racial equality in the sense that conceptions of race as set forth by southern whites to affirm their own superiority in the southern and northern.

They're rooted in falsehood. Rightly, Grimke pointed to such verses as Acts 17, 26 and Genesis 1, 26 and 27, noting that all human beings are descended from Adam and thus created in the image of God.

As a result, he says this, there isn't a hint or suggestion or anything that could in any way be twisted into even so much as the semblance of an argument in support of the belief that some races were created superior to others in the sense in which that term is used by the southern whites in dealing with the race question.

[18:09] For Grimke, that, along with the fact that everyone is held to the same standard in the Ten Commandments and the fact that the gospel is preached to all indiscriminately, solves the problem of ontological inferiority, that is, inferiority in terms of being.

And Grimke was optimistic about the possible success of his project, saying, let the ministers and elders and deacons and members, those who have come out from the world and have taken upon themselves the name of Jesus, first get right themselves on this subject.

Let them accord to the Negro his rights as a citizen. Let them treat him as he ought to be treated as a man and brother, as is required by God's most holy law, which they profess to believe and to follow, and it will not be difficult to get those on the outside to fall in line.

The church is in a position to wield a tremendous influence in this matter if it will only arouse itself to a sense of its responsibilities and will have the courage to do what it knows to be right.

Now, this was an honorable goal and an honorable sentiment, but it was not enough. While it combats the racialization of lynching, that is, or what I narrated before of the shift to black people being lynched in large numbers, it didn't deal with the moral narrative behind it.

[19:31] Because someone can believe that African Americans are human and still think that they're morally degraded and that they particularly need to be kept in line. So, you're not essentially actively a member of the lynch mob, but racist ideology is still present.

And so one way to do this, one way to combat this was to draw on another core Christian claim that sin is a universally corrupting phenomenon. While human beings, by means of our creation and thus our participation in God insofar as we exist, we have dignity as a result of that.

But our sin places us in a place of concurrent guilt. And so in such a situation, justice, insofar as we're able to enact it, appears proximate in most cases.

Because we inevitably have cases of corrupt human beings attempting to form institutions and laws to judge other corrupt human beings. But in the case of lynching, the seeming guiltlessness of the lynchers revealed that such a conception was foreign.

For them, only the black person was guilty and only the black person could be guilty. As white male protectors of southern female virtue, what did they have to be ashamed of? It took the testimony of African American activists, pastors, and poets to continue to affirm the humanity of black people as well as to remind white folks of their own depravity.

[20:56] And it was precisely the second move that Ida B. Wells and other pastors later would attempt to put to the forefront as they described the brutality of lynching and exposed the nation to the circulating postcards and photographs of charred victims.

What you see in this map behind you, and this is only a portion of the map, these are all of the recorded lynchings from 1835 to 1964.

They're color-coded racially. If we were to zoom into southern Texas, we would see just a number of Mexicans being lynched. But this is just the look of the deep south.

This extends northern. But every single one of these dots is a skull. Because every single one of these dots is an African-American man, woman, or child killed by mob violence.

And there are thousands of these. This is from [monroeworktoday.org](http://monroeworktoday.org). But these are just the recorded ones in newspapers. Countless others went unreported.

[ 22 : 05 ] But this is just a visual representation of how widespread this phenomenon was. And so I want to take a quick look at the work of Ida B. Wells.

Because Desiree messes with me about Ida B. Wells because she's basically the hero of my research and I talk about her all the time. And it's generally not a good practice to gush about other women in the front of your wife.

But I assure her that she's no longer living so she's not a threat. But the reason I talk about her is that her courage and resilience in the face of a lynching culture is astonishing.

Wells was a journalist and at the time of what I call her awakening in 1890 she was editor and part owner of the Memphis Free Speech newspaper. A significant achievement in itself.

But when she heard that three men one of whom was her friend had been lynched in Memphis she was surprised. After all she like many others was under the impression that lynching only happened for rape.

[ 23 : 12 ] But she knew these guys. She knew that they couldn't have been accused of rape. As she investigated this case she found that they had been lynched because their grocery store was in competition with the white one across the street.

And when they defended themselves against an attack they shot at and inadvertently wounded police officers. And when she wrote about this the response was not positive.

People burned down the paper that she submitted to and threatened to lynch her so she ran to the north where she lived for the rest of her life. But she still constantly visited the south to investigate these lynchings.

In the case of the one in Memphis this was a lynching that took place because these three men posed an economic threat. And as she and through her national and international anti-lynching campaigns she popularized the truth about lynching convincing both Frederick Douglass and W.B. Du Bois of this fact.

That lynching was a tool of racial terror meant to keep black people in their place of economic and racial inferiority. She brought attention to the fact that what made the narrative of the black beast rapist so compelling was that people believed these stories about all white women all white men all black men and all black women.

[ 24 : 28 ] all white women were paragons of virtue who would never dare to enter into a relationship with a black man. All white men were defenders of virtue justified in using lethal force to defend white women.

All black women were salacious Jezebels and black men were inhuman demons ready to prey upon unsuspecting girls. The complexity of humanity was smoothed and ignored in the face of the need to maintain white supremacy.

And Wells' insight was amazing and her courage to speak not only here but abroad as a black woman in the beginning of the 20th century is mind-bogglingly heroic.

But there's a sense in which even this move backfired because it wasn't paired with a cohesive theological or ethical narrative. So lynching didn't end.

It merely went underground for a while because public brutal execution of allegedly criminal African-Americans no longer had widespread public approval. And so lynching starts to fade in the background in the 30s and 40s though you still have high profile lynchings that continue in the decades to come including the lynching of Emmett Till which ended up sparking the civil rights movement even though recently the woman who accused Emmett Till of whistling at her and calling her baby within the last year she said that she lied about that.

[ 25 : 59 ] So after lynching fades in the 30s and 40s violence moves into the urban centers where African-Americans who had fled lynching in the south gathered.

So one of the reasons for the great migration for 6 million African-Americans moving out of the south into the north was not just economic opportunity in the north but also fleeing lynching.

And so they flee to these urban centers and then you start seeing cases of people's houses being bombed and stuff in these cities because the violence has just moved the anti-black violence has just moved with them.

And so violence moved into the prison system in what some call legal lynchings from capital punishment. Violence moved into the system of mass incarceration and attendant police brutality the effects of which we live in today when this country has 5% of the world's population and 25% of its prisoners.

In a fashion that is truly demonic racial violence has proven to be exceptionally resilient addressed perhaps in one form but always ready to reemerge in another.

[27:07] As Jamar Tisby has said in his recent book racism doesn't go away it adapts. Now I can't give you all the answers because I have to leave you in a little suspense for the book that's going to come out in a few years but such a project must be informed by historical understanding of past attempts to battle lynching and racial violence in general.

We have to continue to ask the question why did Ida B. Wells utter this chilling declaration that American Christians are too busy saving the souls of white Christians from burning in hellfire to save the lives of black ones from present burning in fires kindled by white Christians.

We must ask are we truly working against all suffering especially eternal suffering? Are we saying to our brothers and sisters go and be well fed instead of actually literally feeding them when they need food?

So what does this mean for the church today? We have to remember that the world that we live in today the communities that we live in work in buy or rent houses in have been profoundly shaped by American history.

segregation and its cohabitant racial violence are not southern phenomena. In many cases the segregation in the north was more entrenched and more difficult to extricate than that of the south.

[28:24] This can be seen in the ministries of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King often contrasted with one another because of their methods but it's important to remember that Malcolm almost exclusively addressed particular issues that the north faced where Jim Crow was not explicit but rather was subtly enforced and when Martin Luther King attempted to use the same methods that he used in the south in Chicago in 1966 he found that the issues were actually much more complex.

Economic exploitation of black communities took on a different face. No longer was it these legal forms of segregation but it looked at it looked like racial housing covenants it looked like corrupt landlords racist hiring practices and the like.

And as a matter of fact when he demonstrated in Chicago in August 1966 marching through an all white neighborhood bottles and bricks were thrown at the demonstrators and King himself was struck by a rock and afterwards he said I have seen many demonstrations in the south but I have never seen anything so hostile and so hateful as I've seen here today.

All this is to say this if we're serious about if we're serious about seeking racial justice as an individual and as a church it's important to know the history of your local area.

Are there profound racial disparities in housing poverty and school performance for example? Press into them because chances are you won't like what you see but this is the first step to seeking to be an agent of the gospel and that's not and that's not me kind of making some addition to the gospel.



[29:53] Christ has given us two commandments and he's given us his spirit in order that we might be obedient to those commandments. Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul strength and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. And then in John 15 Jesus then extends that second commandment and says that and says and when he's talking about loving our brothers and sisters in Christ when he says to love one another as I have loved you.

It's impossible to love someone if you do not know them. If you do not laugh with them. If you do not mourn with them. If you watch the Netflix series When They See Us you'll see a horrific story about the Central Park Jogger case in 1989 where five teenage black and Latino boys between 14 and 16 are arrested and convicted for rape and sent to prison.

You will see the interrogations where their confessions are forced. You will see the actual rapist meet one of the boys in jail 13 years later and him actually confessing to the crime showing that in this case the actual rapist in this case ended up having more mercy on these boys than the system that claimed to protect them and society.

Do you wish to train your mourning muscles? Know that this is a reality faced by many especially black and brown men in this country. Unfortunately being convicted of a crime doesn't always mean that one is guilty and there is an uncomfortable amount of data about the innocent suffering.

And so practically what does that mean? Well one thing is take jury duty seriously. Meet your neighbors learn their pains pray for them in your workplace don't let injustice run rampant.

[31:34] If you're afraid for your job remember the Lord is on your side in Christ's sermon on the plain he speaks beatitudes similar to Matthew 5 but not exactly the same. And Luke he encourages us blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the son of man.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy for behold your reward is great in heaven for so their fathers did to the prophets. I submit to you that fighting for the good of your neighbor fighting for the benefit of your neighbor fighting for the life of your neighbor is an action that God has promised to vindicate.

And so how does the gospel of Jesus Christ teach us to respond to the persistent evils of racism injustice and violence? I want to take the tack that Paul normally does in his letters in moving from the indicative to the imperative.

If if we have been if we have been set free by Christ by Christ if we have been set free by Christ that enables us to love and forgive our neighbor in ways that no one else is able to do.

And so this then has to guide I think our interpretation of Romans 13 which is often used as a text to support political quietism that everyone be subject to the ruling authorities and things like that.

[33:02] We have to recognize that if we live in a federal republic as we do we actually make up part of that governing authority body which means that our responsibility then is to use that power well.

And so then this is a call to think through what just political action looks like. And this is something that we constantly need guidance for because it requires an understanding of history it requires an understanding of these local issues but that's not but it's not an option because we have this power and it will either lie unused in the sense of burying a talent or it can be used for the actual benefit of our brothers and sisters and neighbors.

But the second thing and I'm very glad that John Owen's mortification of sin is on the bookshelf because it's one of my favorite books on sanctification but one of the things that he emphasizes in that book is the need to put sin to death but the only way that we actually engage in this activity daily is to recognize that sin is killing us and one of the phrases from that book is be about killing sin or sin will be about killing you.

Racist ideology functions in a very it's it's it's it's it's in this it's it's it's it functions the way that sin does because what what racist ideology is a mixture of pride and greed in this kind of toxic soup and so if this is something that we're seeking to fight like I said as individuals and as a church it has to be something that needs it has to be something that we recognize needs to be put to death not played around with not treated as though not not not not treated as though it's a light issue because people people have died and people continue to die as a result of the belief that certain groups of people are inferior to others whether morally intellectually physically spiritually or any other or or or or or any other category like that and so while while fewer fires may be kindled in today's America the same work is done whenever full human dignity is denied to anyone and so memory of these events and the current application of that knowledge personally in teaching and preaching and loving our communities has to be informed especially by the range of African

American thought on these topics because if not we may be doomed to repeat in insidious ways the evils of our past are there any questions I want to leave some time because this this is not how many of you how many of you haven't have encountered lynching history before lynching history yeah so just reading about it hearing about it since the 60s yeah it's it's it's a so like the scholarship on it has been is like the last 40 years a fair amount has happened but there's but no one has done so what so what so what my dissertation focuses on is specifically black protestant responses to lynching how do you how do you encourage your congregation in the midst of a society that seems to be poised for their death at all points and so what the dissertation is doing is it maps the range ranging from pray about it and it'll go away to self defense and there are a bunch of spots in between but the main purpose of that is to remind people that this practice doesn't doesn't continue because no one is saying anything about it it continues because no one is listening to the people who are actually saying things about it any and all questions how old was

[37:25] Wells when in 89 how old was she in her late 20s yes she was born in 61 I believe so about to turn 30 her most famous her most famous editorials come out in well in 92 is when Southern Horrors comes out she has two kind of most famous editorials Southern Horrors Lynchelony in all its phases and a red record I eagerly recommend those texts for an introduction to this history she's brilliant she's as a child but soon after her parents are free because she was born during the Civil War yes didn't a lot of Christians use that

I don't know the exact scripture but I know it's the Genesis like Noah the son of Sham he was black or dark so so the curse of Ham was common not just in white churches but also in black churches African American Christians would refer to themselves as sons of Ham but they would do so this is its own conversation of how first of how the curse of Ham gets to be interpreted as a curse on Ham when the text is a curse on Canaan the curse of Ham is used as a narrative to justify African slavery that's essentially what it's used as there's nothing in the text to suggest that but it's used that way actually even beginning in the 16th century my professor who was my advisor for a little while when I was doing work on

Calvin and the Puritans he wrote a book on the curse of Ham as a developing doctrine of justification of American slavery but it's an unfounded scriptural interpretation that's essentially used to justify an already continuing practice some people use scriptures to Christians use it to persecute Jews and there's no scriptures that tell us that we're to persecute Jews yeah I mean one point so this is a point that I'll add because it's a little bit of time this is a very important point and probably one of the most important things that I've learned about the way that racism functions in American society so we tend to think that things move from ignorance and hate to racist ideas to racist practices it's one of the reasons why none of us like to be called racist because it's paired with this ignorance and hate and so we think oh no

I'm not racist I'm not ignorant and hateful yes we are but when you look at particularly American history but this bleeds into other countries as well the order historically actually tends to go from policies that disproportionately disadvantage particular populations to ideas that then justify those practices which then become calcified into ignorance and hate for example American slavery when the Portuguese arrive in Africa they don't initially the initial thought is not these people are inferior let's enslave them the initial thought is hey this could make us a whole lot of money let's try this and then they think hold on I need to justify this to the Pope somehow so let's say that this is we're doing this to Christianize the heathen yeah let's do that that'll work so this continues for a while but then you have to think of other reasons because it starts to become clear that actually the goal is not

Christianizing the heathen actually the goal is just for you to make money and so then you have to think of other things you have to think of things like oh they're built for slavery they're inferior to us we need to civilize them so we ought to enslave them they ought to be enslaved these kinds of ideas start to proliferate and these ideas start to build a life of their own apart from the fact that these were built to justify a particular practice and so then these thoughts of white people being inferior and things like that that just starts to calcify and people just think oh this is just common sense these are things that we just know to be true and you can trace this with a number of particularly racist policies in our history but that changes the way that we address it if we recognize that these things begin fundamentally in self-interest because that's where all these things have begun greed and self-interest and things like that then we can start asking the question okay this isn't just an education it's not an education problem it's just that we're evil and so we have to deal with it in that we have to deal with it in those terms and so when we see disparities and we blame entire groups of people for those things we have to think carefully about what we're saying when we say those kinds of things because the fact of the matter is if we're to be ambassadors of the gospel our goal is to figure out how to wisely love our neighbors and blaming entire groups of people for things that are not their fault is unhelpful yeah thanks so much upstairs we've been going through nehemiah yeah and uh when nehemiah heard the news of this terrible terrible situation it seemed like it was a pattern where he heard rather than simply acting yep though he was an actor yep he stopped and he mourned mourns yeah then he confessed he not only confessed personally but also corporately for his people yep then he prayed and really reflected in any act does that seem like a helpful pattern absolutely does john absolutely does john absolutely does john this is this is not the kind of this is not the kind of work that you can engage in without without initially because it's the mourning the mourning and praying and confessing gets you gets you in the proper posture to be able to engage in this kind of in this kind of work this is not a this is this is not a rush in and save situation this is a we have to be working alongside our brothers and sisters and neighbors learning alongside them to figure out okay this is how deep these wounds are how can I come alongside you in these in these wounds that requires sitting with people it requires mourning it requires prayer it requires confession from all of us this is not this is not something that if you were born and if you were born and grew up or have spent any significant period of time in this country you've been shaped in some way by this shaped in some way by this by this culture and so that that those those kinds of practices are necessary preparatory they're necessary preparatory actions before even before even thinking about you know before even thinking about moving forward those are those are I think important initial steps

[ 45 : 22 ] I don't want to take up too much more time I'll be I'll be I'll be available though but I want to but I want to make sure that we have time for worship I want to pray for us let me let me pray for us real quick heavenly father we thank you for this opportunity Lord to gather in your name Lord to worship you gather with our brothers and sisters and lift up your and lift up your name Lord even as we hear of even as we hear of seemingly insurmountable evils Lord not only in history Lord but in our world today Lord I pray that we would constantly be reminded that we serve an actually insurmountable God Lord that you that you that you have shown that you have shown your love for us in Christ that you've shown Lord your forgiveness for us in Christ that you've shown Lord the fact that you wish for us to be conformed to the image of your son in the gift of your Holy Spirit and so Lord I pray that as we continue to seek to live the Christian life Lord that we would that we would do so humbly

Lord that if we as we as we look at these seemingly insurmountable issues of particularly racial justice but this extends to other realms Lord that we would not be discouraged Lord that we would not fall into despair but Lord that we would continue to lean in to lean into you Lord the resources that you've given us in your word Lord in prayer in your spirit and in the community of faith Lord we thank you for the many ways that you continue to bless us by your grace and your mercy and Lord we pray these things in the name of your son and by the power of your spirit amen