

RACISM

Have you ever had an angry mob try to grab you and kill you just because of the colour of your skin? Have you ever been denied service in a store or kicked out simply because of your colour? Have you ever had someone spit in your face and yell at you because of your colour? Today I want to talk about racism. I know that this is a very relevant and painful topic today. I want to be sensitive and careful in the words that I say.

I know that there are people listening today that have gone through very painful experiences in their lives due to racism. I know that I have not experienced anything like that in my own life. I recognize that whatever I say this morning that there will be people who are disappointed because I did not address the issue the way that they would have addressed it. The stories and examples that I will use this morning are all ones that have come from my own life. I know that if you were up here right now that you would have very different stories, probably much more painful than mine.

We all speak from what we know and have experienced. For instance, I can say that the three examples that I started with today have all happened to me. I was almost killed by an angry mob demonstrating against America in Bolivia in 1986, simply because I was white. I have had someone yell at me and spit in my face in Kuwait because I was white. In China in 1988 I had a store owner deny me service, yell at me and kick me out because I was white. That is why to this day I only remember a few words in Mandarin, but those words are “WO SHI JIANADA REN. WO BUSHI MEIGUO REN. WO YAO YIGE WAWATOE.” That means “I am Canadian. I am not American. I would like one ice cream.” Again, please understand, I am not trying to compare myself with anyone else or say that I have experienced racism in the same way you have. We all have different experiences and come at this topic from different perspectives.

In speaking about racism today I know that there may be those who believe that I as a middle-aged white man have no right in speaking about it. Today, as your pastor, I want to look at this issue biblically. For example, I can say that women are of equal value as men even though I am not a woman. I do so because that is what the bible says. I can say that adultery is wrong even though I have never committed adultery. I know it is wrong because that is what the bible says.

I am also going to speak about racism today without directly addressing some of the events that have happened in the last few years that have caused so much pain. One of the reasons that I have waited so long in addressing this issue is the fact that our world today, and even the church, has become so politically polarized. This issue must be approached biblically and not politically. I know that there are people that would love to get into a political debate over this issue, but that would not be helpful. We need to focus on the things that unite us, NOT on the things that divide us but. So, what are the things that we can all agree on today? Let me say three things;

1. Racism is always wrong

I must admit that I do not really understand racism. Of course I am NOT saying that racism does not exist, we all know that it does. What I mean is that I have a hard time understanding that mindset. I have never personally looked at a person and thought that they were superior or inferior to me just because of the colour of their skin. Having pastored in a multi-ethnic environment for the last 30 years when I see a person I see a person. I do not understand why anyone would treat anyone else differently just because they look different. It is illogical.

Prejudice I do understand. We are all taught to be prejudiced from an early age. When I was growing up in Sarnia the kids in my Public School used to tell Newfie jokes. I must admit that I had no idea of what a Newfie even was until I was in High School. Then I found out that it meant someone who came from Newfoundland. I remember thinking, “why do people hate Newfoundland so much? It is part of Canada and seems to be a very beautiful place? I hear it has good fishing.” We see prejudice in different degrees all around us.

What is prejudice? Collins dictionary defines it as ‘an unreasonable dislike of a particular group of people or things, or a personal preference for one group of people or things over another.’ For example, you have cat people and you have dog people. People who use Windows computers vs. people who use Apple computers. We are prejudiced about lots of different things, from our favorite sports teams to the cars we like to drive.

In the old TV show *Corner Gas*, the people from Dog River could not even mention the nearby town of Wullerton without spitting. We see prejudice all around us. Often it is expressed in the context of nationalism. When we lived on the ship we had over 50 nations represented, and people needed to address their national prejudices quickly because they found themselves living and working with people that were very different than them. Israelis living and working with Palestinians. Pakistanis and Indians. Dutch people and Germans. England and Ireland. Most people are prejudiced at some level, we are taught to be. Just ask a Canadian what they think of Americans. We all have likes and dislikes based on how we were raised and our own personal experiences.

Racism is different. Racism is the belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. That is just plain stupid. To believe that a person is better or worse than you simply because they have more or less Melanin in the outside layer of their skin is an illogical and ridiculous idea.

We know historically that as human populations grew after the flood, people who were living closer to the equator developed darker skin to protect against the damaging UV light. Likewise, people further from the equator developed lighter skin because it had better vitamin D production which was essential to their survival. There are no measurable genetic difference between human populations. The notion of race is a societal idea, not a biological one. We are all the same.

In December we purchased a new car. Not a NEW car, a new to us car. In deciding which car to buy there are a lot of factors to look at. What is the make and model of the car? How old is it? How many KMs does it have? Is it mechanically sound? The last thing you really need to consider is the colour. Why? Because it has nothing to do with the performance of the vehicle. They make new cars in lots of different colours, but that is just an issue of preference not performance.

Back in the 1960s, the original *Star Trek* had an episode called ‘Let That Be Your Last Battlefield’ where the ship came across two people from the planet Cheron that hated each other. Lokai was black on left side of his face and white on the right side and Bele was the opposite. Bele had been chasing Lokai across the universe for 50,000 years. Why? Because Bele thought he was an inferior species. The obvious audience response was “you both look the same! Why are you fighting?”

One of the reasons I have a hard time understanding how anyone in their right mind could believe in racism is because I was raised with a Christian Worldview. I was taught from childhood that there is a creator God who made all of us.

Our value and worth are not based upon what we look like or what we do. It is based upon who God created us.

Gen 1:26-31 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ... 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning -- the sixth day.

Psa 8:4-8 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? 5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. 6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: 7 all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, 8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

God created us in His image. We are special. We have worth and value because we were created with worth and value. We are different than animals. We were given the responsibility to rule over the land and the animals.

If you do not believe in God than you do not believe in creation. You must therefore believe that the world came about by chance and there is nothing inherently valuable in us other than what we are able to contribute to society. If you believe in evolution, then you believe in survival of the fittest. You believe that society should weed out from the population all those who are weak and do not contribute so that the overall population will be stronger.

The problem with believing in survival of the fittest is that then you get to decide what you believe are strong traits vs. weak traits. If mankind has no inherent value, if a person is only as valuable as what they contribute to society, than you are free to determine for yourself what is valuable and what is not. Adolf Hitler was an evolutionist. He believed that Jewish people were not valuable because they did not have the traits that he felt were valuable. He believed that by selective breeding that he could create a master race. Just remove the people with the traits you do not like (dark skin and hair) and make people with the traits that you do like have lots of kids together and eventually you will produce a master race. Hitler did that because he was an evolutionist.

This is humanism. This is what you get when you remove God from the equation. This is the inevitable outcome of removing God from society.

When we lived in Kuwait we saw racism all around us. It was overt and blatant. There was a clear hierarchy of who had value and who did not. You would be standing there in line at the grocery store and a Kuwaiti would walk up and just push the people waiting there aside and put their groceries down in front of them. It was their way of saying "I have more value than you do."

The church in Kuwait was across the road from the Arabian Gulf. We often had people that would park in a lot across the road and walk to the church. There was a traffic light so it was mostly safe. One day a Filipino lady was crossing the road to come to church. A Kuwaiti woman who was speeding ran the red light and struck the woman, almost killing her. The Kuwaiti stopped to see who she had hit, and then just drove away. The Filipina was in the hospital for about a month when one day this Kuwaiti woman showed up in her hospital room.

She walked in and the first thing she said was “I have good news for you. I am not going to charge you for the damage that you did to my car.” Let me ask you, how is that possible? How can any person place more value in their car than for a fellow human being created in the image of God having infinite worth? You may shake your head at this, but it is simply the logical outcome of humanism. When people have no inherent value, when society gets to determine what is valuable and what is not, you will have people like this who place more value in things and not people.

This is the root of racism. This is what happens when you remove creator God from the equation. All of us can stand and agree today that racism is always wrong.

2. Slavery is always wrong

A lot of the discussion today around racism is an echo of the atrocities that have happened in the past. Revisionist historians have suggested incorrectly that slavery was supported or at least condoned by Christianity and the Church. So what does the bible have to say about slavery?

First, it is important to understand that just because something is mentioned in the bible does not mean that it is something that is good or something that should happen. Many things in the bible are descriptive, not prescriptive. The bible does not support slavery, it clearly says that slavery is wrong. Most of the time the word slavery is used in the bible it is referring to employment or indentured servitude where someone takes out a loan and then works for a term to pay it off.

Lev 25:39-42 If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave. 40 He is to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident among you.

Exo 21:1-3 These are the laws you are to set before them: 2 If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything.

Deu 15:12-14 If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. 13 And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. 14 Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you.

Notice that the biblical model here is generosity. It is treating people as they deserve to be treated, with respect and dignity. The idea of taking someone against their will and making them a slave was a crime worthy of death;

Exo 21:16 Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.

This is the kind of slavery that Egypt forced Israel into after the time of Joseph. It was brutal forced oppression and God clearly condemned it. This verse alone also proves without any doubt that the bible condemns the Atlantic slave trade which took place in the 1600 to 1800s.

How could such a terrible thing happen? How could millions of people created in the image of God be abused like this, taken against their will and forced into slavery? The answer again comes down to value. It was all about money.

An economic triangle was created. Slaves from Africa were sold to the Americas to produce raw materials like sugar, tobacco and cotton which was then sold to Europe to be turned into manufactured goods, textiles and rum which was then sold back to slave traders in Africa. It was all about economics.

So why did people allow this to happen? How can one human being treat another human being like this? The bible tells us to love people and use money. Remove God from the equation and everything changes. You end up loving money and using people. When society gets to determine what is valuable and what is not, people will begin to justify their horrific behavior in all sorts of ways. When you value money more than people it always leads to abuse and bondage.

If the bible is clear that slavery is wrong, then why were there Christians historically who participated in it by having slaves? What about some Christians in the past who even tried to use the bible to justify slavery? There have been many terrible things done through the centuries in the name of Christ. Yes, there have been Christians who participated in slavery, but there have also been Christians who have committed every other sin as well. Does the fact that Christians have committed adultery justify adultery? Of course not. Romans 7 reminds us that just because we sin, it does not make the bible invalid. The bible does not guarantee perfection, it simply reminds us that we need a savior because we all fall so short of the mark.

In looking at any faith, you look to its founder, not just its followers. Look to what it says. The clear evidence of history is that the people who knew the bible the best were precisely the ones who opposed slavery the most. Although there were some enlightenment philosophers who opposed slavery, it was Christian activists who initiated and organized the abolitionist movement. In fact, most abolitionists were pastors and Christian leaders. People like William Wilberforce, John Newton, Charles Finney, John Wesley and Abraham Lincoln. Many Christian authors in the 1700s and 1800s wrote tracts denouncing slavery. As Christians we are called to stand against injustice.

So what about today? Today there are still approximately 40 million people around the world who live in slavery. About 10 million or a quarter of them are children. This is despite the fact that it is illegal in every country. Again, the driving force behind it is economics. More than 50 percent of enslaved people provide forced labour, usually in factories or sweatshops. In industrialised countries, human trafficking is the modern variety of slavery. In unindustrialised countries, enslavement by debt bondage is a common form of enslaving a person, such as captive domestic servants, forced marriage, and child soldiers.

Again, we saw slavery first hand in Kuwait. People would make bad decisions with their money and get themselves in debt. There were always people ready to lend them the money they needed, but at ridiculously high interest rates. This was not indentured servitude where people were given a loan and then paid it off in a few years. It was economic slavery. Desperate people would take these loans and quickly find themselves drowning in debt that they could never afford to pay. The result was financial bondage. This would even sometimes happen in the church. As pastors we would sometimes have to step in.

Exo 22:25-27 If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest. 26 If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, 27 because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

Luke 6:34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full.

The other area that we saw slavery in Kuwait was in the house maid market. Domestic workers play an important role in the country's wealth and lifestyle. There are only about 1.3 million Kuwaitis, but about 660,000 domestic workers – one for every 2 Kuwaitis. Most are women. There are several laws surrounding hiring domestic workers. They must be given a day off each week and have the freedom to hold their own passport. Every 2 years they must be given a round trip ticket back to their country of origin for at least 1 month vacation. These laws are seldom kept.

Women would enter the country by the plane load lured by the promise that they would make more money in Kuwait than they were making at home. As they exited the plane they had a number stapled to their clothing. They were taken to shelters and then brought out and paraded before Kuwaiti men, who would star at them and tell them to turn around and show their teeth.

Once hired, they were taken to homes and their passports were confiscated, which meant that they did not have the freedom to leave the house. They were forced to work 7 days a week. After about a year and a half of work, they would be accused of stealing, just so the employers did not have to pay for their return ticket home for vacation. People in million dollar homes with a Ferrari and Porsche parked out front, unwilling to pay \$400 so their housekeeper could have a few months off. They were taken to massive deportation centers which were just prisons and eventually, after suffering terribly for many months, deported. Often, they were physically and sexually abused. You would read in the paper often of domestic workers that had committed suicide.

Many would run away. The only place in the country they could go to for help was their Embassy. The Filipino Embassy in Kuwait had a dormitory attached to it where hundreds of women were trapped. They could not leave the country or even leave the embassy because the police would pick them up and send them back to their employers, or to the deportation centers. Hundreds of them would be stuck in these dormitories for years. Our church would have a church service every week in the Embassy for them, and hearing their stories would just make you weep.

How can human beings treat each other in this way? Again, the bible tells us to love people and use money. When you reverse that, when you begin to love money you begin to use people. Slavery is not just something that happened hundreds of years ago. It is still happening today, and as Christians we can all join hands and agree today that slavery (in all its forms) is always wrong.

3. The Golden Rule Always Applies

As believers in Jesus Christ we can all stand today and say that racism and slavery is always wrong, but that is not enough. God has given us the standard by which we are to treat one another.

Mat 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

What is the golden rule? It is not as it says in the movie Aladin, 'He who has the gold makes the rules.' The golden rule is that we treat other people the way that we ourselves would like to be treated. The golden rule applies to everyone. Men or women, old or young, rich or poor, black or white. It is standing against any form of favoritism.

Jas 2:1-8 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

Favoritism is wrong and has no place in the church. I think we all understand this.

As I mentioned at the beginning, there have been times when I was treated badly simply because of my appearance. There are also times like this rich man in this story where I have been shown favoritism. In 1988 I had the opportunity to go to China and teach English at the University in Qingdao. In those days there were 2 currencies in China. You had the Renminbi (for everyone in China) and you had the FEC (Foreign Exchange Certificate- for foreigners visiting China). People visiting china were not supposed to have Renminbi and people in China were not supposed to have FEC. The problem is that there were things that you could buy in China with the FEC that you could not purchase with the Renminbi. It was unfair.

On our way back to Hong Kong we stopped in Beijing for a week. The day we arrived we were hungry and had heard that they had just opened up a KFC in Tiananmen Square. We all wanted a taste of home – some good ole fashioned junk food, so we hoped on the subway. When we arrived, the lineup went around the block. We got in line and found out that we were probably going to have to wait over an hour to be served, but we really wanted it so we were willing to wait.

Just then a lady who worked for KFC came running down the line to us. She told us that we were in the wrong line. We were in the Renminbi line and not the foreigners line. She walked us down the road past all those hungry people waiting in line right to the front doors and then right to the counter to the foreigners line. It was hard to enjoy that chicken when we knew that we had passed so many people in order to get it. We knew and everyone else in that line knew that it was wrong.

We need to always treat other people the way that we ourselves would like to be treated.

John 13:34-35 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

So how do we respond to this message today? As followers of Jesus we need to stand against racism and slavery in all it's forms. But how do we do that? How do we end racism? Racism ends where Jesus begins. You can address the symptoms of racism, but to truly cure it means that Jesus must be lord. The answer to this issue is Jesus. As brothers and sisters in Christ we need to stand together and love one another. We need to declare the Gospel together and protect one another.

There are cat people and there are dog people. For things like that, we can agree to disagree. However, there is NO PLACE in the church of Jesus Christ for racism or exploitation or favoritism in any form. The only black and white we see should be in the pages of this book. We must agree in Christ to stand together against this.

One of the pastors we had in Kuwait was a guy named BW Burnett from Memphis TN. He was a great preacher. We had many Nigerians in our congregation that would often come in their national outfits – big flowing robes and hats. One of our elders was from Nigeria and came back from vacation with an outfit for Pastor B. He was on his way to church one Sunday wearing that outfit and was pulled over. Africans were often targeted for police checks. The Kuwaiti policeman yelled at him to get out of the car and show his Civil ID card. This card indicates your residency as well as your nationality. Pastor B pulled out his card and began to talk to the man in his southern accent. The policeman immediately realized that he had made a big mistake. This was just a few years after the gulf war, and Americans were held in high regard. The policeman apologized and told him he was free to go. Instead of just leaving, Pastor B reached out his hand to shake the officers hand and then said, “You know, I am a pastor at the American Church. I am actually on my way to church right now. My brother, would you mind if I just prayed for you before I left?” There on the side of a busy highway, Pastor B prayed for that man that God would soften his heart and that he would someday meet Jesus. How do we battle racism? The same way we battle against all injustice and exploitation in the world today, We do so in love, lifting the name of Jesus, one handshake at a time.