

***'What is behind today's issues?'*(pt 3 Racism)**



Good morning everyone. We're going to be thinking a bit about *racism* and how we can respond as Christians but before we do that, I'm going to pray for us:

Father God, as we think about this important topic, help us to reflect on what we are seeing going on all around us, please speak to us through your Word and equip us to love you and to love our neighbour more. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

The Presence of God's Presence

If I was to offer you a brief recap as to what we have been sharing over the past two weeks. It would be this...

I shared that we do not know what the reasons are...if there are any reasons...as to this worldwide pandemic...

(OHP) Romans 8: 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We know that the entire creation is groaning together, and going through labour pains together, up until the present time. Not only so: we too, we who have the first fruits of the Spirit's life within us, are groaning within ourselves, as we eagerly await our adoption, the redemption of our body.

We were saved, you see, in hope...

In the same way, too, the Spirit comes alongside and helps us in our weakness. We don't know what to pray for as we ought to; but that same Spirit pleads on our behalf, with groanings too deep for words. And the Searcher of Hearts knows what the Spirit is thinking, because the Spirit pleads for God's people according to God's will. (Romans 8.22-27)

Two things (at least) we can take comfort with from this scripture...

That no matter what we are going through...when we are weak and vulnerable...when we don't know what to pray for...then the spirit comes alongside us and helps us in our weakness...and the Spirit pleads for Gods people

Secondly: God always wanted to rule his world through human beings. That is part of what it means to be made in God's image.

It was gloriously fulfilled in the human being Jesus; and the way creation will at last become what it was always meant to be through the wise, rescuing, restorative rule of renewed, resurrected human beings.

Paul says that the followers of Jesus are caught up in the same 'groaning'.

The thing above all which the Church should be doing, at the present time is praying. But this is a strange prayer indeed.

Here we are, at the heart of one of the most glorious chapters in Scripture, and here is Paul saying '***We don't know what to pray for as we ought. We are at a loss! He implies that this isn't something we ought to be ashamed of. It is the natural place to be. It is a kind of exile; a kind of fasting; a moment of not-knowing, not being in 'control', not sharing what we might think of as 'glory' at all.***

At the very moment when we discover that we ourselves are 'groaning' and don't know what to say or do, at that same moment we find that **God himself, God the Holy Spirit, is 'groaning' as well, groaning without words.** (OHP) There is a pattern here.

*But the God we see in Jesus is the God who wept at the tomb
of his friend.*

*The God we see in Jesus is the God-the-Spirit who groans
without words.*

*The God we see in Jesus is the one who, to demonstrate what his kind
of 'being in charge' would look like, did the job of a slave and washed his
disciples' feet.*

So, what are we saying? Not only do we, the followers of Jesus, not have any words to say, any great pronouncements on 'what this all means' to trumpet out to the world (*the world, of course, isn't waiting eagerly to hear us anyway*); **but we, the followers of Jesus, find ourselves caught up in the groaning of creation, and we discover that at the same time God the Spirit is groaning within us.**

At those very moments when we find ourselves weeping with grief at the death of a friend or family member, or at the impossibility of having a proper funeral, or at the horror of millions of the world's poorest being at risk, or simply because being locked down is inherently depressing — at those moments, when any words we try to say come out as sobs or tears, we have to remind ourselves that this is how God the Spirit is present at the heart of the agony of creation.

That being said. As followers of Christ, as believers, we should be aware of what is happening around us... we may not understand it, of what's happening... but we need to be aware... (This is what I share last week...)

What we need to be, is what they used to say was '*counter cultural*'... swimming against the tide if you like...so be willing to stand on Biblical values. **Often against the times and 'culture' of the day. What we sometimes thought was common sense...Is no longer common...**

I shared some thought last week on our **morality**...and how we should react to things and events that offend us and challenge us...

(OHP) We shared **Romans 1.18-21**, where Paul writes:

For the wrath of God [in other words, his judgement] is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men [meaning men and women], who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth [that is, the truth about God – the truth that he's there and that he made us and that we're accountable to him.]. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him...

(OHP) I suggested that our sense of morality and rights comes from our Creator God.

2. The problem is: we don't like God defining morality and rights for us

3. (But) We can't live without morality and rights – so we create our own for ourselves So, what we do is we suppress the truth about God because he's the Absolute Person and we want to get free of his absolutes because they're inconvenient, and they cross ...or go against ...what we want.

Another amazing 'double dutch' issue happed this week...

(OHP) A BBC headline stated that Fertility rate: 'Jaw-dropping' global crash in children being born

(<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-53409521>)

The world is ill-prepared for the global crash in children being born which is set to have a "jaw-dropping" impact on societies, say researchers.

Falling fertility rates mean nearly every country could have shrinking populations by the end of the century.

And 23 nations - including Spain and Japan - are expected to see their populations halve by 2100.

Countries will also age dramatically, with as many people turning 80 as there are being born. *What is going on?* The fertility rate - the average number of children a woman gives birth to - is falling.

If the number falls below approximately 2.1, then the size of the population starts to fall. In 1950, women were having an average of 4.7 children in their lifetime. Researchers at the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation showed the global fertility rate nearly halved to 2.4 in 2017 - and their study, published in the *Lancet*, projects it will fall below 1.7 by 2100.

Good article. Worth a read...but on the other side of the argument if you like...

(OHP) 52 years of abortion in the UK: 9,446,068 lives lost since 1967 — one unborn baby every 3 minutes

Right to Life UK 28 April 2020 | 8:40 AM

https://www.christiantoday.com/article/52_years_of_abortion_in_the_uk_9446068_lives_lost_since_1967_one_unborn_baby_every_3_minutes/134775.htm

Almost 1 in 4 (24%) pregnancies in England and Wales now ends in abortion, according to the [most recent figures](#). Compared with 1969 – the first year with complete figures for a total number of abortions – where there were 54,819 abortions, there has been a 270% increase in the total number of pregnancies ending in abortion in England and Wales.

Certain rights out strip other rights...

No doubt, you have realised that racism is in the news; recently of course was the death of George Floyd and the protests that followed it. And it is heart-breaking. **Men and women, made in the image of God, should not be treated the way.** And I suggest we cannot stand by while it happens and not respond.

Jesus would not have done, and so neither should those who follow him as their Lord and Saviour.

And it's not an isolated incident either; we see in our newspapers reports of increases in racism in this country and hate crime after Brexit, of antisemitism, and of the 'problems' of immigrants and so on.

And racism is not just in the news. It is closer to home. So, what does the Bible teach about racism?

And what should our response be to it?
Well the Bible's teaching is very clear.

Racism is sin, whether it is obvious and, in your face, or more subtle and hidden.

Whatever form it takes, it is against God's will. Racism is wrong. We see that right throughout the Bible.

Right at the beginning we see that all men and women are created in the image of God. **Genesis 1.26-27:**

(OHP) Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

God made us all equally in his image and so we have value.

That means that all lives' matter. You matter to your family and to your community, certainly, but you also matter to the God who created me and you in his own image.

We also see in the Bible that God didn't create us all to be the same.

There is an incredible diversity.

The population of the world is about 7.8 billion people made up of 10,000 different ethnic/cultural/traditional groups living in nearly 200 countries.

That we are different nationalities, and from different tribes and peoples and languages is not a result of the fall.

True – in a fallen world sin touches everything.

But we know that in heaven, where sin is no more and where God's people are together, we will *still* see that wonderful diversity

(OHP) . Revelation 7.9-10:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Before that day, however, God will judge all of us for our sin; for the way we have treated him and for the way we have treated those made in his likeness.

In suggest to you that Sin is the source of racism and that affects all every single one of us from every culture; white, black and everything in between.

We all sin, and we are all racist. **But the Bible also tells us that Jesus (the son of God) gave his life for us on the cross so that we can be forgiven of all of our sin. He did that for everyone, and if Jesus welcomes everyone then so should we.**

The forgiveness he brings results in those who trust in him being brought into his family – all equally as his children. **Galatians 3.28:**
There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

All Christians, whatever nationality, whatever station in life, whatever gender, they are all one in Christ.

We do not deny our cultural differences but who we are in Christ now transcends those differences. We are one in Christ.

(OHP) **We are family. So to sum up:**

- **Racism is wrong because every single human is created by God**
- **Racism is wrong because God created us with glorious diversity**
- **Racism is wrong because Jesus died to bring us peace with God and with one another**

Racism is wrong, full stop. So, we should stand against racism in all its forms.

Hear some words from (OHP) **James 3.7-10:**

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be so.

James here is talking here about the use of our tongue and his focus is on how we treat one another.

As Jesus said, *'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks'* (**Matthew 12.34**).

So, it shouldn't be a surprise that very often the demeaning attitude of our hearts towards one another other spills out in our words; how we speak about other people, how we speak to them. James is right. The tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison:

From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be so.

The point here is not to pretend that racism only extends as far as verbal abuse. *It's far more than that, but the key point in this part of James' letter is that **our attitude** and **how we treat someone** should not be based on their race, or how wealthy they are.*

Instead, it should be based, as James says in verse 9, on the fact that they are made in the likeness of God.

This is a clear reference to part of **Genesis 1** that I read just now. **We are to look and see before us someone made in the image of God.**

That is what should determine how we treat them, how we speak and how we act.

That's what the Bible teaches about racism.

What, then, should be our response?

*(OHP) Firstly, **We are to care***

Racism is a bigger issue than many of us realise. Perhaps you feel it isn't a problem at all (in which case you are almost certainly part of the problem yourself)! It's key that we listen well here to those effected. If, and I hope you do, have close friends who are ethnically different to you then ask them about their experiences of racism, ask them how they feel about the injustice of what happened to George Floyd. There are also good books you can read, and videos to watch which will help us understand this better...

The personal experiences you will hear are sad and unacceptable.

Racism does exist and it needs to be addressed. Often, we don't speak about it much, probably because we don't want to cause divisions, but in fact, our silence on the matter often communicates a lack of care. **So, I think it would be helpful if the issue of racism could be discussed more in the church.** John Piper has written a book on race relations called 'Bloodline', it's available free online and it is very helpful and in it he says this:

‘...holding your tongue does not usually advance understanding, deepen respect, warm affections or motivate action’.

I think he’s right and I hope these thoughts will help open up a helpful conversation. **Many of us wounded and need 'healing' and some of us need to be more aware of how we are causing hurt through our words and actions, however unintentional they may be.**

Once we have taken time to listen, we need to care, deeply.

We need to pray for a right and holy discontent when we see racism.

We need to be angry enough about it and care enough to want to see it changed.

I know it can be uncomfortable, but when we see racism, (prejudice, intolerance, bias) we need to speak out about it.

In the church especially, we need to remember the Bibles’ teaching that we are all one body with many parts.

So, if one body is suffering, we should all suffer together.

So firstly, our response needs to be to care.

(OHP) Secondly, We need to Take Care

We need to respond by intentionally loving and welcoming everyone, treating them as is appropriate for those made in the likeness of God. That means giving them the honour of making eye contact when we speak to them, giving them our full attention, listening to them and being willing to learn. It means making the effort to learn and remember names and being careful of banter that crosses into stereotyping.

It will mean celebrating and rejoicing in our differences. We don’t need to ignore or downplay our different cultures, we should recognise and celebrate them. **We love people less when we ignore how God made them.**

In his brilliant book ‘*Christian Counterculture*’ David Platt writes this:

“I am prone to prefer people who are like me – in colour, culture, heritage and history. If I walk into a room by myself and see two tables, one with a group of people ethnically like me and the other with a group of people ethnically unlike me, I instinctively move towards the group that is like me.”

We need to be aware of that....

Third – we must not be so scared of getting things wrong that we do nothing or avoid speaking to one another in case we say something stupid. 1 Peter 4.8:

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”

When we get things wrong, we say sorry, we forgive one another and we remember that we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

and finally, We need to pray and work to challenge racism

We live in a fallen, divided world. **As followers of Jesus we need to be prepared to take a stand against racism whenever we see it.** In fact, because we know that we are made in the likeness of God and called to love our neighbour as ourselves, we should be at the forefront of the challenge against racism. Sadly, however, the UK church’s response to this issue appears to be mainly silence.

The Black Lives Matter campaign is a big movement and was started by three women after the death of Trayvon Martin. They are right that black lives do matter, but it is not a response from a Christian standpoint. It’s not born out of the conviction that all are created in God’s image. If you look at the ‘about us’ section of their website, you can see that clearly.

They’re not pro the family and many Christians would struggle to wholeheartedly support some of their foundational principles. It is a secular movement. **As Christians, we’ve got the Bible which tells us who we are and how we are valued in God’s sight.**

We need to promote and teach clearly about race and justice and the need for forgiveness and reconciliation both with God and with man. We should be leading that charge and the response to challenge racism as Christians. **But what will that look like?**

For many of that will mean examining our own hearts and our attitudes and our behaviours and praying for God’s help to change. It will also mean challenging inequality and speaking up when we see racism in our church or in our workplace or in our nation. But, this will only bear fruit as we preach the gospel and care for needs and contend for truth in our society.

(Ben Lindsey recounts an African proverb about villagers who keep finding floating children in the river at risk of drowning. This strange occurrence happens again and again. The villagers keep on pulling the children out of the river, saving them in the process. Suddenly, the whole

community is involved and, while not all the children can be saved, the villagers are congratulated for their efforts. One day, however, someone raises the question, 'But where are all these children coming from? *Let's organize a group to head upstream to find out who's throwing all these children into the river in the first place!*')

Our response as Christians needs to get to the heart of the issue.
And that is the problem of the sinful heart

So we respond to all of this by actively sharing the Gospel with people
We need to remember that the greatest need in the world is not reconciliation with one another.

Our greatest need is reconciliation with God and that's why we need to intentionally share the Gospel across cultures.

But we also need to take a stand not just against racism but also the causes of discrimination in our culture.

Who of us will see those needs and rise up to seek transformation in our society, propelled by a love for God and a love for man as many have done before in their own generation, like William Wilberforce, and Martin Luther King? **Will you do that? Will you pray for that to happen?**

“Racism cannot drive out racism. Replacing one form of hate with another solves nothing. Only racial reconciliation and biblical justice will work.

As. Dr. King said, ‘Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.’”