

Love Your Neighbor: A Biblical Theology of Race
Biblical Theology of Race | 01.29.2017 | Rhythms of Mercy @OBC

This morning marks our last sermon in the series called Rhythms of Mercy: Cultivating Habits of Holiness in Hostile World.

We began this year with a focus on personal disciplines, because we always need to excel more in communing with God in **prayer** and the **Word** . . . so we focused on those two disciplines.

Then we took time to look at **discipleship**, to see how disciple-making is like treasure-seeking, and that it is not a gift for some, but a discipline for all Christians.

And then last week and this week we look into our culture to see two of the greatest needs today—first, the defense of the unborn . . . second, racial reconciliation.

I call both of these kinds of topics . . . **Public Spiritual Disciplines**

More than just social actions . . . these cultural issues have deep impact on our spiritual life.

Jesus said . . . Everyone who confesses me before men, I also will confess before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32–33)

So we want to be the kind of disciples who do not shrink back from speaking truth in public.

But to do that our minds must be renewed by the Word of God . . . as we consider topics like abortion, marriage, sexuality, or race.

Now . . . I pause to acknowledge how heavy this topic is and how easy it would be to ignore it . . .

BUT . . . we can't do that . . . if we want to think biblically or love Christianly.

Instead we need to take captive every thought . . . and submit it to God's truth.

We need to test the narratives of our news cycle . . . and embrace God's view of race.

And indeed, God's Word has so much to say to us about this subject . . .

Unlike television / Internet's portrayal of race . . . which is too often shrill and slanted . . .

What Scripture says is true, beautiful, redeeming . . . and constructive.

That being said . . . **we cannot read the Bible naively.**

In our country . . . Scripture has been twisted in wicked to promote slavery, to elevate the white race as superior, and to subjugate other races – especially blacks.

Oh how that grieves me! . . . to see God's pure word misused to exploit others! . . . To see God's people abused by men and women who hold the Bible.

Therefore, as we read the Bible . . . we must expose errant ways it's been misread.

So my goal this morning is to give a biblical theology of race that follows the contours of Bible.

We need to see God's perspective . . . as it follows the pattern of C / F / R / NC.

In some ways . . . this approach may feel 1-step removed from the main issues of our day

Because I am not going to address all the conflicts we have in our day.

I can't today . . . get into the ways racism has mutated in our culture from outright attacks to ongoing systems of white privilege and systemic injustices against blacks . . .

My heart breaks when I hear my AA brothers speak about their experiences in our country . . . and I'd love to address the current injustices of our day . . . I'm still processing

So . . . to tell you where I'm at . . . I'm in learning / listening mode . . .

I'm listening to my neighbors . . . praying how I can love them.

And I'm listening to the Bible . . . what it says about racial reconciliation.

And I'm inviting you to do the same this morning!

And there are two things I want to show you from Scripture . . .

1. The **weight of evidence** in Scripture for a multi-ethnic people of God.
2. The **vision of glory** in heaven of God's multi-ethnic bride.

It is my prayer that this weight of evidence and this vision of glory

. . . would compel your heart and impel your lives to love your neighbor more fully
. . . that you and I would lean in to those who are not like us
. . . and we would seek racial reconciliation / compassionate justice for all people.

Not b/c we can bring heaven on earth . . . but because we've been reconciled to God in Christ . . . we can be ministers of reconciliation on earth . . .

But if we are going to do that . . . we must understand a BT of race.

Creation: In the beginning God created one human race to reflect his glory.

Genesis 1:26–28 is our key text.

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.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

In church history, there have been many interpretations of the Image of God.

Some have seen the Imago Dei as being humanity’s ability to reason, others our ability to worship; some have taken it as man’s vocation to rule over the earth.

While I think each of these have a place, I’m most inclined to see the image of God in relationship to its historical context . . .

Moses writes as a man schooled in Egypt, to a people coming out of Egypt.

And in Egypt, Image of God had a particular definition: The king or Pharaoh was the image of God. And only the king was the image of God.

Ruling over Egypt, he was treated with god-liked status and called the “image of God.”
Against this backdrop, Moses writes.

And he says every person is made in God’s image.
Adam, Eve, and all their children bear the image of God.

This is the dignified calling for all humanity . . .

Gen 1 says that all children of Adam and Eve are created equal / created valuable

And there is no feature of humanity – skin color, biological gender, ethnicity – that makes one better than another.

Every man/woman/child – born/unborn – is an image bearer and worthy of life & respect.

Therefore, Proverbs teaches

Proverbs 14:31 – Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, . . .

Proverbs 17:5 – Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; . . .

We cannot hurt another but what we are hurting God . . .

Why is that?

Because all people are made in God's image . . .

And therefore, the greatest commandment – to love God and love neighbor – could be translated . . . **Love God and Love God's Image!**

Genesis 1:26–27 is foundational for every ethical question we face.

Why do we March for Life . . . because babies are made in the image of God.

Why do we care about the ethical treatment . . . of the elderly, of prison inmates, of refugees, and of police officers? . . . Because each bears God's image and likeness.

Why do we care about racial reconciliation? . . . Because every person uniquely reflects their Creator . . . and possesses inherent value and dignity.

We care about race . . . because Satan hates the image of God and works to seed hatred and distrust in our hearts towards people who look different than us.

We care about race . . . B/C made in God's image . . . the 1 HUMAN RACE possesses beautiful diversity . . . and instead of appreciating it, we idolize people like ourselves.

And I bring this up . . . not to cause pain ... but to acknowledge pain.

To remember that in the land of liberty & Enlightenment ... there's been a lot of darkness.

And this darkness has been made worse by Christians with unbiblical views of creation, humanity, and race.

So we must affirm with the strongest speech . . . God made all men equal and there is no place for racial superiority or ethnic inferiority.

Even if they are only espoused in jokes . . . they do damage to God's truth . . . and members of Christ's body.

To love your neighbor well . . . means affirming and defending God's view of creation.

But loving our neighbor well . . . also means acknowledging the effect sin has had on humanity.

Fall: Through Adam's sin, humanity inherited a disobedient heart & a divided humanity.

Genesis 3 is the place where humanity FELL. In verses 3:14–19, Moses records the curses that God put on creation.

Working backwards . . . v. 19 says that mankind will die and return to the dust.
v 16–19 speaks of the competition between men and women
v. 15 speaks of the division between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman

While this sounds like a war between angels and men . . . Genesis 4–5 indicate two kinds of people . . . those who trust in the Lord and those trust themselves.

From the very beginning there is division in the human race.

And the opening chapters of Genesis trace this spiritual warfare among the human race.

The Flood is the prototypical judgment that God brings because of mankind's sin.

Yet, instead of destroying everyone, he spares eight people, Noah, his three sons, and their four wives. From them, the rest of humanity has come.

Genesis 10, which is called the **Table of Nations**, tells how these 3 sons fathered all people.

Now this chapter . . . along Gen 9 and 11 . . . are necessary for understanding a biblical view of the nations.

But it is also necessary to know how this passage has been grossly misused.

In the 1800s . . . Genesis 9 became a key passage for explaining why it was morally right for whites to enslave blacks. Looking for moral justification, Xians twisted this passage.

Genesis 10 came to seen as describing three races – **Ham** became the African race; **Shem** the Arab and Jewish races; and **Japheth** the White European Race.

Combined with this . . . they read Genesis 9:18–29 as saying God ordained the subordination of Ham to Shem and Japheth -- READ

But this is not what it means . . .

The curse was not on Ham but Canaan, C. who would be subjugated by Israel in the days of Joshua and the sons of David. **This is not a justification for racial superiority.**

And it needs to be said . . . because you can go on CBD today and buy old commentaries that make this argument.

So . . . Genesis 10 is not about the elevation or subordination of any race.

The point of Genesis 10 is this:

From one man (Noah) . . . all people have come. This truth reinforces the fact that all people have the same origin, the same value, and the same human characteristics.

Moreover, the divisions in the list are not physical: "Racial characteristics, physical types, or [skin color] play no role in categorizing" (Sarna 68).

Rather, the Table of Nations lists the largeness and diversity of the nations that came out of the Tower of Babel incident AND that will ultimately find redemption thru the gospel. . . . **A gospel proclaimed ahead of time to Abraham in Genesis 12 . . .**

If you read carefully, you must put Genesis 10 with chapters 11 and 12.

For look at **Genesis 10:5: READ . . .**

Interestingly Moses speaks of the division of language BEFORE the tower of Babel, the event which records how the nations were divided. **What's he doing?**

Genesis 10 lists 70 people or nations. Most commentators see this number as representative of all nations . . .

But then . . . Genesis 11 explains how the division came . . . when the one people tried to build a tower to preserve their name, God came down and confused their language.

Because of sinful self-exaltation . . . God brought confusion and division upon humanity.

Today . . . we still feel the effects of this judgment on sin.

But praise be to God . . . this is not the end of the story.

Genesis 12 begins with God promising a blessing to Abraham . . . and thru Abraham's seed all nations will be blessed.

In other words,

Whereas sin brought a nation-dividing curse upon humanity, God was and is going to bring reconciliation and blessing to all nations.

The rest of the Bible tells this story of universal redemption through the offspring of Abraham . . . namely the son of Abraham, Jesus Christ.

What do we learn from Genesis 3–11?

1. Sin caused individual prejudice

Individual prejudice is the natural overflow of the unregenerate heart.

Now, there are some social factors that may prevent the full manifestation of prejudice

. . . but all it takes is the slightest negative experience with one person unlike us

. . . and the natural heart will pull back / lash out / put up walls.

How much more when waves of false thinking . . . wash up against our hearts & minds?

Sin always separates . . . and the Fall explains why: “Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

But racial prejudice is not just a matter of separated individuals . . . it is also corporate.

2. Sin caused ethnic prejudice.

A biblical view of sin teaches us that sin is never restricted to an individual.

Sin is also corporate . . . meaning it impacts systems and structures larger than ourselves

Racism is not just something individuals of one race self-consciously do to another.

Racism also exists in the systemic injustices, legal malpractices, and corporate ways of thinking that privilege one race over another.

To say it differently . . . because one individual or many individuals does not see racism or pursue a racism . . . doesn't mean that racism has been eradicated.

In fact . . . if you have ears to hear . . . you'll soon hear from godly African-American brothers and sisters . . . their experience of race is not the same as their white neighbors.

How could it be . . . we live in a land with a blood-stained past and segregated present.

And even in the church . . . Sunday morning is a segregated hour.

But it wasn't always this way . . . and so we need to see how God's redemption story re-orders our understanding of worship / fellowship / discipleship.

In Redemption . . . God's plan is to save his elect from all nations.

As I mentioned, redemption begins in Genesis 12:1–3.

In these three verses, Yahweh promises that he will bless Abraham.

And through his family, he will bless all the world.

In the Bible, like now, this plan of salvation is slow moving but powerful and pervasive.

By Exodus, we find more than a million people who would claim Abraham as their father.

Thru Moses, God delivers his people from Egypt . . . but importantly, Exodus 12:38 reads, "A mixed multitude also went up with them, . . ."

The significance of this verse is that it means that the covenant people of God were multi-national from the start. **Predominately, they were sons of Abraham, but not entirely.**

There is strong historical support that Cushites from the region south of Egypt joined the march out of Egypt.

If this is so, it puts African men and women in the circumcised people of Israel. In fact, Exodus 12 explains how foreigners could partake of God's Passover and enter God's ppl.

It was not ethnicity that marked out the people of Israel, but circumcision. To be explicit, the sign of Israel's covenant was not skin color; it was foreskin removal.

As one commentator put it: "earliest Israel was not an ethnic community." They were a circumcised community.

And . . . this multi-ethnic understanding of Israel continues throughout Israel's history.

Skipping all that we could say about Moses and his two foreign wives . . . we find instructions in Deuteronomy for how Israelite men could marry foreign women in Deut 21.

This explains how Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba could enter into Christ's birth line.

Then, there's Phineas.

Phineas is a son of Aaron, whose priestly action in Numbers 25 secured a covenant between God and the Levites.

Yet, it is worth noting: His name literally means . . . **the Cushite . . . Cush – the black people south of Egypt.**

I don't know how you envision the priests of Israel, but he was not white.

Following the history of redemption further . . . we come to David . . .

First in 2 Samuel 7 . . . when God makes a royal covenant with David, verse 19 says:

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? ¹⁹ And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD. You have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord GOD!

The instruction for mankind . . . this is a key turning point in redemptive history.

While the Law of Moses constricted the people of Israel to those who would keep the law- . . . this TORAH for all mankind . . . is meant to extend David’s kingdom to all earth

And this is exactly what we see in his lifetime. He won battles extending his kingdom.

AND . . . he had many warriors who came from foreign nations.

Most famously, Uriah the Hittite . . . Bathsheba’s righteous husband is just one example of foreign-born leaders.

So in Israel’s history . . . we find a plethora of ethnicities coming into the tent of Abraham.

But if that’s true . . . the prophets expand the multi-ethnic people of God even further.

To consider only one prophet, we turn to Isaiah.

1. In Isaiah 2:2–3 . . . God tells us that the nations will one day flood God’s city

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, ³ and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”

2. Then in Isaiah 19 . . . we find a promise to Egypt and Assyria that they will share in the blessings of Israel. In fact, Isaiah says that Assyria and Egypt will go ahead of Israel in worshiping the Lord.

²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵ whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.”

If you wonder how that will happen . . . we might turn to the Servant Song in Isaiah 49 . .

3. In Isaiah 49:6, the work of the Servant goes beyond Israel. Because saving Israel would be too easy . . . he will save the nations.

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

In the flow of thought in Isaiah . . . ch. 53 introduces how this will happen – through the substitutionary death of the Messiah.

And chapters 54, 55–66 reveal how this sacrifice will have universal impact, including what

4. Isaiah 66:21 speaks of the way God’s word will bring in the nations:

And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the L

Clearly . . . from these passages in Isaiah . . . we find a fulfillment of God’s original promise to A.

From the start God has intended to bring salvation to the nations . . . This is what Jesus Christ came to do.

He came to lay his life down for the nations . . . so that we from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation . . . would be united to Christ and to one another!

In the Gospels . . . we find Jesus fulfilling these OT promises.

For instance, he crosses boundaries to bring salvation to the Samaritans in John 4.

And he teaches his disciples to do the same . . . as in the Parable with the Good Samaritan (Luke 10).

While this is a familiar story to us . . . I wonder if you know the background.

When Luke wrote his gospel, it was written within a few years of two bloody events.

In 51 AD people from the Samaritan Village of Ginae murdered one or more . . . Jewish pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. The Jews appealed to the Roman rulers for justice, but the Romans ignored them. So . . . unruly 'mob' from Jerusalem then went down to Ginae, massacred all of the inhabitants, and burned the village to the ground. (Hays, 166)

So this is in the recent memory of any Israelite who heard Luke's account.

For them the Samaritans were more than despised neighbors. They were racial enemies!

So . . . what a scandal for Jesus to rebuke the priests and scribes and to treat the Good Samaritan as a hero. **Really Jesus? This is too far Jesus!**

And yet, this is exactly what the gospel does . . . it puts to death our human allegiances based on race, culture, ethnicity.

And in its place, Jesus' gospel calls his redeemed to receive his reconciliation so that we can become ministers of reconciliation . . . and break down walls of hostility.

Ephesians 2 says gives the theological explanation of this . . . As Paul says: Jesus came to be our peace and to make peace through his own death and disfigurement on the cross.

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

One new man here is the description of the unity created by the death of Jesus.

As all the OT prophets foretold, Jew and Gentile (which the Law divided) have now been united by Christ's death and the gift of the Spirit.

In fact . . . this is what Acts 2 shows . . . when the Spirit of God was poured out . . . the many races and nations in Jerusalem were united in the Spirit.

Amazingly . . . Pentecost along with its gift of tongues indicated that what God had done to divide the nations – multiply languages – was now coming to an end.

God had poured out his Spirit to make the many nations one.

Only better . . . he was not going back to one nation, with one language, and one culture.

Now . . . through Christ's work of redemption . . . he was going to do the miraculous, the impossible . . . he was going to make the many nations one!

Perfect unity . . . without blurring wonderful diversity.

And full-bodied diversity . . . without the ugliness of sinful prejudice.

This is what the story of redemption promises . . . and what Jesus came to fulfill!

He died to create a multi-ethnic bride that is comprised of thousands of different tongues, tribes, languages, and colors.

Indeed, God's people who are not color-blind . . . we are color-blessed . . .

We do not recoil at people who look differently than ourselves

Rather . . . we praise the Lord for the multi-ethnic bride he has purchased.

We pray & labor for that multi-ethnic bride to enjoy unity on earth, as it will be in heaven.

And his leads us to our final destination in this biblical theology of race—the book of Revelation.

Revelation 5:9 says that the blood of Christ “ransomed people for god, from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Indeed, the future kingdom is not monochrome! It is color-full . . . as all the peoples of the earth gather around the throne to worship the victorious lamb.

This is why Jesus died . . . and it should be our constant vision.

Where the world teaches us to fight for ourselves . . .

God calls us to lay down arms and receive the reconciliation Christ has won . . .

As ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors of Christ we are to love our neighbors.

This means leaning in, listening, lamenting, and looking together to Christ.

It means letting the weight of biblical evidence reorders our understanding of salvation
And letting throne room of Christ be our greatest longing . . .