

Victory of the Lamb June 6 and 7, 2020 – God is Here – Genesis 1:26,27

Race, Racism, and a Path Forward – Pastor Bill Limmer

The summer before my sophomore year in high school one of my friends came over to play basketball. I didn't know he was coming over he just showed up. And in fact, it was the first time he came over. I was in the house when I heard someone calling out my name over and over again. I go out front and there he is riding his bicycle around in circles on the street in front of my house. He asks from his bike, "You wanna play basketball?" "Sure" I said, let me get on my shoes. Come on in." His response was, "Is it okay if I come in?" You see, he was black and well I'm white, and apparently he had been warned about even going up to a white person's house to ring the doorbell, let alone go in. I assured him it was ok. And he came in kind of sheepishly. I remember my mom met us in the living room, I introduced them and told her we were going to play basketball. And my mom blew my friend away. She asked him if he wanted something to drink." It blew him away because he really was accepted and welcome."

What we have come to realize is that before the COVID-19 pandemic began, we were already in a world crisis. Some people knew we were in the crisis of racism and didn't understand why not a lot of people were concerned about it. Some didn't really see it as a crisis, mostly because they didn't see that racism was a problem in their heart but didn't understand that other people were being hurt and traumatized by a lifestyle. And for some even know the pandemic of racism, of hate and separation was and is their right. Today we are going to interrupt our current series because we need to listen to what God has to say about race, racism, and look at a path forward.

Let's look back to creation. Genesis 1:26-27 **Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."** ²⁷ **So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.**

The first thing we see is that the Triune God made us, all of us, the human race. We were wonderfully, magnificently made by the architect of the universe. Crazy good how he made us. The American Heart Association says that on average our hearts will beat 2.6 billion times in our lifetime. All on its own. Our eyes have the capability to see detect approximately 10 million different hues. the human eyes consist of 2 million working parts. These are just a couple of examples of the creativity and wisdom God used when he created mankind. You understand this is true regardless of a person's skin color.

Not only did God create mankind but he **created mankind in his own image**. Being made in God's image means that mankind has a soul and that our first parents were created in and with righteousness and holiness. This divine image also consisted of mankind's emotions and feelings. Mankind was created in complete harmony with God. They were without sin.

And so, from the beginning, every single human being regardless of what country they live, what abilities they have or don't have, what color their skin is, has value and significance beyond comprehension. This this is the Scriptural worldview and it is one of the most radical in the world and is not held by many worldviews.

"(But) the Christian worldview holds that because we were created (by God), there is value, meaning and purpose to every single life. And it also means that we have one who stands over it as authority, in defense of the value of every person." James Emery White

God created us not only with great value but great diversity. For example: there are men and women. No one has your fingerprint. And like our fingerprints, the iris of no two individuals can be the same. The color, texture, as well as the pattern of the iris is unique. No wonder, iris scans are popularly used for the purpose of identification. You are uniquely you and you are one kind of valuable to God no matter who you are. Some of us grew up and learn the song that says, **“Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world.”**

As we look at the Scriptures God created through Adam and Eve not races, but the human race. Acts 17:26 says, **From one man he made all the nations**, And just to make sure we are all tracking together Acts 10:34-35 says, **Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.** In our diversity we have unity in Christ. Galatians 3:26-28 **“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”**

So how did we get to the mess we are in today?

Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Third chapter. The Fall into sin. That harmony with God was shattered like a piece of crystal falling on to the floor. And so instead of complete harmony, trust, and love, there are shards of animosity, mistrust, and hate.

Racism undermines, tears apart, and ruins the very nature of God’s creation known as the human race. Racism is evil. Racism devalues. Racism is murder of the heart. Racism divides instead of unites. Racism forgets or denies that we were all created in the image of God with a value that cannot be calculated. Racism is not a skin issue. It is much deeper than that. It is a sin issue. Galatians 4:14-15 **For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”^[a] ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.**

Racism is on display today individually and institutionally. Recognizing that making institutional change will be key, we first must make the change individually. Other than white supremacists, I don’t know of anyone who would say that slavery was a good idea. What I am concerned about in our hearts is implicit biases, internal judgments based on false assumptions just based on seeing someone.

Put yourself in this situation: You have vetted the candidates and four are as close to identical as possible. You look at their names, John, Jeff, Charles, and Snowden. Do you assess worth, value, capability, likeability, based on names even though the resumes are the same? If so, that is implicit bias. You may not have racist bones, or a racist heart, but you were being racist at the moment. By the way, all four are friends of mine and all are black.

For some people there is an implicit bias when it comes to dating: But did you know that Moses married a girl from a different nation? His brother, Aaron, and his sister Miriam went ballistic. How could you do this Moses? If you want to see how God reacted to that you can find the full account in Number 12:1-15. Spoiler alert – Miriam gets leprosy.

15 years after the resurrection, Peter, the one who had heard it all, seen it all – still doesn’t like the Gentiles. One day God interrupts Peter’s quiet time and tells him I want you to go to the house of a

Gentile and tell them about Jesus. But Peter is like, “I don’t go into their homes and they don’t into my home.” But since it was God, Peter goes and this is what it is like Acts 10:27 **While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.** Imagine the difference attitude makes. If Peter crosses the threshold, holding his breath hoping no Gentile germs or anything sticks to him and says. **Acts 10:28** ²⁸ **He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.** In other words... *up to this moment, I considered you impure and unclean but God has shown me I should think that way anymore.* If you are Cornelius and that large gathering of Gentiles, you are probably thinking, *Well I feel so much better now! Shaking your head – God had to tell you that. God may have told you that, but I don’t know if you believe that because you have acted a different way your entire life.* But what if the attitude is one of repentance: Acts 10:28 He said to them: **“You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.**

So where do we go from here? Here is what we know: At the time of the early Christian church there was opportunity for extraordinary division. 5 groups of people Jews who thought they were better than everyone else, Gentiles – who thought the Jews thought they were better than everyone else, which caused tension right. There were the freedmen and slaves. The Jews and Gentiles looked down on the Freedmen who earned the freedom either by paying off their debt or behavior, there were the slaves and of course everyone looked down on them and then there were the women who had no rights. . Do you know what brought them all together? Jesus - his love, his forgiveness, his redemption brings unity.

Here is what is going on to one degree or another: Most people hate each other because they fear each other. Most people fear each other because they don’t know each other; they are not in relationship. **Relationships are key.** Relationship don’t just happen. They normally happen over time with shared communication and experiences. So, **talk and listen.**

White people often feel awkward and don’t know what to say. They truly don’t want to say anything wrong. But one of the things that is extremely painful in life is the silence of friends. Just be humble enough to say I need help because I don’t want to hurt. So, begin the conversation with an **ask.** We can accomplish a lot more talking together than we can accomplish not talking to each other. And one of the key factors in communication is listening. I have heard it said there is a reason why God gave us one mouth and two ears. Use proportionately. Meet in the middle and look up to the cross. Because until the blood of Jesus gets on our minds, it won’t get in our hearts or our hands.

Only in the church are we taught that we are made in the image of God. And God says you can’t mistreat my children and get along with me. Only in the Christian church do you have God loving people enough to die for them despite their weakness, failures, and sins. That is the message of the NT and that trumps all experiences, generations, and times. We have the message as Christians, what you don’t, and I don’t have is an excuse. At this time, and actually every day, ask this: what does love require of me?