

Cross Culture—Overcoming Racism—Ephesians 3:1-13

- **Intro:**
 - There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests. Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an arch defender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent--and often even vocal--sanction of things as they are. But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.
 - Never have Dr. King's words been more relevant than they are TODAY!
 - Every week there is a new incident...a new example of the hostility and division that exists between people due to differences rooted in race and culture.
 - Dylan Roof. Michael Brown. Trayvon Martin. It is a short list, the things in current culture that are more hot button and pressing for us to think through as a church than racial reconciliation!
 - The gospel of Jesus Christ destroys racism and God has calls the church to display his glory as we pursue and celebrate racial reconciliation.
- **The gospel announces the death of racism (1-6)**
 - v.6— This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
 - **Mystery:**
 - Paul doesn't mean mystery in a way implying we don't know what is going on.
 - Mystery = the piece of information that sheds light on everything else. Like that moment in a suspense drama where the lights go off and you are like, AHHH...that's what that meant!
 - Ephesians 1:9-10—making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
 - A huge piece of how this mystery plays itself out happens in Ephesians 3 as we see the work of Christ addressing and overcoming racism!
 - **The gospel alone empowers this kind of reconciliation and unity:**
 - What do I mean by that?
 - The unity shown in something like a sports team/concert isn't the kind of unity/ reconciliation we are after.
 - You don't have to love those people. You just have to tolerate them. We are after more than that and the gospel offers more than that!

- **Fellow Heirs:**
 - The gospel reminds us that none of us are natural born sons/daughters. We were all adopted and made heirs in Christ.
 - Imagine being a Gentile sitting in these early church services—reading the OT where every mention of a Gentile is about them getting slaughtered.
 - DO I REALLY BELONG HERE?
 - **PROBLEM WITH MAJORITY CULTURE**—we can easily read OURSELVES in this passage as the Jews and all the minority cultures as the Gentiles.
 - WE ARE ALL THE GENTILES!
- **Members of the Same Body:**
 - Our goal is NOT to just get people with different skin colors into the same room! Our goal is to preach peace to all people and watch God do the supernatural work of saving and uniting.
 - It would be one thing if Paul were just saying, you can both HAVE the same gospel. But he is saying you are all PART OF THE SAME FAMILY AND BODY!
- **Partakers of the Promise:**
 - In the gospel, we all share the same future and same hope!
 - Racial hatred and division are not merely cultural issues; they are rooted in an idolatry that will consistently manifest itself if we do not watch out for it and guard our hearts!
- **The Church displays the beauty of racial reconciliation (7-13)**
 - v.9-11 —to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - The implications of the horizontal and vertical work done by the gospel are meant to be celebrated and displayed in the church.
 - Manifold = multi-layered; layered; diverse; multi-dimensional
 - When God puts the church together, he doesn't make a homogenous club but a VAST array of people!
 - This is a SIGN of God's power!
 - The working through of all the complexities involved in overcoming racism demands that we humble ourselves, demands that we consider others as more significant than ourselves. This is how we are enabled to outdo each other in showing honor!
 - If all we ever are is a gathering of people who would be together even if Jesus were still dead... THAT IS NOT A SIGN OF THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD!!
 - The sign happens when people commit to this hard work and this grind because they love one another and are in the SAME FAMILY!
 - Culture will listen to the church NOT when we scream louder or pass more laws but when we begin to picture a diverse dynamic that stands COUNTER to every traditional mode of operation in society.
- **The Way Forward:**
 - Admit the presence of racism in our hearts, confess that and repent.
 - Repent of pride and humbly seek to know and understand the perspective of our African American and other minority brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - Refuse to participate in conversation that is filled with racism or racist joking.

- Have an African American friend/couple over for dinner and seek to understand them and the pain and struggle they have experienced.
 - Ever notice that it appears each time a racially charged incident happens, white people see it one way and minority people see it another way?
 - What would it look like to care so deeply about this that we learn to think like our minority family members!?
- Spend time in contexts where you are the minority—go to neighborhoods, etc where you are the minority.
- Don't assume stereotypes and generalize—whether age, race, SES, etc. See people as INDIVIDUALS!
- Build significant relationships with people of other races.
- Revelation 7:9—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!
- RACIAL RECONCILIATION IS NOT SOMETHING WE HAVE MADE UP BECAUSE WE ARE PROGRESSIVE. IT IS SOMETHING GOD MADE UP BECAUSE JESUS DIED FOR A COLORFUL BRIDE AND IN THE KINGDOM THERE WILL BE NO DIVISION, NO RACISM, NO HOSTILITY...JUST UNIFIED, RECONCILED WORSHIP!