



**NO LONGER SILENT:
A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY FOR PREACHING ON
RACISM**

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INTRODUCTION

On May 25th, George Floyd, an African American, breathed his last breaths with a knee on his neck. Despite Floyd's cries for his mother and saying he could not breathe, Derek Chauvin, now former Minneapolis Police Officer held his knee on Floyd's neck for seven to nine minutes until Floyd stopped breathing. As devastating as it was to see George Floyd's lifeless body in the street, it was heartbreaking to know three other officers did not intervene to stop Chauvin's illegal and excessive use of force. George Floyd could be alive today if those officers would have interceded on his behalf. However, Floyd died because they did not speak up for him. Many African Americans feel as if America has a knee on their necks while those with an authoritative voice stand by and watch in silence.

As an African American affiliated with several evangelical groups, I am greatly disappointed in the silence of the evangelical voice regarding the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and the systemic racism¹ that continues to oppress many African Americans. I am disheartened because the evangelical voice is loud and clear in speaking up for the rights of an unborn child but seem to be unheard when African American men and women are fighting for the right to live. Many evangelicals complain about the protesting, rioting, and looting throughout the nation, but they say nothing about the shootings

in those same communities. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”² This statement brings a question to mind, that is, are you guilty of being silent? The sins of racism and injustice perpetuate in our congregations, classrooms, communities, and circles of influence because some of us are silent and refuse to preach against those evils. Some evangelical pastors and preachers have told me they want to speak up but do not know what to say or preach. In this essay, I provide a practical theology of preaching on racism by answering the why and how we should preach on racism. I also share a sermon series I preached on racism to demonstrate theology in practice. I hope this essay will provide inspiration and ideas for preaching on racism so that we are *no longer silent* about this sin. The Bible speaks against racism and we should too.³

PREACHING ON RACISM—A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

What did you or your pastor preach on the Sunday, May 31st? This Sunday was the first Sunday after George Floyd’s death. Was it a sermon on racism? Why or Why not? Why do some evangelicals not preach on racism? Some evangelical preachers have told me they do not preach on racism because they are uncertain of what to say or preach. Others have told me they do not want to be “misunderstood and say the wrong thing.” I believe others are fearful of being terminated from their position by their congregations or school administration.

Why should we preach on racism? We should preach on racism because our congregations need to hear God’s perspective on this divisive issue. We should preach on racism to interject the Christian voice into the global conversation, which is often facilitated by individuals, groups, or organizations without a Christian conscience. Preaching on racism will demonstrate unity within the Kingdom of God because we can all share in condemning this sin. Preaching on racism will encourage our congregations and student bodies by knowing their leadership is

sympathetic towards the racism, discrimination, and injustice experienced by African Americans—and other people of color.

How do we preach on racism? When preaching on racism, one must acknowledge the fact that racism exists today. Racism is the belief that one race is superior over another race. These beliefs may be conscious or unconscious; however, the beliefs are manifested through power, influence, position, and communication by rejecting, marginalizing, or oppressing people of another race.⁴ Racism is real and lives in the heart of many citizens throughout our nation and in our local communities and churches. Racism is sinful, and we must preach against this sin. Before calling out this sin in the lives of others, preachers must be introspective and rid ourselves of any hint of racism in our hearts and minds.

When preaching on racism, sermons must be biblical. The points and principles should be derived from a theological, historical, cultural, and exegetical study of Scripture. When preaching on racism, sermons should be practical. Preachers have to include “how-to” and “what’s next” applications for their listeners. Sermons on racism should be culturally sensitive. We must know our hearers and their vernacular. When preaching on racism, sermons should have prophetic undertones. We must condemn racism as sin and diabolical.

PREACHING ON RACISM—THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE

After watching the death of George Floyd and hearing the outcry of Black America and my community, I felt God encourage me to preach a series of prophetic messages on racism. Instead of continuing with my sermon series from Psalm 34, I began a new sermon series on May 31st, the first Sunday after George Floyd’s death. My first sermon was “I’m Angry” from Ephesians 4:26-27. I gave my congregation three steps for dealing with their anger caused by past and present acts of racism and injustice.

First, we must realize we are angry. Second, we should release our anger in a healthy way. Third, we should reconcile with our offender.

My second sermon was “Being Black is not a Curse” from Genesis 9. Some African Americans believe God cursed our race; therefore, subjugating us to white oppression in America. The idea of being cursed generates hopelessness because some African Americans believe suppression is their destiny. However, this message offered my congregation hope. The main point of the sermon was that being Black is not a curse because God did not curse us. I shared a few theological, historical, cultural, and exegetical observations from Genesis 9 to eradicate the erroneous theology called the “curse of Ham.”

First, Noah did not curse Ham. Noah cursed Canaan the son of Ham, which means Noah did not curse *all* the descendants of Ham, just Canaan. Benjamin M. Palmer, a Presbyterian theologian and pastor in the 1800s, relied on the “curse of Ham” to justify American slavery.⁵ Noah cursed Canaan not Ham; therefore, Palmer’s claim is unjustified. Second, Canaan was to serve his brothers, that is, Mizraim, Put, and Cush, not his uncles Japheth and Shem. Third, the “land of Canaan” was in the Middle East not Africa, so there was no curse on any of the African nations. Fourth, God did not curse Blacks. Although Noah cursed Canaan, Noah’s curse was powerless because God did not sanction the curse. A few members of my congregation who are in their late sixties and early seventies told me they thought Blacks were cursed because that is what they were told in the past but this message broke the psychological curse which they lived under for their entire life.

My next message was a two-part message entitled “How Jesus Fixed Racism.” The sermon for part one was based on an exposition of Ephesians 2:11-22. The main point of this sermon was that Jesus fixed the problem of racism by uniting us as one family under God. I noted three truths from these verses. First, Jesus united us with His blood. Second, Jesus united us by removing the wall of division. Third, Jesus united us by making us fellow heirs of God’s kingdom.

The sermon for part two was based on John 4:4-42. From these verses I identified five principles for racial reconciliation:

1. We must cross the lines of racial divide. Racism will continue to exist if we segregate our society by restricting certain groups of people from certain places.
2. We must start conversations to address the issue. Our conversations should begin with simple introductory matters then move towards the tough issue of racism.
3. We must call out sin. Racism is a sin that must be called out. We say love your neighbor as yourself, but do we ever say it is a sin if you do not love your neighbor as yourself?
4. We must find common ground. We are divided politically, racially, and religiously, but the cross of Christ is the common ground for every Christian.
5. We must come to Jesus. We must preach the gospel of truth and liberation. We must lift up Jesus to overcome racism because he will draw all men unto him from every race and culture.

The final message in my racism series was from Luke 10:25-37 entitled "Who is My Neighbor?" I made the following applications. First, our neighbors do not always look like us. Second, our neighbors are not limited to those who live beside us. Third, our neighbors are those who show us compassion.

CONCLUSION

Have you preached on racism? Do you plan to preach on racism? Will you be no longer silent? Racism cannot be ignored. As oracles of God, we must denounce the fruits of racism, hate, and discrimination harvested in our communities and fed to future generations through some of our homes, churches, and schools. Racism is a sin that can only be eradicated by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Woe to us if we do not preach the gospel of truth and liberation.

Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak

with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak. And we must rejoice as well, for surely this is the first time in our nation's history that a significant number of its religious leaders have chosen to move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history. Perhaps a new spirit is rising among us. If it is, let us trace its movement, and pray that our inner being may be sensitive to its guidance. For we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seems so close around us.⁶

NOTES

1. Tony Evans, "Systemic Racism," 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7Rq78jFiJg> (accessed 30 July 2020).
2. Martin Luther King Jr., "On the Future," <https://mlk.wsu.edu/about-dr-king/famous-quotes/> (accessed 28 August 2020).
3. Genesis 1:27, Malachi 2:10, Luke 10:25-37, John 4:4-42, Acts 10:28-35, Romans 10:12-13, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:11-22, Colossians 3:11, and Revelation 5:9-10.
4. Tony Evans and Trevin Wax, "Discuss Race in America—Part 2," 2020 <https://lifewayvoices.com/culture-current-events/dr-tony-evans-and-trevin-wax-discuss-race-in-america-part-2/> (accessed 27 August 2020).
5. Stephen R. Hayes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford University Press, 2007), v.
6. Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam," 1967, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam> (accessed 28 August 2020).