**The End of Prejudice: My Journey and Why Gospel Teaching Transforms the Heart**

**Introduction**:

1. **Charlottesville**. I’ve thought so much this past week as soon as I heard about the events in Charlottesville. This past week has been emotionally exhausting: I’ve prayed, watched, conversed. And the problems are so convoluted, all the factors – political, historical, social – that it’s like a huge, tangled ball of electrical cords still plugged in. You can try to disentangle them but it’s going to take a long time and you might get shocked.   
    But what I can do is to make a simple statement and a stand against the evil of racism and to reason with us about the pervasive problem of prejudice. I can’t possibly say everything that needs to be said (political stances, historical opinions), and I don’t intend to. I’m just going to say what God says.   
    You’ll inevitably think of something more to even share with me afterwards – but *something* needs to be said here, in this church.
2. **Point**. So my simple point in this talk is to show that the Bible cannot be used to support either racism/slavery. Someone actually made a claim to me this past week that the Bible supports slavery, therefore it’s an evil document and I even asked my high school students how would they answer/rebut that claim. But I’m asking you “Do you know how?” Do you have the confidence that God’s word is not for slavery but actually diametrically opposed to it?
3. So I want to do it by telling you my story and journey with prejudice, my understanding of the Bible, and what I think we can do in response to Charlottesville.
4. **My Story**
5. **Strange Fruit**.
   1. Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

Pastoral scene of the gallant south

The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth

Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh

Then the sudden smell of burning flesh

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck

For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck

For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop

Here is a strange and bitter crop

* 1. It was famously sung by Billie Holiday in 1939 about our nation’s dark history with lynching.
  2. And just feel the weight of the lyrics and think about what life experiences must have produced such a dark poem. Now you might say “Thailer, that was ages ago and we don’t have lynching today.” Okay. You may not see physical lynching today. But Charlottesville – and all of the mess that’s going on in this country – is a testimony that the lynching-heart still exists. And that mattered to Jesus who taught us that murder in the heart looks like anger and hate (**Mt.5.21**).  
      I’m not asking for a rebuttal, I’m asking for empathy. We could *never* know totally the pain behind that song. You’d have to be black to sing this song with any integrity, with any real understanding.

1. **Growing Up**. Now, I’m speaking as a mixed person. People when they first meet me either think I’m white and think nothing of it, or they assume I must be Hispanic because I got that olive-skin thing going on. But my mother (as you know) is about as white as can be – born in Mobile, Alabama. And my father is from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, born and raised. Came to America in the 80’s.   
    **Jokes**. Now I can remember nearly in every grade being the butt of an Asian joke and hearing just about any form of Asian slur that you can think of. And kids told them for no other reason than that it was funny. But I can tell you that I never experienced a racist joke as a white person. You didn’t hear it. That’s what it means to be in the majority. (Now, I’m not saying it doesn’t happen.) But I was only made fun of for what was different. But, honestly, it didn’t actually bother me. I had a thick skin.   
    **Grandparents**. No, what bothered me was the story of my grandparents’ initial reactions to me or my father. None of the racist jokes I experienced in school compared to hearing one grandparent on one side telling my mother when she brought my (viet-)father home, that they’d “rather her marry a black person than a Vietnamese man.” (And make no mistake, it’s not just Caucasian folk who are prejudiced.) On the other side, I experienced years of hate from my Vietnamese grandmother who could only see me as impure, a half-breed. I reminded her of her home in Vietnam where the American GI’s would shack up with desperate Viet women, only to leave them and their Halfling offspring behind to return to USA. They called them “My-Lai.” She called me “My-lai.”   
    **Pain**. But my point is that nothing that I experienced ever haunts me. It doesn’t negatively affect me. It’s nothing that I’m reminded of everyday. In other words, it does not compare to the ever-present pain blacks feel, or to the pain that produced “Strange Fruit”. The pain being felt in Charlottesville. It’s still very much alive and well.   
    **Being prejudiced**. And the weird thing is that I was prejudiced myself. (What do know, prejudice begets prejudice…) Now I didn’t hate any other race than my own. (Actually, I remember intuitively feeling that they were warmer and a lot funnier than some white people I’ve met. Their food tasted better. And their music was better, too.) But I just remember growing up thinking that white people were better. That the minorities of the inner-city deserved to live in the slums, they brought it upon themselves by the choices they made (totally blind, at the time, of any systemic injustices that might have played a role). I remember getting in a fight with my high school girlfriend at the time over an orange engine hoist my stepdad was using because it had a confederate flag on it. And I shot down her arguments because I didn’t care what it represented. I remember the racist jokes I told. I possessed prejudiced views on my white side (and Viet) and it flared up from time to time.
2. **The Bible**. BUT for the first time in my life, I began to realize that these hidden, underlying beliefs and sentiments were wrong when I opened my bible. I didn’t repent of my prejudice until I became a Christian. So, imagine my surprise when unbelievers say that the bible is an impetus for racism and I’m saying it’s what removed mine!  
    I want you to see what I saw because the Bible is not silent on this issue.
3. **The Bible on Prejudice (Slavery) – *A Primer***
4. **Passages on Racism**.
   1. **Ga.2.11-14**. Many Jews wrongly interpreted God’s choice of their nation of them being superior race. Ac.10. Paul didn’t say “Don’t be racist.” He said it’s not the gospel.
   2. **Ga.3.28**. All are one in Christ.
   3. **Ep.2.14-22**. Gospel (i.e., Jesus died for ALL MEN) breaks down dividing walls of race.
   4. **Jas.3.9**. We can’t use our mouths to praise God and also curse those made in his image.
   5. **Ac.17.26**. We all come “from one man.” And Paul said this to a bunch of Greeks who viewed all other races as barbarians. There was a Rabbinic saying “You know why God created only one man? So that no one being might say “My father was better than yours.”
   6. **Re.7.9**. History is moving towards this point.
5. **(Passages on Slavery.** *“Yeah, but doesn’t the Bible support slavery? Like isn’t that supported in the OT and NT?”* (I heard an argument like this just this week: “We need to get back to 1Pe.2.18 living”). But I hope by the end of this point, we’ll see that that claim is false.  
    We’re going to look at what the Bible says and draw some conclusions but before we do that I want to adjust your lenses. When we read these passages, we’ll be tempted to read something into the text that’s not there. When the Bible talks about “slavery” it never has in mind the transatlantic chattel slavery where the Africans were systematically kidnapped, abused, and forced to work without pay based on the color of their skin and the thought that they were an inferior race. That’s not what was going on in the bible when it talks about slavery.   
    So, does the Bible ever support the institution of chattel slavery – i.e. the ruthless man stealing that occurred in the transatlantic slave trade where Africans were stolen from their homes, packed in ships, and forced to work without pay, under harsh conditions? No. Never. Nada.  
    But with the type of slavery of its day, notice how slavery is undermined in the Bible:
   1. **OT**. In the OT you could never abuse a slave, or kidnap, or even return him if he ran away from the owner – otherwise even death could be the penalty placed on your head.
      1. For example (this is just one of MANY), “You shall not give up to his maters a slave who has escaped from his mater to you. He shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him. You shall not wrong him.” (**De.23.15-16**)
      2. God regulates it, never endorses it – like Polygamy in the OT where instead of giving a command. God sometimes just shows you the evil instead.
   2. **NT**. Here, we get even more subversive of the institution of slavery. Along with passages that regulate the indentured servanthood of the day, we have passages that warn masters to be fair and courteous to their servants. And even more interestingly, we have subtle passages placed in the text that seem like ticking time bombs to this institution.
      1. **1Ti.1.10.** “The law is laid down for rebellious, ungodly sinners…kidnappers” (Gk. ‘enslavers, kidnappers, slave dealers.’)
      2. **1Co.7.21-23**. “Were you called while a slave? Do not let it be a concern to you. But if indeed you are able to become free, rather make use of it. For the one who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedperson. Likewise the one who is called while free is a slave of Christ. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.”
      3. **Philemon 16.** “no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.   
          And, again, many people wonder why the tiny book of Philemon is even included in the Bible because of its size, but there is a good reason. Its importance is right up there with other books, and I think it is primarily because of the subversive request Paul makes and the way in which he makes it. His request: take Onesimus back as a humble brother in Christ, don’t punish him, and send him back to me with his freedom. But he makes this request because of the truth in Jesus Christ, namely, that in Christ all relationships are changed – slave and master on equal footing, in Him. In other words, the way they thought about relationships – especially between slave and master - would be completely changed and renewed with the spiritual mind of Christ. And so Paul is seen, in the middle as Christ himself, reconciling the two. This letter – this message – would have had ripple effects throughout the world, and it did
      4. **Exodus**. Probably strongest point of all – the main story of the Bible.**)**
6. **MLK Jr.** I spent a lot of time to bring out the fact that the bible is NOT a purveyor of racism and slavery, though many will claim the contrary. I find a lesson most interesting from MLK, Jr. When Martin Luther King, Jr. dealt with the gross injustices of segregation and racism, even (and perhaps mainly) among the white, middle-class, conservative believers, he never said the problem was with Christianity itself (he never said the problem was with the Bible); that we needed to depart from the teachings of the Bible in order to have justice.   
    Instead, he said: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).  
    I saw it. MLK saw it. And it was the beginning of the end of prejudice for me.
7. **What to do Charlottesville**
8. I just want to wrap up briefly by considering what we can do about Charlottesville, since there are many here who are wondering exactly that.
   1. **Feel**. Like this morning’s lesson, don’t be apathetic.
   2. **Come out full-stop against racism**. That means not tolerating it. And I think sometimes we demonize racism so harshly that we could never identify ourselves with it. I could never see that in myself – but stop. You might be more blinding yourself to it than admitting the truth. Repent of any prejudice hiding in your own heart.
   3. **Educate yourself**. History (white-privilege) – Reading the other side – Make friends
   4. **Realize the problem is wider and deeper than any political faction**. The problem really is as simple as this: sin. And the answer is as simple as the gospel. Don’t believe me? If everyone lived for the glory of Christ and loved their neighbors as themselves – even their enemies, the world’s problems would stop tonight.   
       **Alexsandr** **Solzhenitsyn**: “Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts…”
   5. **Pray**. “You will be done, on earth as in heaven”
9. Ps.34.18: “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”