

June 7, 2020

“Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken”
Psalm 87

FCF: The pandemic of racism. A deep cure needed.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) In response to the pandemic of racism,
(magnet) the LORD is promising a new city.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

The COVID-19 outbreak has been serious but solvable. By that, I mean there has been much suffering - physically, economically, socially. But the measures taken have helped - hand washing, social distancing, and such. The curve is flattening and there may be a vaccine coming.

So it's been serious but solvable. Yet we face a pandemic of another kind at a deeper level - racism. George Floyd's death and the unrest of recent days did not create this pandemic. Those events revealed it. We have known it was there all along but have tried to ignore it. To which, two things must be said. This pandemic must not be ignored. And a deep cure is needed.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Psalm 87](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is cited as saying ([READ quote](#)), “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.” Here's the backdrop to that. In the 1930's, as Adolph Hitler's Nazi party was gaining strength, Bonhoeffer, a German pastor, was increasingly upset by the German church's complacency to the suffering and injustice towards Jews in Germany. So he formed a new church to speak out against the political and religious authorities. When the Nazis outlawed this church, Bonhoeffer escaped as a fugitive. Eventually, after much prayer and reflection, he agreed to participate in a plot to assassinate Hitler. And why? Simply this. “Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

So here's the question. Has God acted? Has He spoken? The answer is an emphatic yes. Which brings us to our text. Psalm 87 is a vision of a new world city - a certain future, a hope of a place and a people that taps into our deepest longings. For it is something for which we were made. Pressing into the issue of racism, this is what becomes clear. If we will but hear this, take it to heart, and live it out, it could bring real substantive change. For in response to the pandemic of racism, the LORD is promising a new city. He is promising nothing less than a new city.

That begs some questions. What about this city could warrant such claims? There are three things. First, the city of God. Second, the people of God. And, third, the grace of God.

I. THE CITY OF GOD

First, the city of God. How does God view this city? He loves it ([READ Psalm 87:1-3](#)).

A) Zion as a Place

Now, for clarity's sake, we need to talk about Zion as both as place and as a people.

1. History

First, as a place. This is Jerusalem, the city captured by David and made the capital of Israel.

2. Names

The biblical names for Zion are revealing ([READ list](#)): the city of David, the city of God, God's resting place, His holy hill, the holy city, the holy mountain. These are all Zion as a place.

B) Zion as a People

1. God's covenant people

But Zion is also a people, God's covenant people. He promised to be with us and to be our God. He promised to bless us that we might be a blessing. Again, Zion is God's covenant people.

2. The "city on a hill"

Zion, the church, has a purpose as a city on a hill. This is made clear all through the Scriptures. We are to be a demonstration to the world, drawing people to God as we live out our calling.

This is Zion, the Lord's beloved city - a place but ultimately a people, the church.

Application:

The Lord has a purpose for us. The church has a role in the issues of the day - no matter how complex. Questions on power and money, gender and sex, race and justice. The gospel speaks to all these things, setting forth another way, another path. We need to know that. And we need to be emboldened to speak. Humble enough to listen first. But loving so as to speak.

In response to the pandemic of racism, the LORD promises a new city - the city of God.

II. THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Which brings us to the people of God. Who is in this city? ([READ Psalm 87:4-6](#)).

A) Those Who Know Him

Who is in this city? There are two parts to this. First, those who know the LORD.

1. Narrow

As Jesus said, "the gate is narrow." Not everyone is included. There is a condition to this.

2. Wide

So on the one hand, this is narrow and exclusive. But, on the other hand, it is wide and inclusive. Not everyone is included. But anyone who knows the LORD, anyone in a relationship with Him will be in this city. Not through mighty deeds or a life of works but something else entirely.

B) From All Nations

And from where do they come? Are they all the same? No, they are from all nations.

1. Varied list

This is a varied list. Rahab is Egypt to the south. Babylon is the other superpower to the east. Philistia was SW on the coast. Tyre was NW on the coast. And Cush was way south of Egypt.

2. All made one

All these different peoples, all made one. All recorded and registered as citizens. All embraced and adopted as native born. Zion is multi-cultural, multi-racial. A city of unity and diversity.

Who is in this city? Who is the people of God? A beautiful mix of unity and diversity.

Application:

“How can this be?” you ask. Looking back to Genesis 1-2, what do we see? The roots of every tribe and culture are traced back to one couple. Do you see? There is ultimately one race. I remember the first time that really landed on me. I was reading Ruth Graham Bell’s storybook, *One Stormy Night*, to my kids. It’s a wonderful retelling of the whole biblical storyline. It was the artwork depicting Adam and Eve that grabbed me. There I could see all the races represented in them - red, yellow, black, and white. Looking back, we see there is ultimately but one race.

That’s the unity. But the diversity is also clear as we look forward. You read the book of Revelation and you see these celebration scenes around the throne, celebration of all the gifts and distinctives of the peoples. It is not a flat monochrome but a rich multicolored assembly, gladly present and gloriously welcomed. That’s the picture of what we see as we look forward.

The LORD is a God of unity and diversity. It’s how He likes it. And we see hints of that wherever we turn, everywhere we look in His creation. He delights in unity and diversity.

In response to the pandemic of racism, God promises a new city. This is who is there.

III. THE GRACE OF GOD

But that leads to one more question. How do we come to be in this city? By His grace (**READ Psalm 87:7**). You hear this deep refreshment, a song of glad reliance upon Zion’s God.

A) Not of Our Own Doing

For our being there is not of our own doing. Let’s take another look at those nations.

1. Rahab and Babylon

Rahab and Babylon - not only two superpowers but two great oppressors of God’s people.

2. Philistia and Tyre

Philistia - yes, a coastal culture and also a continual thorn in Israel’s side. Tyre - yes, an affluent sea power and also a source of ongoing enticement into false hopes. Each of these were hostile.

3. Cush

And then Cush - the most remote and spiritually illiterate culture of the known world.

Do you see? These peoples were all, left to themselves, had no claim, no place, in Zion.

B) But All of His Doing

Our being included is not of our own doing but all and only of the LORD’s doing.

1. His founding

(**READ Psalm 87:1**) This was all His idea, solely of the LORD’s initiative.

2. His listing

(**READ Psalm 87:6**) Our being in this listing is only of Him. Which is our sole security.

You get a sense of the shock of all this with the threefold repetition in the psalm, “This one was born there.” As if to say, “Can you believe who is there?” This is the grace of God.

Application:

This is the grace of God. Let's press this into the matter of racism. It takes the gospel of grace to heal our struggle with race. It takes the gospel of grace to heal our struggle with race.

Let's run a diagnosis on this pandemic. We were born to worship - to trust and rely upon something for meaning and significance. And whatever we land on is what we worship and serve. If it is not our Creator, then it has to be something in the creation. Among other things, this can be our race. That becomes what is most important to us, the key to our identity. To the degree this is true, we will separate and divide. We will boast about our color and culture. We will look down upon others with disdain and despise them. These are the deep roots of racism.

It gets worse. One group gets power and asserts it over another. Which leads to injustice. Please hear me. Racism is not a white thing. It is not a black thing. It is a fallen sinner thing. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said ([READ quote](#)), "The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either – but right through every human heart." Think of what we have seen in recent decades - the genocides in South Sudan, Rwanda, and the Balkans. That is the dynamic we see playing out. This is a spiritual problem.

We have turned from God. What then is the cure? Repentance, turning from our self-righteousness to Christ's righteousness. Embracing the grace of God in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. That is our only hope. Not ignoring the problem or playing it down. Nor shaming and attacking people. Our sole hope, the only cure, is the grace of God in the gospel.

In response to the pandemic of racism, God promises a new city - all of His grace.

CONCLUSION:

There have been loud cries from many corners over the last few days. "What happened in MN was so wrong!" This has been all across the political spectrum, reverberating around the globe, and expressed in so many ways. "It ought not to be this way!" And that's absolutely true.

Let me speak, if I may, to this. You are right to call out what is wrong. But do you know why it is wrong? Do you know why you are right to say it is wrong? Please hear my question. I am simply asking if you know why you are right. That's a vital thing we all need to know.

The Word of God is what tells us this. In the Scriptures, we have a voice speaking to us. And this goes far beyond our subjective opinions to objective truth. This is a place that is far firmer than the latest study or poll. Friends, we need the Word of God. We need to hear it.

For there in the Word of God we find the message of the grace of God. And His grace is the only medicine that can cure this pandemic. It is the only balm that can heal the wound. The message of the gospel of grace is the only thing that will enable us to really listen. It is the only thing that will humble us. It is the only thing that will compel us to repent and confess. It is the only thing that will embolden us to forgive and embrace. This broken world needs the gospel.

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