



Shelby Christian Church

CORE 52: LIVING IT- RACISM * ACTS 17:26, JONAH 1:1-3, 3:1-5, 4:1-11,
ISAIAH 49:6, EPHESIANS 2:13-14, REVELATION 7:9-10 * 8/10/2025

INTRODUCTION

What are some examples that come to mind from the New Testament of God breaking down racist barriers in the existing culture?

What are some modern examples you've seen of the Church working to fight racism in our culture for the sake of the Gospel?

UNDERSTANDING

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 17:26

According to this verse, from whom did God make all the nations?

Why is it significant that all nations came from “one man”?

How does this verse challenge or affirm ideas about race, ethnicity, and equality? In what ways can this verse guide how we think about nationalism, racism, or cultural pride?

What might Paul be communicating to the Athenians about their place in God's plan?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER TO READ JONAH 1:1-3, 3:1-5, 4:1-11

Why do you think Jonah chose to run from God's call? What are some “Tarshishes” in our lives—places or ways we try to avoid God's calling? Why is it often easier to run from God than to trust and obey Him?

In what ways are we tempted to avoid sharing God's message with people we think won't respond?

What can we learn from the Ninevites about responding to conviction or correction?

How does Jonah react to Nineveh's repentance and God's mercy?

What does Jonah reveal about his motives for running away earlier?

How does God respond to Jonah's anger? How does God's response to Jonah teach us about racism?

The Book of Jonah is one of the Minor Prophets but is unique in that it's primarily narrative rather than poetic prophecy. Jonah, an actual historical prophet (cf. 2 Kings 14:25), is called by God not to speak to Israel, but to preach to Nineveh, a powerful and violent Assyrian city known for its brutality.

Jonah 3:1–5 reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy, and no act of obedience is too small to be used mightily by God. Whether we identify more with the rebellious prophet or the repentant pagans, the message is the same: God is patient, powerful, and merciful—and He calls each of us to respond with repentance and trust.

Jonah 4 provides a climactic conclusion, exposing the prophet's true feelings about God's mercy toward Nineveh. While Jonah obeyed God externally, his heart was filled with racism, resentment, and anger at God's compassion for Israel's enemy. This chapter explores themes of grace, forgiveness, and God's sovereign care.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 49:6

Who is speaking in this verse, and who is being addressed?

What was the initial mission mentioned for the servant?

Why does God say the original mission “is too small a thing”?

How does this verse connect to the broader theme of salvation for all nations?

How does this verse challenge narrow or exclusive views of God's plan for all mankind?

Isaiah 49 is part of the “Servant Songs” — passages describing the mysterious Servant of the Lord, a figure who suffers and serves on behalf of God's people. This verse expands the Servant's mission beyond Israel to include the entire world. Verse 6 challenges believers to see God's mission as global and inclusive. It invites us to embrace the call to be “lights” in our communities and beyond—sharing hope and salvation with all people, not just those like us. This verse reminds us that God's heart beats for every nation and culture, inspiring us to participate in His redemptive work.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 2:13-14

Who is Paul addressing in this passage?

What does it mean that those “once were far away” have been “brought near”?

How does Christ bring peace between these two groups?

Why was there a “wall of hostility” between them?

What does this passage reveal about the purpose of Jesus' sacrifice?

How does this unity in Christ challenge social, ethnic, or cultural divisions today?

Ephesians 2:13–14 challenges believers to embrace the unity Christ has secured. It calls us to reject division and hostility within the Church and society, promoting peace and reconciliation. Understanding that Jesus is our peace motivates us to build bridges across racial, cultural, and social divides, reflecting God's heart for a united people.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 7:9-10

Who is described in this vision?

What is significant about the diversity of the people in the crowd?

What are the people wearing and holding? What might these symbolize?

How does this vision reflect God's plan for salvation?

What role does the Lamb play in this scene?

Revelation 7:9–10 encourages believers to embrace the diversity of God's kingdom and to live in hope of the great gathering of redeemed people. It invites us to join in the worship that recognizes God and Christ as the sole source of salvation. This vision challenges us to welcome and celebrate all who come to faith, reflecting the unity and joy of the eternal kingdom.

APPLICATION

Did you grow up in a family or community that treated all people the same or was there some level of racism, overt or subtle? These could have been jokes, comments, phrases, what a particular group of people was called, etc.

In your experience, why is racism so difficult to overcome? What actions or attitudes have you personally implemented to reduce it in your own life?

What could your church do (or what could you do in your church) to make others ethnic, economic, cultural, and political groups feel more included?

Share the name of specific person who is different than you who you could escort to church to make sure they feel included when they came.

PRAYER

COMMENTARY

Acts 17:26

“From one man he made all the nations...” - Refers to Adam (or possibly Noah, depending on interpretation), emphasizing the common origin of all humanity. Paul declares that all ethnic and national distinctions exist within a shared human family, created by God. This was a direct challenge to Greek elitism and pride in being superior to "barbarians" or other peoples. Theologically, it affirms that racism and ethnocentrism have no place in the Christian worldview.

“...that they should inhabit the whole earth...” - God intended humanity to spread out and inhabit the entire globe (cf. Genesis 1:28; 11:8–9). This is part of God's creation mandate and reflects His sovereign plan for humanity's development and diversity.

“...and he marked out their appointed times in history...” - God is not a distant deity; He is actively governing the rise and fall of nations. “Appointed times” refers to historical eras, dynasties, and empires—nothing happens outside God's sovereign timing. This would have resonated with the Greeks who prided themselves on their place in history; Paul reminds them it was God who determined their moment in time.

“...and the boundaries of their lands.” - God also established the geographical limits of nations (cf. Deuteronomy 32:8). Even land distribution and borders are under His control, which challenges the

idea of human autonomy or conquest as supreme. This highlights the truth that God oversees both the big picture of history and the fine details of nations' boundaries.

Jonah 1:1-3

Verse 1: “The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai” - This is a standard prophetic formula introducing a divine commission. Jonah is identified as “son of Amittai,” linking him to his earlier mention in 2 Kings 14:25 during the reign of Jeroboam II. God initiates—He speaks first, as He does with all prophets.

Verse 2: “Go to Nineveh” is a surprising command. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, Israel’s enemy, known for wickedness, cruelty, and idolatry. “Preach against it” implies warning and confrontation—a call to proclaim God’s coming judgment. “Its wickedness has come up before me” echoes the language of Genesis (e.g., Sodom in Gen. 18:20), signaling that God is now going to act in response to injustice and evil.

Verse 3: Jonah does the opposite of what God commanded. Instead of heading northeast to Nineveh, he goes west to Tarshish, likely in Spain—the farthest place known in that day. The text stresses his descent: “He went down to Joppa... went aboard...” symbolizing a downward spiritual path. Jonah’s attempt to “flee from the Lord” shows a faulty understanding of God’s omnipresence (cf. Psalm 139:7–10). His disobedience isn’t just fear—it’s defiance. Jonah didn’t want to participate in God’s mercy toward Nineveh (see Jonah 4:2).

3:1-5

Verse 1: God graciously gives Jonah a second chance after his rebellion in chapter 1. This reveals God’s patience and willingness to restore His servants, even after failure. It also reinforces that God’s calling had not changed—Jonah’s mission was still valid.

Verse 2: “Great city” may refer to Nineveh’s size, influence, or prominence in God’s redemptive plan. God tells Jonah to proclaim “the message I give you”—Jonah is not to speak his own words but deliver God’s direct message, emphasizing prophetic obedience.

Verse 3: This verse marks a turnaround in Jonah’s attitude. He finally submits to God’s command. Nineveh’s size (“three days’ journey”) likely refers to how long it took to walk through the city and preach, not necessarily its physical dimensions.

Verse 4: Jonah delivers a short, direct, and sobering message: judgment is imminent. The number 40 often signifies a period of testing or warning in Scripture (e.g., 40 days of the flood, Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness). The word “overthrown” (Hebrew: hapak) can mean “destroyed” or “transformed”—possibly hinting at God’s mercy to come.

Verse 5: “The Ninevites believed God...” - This is one of the most shocking and miraculous moments in the book: a violent, pagan city repents after only one day of hearing a reluctant prophet. The people respond to God, not just Jonah—they recognized the divine authority behind the message. Fasting and wearing sackcloth were traditional signs of mourning, humility, and repentance, adopted by all levels of society (“from the greatest to the least”).

Chapter 4

Verses 1-3: Jonah is angry because God spared Nineveh after they repented. His prayer reveals he ran away initially because he expected or wanted God to judge Nineveh. Jonah's statement about God's character—"gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love"—shows he understands God's nature but resents its application to Nineveh. Jonah even asks God to take his life, showing deep frustration and despair.

Verses 4-6: God asks Jonah a probing question about his right to be angry, inviting Jonah to reflect on his attitude. God provides a plant to shade Jonah, which gives him comfort—a rare moment of relief and blessing. The plant's quick growth and Jonah's joy in it contrast sharply with his anger over Nineveh.

Verses 7-8: God causes the plant to wither the next day, and Jonah is disappointed and distressed. This highlights Jonah's self-centeredness—he cares more for a plant than for an entire city of people.

Verses 9-11: God questions Jonah again, this time highlighting Jonah's compassion for the plant versus his lack of compassion for Nineveh, a city of many people. This rhetorical question challenges Jonah's sense of justice and mercy and underscores God's sovereign concern for all people, even enemies.

Isaiah 49:6

The servant's initial task is to restore Israel, God's chosen people. "Too small a thing" suggests the servant's mission goes far beyond Israel's restoration—it is just the beginning.

"...and bring back those of Israel I have kept." This acknowledges God's ongoing preservation of a faithful remnant. The servant's role involves bringing back the exiles, both physically and spiritually.

"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles..." The mission extends to the Gentiles (non-Jews), meaning salvation is for all nations. Being a "light" symbolizes guidance, hope, and revelation—bringing God's truth to those in darkness.

"...that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." The ultimate goal is global salvation—God's redemptive plan includes every people group and nation. This is a foundational prophecy pointing toward the universal scope of the gospel.

Ephesians 2:13-14

"You who once were far away" refers primarily to the Gentiles, who were once separated from God and His covenant promises.

"Brought near" means restored to fellowship with God and with His people.

This reconciliation is made possible "by the blood of Christ", highlighting Jesus' sacrificial death as the means of redemption and peace.

Jesus is not just a source of peace but embodies peace itself. This peace is more than an internal feeling; it is the removal of hostility and enmity between divided groups.

The "two groups" are Jews and Gentiles, traditionally separated by religious, cultural, and social boundaries.

The “barrier” or “dividing wall” refers to the law and regulations, including the temple wall in Jerusalem that separated Jews from Gentiles. Jesus abolished this barrier through His death, ending the hostility and making both groups one new people—the Church.

Revelation 7:9-10

The innumerable crowd symbolizes the vastness and inclusivity of God’s salvation—it’s beyond human ability to quantify. This multitude contrasts with the often exclusive or limited views of salvation.

“...from every nation, tribe, people and language...” - This phrase emphasizes the global scope of salvation. It signifies that God’s redemptive work transcends ethnic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries, fulfilling Old Testament promises (e.g., Isaiah 56:7). The diversity reflects the fullness of God’s kingdom.

The throne represents God’s sovereign authority; the Lamb is Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. Their presence before God’s throne signifies intimacy, honor, and victory. White robes symbolize purity, righteousness, and victory (cf. Revelation 19:8). Palm branches are symbols of triumph and celebration, harking back to Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (John 12:13) and Jewish festival traditions.

“Salvation belongs to our God... and to the Lamb.” - The loud praise declares that salvation is entirely the work of God and Jesus Christ. It acknowledges the divine source of redemption and worship.