

“The Amazing Race”

Revelation 5

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

The title of the message today is: **The Amazing Race**

And I’m not talking about the TV show on CBS, where teams of two race around the world figuring out clues, experiencing foreign countries, enduring mental and physical challenges and competing for a million dollars.

When I say the words “amazing race”, I’m talking about the kaleidoscope of people all over the world that make up the human race and even more specifically what has been called a “third race” that is made by the grace of God in Christ, and this is what we are going to talk about in today’s message.

And I want to begin our time together with the end in mind. And when I say “end”, it’s actually THE beginning from an eternal perspective. John gives us this grand vision he receives in the Revelation of a future time when:

- all of redeemed mankind is gathered around the throne of God...
- Angels are there...
- all the host of heaven is there...
- those whom the Bible refers to as the 24 elders are there...

And listen to how he further describes it: **Revelation 5:9-10 – “And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain (they are singing worship to Jesus because it’s Jesus that has saved them), and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”**

It is a beautiful picture of God’s desire and design coming together and it’s a vision of what it is to come...it is going to happen!

People from every tribe...every language...every nation. And while:

- they look different...
- come from different places...
- have had different life experiences...
- experienced different cultures...

They are ALL doing the same thing – WORSHIP...and it’s ALL directed toward the same person – JESUS.

Now, THIS END goal of God and vision for the future should fuel our present-day living! It’s WHY we do missions...this is why we GO to the ends of the earth with the gospel so that those

who have never heard the good news of Jesus will hear it, hopefully receive it and therefore will be with us for all of eternity worshipping around the throne.

As theologian **John Piper** wrote in his book, *Let The Nations Be Glad*: “**Missions exist because worship does not.**”

This end goal of God (people from everywhere worshipping him for all of eternity) - it does not only fuel our present-day living in the sense of being on mission, but it should also awaken us to desire, long for and work towards the Church TODAY reflecting what WILL BE reality in this future Kingdom that is mentioned in Revelation..

Illus. Appetizer – I liken it to a great restaurant. Surely, you have been to a great restaurant, and they bring out the bread, and you order an appetizer – and BOTH are amazing! I mean the anticipation of what the actual meal is going to taste like is off the charts!

Well, this is sort of what the Church today should be like! We as believers in Christ should be praying for, striving towards and working like crazy to give this world a foretaste of what heaven is going to be like.

People should visit our church and leave with a longing for the eternal – and they may not even articulate it – but they see people from:

- different cultures...
- different ethnicities...
- different backgrounds...
- different color skin...
- different likes and dislikes...
- different political opinions and persuasions...

And yet they ALSO see how we love one another, treat one another, serve one another!

- They see how we are unified around a person – Jesus, and what he has done for us in his cross and resurrection.
- They see how we are unified around a shared mission of sharing his love in word and in deed, and they leave after being with us, with a picture of eternity in their hearts, inwardly LONGING to have what we have.

THIS is our desire. And in many ways, Champion Forest we do just this. In many ways we are “ahead of the game” so to speak as it relates to fulfilling this Revelation 5 vision.

I can’t tell you how grateful I am personally, for previous leadership that worked so hard for this vision of diversity...and they prayed and labored and staffed our local church to reflect the Kingdom of God, and you embraced this vision and in many ways what we are talking about has become a reality here.

Did you know we (that we know of) 26 countries represented in just our Spanish congregation? And there is no telling how many countries are represented in this service today!

Besides our English and Spanish services, we have a deaf service that meets in our church, a Vietnamese life group...a Farsi life group.

What we have here at Champion Forest is a beautiful tapestry of people that look different. Speak different languages, are from different places around the world, but we come together to worship Jesus and live on mission for him – it's incredible!

However, we must continue to work...and be diligent...and make sure that we are doing everything in our power both personally and corporately to continue reflecting the future Kingdom reality that is to come.

We have to be on guard...we have to be watchful...we have to have the power of discernment and wisdom from above to stay the course because it would be so easy to allow our differences to divide us.

I can tell you this is what Satan wants. He loves division! He loves strife and chaos. He prides himself in creating disunity. He is the author of prejudice and racism...of evil itself, and as the Bible states, he is out to steal, kill and destroy the unity and mission we share.

And so, what I want to do in this message today is show how we can fight FOR this Revelation 5 vision and fight AGAINST an Enemy that wants to thwart and destroy any semblance of it.

Now, to do this, we have to begin where we started last week and that is with man being created in the image of God. We call it the "Imago Dei". And do you remember what we said?

It's a fact from scripture...undeniable that each person is loved by God, known by God and created by God. Therefore, each person has value.

**Gen. 1:26-27 – "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."**

It must be underscored, highlighted and repeated...I'll put it in a sentence that is easily digestible:

Each person is made in the image of God and therefore each person has equal worth and dignity.

Racism in ANY form is antithetical not only to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but to the very doctrine of the "Imago Dei". Let me say this as loudly and clearly as I can as a pastor of God's people and a preacher of his word as we get going here. Anything that cheapens, demeans or

despises another man or woman made in the image of God is sin – PERIOD. And it needs to be repented of!

We value life INSIDE the womb (that was last week) and we value life outside this womb (that's what were dealing with this week!)

As author and theologian **Art Lindsley** writes: **“It is contradictory for Christians to walk into church proclaiming the worthiness of God while cursing someone who God created in his likeness. How believers treat people is an indication of how they value God.”**

When we value God, we will value those created in his image – ALL of those created in his image.

Now, this is a biblical worldview series and in the creation account that we just read in Genesis 1, we see that there was only one race - and it had nothing to do with the color of skin, because the Bible doesn't speak to what color of skin Adam and Eve even had.

We have no idea! If it was THAT important scripture would have spoke to it, but it doesn't! One race is seen in Genesis chapter one and, that is the human race.

And the call...the command to Adam and Eve is to **Gen. 1:28a** – **“And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...”**

And that is EXACTLY what they do. You read Genesis 4-6 and Adam and Eve do what they were commanded by God to do. They are fruitful and multiply. You read those same chapters and you will also see that their choice to sin against God has marred the very people made in the image of God.

Cain has a sin nature now because of Adam and Eve's sin and jealousy is in his heart. It provokes him to murder his brother. You get to Genesis chapter six and listen to how the crown creation of God (mankind) is described:

Genesis 6:5 – **“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only on evil continually.”**

If you want to trace racism back to its root, look no further than the sinful heart of man. THIS is where it begins...the same place ALL sin begins.

If you've been in church a long time, you know what happens in Genesis 7-8 – and we're just taking a take a short journey through the Scripture here so we can have a biblical worldview on how God views race God.

In Gen. 7-8, he judges sin once more (sin must always be judged) and he sends a flood that destroys everything and everyone on earth.

Illus. Ark - I know we like to paint rainbows in our children's nurseries, you might want to give a G-rated version of the Noah's ark story as you are explaining to your children why the rainbow is there and what it means!

We get to Genesis 10, and THIS is where it gets really good. Noah is saved from the flood along with his family. BTW, that's a perfect picture of Christ – when we trust in him – he's our ark, he locks us in, protects us, saves and delivers us through the waters of judgment.

Noah's family is saved with him, and Noah had three sons. Now, listen to Genesis chapter 10 because this is where we witness different nations and peoples coming from...again, we are ONE race.

Genesis 10:1 – “These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.”

Now, you see in (v. 2) the sons of Japheth and his descendants and look at how it reads in:

Genesis 10:5 – “From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations.”

In (v. 6) we read of Ham and his descendants. And look at how it reads in **Genesis 10:20 – “These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.”**

And then (v. 21) we read of Shem and his lineage. Look at **Genesis 10:31-32 – “These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations. These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from those the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.”**

So, see this map (**SHOW IMAGE**). If you want to know where the different races so to speak came from, this is where – the sons of Ham, Shem and Japheth.

Ham and his descendants as you can see settled in the Northern Africa region. Shem and his descendants for the most part settled in the Middle East (Mesopotamia and Arabia) and the descendants of Japheth settled in Asia Minor and more toward what we know as European countries.

And so, this is how it all started. The Apostle Paul would even mention this when he was preaching in Athens trying to get them to see and understand that the “unknown God” they were worshiping was actually the Creator God of the universe:

Acts 17:23b-26 – “...What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man (Adam and Eve to Noah and Noah to his sons) every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.”

God made man and woman in his image, and he made every single race, ethnicity, people group we know and are aware of...and listen to this...mentioned it last week, and it definitely deserves repeating: He LOVES every person of every race and people group.

Let me show us this just by continuing our journey through the scripture. What happens in Genesis chapter 12? God calls a people to himself.

It's the call of Abram and the setting a part of the Hebrew people. They would be known in scripture as his "treasured possession" and God no doubt had a unique, covenant relationship with them.

But this covenant wouldn't just be a blessing to them, but through them God promises ALL the nations of the earth...ALL the peoples of the earth...would be blessed!

Genesis 12:3 – "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you (Abraham/Israel) all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

How? It's a sneak preview of Jesus! Jesus would come from the line of Abraham. And by faith in him ALL the families of the earth would be blessed – they will one day be gathered around his throne worshipping him. The Revelation 5 vision is a fulfillment of the Genesis 12 promise!

We see God's love for the world in the pagan Ninevites when God sends the prophet Jonah to preach to them. Psalm 96 compels us as part of our worship of God to share his love with the nations...with peoples...

Psalm 96:1-3 – "Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! ² Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!"

You turn to the New Testament, and Jesus models this love for all peoples, breaking down all racial barriers.

- Jesus serves a Samaritan woman (hated and despised "race" in that time) and gives her living water...
- Jesus heals a Roman centurion's servant – those centurions were as unclean as a leper in the eyes of the Jewish people...
- Jesus casts demons out of the daughter of a Canaanite, pagan woman...
- Jesus speaks to some Greeks who were on a spiritual search right before he was betrayed and arrested...

Ultimately, Jesus goes to the cross and dies NOT just for the Jew, but for the Gentile as well. He dies for everyone, regardless of their race or ethnicity, their language, their color. He died FOR all because he LOVES all.

And just think about what his death did! It reversed the curse of Genesis 3! Where sin brought separation from God and one another, Jesus in his death brings reconciliation! Reconciliation between man and God and between man and one another!

Illus. The Cross – This is why I love the image of a cross! It's a vivid picture of reconciliation (vertical and horizontal).

This is why I say, the answer to the race issues then (which were great – the hatred and opposition between Jew and Gentile – are you kidding me?! It was HUGE!)...the answer to the race issues then and the races issues now...and ALL other issues in our culture for that matter – the answer is Jesus!

Listen: this is also why any competing worldview OR organization will always fall short in their ability to bring peace and reconciliation. It doesn't have the power to do what Jesus does.

And I'll just lean in here and call it what it is – Critical Race Theory and any other applied postmodernist worldview like ANY worldview that we are EVER introduced to, before we embrace it or ANY part of it, we need to:

1. Do as Paul said and make sure that we (2 Cor. 10:5) take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ...
2. We have to make sure we are not (Heb. 13:9, 1 Tim. 1:4) led astray by various kind of strange teachings, controversial speculations...
3. AND we have to funnel and filter EVERYTHING through the gospel first and foremost...

We should be VERY careful to embrace movements, employ terms and use language especially in our day that intentionally divides – that's not of Christ!

N.T. Wright – “Secular modernism has tried to get the fruits of the Jesus-message without the roots. It can't be done. Christianity was the original multicultural society, committed to caring for the poor and to sharing a common life across racial boundaries. Trying to recreate a society like that without Jesus leading the way is like trying to type with your fingers together.”

Jesus is the answer! Sounds simplistic doesn't it! Like you'd expect me to say it as a pastor and preacher. But I'm telling you the answer to prejudice and racism in any form...the answer to:

- The struggles...
- The bitterness...

- The anger...
- The hate...
- The injustices we see and witness...

You can tell me I'm oversimplifying the issue all day long, but the answer to these things is Jesus! He's the ONLY hope we have in bringing true reconciliation and peace between the races which as we have already seen is really only one race when seen through a biblical worldview.

Ephesians 2:13-16 – “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”

Only Jesus can redeem and plant within us the ability to repent of the heart issues like pride and prejudice that fuel racism which only brings about separation and death. Only Jesus can KILL hostility! See:

- When we trust in Jesus, we are given a new identity – we are “in Christ”.
- When we trust in Jesus, we are given a new family – it's called the Church.
- When we trust in Jesus, we are given a new citizenship – it's called heaven.
- When we trust in Jesus, we are given a new ministry – it's called reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 – “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

Our job as Christ followers is to be instruments of God modeling reconciliation AND preaching reconciliation!

We preach peace through Christ and therefore (Eph. 2:11-22) the hostility that exists between people is broken...it's done away with...it ceases – but this ONLY happens through the gospel!

That's what makes the message of Jesus so powerful...it's unique and universal! It speaks to and is for every tribe, nation, race and ethnic group!

Go back to the sons of Noah! Ham, went to North Africa. You go to Acts 8 and the Holy Spirit is leading a man named Philip to share Jesus with of all people – an Ethiopian Eunuch. He leads

him to Christ, baptizes him and sends him on his way back home! The gospel is for EVERYONE!

Think of Shem. His descendants are those from the Middle East. Does the gospel work for the Shemmites of the middle eastern descent? You go to Acts chapter 9, and a leader in the Jewish synagogue named Saul of Tarsus, meets Jesus and his life is changed forever. The gospel works for ALL people groups!

What about Japheth and the peoples of Asia Minor and Europe. You turn to Acts 10, and there is a Roman centurion there that is reconciled to Jesus and he and his whole household is saved.

Once again, we see the gospel works for every single person of every single race and origin.

Jesus is the answer to the race issues of our day. There is not one person outside of his love and there is not one person outside of his power to transform, reconciling them to God and to one another.

Just take the tour! From Genesis to the Psalms, to the Prophets to the Gospels, to Acts of the Apostles, to the New Testament letters and culminating in Revelation...here is what you see: People made in the image of God – from every language and tongue, ethnicity and race representing people groups from around the world worshipping around the throne!

There will be no racism in heaven. There is one amazing race!

Listen to **1 Peter 2:9a** – **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession...”**

Some have referred to this “chosen race” as a “third race”...it’s a new race that comprises of Christians...it’s called the Church.

To quote pastor and author **Derwin Gray** – **“One of the most compelling realities of Jesus’ saving work is that his grace creates a new race. A new race walked out of the tomb with Jesus...Though we are different colors with diverse cultures, the red blood of King Jesus runs through our veins, making us family.”**

And so, we see race as God sees and intended it, and while there will be no racism in heaven, and it’s our responsibility as Christ followers to continue fighting and working and praying like crazy to ensure that where we live and worship...there won’t be racism there either.

And so, in closing what are some ways that we can work to ensure just that...that in our church for sure...our sphere of influence...the pockets in which we live and work, how can/what can we do to ensure we are modeling and working towards a Revelation 5 vision, working to maintain a spirit of unity, where this isn’t division and pride and prejudice:

1. Consider others

This is the essence of the Christian life. That it’s not about me...and it’s not about you.

Illus. Future series – Did you know there are over 50 “one another” passages in the Bible.

- Love one another...
- Serve one another...
- Prefer one another...
- Be at peace with one another...
- Be kind to one another...

When it comes to this very sensitive issue of race, we don't begin with our rights and our opinions. We begin with humility and consider others...their feelings...their desires...their wishes...their struggles...we consider others more than we consider ourselves.

This is what it means to have the mind of Christ! Paul wrote in:

Philippians 2:1-5 – “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...”

Illus. MLK - During Covid and in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in May of 2020, like many of you I was distraught at what had happened and then what we were seeing take place in our country...the civil unrest.

And I just had a desire to begin educating myself on the civil rights movement of the past. And I figured there was no place better to start than with the writings of Martin Luther King Jr.

And so, I started reading his authorized biography. It had in it his “Letters from Birmingham Jail”. King was arrested for a peaceful protest. He was put in jail and some white pastors wrote an op-ed calling for unity. King read this call for unity, but he realized there was very little empathy from these pastors and so he wrote a letter to them from his prison cell.

Martin Luther King Jr – “Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five year old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross county drive

and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "n----," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"--then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait."

We've come a long way since 1619, 1776 and 1960 and we still have a ways to go! We're calling for empathy here!

We can speak truth, but we are to do so in love. Listen: no one according to the scripture (Ez. 18) should be judged or held accountable for the sins of their parents or grandparents.

If we want to see racism end and a Revelation 5 vision to come to fruition, we need to begin with considering others...empathizing with others. And this starts with genuine friendships with people that look different than us and for us to listen to each other with empathy and care.

Tony Evans – “We must begin with friendships with people who are different from us; we must intentionally connect as families and partners. We must demonstrate that we are willing to disadvantage ourselves for the sake of others. Jesus laid aside privileges and power to redeem us. He is our example of humility and sacrifice. A good starting point is to ask: How can I personally put the needs of my brothers and sisters above my own?”

We must consider others. Secondly, we must:

2. Challenge prejudices

As Christ-followers, we have an obligation to stand up for any injustice we see. The greatest command in scripture is to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. If we see our neighbor being abused, cheated, taken advantage of for any reason, but ESPECIALLY for the color of their skin, that's a line in the sand for us.

The scripture says in **Psalm 89:14** – **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.”**

God cares about justice...it's a part of his holy character. He is a just God. And where we see injustice and where we see prejudice, we need to open our mouths and speak and roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Micah 6:8 – **“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”**

Amos 5:24 - “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

In our desire for the glory of God to be on display through all races and people groups reconciled to him and praising him, and in our desire to see racism eradicated:

- we consider others...
- we challenge prejudices...
- we speak the truth in love...
- we stand up for righteousness...

And then thirdly and finally:

3. Celebrate differences

I learned this lesson concerning my marriage years ago. I learned that I don't need another me in my life! I need Debbie...and our differences aren't to bring separation, but instead they should bring celebration!

We are (1 Cor. 12) one body with many parts! And we need one another...our differences help us make a difference for Christ!

David Platt – “For the gospel doesn’t deny the obvious ethnic, cultural and historical differences that distinguish us from one another. Nor does the gospel suppose that these differences are merely superficial. Instead, the gospel begins with a God who creates all men and women in his image and then diversifies humanity according to clans and lands as a creative reflection of his grace and glory in distinct groups of people. In highlighting the beauty of such diversity, the gospel thus counters the mistaken cultural illusion that the path to unity is paved by minimizing what makes us unique. Instead, the gospel compels us to celebrate our ethnic distinctions, value our cultural differences, and acknowledge our historical diversity, even forgiving the ways such history may have been dreadfully harmful.”

Our differences don't weaken us...they strengthen us...and as we are united in Christ, it makes the differences between us that much more beautiful.

Illus. Pastor Search – (story of coming to Champion Forest) – I remember seeing the diversity...it looked like the Kingdom, and my heart jumped...I knew then, “I could Pastor Champion Forest”...and I'm so glad God called me here.

I want to keep working toward Rev. 5...and so, let's continue to strengthen and build what is already in us, and let's work and pray and stay focused on what matters most...and that is pointing people – ALL people to Jesus.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.