

# Healing the Past: Slavery and The Sins of My Father's House

Notes by George Miley 2020

## Healing the Past: Four steps:

- 1 - We face (confess) the truth (Public sin is confessed publicly)
- 2 - We grieve the sin
- 3 - We bring the sin to the cross and ask God to break its power
- 4 - We ask those we have wronged for forgiveness; we seek reconciliation

### Step One: We face (confess) the truth

Three brief examples: Israel, Germany, America

#### Israel

"Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.... On every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore" (Jeremiah 2:12-13, 20b).

What does it mean to stand with Israel? What does it mean to God?

- 1 - Unchanging commitment to Israel
- 2 - Uncompromising requirement that Israel face their sins and repent

#### Germany

1 - My wife Hanna is a German Jew. Born in 1932, she escaped Germany as a seven-year-old unaccompanied child refugee five weeks before the outbreak of WW2. Her parents, Markus and Amalie Zack, unable to leave, were gassed to death in the Nazi death camp in Chelmno, Poland, on May 3, 1942, by Germans.

2 - Twenty years ago God began to call Hanna to return to Germany to demonstrate the power of Christ to heal the wounds of history through forgiveness and reconciliation. We have both been deeply moved, and changed, by the grief, confession and repentance of so many German friends. Here are a few examples:

- + Visit to Auschwitz with the Beneckes and others
- + Hanna being asked to be honorary patron of Gemünd's 800 anniversary
- + Hanna and Germans in Chelmno

3 - On the 75th anniversary of the end of WW2 in Europe, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of Germany, said during a speech in Berlin that, due to their national past, Germans carry responsibility for the murder of millions and the suffering of millions. That breaks our hearts to this day. This country can only be loved with a broken heart.

### Step Two: We Grieve the Sin

#### America

1 - A white police officer pinned down a black man in the street, pressing his knee into his neck for almost nine minutes. The man died pleading, "I can't breathe."

2 - George Floyd's death in Minneapolis set off days of protests all across America—crowds responding to recent killings of African Americans.

3 - African Americans killed by white police officers, shot dead by white people with guns—Where does this come from? What are its roots?

4 - When Minnesota Governor Tim Walz commented on these events he offered this answer, "These are things that have been brewing in this country for 400 years."

5 - In Louisville, Kentucky, Governor Andy Beshear was even more specific. He said protests there reflected a city still affected by the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow.

6 - American racism gushes forth out of our unhealed past. In order to be able to enslave people, you have to regard them as inferior—even sub-human.

7 - Such evil cannot be eradicated by social action alone. Its roots go much deeper. Racism is a spiritual problem. Only the cross of Christ can break its power.

### **My personal grief and confession:**

1 - I was born in America. That was God's decision. I am so thankful for America. I and my family have been deeply blessed by this country. I honor my forefathers.

2 - I also carry a deep grief concerning America. I stand before you now to identify with my forefathers and confess our sins—my sins—to God and to you.

3 - There is an academic discipline called "African-American history". For the most part, African-American history is also white-American history. It is my history.

4 - In 1619, in Jamestown, Virginia, settlers bought 20-30 Africans from pirates. This began almost 250 years when my people enslaved people of African descent.

5 - I am a Virginian. My family has been Virginians for generations. I have relatives who seek proudly to trace our family history back to the Jamestown colony.

6 - Over twelve million Africans were shipped in chains across the Atlantic—the largest forced migration in history until WW2. Almost 2 million died on the way.

7 - Of these, 400,000 were sold into what is now the United States—into a brutal system of slavery unlike anything that had previously existed.

8 - Chattel slavery was a system in which people of African descent were treated, under law, not as human beings, but as property—to be owned, bought and sold.

- + This slavery was not conditional or temporary, but racial, inherited, permanent.
- + Enslaved persons could be mortgaged, traded, bought, sold, used as collateral.
- + They themselves could own nothing, inherit nothing, will nothing.
- + They were not allowed to be educated.
- + They could not legally marry. They had no claim on their own children.
- + Children could be taken from parents any time and sold for profit of the owner.
- + Enslaved could be tortured, raped, murdered, worked to death, and often were
- + All this required a deeply rooted belief system, supported socially and legally.
- + In 1865 the system of slavery ended. But the structural belief system lived on.

## **From 1619 to 1776**

- 1 - Enslaved Africans transformed the land into which they were sold. It became some of the most successful colonies in the British Empire.
- 2 - They grew the cotton that at the height of slavery was the nation's most valuable commodity, accounting for one-half of all American exports.
- 3 - They built the plantations of many American founders. Ten of our first twelve presidents were enslavers. ("Plantations" were in fact "slave-labor camps".)
- 4 - They built vast fortunes for white people North and South. At one time, the second-richest man in the nation was a Rhode Island "slave trader."
- 5 - Profits from black people's labor helped the young United States pay off our war debts and financed some of our most prestigious universities.
- 6 - Buying, selling, insuring and financing the bodies and products of enslaved people made Wall Street and New York world centers of insurance and trading.

## **From 1776 to the Civil War**

- 1 - In 1776 Thomas Jefferson penned the now-famous words of the American Declaration of Independence:  
  
"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."  
  
2 - As he wrote, one-fifth of the population of the colonies were enslaved. Jefferson owned at least one hundred thirty people who worked his plantation at Monticello.
- 3 - Liberty was not the "inalienable right" of all men—only men who were "white". Subjugation was the legal status of those who were "black".
- 4 - In 1794 Eli Whitney patented the cotton gin. It revolutionized the production of cotton and greatly expanded slavery in the American South.
- 5 - My home city, Richmond, Virginia, became the epicenter of the internal slave trade. Buying and selling of "Negroes" created great fortunes.
- 6 - By the early 1800s, white Americans had considerable social and economic investment in the doctrine of black inferiority.
- 7 - The US Supreme Court enshrined this thinking in law in its 1857 Dred Scott decision. This ruled that blacks, enslaved or free, came from a "slave" race.
- 8 - Democracy was for citizens. The "Negro race," the Supreme Court ruled, was a separate class of persons which the founders had not regarded as citizens.
- 9 - The idea that black people were not merely enslaved but were a slave race further solidified endemic racism in much of the American population.
- 10 - By 1860 there were more millionaires living in the lower Mississippi Valley than anywhere else in the United States. All of them were slave owners.

11 - The four million American slaves were the largest single asset in the US economy—worth more than all manufacturing and railroads combined.

12 - My great, great grandfather was a slave owner. I have seen his will. Human beings were listed as assets.

### **Jim Crow**

1 - When the Civil War ended, four million black Americans were suddenly free. But this did not stop the evil. Contempt in the heart continued.

2 - Contempt gives permission to hate speech. Hate speech gives permission to hateful, violent actions against those spoken about with contempt.

3 - The effects are far-reaching—nationally, politically, socially. We white Americans have not told ourselves the truth about our history. We have romanticized it.

4 - Some characteristics of the Jim Crow South:

- + Glorification of the Confederacy and romanticizing of slavery
- + Public lynchings of African Americans—sometimes treated as white entertainment
- + Segregated neighborhoods, schools, churches
- + Separate public toilets, drinking fountains, restaurants, hotels
- + Blacks required to enter busses through the rear door and sit at the back
- + Whites expecting blacks to “know their place”

5 - In 1961 I began to pastor a rural church in central Virginia. Our building housed an all-white school to avoid court-order integration—a case of systemic racism.

6 - All this evil is my evil. My people have done this.

### **Step Three: We bring our sin to the cross**

1 - You may join me. We will use Nehemiah’s prayer (Ch. 1:4-11) as a guide. Components: 1) Grief 2) Prayer for the nation 3) Confession of national sins 4) Identification with the sins of forefathers 5) Asking God for forgiveness.

2 - I can only confess my own sins, and the sins of my people. If other Americans wish to join me, of if you are being led to confess the sins of your people, please stand with me. We pray with Nehemiah: “I and my father’s house have sinned.”

### **Prayer of Confession**

1 - Holy God, as we pray, protect us from attacks from the spiritual darkness that would come against us due to these prayers. “I bind unto myself today the strong name of the Trinity. By invocation of the same, the three in One, and One in Three.”

2 - Heavenly Father, we come before you in Jesus name to confess our sins, and the sins of our people. I confess the sins of America. I confess my sins. I confess the sins of my father’s house. Almighty God, we have sinned against you. Lord, have mercy.

3 - Lord Jesus, I confess the sin of **slavery**. I and my father's house treated fellow human beings as property. We bought and sold them. We profited from their forced labor. We terribly abused them. This was a great evil. Lord, have mercy on us.

4 - Holy Spirit, I confess the sin of **racism** in American society. To enslave other people, we had to think of and treat them as inferior—even legally. This mind-set, along with the behaviors it encourages, continues to this day. Lord, have mercy.

5 - Holy God, one ongoing attitude of slavery is that I and my father's house carry an sense of superiority. I confess and renounce all forms of **white superiority**. Convict us of this right now Father. Expose our denial. Catalyze heart repentance.

6 - Father, I confess the sin of **contempt**. We Americans have normalized hate speech. Social media is filled with this, even by Christians. Our politics have become dysfunctional; our country largely ungovernable. Break the grip of this evil.

7 - Lord Jesus, I confess the **sins of our American churches**. Many authorized and defended slavery and the racism that followed. Lack of repentance has left us spiritually anemic and largely blind to what is going on around us. Lord have mercy.

8 - Holy Spirit, I confess the **denial**, avoidance, justification—all the ways we have bought into the lies that slavery was just the way things were, that it really wasn't so bad, that its effects are not with us today. In your mercy Lord, open our eyes.

9 - Holy Father, fill us with your authority and power to **renounce** these sins. We renounce the sin of slavery. We renounce the sin of racism. We renounce the sin of white supremacy. We renounce the sin of contempt. Lord, have mercy upon us.

10 - Lord Jesus, we **lift up to your cross** the hate, the cruelty, the divisiveness, the contempt. We don't want these things in us. We don't want them in our children. We don't want them in our people, in our churches. Come Holy Spirit.

11 - Lord Jesus, you taught us to pray "**Deliver us from evil.**" So we ask right now that you would deliver us from these evils that we and our father's house have perpetrated, participated in, colluded with, tolerated and tried to justify.

12 - We want to pray **for those we and our father's house have sinned against**. Holy Father, we ask that you would pray this prayer through us. It is too big a prayer for us. We cannot bear its weight. Lord, teach us how to pray.

13 - We pray **for the millions, the generations, the family lines** who have been devastated by slavery and the racism that continues to this day. Deliver them from the grip of the evil one, from the assault of evil that was unleashed upon them.

14 - We ask **for deliverance from internalized hate** in descendants of slaves and their family lines. Lord, in the authority of your name, break the power of this evil. We release healing on bodies, souls and spirits of ones who have been crushed.

15 - **We praise you for the good that has endured** in the African American community. Thank you for the strength...beauty...overcoming. African Americans are leading the way toward righteousness in our society. You are greater than evil.

16 - Lord we pray **for our nation**. Raise up repentant hearts. Raise up Christlike leaders. We thank you for Christian ministries of reconciliation. Bless and protect them. Raise up more, that healing might flow through our land.

17 - Lord Jesus, **break through the apathy of the American church**. In your kindness, make your church more of what you want us to be. Break the power of our spiritual blindness. May the healing power of your gospel flow freely among us.

18 - And now Lord, I ask you to seal each one of us with the authority of your cross. Protect us from attacks from the darkness in response to these prayers. May we be marked by you, purchased by your blood, under your protection.

**Step Four: We ask those we have wronged for forgiveness;  
we seek reconciliation**

Markus in Bonn

“And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in” (Isaiah 58:12).

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.