# RACE MATTERS IN MISSION

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**Category:** Observations

There is a sense in which "race" is a non-category for the Christian church, after all Paul famously said:

> *There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)*

Christ has broken down the dividing wall between ethnic groups and all are one in Christ.

However, this union is not achieved through a process of homogenization in which everyone is transformed into some sort of Christian identity. One of the glories of the church is that unity exists in diversity. The crowd listening to Peter and the other disciples on the day of Pentecost all heard the message in their own languages, they were not all suddenly given the ability to decipher Aramaic with a Galilean accent. God worked a miracle of diversity, not one of uniformity. John's great vision in Revelation 7 shows people from every tribe, tongue and nation gathered to worship the Lamb. There is no suggestion that their differences have been ironed out into some sort of uniformity.

Before Christ, people from all races are equally in need of salvation and are equally able to be saved by his grace. In that way, we are all the same. No race is inherently superior to others; all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Any suggestion that one race is superior to others is wrong, whether that is the ugly racism on display in Charlottesville this weekend, or the slightly smug superiority that Brits of my generation were brought up with (echoes of fading Empire). Implying that one race is morally superior to another ultimately undermines the teaching of the importance of the cross of Christ - it is heresy, pure and simple.

So what has this to do with cross-cultural mission?

Everything! Cross-cultural mission by its very nature involves sharing the gospel across racial and linguistic boundaries and in that situation, you can't escape the issue of race. A few brief thoughts:

- A missionary who thinks that they are in some way superior to the people that they are working with is on very shaky ground. The cross brings us all to the same level; we are all in need of salvation, the missionary just as much as the people he or she is witnessing to. If we lose sight of that, we have lost sight of the whole purpose of mission in the first place.
- If you can't relate to foreigners at home, what makes you think that you will be able relate to them in their country? For Christians, the key factor about immigration is that it has brought the world to our doorsteps and opens up the opportunity for us to witness to the nations without travelling the world. If you can't bring yourself to strike up a conversation with your Sikh neighbour in your home town, then you probably shouldn't consider travelling to the ends of the earth on a mission trip.
- Taking this a step further, if you actively dislike or hate people because of their race, then you have nothing to offer to world mission.