

The Black Church Is Beautiful

Lesson 2: Faith In A Land of Bondage



Week 2 Objective

This lesson will explore how enslaved Africans encountered, interpreted, and practiced Christianity amid oppression. We will explore how they differentiated between the liberating message of Christ and the Westernized form of Christianity used to justify slavery.

Central Scripture: Exodus 3:7-10

Supporting passages: Genesis 1:26-27, Luke 4:18-19, Acts 8:26-39, Galatians 3:28



The Ministry of Memory

Affirmations From Week 1:

- **Where did our story begin? (Origin)**
- **We are created in the image of God. (Identity)**
- **We were humanized by God before we were dehumanized by man. (Dignity)**

Last week we established that our story does not begin with a ship. Our story begins with God. Before there was an Atlantic Ocean slave trade, there were African civilizations, African cultures, African intellectual traditions, and African Christians and expressions of African Christianity.

Primary Source Document from King Affonso of Congo on the Slave Trade (1526)

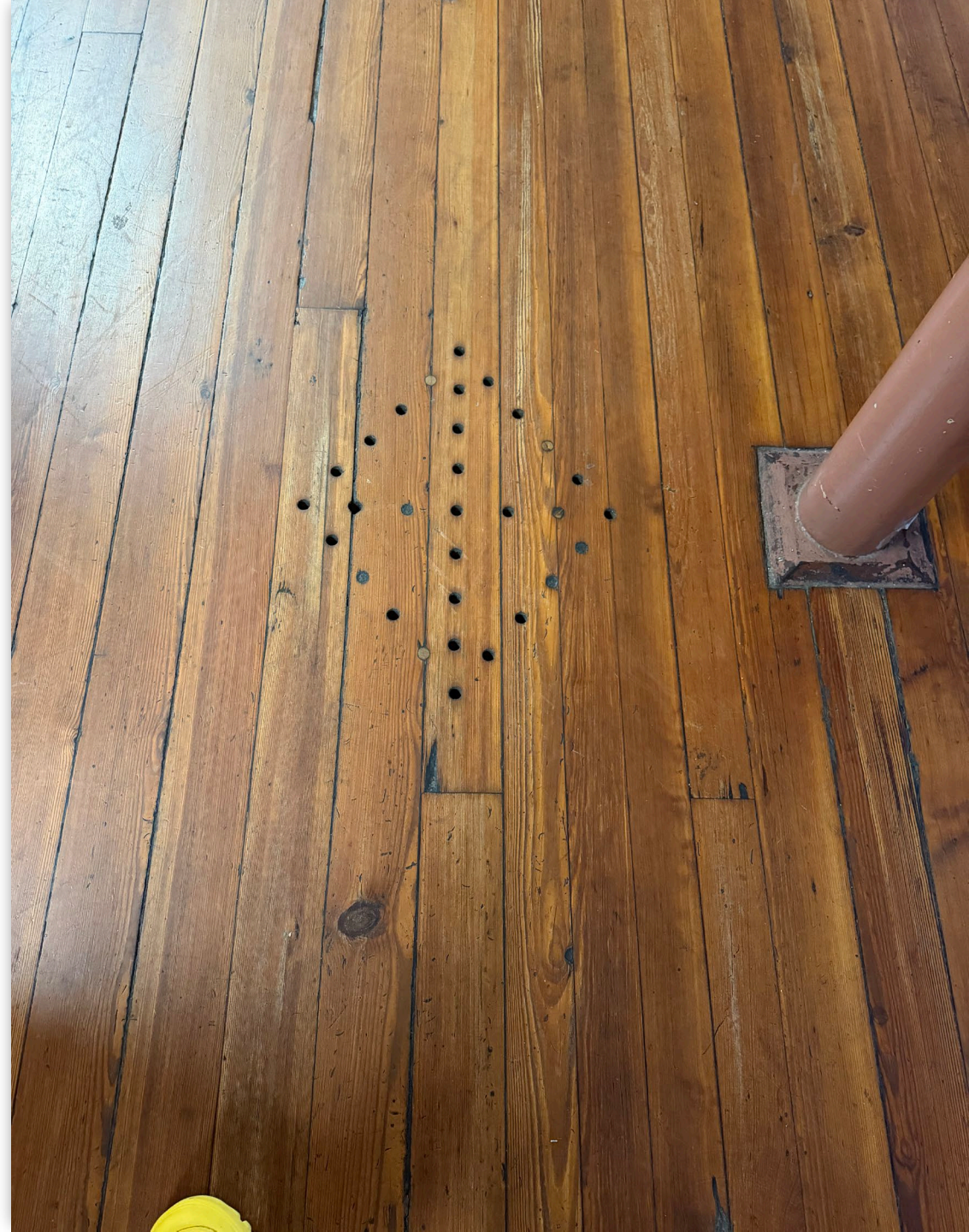
Sir, Your Highness should know how our Kingdom is being lost in so many ways that it is convenient to provide for the necessary remedy, since this is caused by the excessive freedom given by your agents and officials to the men and merchants who are allowed to come to this Kingdom to set up shops with goods and many things which have been prohibited by us, and which they spread throughout our Kingdoms and Domains in such an abundance that many of our vassals, whom we had in obedience, do not comply because they have the things in greater abundance than we ourselves; and it was with these things that we had them content and subjected under our vassalage and jurisdiction, so it is doing a great harm not only to the service of God, but the security and peace of our Kingdoms and State as well.

The Ministry of Memory

Tonight, we must confront another historical reality. A people created in God's image were reduced to property by systems of human invention. But the same God who created humanity in His image is the God who heard Israel crying in Egypt. This is the problem: **How could a nation professing Christianity simultaneously perpetuate the enslavement of human beings?**

Homework Discussion

1. **Was Christianity present in Africa before the arrival of enslaved Africans in English North America?**
2. **What does the correspondence from King Afonso I of Kongo reveal?**



Primary Source Documents

Letters Written From A King in the Congo Addressing the African Slave Trade

Excerpts from: King Affonso of Congo Letters on the Slave Trade (1526) Public Domain

[FIRST LETTER]

Sir, Your Highness should know how our Kingdom is being lost in so many ways that it is convenient to provide for the necessary remedy, since this is caused by the excessive freedom given by your agents and officials to the men and merchants who are allowed to come to this Kingdom to set up shops with goods and many things which have been prohibited by us, and which they spread throughout our Kingdoms and Domains in such an abundance that many of our vassals, whom we had in obedience, do not comply because they have the things in greater abundance than we ourselves; and it was with these things that we had them content and subjected under our vassalage and jurisdiction, so it is doing a great harm not only to the service of God, but the security and peace of our Kingdoms and State as well.

And we cannot reckon how great the damage is, since the mentioned merchants are taking every day our natives, sons of the land and the sons of our noblemen and vassals and our relatives, because the thieves and men of bad conscience grab them wishing to have the things and wares of this Kingdom which they are ambitious of; they grab them and get them to be sold; and so great, Sir, is the corruption and licentiousness that our country is being completely depopulated, and Your Highness should not agree with this nor accept it as in your service. And to avoid it we need from those (your) Kingdoms no more than some priests and a few people to reach in schools, and no other goods except wine and flour for the holy sacrament. That is why we beg of Your Highness to help and assist us in this matter, commanding your factors that they should not send here either merchants or wares, because it is our will that in these Kingdoms there should not be any trade of slaves nor outlet for them.

[SECOND LETTER]

Moreover, Sir, in our Kingdoms there is another great inconvenience which is of little service to God, and this is that many of our people, keenly desirous as they are of the wares and things of your Kingdoms, which are brought here by your people, and in order to satisfy their voracious appetite, seize many of our people, freed and exempt men, and very often it happens that they kidnap even noblemen and the sons of noblemen, and our relatives, and take them to be sold to the white men who are in our

Kingdoms; and for this purpose they have concealed them; and others are brought during the night so that they might not be recognized.

And as soon as they are taken by the white men they are immediately ironed and branded with fire, and when they are carried to be embarked, if they are caught by our guards' men the whites allege that they have bought them but they cannot say from whom, so that it is our duty to do justice and to restore to the freemen their freedom, but it cannot be done if your subjects feel offended, as they claim to be.

Letters written in 1526- Public Domain

Source: Excerpt from Historia de Congo by Visconde de Paiva-Manso, translated in The African Past by Basil Davidson (Grosset & Dunlap, 1964).

And to avoid such a great evil we passed a law so that any white man living in our Kingdoms and wanting to purchase goods in any way should first inform three of our noblemen and officials of our court whom we rely upon in this matter, and these are Dom Pedro Manipanza and Dom Manuel Manissaba, our chief usher, and Goncalo Pires our chief freighter, who should investigate if the mentioned goods are captives or free men, and if cleared by them there will be no further doubt nor embargo for them to be taken and embarked. But if the white men do not comply with it they will lose the aforementioned goods. And if we do them this favor and concession it is for the part Your Highness has in it, since we know that it is in your service too that these goods are taken from our Kingdom, otherwise we should not consent to this. . . .

Letters written in 1526- Public Domain

Source: Excerpt from Historia de Congo by Visconde de Paiva-Manso, translated in The African Past by Basil Davidson (Grosset & Dunlap, 1964).

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