

Race, Ethnicity & the Gospel Pt. 2

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[0:00] Good morning. As you can hear, we have a little background music, so if at any point it's hard to hear, just wave your hand and I'll know to speak up.

You didn't arrange that? We didn't arrange that, but I guess it's kind of nice. Yeah, not complaining. So I thought it would maybe be helpful. So I guess to go back to our roadmap, last week we went through some of the biblical foundations of race, ethnicity, and the gospel through the Old and New Testaments.

And then this week we're going to try to move through more of a history and contemporary sort of analysis and try to think what does it look like in our particular context here in New Haven, Connecticut in 2020 and what it means to apply the gospel to race and ethnicity, to seeking justice in the world.

And to begin, I thought it would be helpful to go to a passage that actually Pastor Greg referenced during our conversation last week in the book of Luke in chapter 4, where we find a striking scene.

[1:29] So Jesus is early in his ministry, and so he's a carpenter, and he's in his hometown, and he goes to the synagogue, and someone hands him a scroll from the book of Isaiah.

And he takes it, and he decisively turns to the end of the book, and he reads one verse. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

After reading this solitary verse, he rolls up the scroll and takes a seat. And as he sat, people are fixated on him. He read with such authority, and his just presence and decisive reading of the passage left a hush over the crowd.

And he said, today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. Last week, we talked some about the year of Jubilee in Leviticus, the time when the oppressed would be set free and property would be returned and made equal.

[2:43] To our knowledge, the Jewish people never followed this command. There never was a year of Jubilee in history. Not yet.

But Jesus stands up and summons this passage from Isaiah that's ringing with echoes of the year of Jubilee. A year in which the poor receive good news, the captives are set free, those who are blind are made to see, and the oppressed are given liberty.

Jesus came. I think he's saying, as he's doing this, and Luke is arguing by virtue of this narrative, that he came to inaugurate the freedom and Jubilee that never took place before him and that cannot take place without him.

In the rest of Luke, he lives out this mission of healing and freedom. And not only that, those who encounter him do the same. In Luke 19, the tax collector, Zacchaeus, follows Jesus, and then he responds by restoring to those he had defrauded fourfold, and he gives away half his goods to the poor.

This oppressor became an agent of freedom after an encounter with Jesus. And Jesus would die and rise again so that his church continued this message of proclaiming a liberty that included both restored relationship with God and physical healing and justice.

[4:09] And in the book of Acts, Luke gives another echo of the year of Jubilee. We see people who've encountered news of the risen Jesus and immediately start selling their things and giving them to the poor.

They are continuing this Jubilee that Jesus began. And likewise, as Daniel took us through in the book of Acts, we see the apostles responding when there was discrimination causing some widows to be neglected and them responding and creating systems within the church to provide assistance

and to love them.

So the mission of proclaiming the good news of a restored relationship with God through Jesus and seeking wholeness and freedom for the oppressed and breaking the bonds of injustice is our mission as we continue the calling of the book of Acts.

Last week, we talked about God's heart for a multi-ethnic community that pursues holistic, intergenerational justice. We heard how that's made possible through Jesus, prophesied as our destiny in Revelation.

But as Daniel reminded us, we haven't seen that vision fully fulfilled even still. But this calling remains.

[5:27] This holistic, intergenerational justice requires, I think we see this, we saw this in Scripture, that we understand and undo injustice and inequality that has accumulated over time and across generations.

And so today, for the next several minutes, I want to talk about some of the injustices and inequalities that have accumulated over time in our nation's history and that persist today.

And I want to make a particular case that inequalities and injustices we see today are the result of these accumulated oppressions. And the church is called by Christ not just to stop the oppression, but to undo the accumulated effects of centuries of injustice.

And I think that black Christians have been urging us to consider this for centuries. And I think that we, as a white church, as multi-ethnic churches, have not adequately listened to these voices.

And I hope that we can continue to grow in that. And so I'll go through a little bit of history, both of our country, but also even of some New Haven-specific things.

[6:56] And then hand it over to Daniel, who will continue the conversation, sharing some of his story, as well as continuing some of these themes. As you're perhaps well aware, for over 230 years, African people were enslaved in America.

Slave traders violently ripped people from their homelands, chained them in boats on a passage across the ocean that many, if not most, did not survive. In America, they were sold like cattle, often separated from their families.

They were forced to work in fields under brutal conditions. And their children were born into a system that dehumanized and enslaved them. And often Christian churches in the South crafted arguments to justify this slavery based on scripture.

Denominations split over their views on slavery. And the Civil War ended chattel slavery, promising a freedom for black Americans for the first time.

But this promise proved a rather empty one. Despite early efforts after the Civil War of Reconstruction to repair the damage that had been done and provide property and opportunity, powerful white people continue to oppress black Americans.

[8:16] A few examples. Through a practice known as convict leasing, white landowners could lease people convicted of crimes and force them into labor.

They were leveraging the 13th Amendment's clauses which abolished, quote, slavery and involuntary servitude except as punishment for a crime.

So white landowners conspired with law enforcement to arrest black people, often for no reason, and send them back into forced labor. Douglas Blackman calls this slavery by another name.

And the practice continued until World War II. Black Americans often had little land or opportunity by themselves. And they often had no choice but to enter into sharecropping arrangements.

Here they would farm the land and white landowners would charge them a portion of the land's crops. And because black Americans still had no real legal protection, in practice, white landowners often demanded far more than their fair share.

[9:20] And it was rare for black farmers to have anything left to show for their work. Rarely breaking even, often going into debt, which then gave white landowners more leverage to subjugate them even further.

Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation, ensuring black people could not go to white schools, sometimes churches, restaurants, other institutions in the South and sometimes in the North too.

They were systematically put on a different caste level without economic opportunity, quality, education, or any of the rights promised to them as citizens.

All of this was sustained by the lack of protection afforded to black Americans. In the, in around 1890, the era of mass lynchings began.

In this, black Americans were, were violently killed in public settings. And at least probably by our best estimates, 4,000 that we know of and there are probably many more.

[10:29] Men and women were publicly kicked, beaten, stripped, raped, castrated, hung. And people would, would literally come to watch these events. Um, and there's accounts of, uh, of white church people going after church to witness lynchings, almost like it's a church potluck or picnic.

Um, and one of the reasons they were so public is this. Lynchings communicated that black people had no power. White people could commit the most violent, brutal, grotesque acts against them. And there's nothing that could be done about it. The police often either let it happen or even participated in the events. And if lynchings were allowed with impunity, then there was no kind of violence or defrauding that white people could do against black people where there would be any kind of recourse.

And so it just, it wasn't just the lynchings themselves. It was what these things were communicating. So as the terror of lynching and Jim Coe reigned in the South, millions of black Americans fled the racial violence to Northern and Western cities.

The promise of freedom from violence combined with the possibility of economic opportunity as industries made their homes and cities like our own. Uh, and this would become known as the great migration.

[11:52] During the first wave, starting in 1916 or so, black Southerners fled to cities like Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh. Uh, and as the flow continued of refugees seeking opportunity and freedom, uh, they ended up in a vast array of medium and large size cities.

And here is where New Haven enters our story. From 1940 to 1970, thousands of black Southerners migrated to New Haven. Winchester and other companies afforded, uh, factory jobs, uh, in the hope of economic opportunity without the, uh, fear of, um, the kind of violence or segregation experienced in the South.

But all was not well in New Haven either. Um, remember black migrants had faced systemic oppression and had little wealth or access to education prior to migrating.

Once arriving, they were funneled into certain parts of the city, often in substandard housing. Um, one of the major tickets to generational wealth, uh, uh, was home ownership and black New Haveners were denied this opportunity.

Uh, the government, uh, in the 1930s through 60s drew maps on what areas of town they could, uh, they would back loans in. Um, and they had four different categories with the lowest category being, uh, shaded red, uh, practice known as redlining.

[13:15] Um, and, uh, we have the documents where they justify why, which areas of New Haven are classified and why, um, in any area with any significant black population was coded red.

Um, and one, uh, of these reports, uh, said this in a quote, this describing the Dixwell neighborhood, uh, this is an older section of the city now given over largely to Negroes employed as domestics, end quote.

And the private market, black residents face similar problems. As one report summarizes, realtors would do everything legally possible to avoid selling a house to a Negro unless the area already contained a number of Negro residents, end quote.

Uh, then in the, the, in the, starting in the 1960s, New Haven went through a period called urban renewal. Uh, the purported goal was to develop the city, uh, and eliminate the slums, uh, but it tended to benefit the rich and white and harm the poor and black population.

Um, in one of the most significant cases, the city raised the Oak Street neighborhood, um, to create the Oak Street connector where 95 and 91, uh, converge into downtown.

[14:30] Um, while the neighborhood was, uh, pretty diverse, um, this raising harmed black residents the most, uh, for white residents, many of whom maybe own their homes and the government would pay them for the price of their home.

Uh, most of them either moved out of the city or bought a house elsewhere in the city. 53% did so. Uh, but a black residence displaced, uh, only 13% either moved out of the city or were able to buy a home elsewhere.

Um, so even in cases where both black and white residents were affected by these things, it was often the black residents most negatively affected. Moreover, as black migrants arrived and entered New Haven schools, white residents moved out of cities, uh, out of schools with significant number of black students.

The school soon became de facto segregated. An attempt in 1964 to desegregate New Haven schools failed. Many white families left the city entirely.

The white population in New Haven dropped from almost 160,000 in 1950 to 80,000 in 1980. White families had access to quality education at higher rates with higher rates of college education.

[15:44] They also had much higher rates of home ownership. These and other factors combined to create greater mobility. Mobility denied to black residents.

In the 1960s, cities across the country, including Hartford and New Haven, experienced violent racial conflicts. In 1967, Lyndon Johnson commissioned a study of the causes of these conflicts. In a powerful report, the Kerner Commission identified one overarching conclusion. Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal.

They said that the alternative, quote, will require a commitment to national action, compassionate, massive and sustained in order to undo this segregation and inequality.

Despite this urgent call, we as a country or a city never did this. And New Haven became even more segregated and unequal. During this time, instead of a massive effort to end racial inequality and segregation, the government launched a massive expansion of the criminal justice system.

[16:58] In 1970, the incarceration rate in America was about 100 per 100,000, on par with most other developed countries. By 2000, it was about 600 people per 100,000.

By this time, black Americans were at least five times more likely to be incarcerated. We were incarcerated, and this was even worse for black men. And this was true in Connecticut as well. And so while the Kerner Commission called for us to address systemic inequality, to address the conditions that cause crime to proliferate, we instead incarcerated on a large scale those who had been cast aside and blocked out of opportunity.

And another contributing factor in this time, as we kind of saw, that white residents were at higher rates equipped with the opportunities to have greater economic and educational mobility, moving into white-collar jobs at higher rates.

And so when deindustrialization happened, black residents faced more dire consequences. So in the 1970s and on, the factory jobs in New Haven were slowly and sometimes quickly depleted, removing one of the significant opportunities they did have access to.

And by this time, many white or most white residents had moved out of the city, oftentimes moving out of the blue-collar sector. And again, deindustrialization affected the entire city and region and many regions, but it affected black residents in more significant ways.

[18:44] And the flight of white folks continued. Our very church building is in part an emblem of white flight. As a German Catholic church with a parish model depending on local residents, there were simply fewer German Catholic folks in the city.

And so all of this sort of picture is, of course, a high-level summary, not going into detail into any one of these things.

But what I just want to highlight is that even in our city, we have persistent interlocking systems of race-based inequality rooted in these histories.

Worse education, lack of jobs, racial segregation, lack of home ownership opportunities, housing insecurity, worse health care access, higher rates of incarceration, family instability.

All of these things form to create vicious cycles in communities whereby they are locked out of the same kind of opportunities afforded to others.

[19:52] I just want to note that this isn't to say that there aren't black leaders in every sector, that there aren't successful black communities or black people.

We know that's not true. And that's not the point. The point is that it's systematically more difficult for black communities on a large scale to have the same kind of access to opportunities afforded to white and Asian Americans.

So it's not to say that they don't succeed. It's that it's much, much more difficult. And so they succeed not because we've, as a country or city, provided the opportunities, but despite the ways in which we haven't.

Listen to some of these numbers to date. White Connecticut residents own homes at a rate that is almost twice that of black residents. White Connecticut residents graduate college at a clip more than twice of black Connecticut residents.

The average income of white Connecticut residents is nearly double that of black Connecticut residents. At the same time, black residents are 10 times more likely in Connecticut to be in prison

and five times more likely to experience child poverty.

[21 : 10] In America today, the wealth gap between white and black residents has not changed substantially since 1968. The average net wealth, net worth of a white family is 10 times that of the average net worth of a black family in America.

And these things, I want to suggest, are in large part a result of systemic racism that has persistently denied opportunities to black people and communities.

It's the result of the accumulated effects of slavery, Jim Crow, housing discrimination in New Haven, school segregation in New Haven, white flight, mass incarceration, and a thousand other things.

Just as we saw these accumulated generational effects identified in the book of Leviticus.

Sociologists, Christian Smith and Michael Emerson argue that white evangelical Christians tend to see race as an individual concern and that these gaps in opportunities are the result of individual choices and motivation.

In their surveys, they found that 27% of, this was back in 2000, of conservative white Protestants identified structural discrimination as a source of the socioeconomic gaps.

[22 : 43] 72% of conservative black Protestants identified structural discrimination as a cause of the gaps. I think that's really, really striking and I think should give us pause to listen.

Yeah, can you say that over again? Yeah, yeah, yeah. So 20, so it's a survey of Christians asking about why do these socioeconomic gaps still exist between black and white Americans?

And they asked, you know, was it a result of individual motivation and said how many people thought that? And then was it a result of structural discrimination? And a vast majority of white conservative Protestants said it was the result of individual motivation.

So black Americans, I don't have the exact number here, but I think it was around 70% of white. So as a result of the individual motivation decisions of basically black Americans that, you know, caused the gaps.

And so when they asked, was this a cause, the result of structural discrimination for white conservative Protestants, 27% said that it was.

[23 : 55] And for black conservative Protestants, it was 72%. And for, I think these numbers should give us pause and encourage us to listen to our brothers and sisters.

Smith and Emerson go on to argue that white evangelicals, even while promoting interpersonal racial reconciliation, have made racial inequality worse by failing to account for systems and failing to pursue justice.

And as they wrote in 2000, it's possible that this is even more true today. What then are we called to do?

I believe in line with what we talked about last week and what I mentioned at the beginning about the mission of Jesus, we are called to participate in the mission of Jesus to seek restored relationships with God and pursue holistic justice that undoes accumulated effects of oppression. And these things come most fully through the power of the life and resurrection of Jesus. I think we're called to follow the example of Zacchaeus who responded with gusto to the call of Jesus by giving fourfold what he defrauded and giving half he had to the poor.

[25 : 23] And I think we have never fully reckoned like Zacchaeus did with the accumulated effects of what we've done in our case of racial oppression in America.

The church ought to be leading the way. Jesus offered us grace. And so we don't we don't need to justify ourselves. We don't need to justify our country.

We don't need to do these things because Jesus gave all the grace and forgiveness that we need.

And so we can be honest with ourselves, both as individuals and as churches and as a country.

So we ought to be the most freed and empowered to seek holistic racial justice in our city, a city with deep and longstanding racial segregation. And and I think there have been intentional efforts in these last several years for the church to unite for black, predominantly black and predominantly white or multi-ethnic churches to come together and to work together in our city.

And this is encouraging to see. I think it's in many cases rare. But I think there is so much more to do.

[26 : 38] There is more to go. And so I want to close just with a few quotes from from black Americans. And I'm going to hand it off to Daniel, who's as soon who's going to share even further some of his story and reflections.

Um, but, uh, I'm often haunted when reading Martin Luther King Jr.'s letter from a Birmingham jail, a document written to white moderates.

Uh, I'm often haunted by this feeling that were I alive, uh, to read his words, then he would have been writing to me. Um, listen to some of his words.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail on this purpose, they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative piece in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight to a substantive and positive piece in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality.

[27 : 51] Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We nearly bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open where it can be seen and dealt with like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up, but must be open with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light.

Injustice must be exposed with all the tension its exposure creates to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

Lastly, I want to share some words written by a former Trinity intern, Malcolm Foley, who I think shares similar things written in this contemporary context.

He says this, he's now studying African-American religious history at Baylor. He says, but the most frustrating aspect of studying African-American religious history is the deafness of the white pastors that are constantly cried out to.

It is that deafness that inspires and encourages the continuation of nationalistic options and the shutting down of conversation. If I ever choose to disengage from reaching out, it is not because I have acquiesced to some heresy of racial supremacy.

[29 : 11] It is because I, like many of my black brothers and sisters, am tired of constantly trying to plead with deaf ears. I'm tired of reading about my brothers and sisters during the civil rights movement who were constantly told to wait because there were issues more pressing than their livelihoods.

I'm tired of reading about my brothers and sisters under the invisible terror regime of lynching who cried out to white pulpits to join them in denunciation of evil and who were met with accusation and diminution.

I'm tired of hearing my brothers and sisters now crying out about mass incarceration and police brutality and receiving the same responses. This is our national history.

It is tiring. To demand that I engage with you is to demand something that I and many others have already done. And in many cases, you have not listened. We ask that you do both.

But even if you do not, we will continue to battle the growth of sin and sorrow, both individually and corporately, personally and systemically. And I'm convicted by both of these passages, by these words.

[30 : 20] And I think we have a lot of work to do, both as individuals and as a church and as churches in this city.

And I hope that we will engage in this work with ever increasing fervor. And so I'm going to hand it off to Daniel.

I guess before I hand it off to Daniel. Okay, I think we're good. All right.

Morning, y'all. Everybody hear me okay? Good, Luna? Bob and brother, we straight? All right.

Difficult things we're talking about today, to say the least.

To be confronted with the past that a lot of us had nothing to do with. And to recognize that there are still things happening that we very well may be a part of.

[31 : 35] Doesn't feel good. When we speak of justice, as I mentioned last week, we aren't just talking about somebody receiving the penalty for the wrong that they've committed.

But it's also on the good side of things, we're talking about them receiving the good that is due to them. Justice is receiving what you deserve.

And as people, and it's written in one of our nation's founding documents, that all men are created equally.

And that we all should have the right and liberty to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Unfortunately, as we've been discussing this morning, that right and those rights have not been equally afforded to all citizens.

As a matter of fact, up until very recently, everyone has not been considered citizens, although their family has been born on this land going back hundreds of years.

[32 : 46] I remember I heard a quote from Malcolm X. And he said that humans don't need civil rights laws.

He said that humans do not need civil rights laws. Because their civil rights are acknowledged because of their humanity. So a question that raises in my mind when I hear that, I say, OK, so if we just erase the Civil Rights Act of 1964, if we just erase it off the books, do my rights and my family's rights and my other brothers and sisters' rights automatically go with it?

Are our rights only in place because of that act and because it's still in the books today? Now, I know there are those that would say, of course not.

No, you're fully human. You are fully American citizens. You are people and you deserve these things. It's a tough tightrope to walk across because in our culture that can be so focused on law and order and structure and having things on the books and things in place, we recognize that just because something is a law does not mean that it is just.

Essentially, what we're discussing when we're talking about the equality of African-Americans and minorities here in America, a lot of people, when they hear us speak of equality and justice and writing or dismantling structural systems and inequalities and things that perpetuate injustices, a lot of times what some people hear are calls for equity of outcome.

[34 : 52] They say, oh, you just want to have what these people have. You just want the same things that they have. When in fact, what the call is actually for is legitimate equity of opportunity.

And unfortunately, reaching that equity involves much more than just saying, OK, everybody has now has a fair shot.

Yes, we have things like affirmative action and other initiatives that have been constructed in order to give minorities a fair shake.

You know, we think about the NFL and what they call the Rooney rule, which means that every offseason NFL teams are required to interview minority candidates for head coaching positions.

Again, my mind thinks about the Civil Rights Act. If it's not a fair shot, if it weren't for these rules and for these laws, would we still make the same effort at giving others the same opportunities?

[35 : 54] Now, the argument commonly is, well, those most qualified will rise to the top. Those who are legitimate candidates for these positions will come to the forefront.

When unfortunately, I believe that the biases that we have extend much deeper than we may realize. It extends to places that cause HR representatives and other people who are in charge of hiring.

It causes them to disregard more often applications and resumes with names like Tyrone and LaShawn more often than they would a Stephanie or a Michael.

It's difficult.

Don't you understand the effects of this one decision? How it's going to destroy the rest of forever for people? But just like Adam couldn't see beyond the moment.

[37 : 25] There are individuals who have lived and individuals who are still alive who make decisions that unbeknownst to them will affect generations to come. So when we speak about economic inequality and food deserts and educational inequalities and the lack of resources and urban environments, we're speaking about the decisions that people have made, some consciously and some unconsciously, where the effects have trickled down in a most negative way.

I mentioned a second ago that our biases extend beyond our conscious vision.

And I believe because of our history, because of the racialized society that we live in here in America, there are things that happen to us and around us and in us that we are even unaware of. And it's because of that fact that from this place, we need to be we should be more conscious moving forward.

And it takes a deep examination of our own hearts, of our own perceptions, of our own perspectives.

[38 : 59] It takes a deep examination to figure out where are they coming from? Why do we hold the positions that we do? Why do we have the opinions that we have, especially in terms of race

and and other individuals?

Why do we believe what we believe about the black church? Why do we believe what we believe about the white church?

Even the fact that we have those terms in our social vocabulary is an effect of racism. In Philadelphia, I believe in the 18, I forget the date exactly.

But Richard Allen was a black Presbyterian minister. He was a black Methodist minister. And he and other congregants were in their church for a prayer meeting one day.

And in the middle of the prayer meeting, white church members came to them and said, hey, y'all have to go. In the middle of the prayer meeting, they kicked them out of the church. And that's when Richard Allen and Absalom Jones got together and started the Methodist, the AME Church, the American Methodist Episcopal Church.

[40:11] So from that split is where we get the black church and the white church. So it's not because black people wanted to go off and worship God their own way.

It's because white Christians said, hey, you can't worship with us. You can't pray with us. Our nation would not be in the it would have been impossible for America to get where it had gotten.

If the church would have stood up and said, if broadly, widely across the board, if the church would have said racism is wrong, slavery is wrong.

It would have not had a chance to advance if Christians in that time stood on the word of God honestly and truthfully, instead of using it to justify their racism and their prejudices.

Instead of using theologies like the curse of Ham, which said that all people with darker skin color were cursed. If they wouldn't have used doctrines like the providence of God to say that this is their lot in life to be in this position, to be in servitude.

[41:23] Much like we talked about last week, how the priest and the Levite walked by the man in the road who had been beaten and robbed and leaning on their religious ideas, leaning on their self-righteousness in order to not help using as a justification to pass by this person who was clearly hurting.

I mentioned it last week, God doesn't call us in order to judge whether or not this person who says that they're in pain. He doesn't call us to judge the legitimacy of it. He calls us to help.

And nowadays we hear many calls from many places of people crying for help. Because they're in a position that they themselves did not call themselves into.

Our responses as a society must be rooted in love. It must come from a deep, biblically informed, theologically robust, gospel-centered love.

My mind goes back to hearing about the crack and the heroin epidemic that plagued black neighborhoods in the 70s and 80s.

[42:49] And how in response to this, the government said, OK, we're going to wage a war on drugs. So what we're going to do, we're going to arrest drug users and drug dealers. That decision has ravaged black communities.

The largest effect, I believe, is the taking away of fathers from the homes. Now, of course, the justification is, well, nobody told them to do drugs.

No one told them to sell drugs. Yes, yes, and when they're in an economically depressed environment and they're presented with this opportunity to make some money so they can feed their family, they will do what they have to do.

Imagine yourself being held underwater. And you're struggling and you're fighting to get up to the surface, to get a breath, to get a breath of air. You will do whatever you have to do in order to breathe.

You will kick, you will scratch, you will claw, whatever it takes to get that person off of you so you can get to the surface and breathe.

[43:55] You are desperate. And when you are desperate, you will do things that you may not normally do. Things that might be a little outside of your own character. When we study human physiology and biology, we learn that humans respond in certain ways to stress and comfort.

I've heard it said that comfort is a creative state. When you have time to relax, you can sit back and ponder the stars. You can write poems about nature.

And you can create marvelous inventions. But when you're struggling in life, when you're living for survival, when you don't see a way out of the darkness that you live in, you might do things that others might consider animalistic.

You might rob. You might cheat. You might defraud. Is it your fault? Yes. And we must recognize the conditions that nurtured that thought and that desire.

It's not because they're inherently criminal. It's not because they're inherently violent. It's because they see no other way. What would be the difference between a young lady growing up in an urban environment without a father, several brothers and sisters who don't know their fathers, who see the drug dealers, the street walkers of the night, who sees the violence in her community and is numb to the gunshots that ring out, who grows up and gets involved in the lifestyle of those around her.

[45 : 59] Every step along the way, she made the conscious choice to do what it is that she wants to do. And eventually she may end up dead or in jail, or she may end up in a similar situation to those around her, with multiple children, by multiple fathers, on government assistance.

may look at her and say, well, she's just a lost soul. What would be the difference between that young lady and the young lady who grows up in the suburbs, both parents in the home, college educated, father's a doctor, mother's a lawyer.

She has a couple of siblings. They live in a nice gated community. They have a large backyard. She grows up, goes to college, gets her doctorate, changes the world.

What's the difference between them? The answer is nothing. Because both of them are doing what they've seen in their environment. So for me, it raises the question, what would happen if we take these same people from disenfranchised environments in urban neighborhoods and put them in places where they're resourced and they can have the opportunity to breathe and create?

had a conversation with a friend one time about the fact that a lot of our ancestors who were enslaved, you know, they didn't have time to worry about creating in life.

[47 : 55] You know, I very much enjoy creating, whether it's, you know, media, you know, sometimes I dabble in graphic design and things of that nature.

I love thinking. But being able to think and theologize and to systematize your theology, that comes from being in a place where I don't have an obligation.

I'm not, I don't have to be off somewhere doing something else. I don't have to be off making sure that, okay, nobody's after me in this moment. Our ancestors weren't able to do those things.

So, one of my, one of my missions in life is to help create that space for people who may not feel like they have it. Even if all it is is bringing them into a space where they don't have to worry about the outside world for an hour, two hours.

Because that space to breathe, that space to create is necessary in life. It helps get us, help get, it helps get us back in touch with our more human side.

[49 : 12] Going back to this point, well, I'll move forward this way. When we think about race in the church, the differences among black church, the white church, again, that fact right there, the fact of being able to develop a theology extends from having the space to do so.

A lot of times, nowadays, there are those who would feel that what we can call African American theology is sub-biblical, or it's not as good as maybe conservative evangelical theology.

It's not as expansive. It's very surfacy. And so, people would say, if you have the chance to choose between a theologically robust conservative church or an emotionally led, you know, theologically shallow African American church, go with the deeply theological church where they have expositional preaching and, you know, the gospel is presented in its rightful light and it's the forefront of everything.

This particular issue hits very close for me because it is the world I've walked in for the last five years.

I grew up in Bridgeport in a black Pentecostal church. My grandmother started the church in her living room in the 70s and eventually moved into a building that seated over 150 and in the early 90s it was rocking.

[51 : 07] I mean, we had several choirs, a band, like it was the place to be. And even to this day when I go to certain places in Bridgeport and I tell people, oh, my name is Daniel Allen.

Like, oh, you know, Pastor Allen? I'm like, yeah, that was my grandmother. You know, to this day that still happens, although she passed away in 2007. So around 2015, I had a phase where I was reading more books and I read Knowing God by J.I.

Packer. And my mind was in a different place. I mean, I was presented with thoughts and ideas that I had never been presented with before. And I had seen things that I had seen before, but they were in a completely new light.

And I was just like, wow, where has this been my entire life? I, to this day, I still read that book every summer. Just to refresh myself. But what it did for me back in 2015, it set me on this path of studying theology on another level because it wasn't something I had done before.

I mean, although the church I was in had a Bible college that you can go through and you can learn of these things, but there was a sense that that was for those who were being prepared for ministry and things of that nature.

[52:27] But as I read J.I. Packer, I was like, no, this is for everybody. Everybody needs to know this. This is for every Christian. Every Christian should be a theologian.

And as R.C. Sproul said, everyone is a theologian. So as I went through Packer and my mind was expanded and I started reading these other authors that he mentioned and other figures from church history and I got introduced to other contemporary conservative preachers and pastors and teachers and this entire world of reformed theology was opened up to me and I said, wow, this is great.

So then me and my my cage daisy form, I was full of fire and I said, hey, we're doing this, this and this.

The scripture says this. So we need to change all of this and stop that. And this person needs to move here and they need to sit down over there because this is what the Bible says. And we're Christians.

We believe the Bible and this is what we need to do. needless to say, that didn't go over very well. Now, I know a lot of this was my own disposition and not the position of the theology I was stepping into.

[53:52] At least that can be argued. But the thing that attracted me was the sense of seriousness and the sense of surety and this and of having the word of God that is useful for all of life.

You know, given the word of God, you know, having the scriptures that is inerrant and infallible in their original form. It was it gave me this confidence to say things that I may not have normally said. I told my mom, who was a preacher and an elder in our church, I told her, I was like, hey, you shouldn't be doing that.

The scriptures say this. Yeah, I don't care what the Holy Spirit told you. I mean, this is what the scripture says. The Holy Spirit is not going to contradict himself. So I remember standing in the kitchen having this conversation with my parents and it was rough.

of course, in our church, we do have a position on women in ministry and patented pastorate.

[55:11] However, the way I approached that was completely loveless. And as I walk, like looking back now, I can see that, okay, maybe it's not just me.

Because I still see today a lot of other individuals, not necessarily in our context, but, you know, because of social media, we're exposed to a lot more. I still see individuals today who have been in it a lot longer than I was, but still act with that sense of lovelessness and more surety that they are firm on their biblical grounds because of their firm in their position because of the biblical stance that they hold.

Again, using the scriptures to justify lovelessness. another thing that I experienced and went through was, and I remember I legitimately had this thought where I said, okay, I have this new theology.

Well, now if I come across, you know, this older theology, or if it's coming out of a black church, I should probably be a little bit more aware of the biblical fidelity.

So, for a period of maybe eight or ten months, I went through a phase where I would not listen to a black preacher if they were not reformed. Now, again, was that just my own personal disposition, or was it an effect of this new world that I had stepped into and had seen where there aren't but maybe a handful of African-American pastors who are platformed into particular conferences and events.

[57:03] Looking back, I was wrong. That prejudice that had arisen in me, although I spent my entire life in the black church, around black Christians, around black preachers who know God, who preach the gospel, I still took a stance and said, hey, well, even if it looks like me, I'm still going to be suspicious of it.

So my question is, if that can happen to me, how much more so for those of you who did not grow up in the same context that I did, but grew up in the majority white church around a majority of white Christians and never had to even think about, well, okay, this is solid theology and this is less solid theology.

It just seemed to be a natural effect of just the environment. So when we think, when we talk about systemic injustices and racism and equality and justice in the gospel and the church, we have to realize that a lot of it may stem from issues that we aren't even cognizant of at the time.

We are fish and water and we don't know that we're wet. That's just the world we live in. That is just our environment. So it may not be readily observable to us, but when we have these conversations, it takes us being willing to examine our hearts.

As I said before, it takes us being willing to examine our motives and our opinions. to be able to make the necessary change and step into the love that Christ calls us to.

[58:52] I'll tell you what did it for me. One day, as I was thinking, thinking about these issues and again, seeing the racial tensions in America and hearing other black preachers speak on these issues and acknowledging the fact that the theology is solid.

It's just presented in a different wrapping paper and with a different bow than the conservative circles are used to. But the gospel is fully there. It may come across with more emotion and the preacher may vocalize the words when he sings and it may seem like a show to you, but in all actuality, those are just cultural trappings that mean nothing and have no effect on the gospel that is presented.

But, because of deep-seated and often unconscious biases, we look at those cultural trappings and the way the gospel is expressed and presented and we say, okay, those people over there aren't being authentic to the scriptures.

They have to over-emotionalize the presentation of the gospel and the Holy Spirit apparently isn't strong enough because they need to have the loud music and play the drum super loud. And we find excuses and we try to find biblical grounds to, again, justify the misconceptions and the misperceptions and continue to perpetuate the injustices.

So what did it for me one day as I was thinking, I began to think about the older church mothers, those grandmothers, those aunts, those moms who had lived through Jim Crow America, who had grandparents, who shared coppers, and great grandparents who were slaves, and the very fact that they can stand up in service on a Sunday morning and say that, or they can sing songs like, hold to his hand, God's unchanging hand, God's God's song.

[61:06] I don't believe he brought me this far to leave me. The fact that they knew that no matter what, the promise of Christ is true, that he would never leave them nor forsake them.

the fact that they lived through legitimate racism and discrimination and being told that they had to go to the back of the restaurant to pick up their food and that they couldn't eat inside. God's love. God is good. They knew God on a deeper level because of the sin and the oppression and the racism that they were faced with on a daily basis.

They were forced to rely on their faith. And so what? They couldn't explain the hypostatic union. So what? They may not have been able to verbally express substitutionary atonement and propitiation. It does not matter. They still knew Christ. They still knew the saving power of God's grace. And they were still trusting and relying on the grace of God to get them through on a daily basis because society around them and their white brothers and sisters were not coming to their aid.

[62:24] Although they had the power and the ability to speak into their lives and say so. This isn't to say that all of them did not. There were some. But for a lot of America's history, it was not the conservative evangelical church that stepped up to the plate.

We see it in the Catholic church. We see it from the Orthodox church. But where were the evangelicals? Where were those with the euangelion? With this theologically robust preaching and the gospel that is so focused on Christ that it blinds you?

Where were they? I think a lot of what we've seen then we see today where individuals find excuses again not to step up in love.

And it's not their fault. I don't blame them. I pray that you would show them grace as well because again the sin in our hearts extends beyond what we can see.

does this mean that individuals who hold these perceptions and these views don't know Christ? No. We know that sanctification is a process and the Lord is continually working on each and every one of us daily.

[63:41] Each and every one of us has our own cross to carry. It just really hurts because certain sins seem to affect others in a disproportionate rate than other things.

if someone is addicted to pornography or they're greedy or they're glutton, a lot of those things and things like they seem to only affect them initially.

Of course we know they'll come back to bite others in the long run because sin never just stays local. It always spreads. But the sin of racism, partiality, those affect others immediately and directly.

And it takes the work of Christ in our hearts and in our minds to change us. It takes those of us who know and see what's happening, it takes us to step up and speak into it.

A phrase that we not hear commonly nowadays is speaking truth to power. just as Peter wanted to hang around with those men that came from James. He wanted to hang out with the powerful guys. [64 : 55] He wanted to be with them. We must speak the truth to those individuals and say, no, no, no, no. These guys, these girls, these people are just as much a part of the body of Christ as we all are.

And so what? The gospel is presented in a different box than we're used to. They still have the gospel. They still know Christ. And yes, they may not worship as I do.

I may not feel completely comfortable in that environment, but that is no reason for me to ignore them and their lives. Their lives matter too.

Again, when we examine our cultural situation and our cultural condition, a lot of it's not going to be fixed overnight.

A lot of it's not going to go away anytime soon, unfortunately. But this doesn't mean that we sit back and just wait until we Jesus returns to end it all and to establish his kingdom.

[66 : 08] He calls us now to be the kingdom of Christ. He calls us now to be his light bearers. He calls us to step into the darkness and to change things where and when we can.

He's given us all the tools to do so. We may not be able to speak and organize and lead a movement as Martin Luther King did.

We may not be as technologically savvy as some people are. We may not be able to start a YouTube channel and begin an online ministry preaching against these issues or preaching to these issues.

But you know what each and other one of us can do? We can love the very next person that we see. And we can love them with our whole hearts. we can love them acknowledging that they are created in just as much as the image of God as we are.

Because for a lot of human history and even to this day there are still those who believe that individuals with more melanin are subhuman. And that everything that they touch is then brought to a substandard level.

[67 : 22] and that the only thing that they're really good for is entertaining us by singing and dancing and playing sports. This is why individuals get upset when athletes make a public statement about social issues.

They say I didn't come here to see this. I came here to see you play. And this is why I think you have to appreciate LeBron James' movement. He says I am more than an athlete.

I am not just in this position to entertain. I'm not just here to bring this organization money. No, I am a person. I have an opinion.

I have thoughts. You're going to hear them. If you don't want to hear them, then okay, you don't have to watch. It's okay. But recognizing the humanity and humans, recognizing the stamp of God on his creation, an analogy I like is as if we are sunbeams extending off of the sun.

Is that sunbeam any different than the sun? Only in the fact that the sunbeam is not the sun, but that sunbeam would not be if it were not for the sun.

[68 : 43] similarly, all of us in all of our different shades and hair textures and heights and weights and backgrounds, although we may all seem different on the outside, in actuality, we are all extensions from that same light.

we must acknowledge and love the light in each and every one of us, that same image of God.

There are many places I wanted to go as far as delving into just a little bit more of the history and cultural present moment, but I believe at this point we have a better understanding of what it is we are engaged in as a people.

You know, it's unfortunate because there are those who we look to in church history as some of the most influential names. Think about people like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield who were a part of some of the greatest revivals in American history.

And yet, and still, these men did not speak up and out against the ills of slavery. But George Whitefield justified for it so that he could build an orphanage.

You know, Jonathan Edwards had a slave girl. Their theology is so great and so vast and so magnified Christ, and we learn so much from them.

[70:21] And yet, and still, they could not see this area where they were wrong. Does that put them out of the kingdom? I believe God's grace covers a multitude of sin, even the sin of racism and slave holding.

But as we think through these issues and draw these conclusions, we must be aware of the fact that yeah, God's love is greater.

So, as we have these discussions with the people who may disagree and hold different opinions, let's keep love at the forefront.

Because, you know, that's the reason we've been brought together, is because of the love of God for us. That while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. That through his death, he made us one family.

Through his death, he made one new man. And we are all part of that one body under the one Lord, one God who is father of all, who is above us all and in us all.

[71:44] That love that binds us together, I mentioned it last week, through the blood of Christ, we are now joined more tightly than any other biological relative I have, more than any other biological relative you have.

One day, some of those bonds are going to be severed forever. But the bonds that we share, through our oneness in Christ, is going to last into eternity. And the faster we realize this, the faster we can begin to repair the damage that has been done.

And this is going to be a tough uphill battle. It is. Because some of these things are uncomfortable to speak about. A lot of them are. It's difficult facing the history. You know, you think about the heroin and crack epidemic in urban communities and how the government's response was to criminalize it.

But I think it's so interesting that a few years ago when we started to see a heroin epidemic break out in the suburbs, all of a sudden it's a public health crisis. Now is that because we now have more information and we're smarter than we were 30 years ago, 40 years ago?

Or is it because now it's in a place where it shouldn't be? It's now affecting the family members and the lives of other people who aren't associated with that lifestyle.

[73:15] These are the things we talk about when we mention systemic injustices in society today. It doesn't always look like racism. Again, sin is insidious and it is slick and it evolves with the times.

It looks like laws that prevent people from being criminally charged for clear wrongs that they did, that they've committed.

Again, just because something is a law does not make it just. And that's what we should be out for, legitimate justice, real biblical justice, not just in terms of punishment, but in terms of giving people what is due to them because they're right, because it is their right as humans, as people.

So as I wrap up, I just want to reemphasize the fact that we are all capable of loving on another level.

And we reach that level when we step out into the place where we don't want to, when we step into the place that is uncomfortable, where we may be a little bit unsure of our footing.

[74:41] Will we take that chance and reach out to that person who may or may not receive us when we speak on this issue that we know some of our family members aren't going to like.

Just as Christ said, what do you gain from loving those who love you? That's easy. Even an unbeliever can do that. Love, not just love for our enemies and those who hate us, but love for those whom disagree with us, love for those whom we disagree with, love for those who we believe are in the wrong.

And we're called upon to have these conversations lovingly, to say that the same way we want somebody to converse with us and show us love and show us grace, tendered heartedness and compassion with listening ears.

We come to the table with all of that. We present that. We step out first. Because that's what Christ did for us. And that's, he is all we are trying to emulate.

And yes, it's difficult for us, but we have a secret superpower. We have the Holy Spirit of God. The same spirit that raised Christ from the dead, will give life to your mortal bodies.

[76:10] And if the spirit of Christ is in you, you are dead to sin. You no longer walk as the world walks, but you walk in the newness of life. And nowadays, we can show that newness of life by walking differently than the majority of those around us.

people. So be encouraged. Be encouraged. Trust and know that the Lord is working everything out. God has a plan. And as the old folks used to say, it's mighty sweet. we may not be able to see the exact end.

We don't know the way there. We don't know how everything is going to shake out between now and that scene before the throne of God that we see in Revelation 7. But we do know that that's where we're headed.

Where people from every nation, every tribe, and every tongue are gathered around the throne of God, worshipping together in one tongue, worshipping the father who saved us all.

[77:22] So one day, the cultural expressions and the cultural trappings, they're not going to matter. So we can let go of those right now. What matters is do they know Christ?

Not according to the standard that we create in our minds that, okay, they have to have this in place and put that in place and they have to believe this, that particular way, and that view has to look exactly like that. No, no, no. Do they know Christ?

Is Christ the Lord and Savior of their life? Are they trusting in Christ for the salvation of their soul? Are they trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of their sin?

That's what matters. Whatever else comes after that, we can have conversations about it. You know, there are some things that are a little errant. However, it's not going to keep them out of the kingdom. And we have to acknowledge that.

So again, as we go forward from here, God, I just want you to be encouraged knowing that in those moments where you don't know necessarily what to say, the Father, through his Holy Spirit, will give you the words to say.

[78:29] And that he's working this all out together and we are just vessels. We are just tools in the master craftsman's hands. He's using us to help paint a beautiful masterpiece.

where one day the entire cosmos will stand back and say, wow, wow, the creator did that with them. How? Because of love. Through the love of God. I'm getting a little happy thinking about it, talking about it because.

Yes. Yes. Yes. The love of God for our neighbor.

Just like that, that lawyer one time tried to justify himself in front of Christ. Yes, Christ, how do I get to the kingdom? How do I get to heaven? You said, well, you know, follow the commandments. He said, great. I've been doing that since I was born.

[79:28] Oh, there's still one thing you haven't done. You still haven't given up your attachment to the things of life. They still have you.

Jesus said that, you know, the entire law and commandments are summed up in this. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. Not the way that we feel is acceptable and right, but the way that we know that God accepts.

The way that we know that God calls right. And what does it look like? Looks a lot like the day of, like the year of Jubilee. Setting captives free, forgiving debts.

Everybody getting, you know, all families getting their land back. It's like a loving society and community where the breaches have been repaired. And that everybody is together walking in this, the celebration of life that we all have.

It looks a lot like Christ standing up in the temple quoting from Isaiah. That he's coming to preach the good news to the cat, like preach the good news and set the captive free. To give sight to the blind, give hearing to the deaf ears.

[80:47] The, our actions, the repairs aren't just spiritual, but there is a physical component that we must acknowledge.

Caring for one's felt needs is okay. And I'm, so I'm glad about the few ministries that we have here at Trinity that do acknowledge those needs. But of course, as I said, we can always love on another level.

So as we continue to grow, as we continue to learn, we continue to think of new ways and different ways, more ways that we can love each other. of music. Thank you.

Thank you.