

Pastoral Thoughts on Racism, Justice, and Love in Response to the Current Crisis Concerning the Death of George Floyd (part 1)

I've given a lot of thought as to whether I should address what is happening around us in response to the death, and what appears to be murder, at the hand of a police officer (while 3 others stood by), of George Floyd. If you've been attending Grace very long, you know I don't usually respond directly from the pulpit to particular topics or issues. I do respond. But, my responses flow naturally as applications from the Scriptures as I preach through whole books of the Bible. I've spoken with a number of you as well as our elders, and think this might be a good time to give some thoughts. I do not claim to know the motives of the police officers or those of Mr. Floyd. I do not know the motives of the millions of protesters around the world, nor the motives of politicians and powers that be. I certainly do not have a political agenda in sharing these words. I share them as a Christian. I share them as one who desires peace and justice in this world. And I share them as one of your pastors at Grace so that we may be wise, knowing how to think and how to act biblically, which is wise. James says to us, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him"** (James 1:5).

I may fall short of specific applications for us today, but I hope not to fall short of the principle truths and motives from which all our thoughts and responses as Christians must come forth. With this in mind, I want to organize these thoughts around three topics: Racism, Justice, and Love. I will only finish racism and justice today and wait till next week on love. So let's begin.

1. Racism. It seems to me that much of what is happening stems from what most would call racism, centered around the color of a person's skin. This is obvious as we see and hear the words "Black lives Matter." At least in this instance we have a black man killed by a white man. Now, I am not going to cite statistics in this country concerning the long-standing issues of racism. You can do that for yourself. Racism has been with us from the founding our country. And it is not unique to us. It exists in every country of the world. I remember our time in Russia. Over and over again, I saw people group after people group affected by some form of racism. Central Asian ethnicities found it extremely difficult and often impossible to live and function normally in society because of skin color. And in my opinion, minority groups, especially those of another color had much less opportunities than they would have had here in the USA.

When we lived in Kenya, I was always greeted in the village by the songs of the children singing, "Mzungu, Mzungu, Mzungu. White man, white man, white man." I remember talking with one of my Luo friends, a particular tribe in East Africa with very black skin color. I can't remember exactly our conversation, but I pointed to another "black" man, referring to his color, to which my Luo friend, laughed and said, "*He's not black. He's brown.*" Brothers and sisters, there will always be differences in skin color. And sadly, racism is not going away. So, as Christians, how do we think? And, how do we act? I have some applications.

Application: The answers the world gives to combat racism falls short of God's answer. Think about it. What do we hear on the news? White man, black man, Red man, Yellow man. We see signs of protesters holding up signs about peace. Stop racism. Black lives matter. I get it. But here the emphasis is on the color of our skin. Others may move beyond skin color and speak of those who have power, over against those who do not, those who have "control" and "privilege," using such to their advantage to discriminate. I get it. I understand this way of thinking. But, in the end, this view of the world falls short of the solution.

Why? Because racism flows from a heart of sin. Cain killed his brother. Why? We might say because he thought Abel was more privileged, had more advantages in the family, was favored by God, and other reasons. But, in the end, why did he do it. James puts it this way: **"But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death"** (James 1:14-15). He also says, **"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel."** (4:1-2). According to James, racism falls under a greater category of discrimination (cp. 2), which falls under the sin of evil desire, which eventually leads back to the heart of the matter. **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Rom. 3:23).

This means racism will not end in this world as long as we have sinful hearts. Now, this doesn't mean that we ignore it or say, *"Oh well, it is what it is."* No, as civil authorities and citizens under these authorities, we must do what we can to fight against racism and not give certain groups of people discriminatory power over other groups of people. Our laws should reflect our desire to end racism! And we should protest accordingly. But, at the end of the day, government does not have the power to change the heart! Jesus says, **"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."** And, **"It is not what goes into a man that defiles him but that which comes out of a man's heart."**

Application: There is no place for racism in the heart or in the actions of a Christian.

Application: Do not focus on the color of skin, but on the person whom God created. Man looks upon what is outward, but God looks to the heart. We must see EVERY person as created in the image of God with dignity and honor. This is our worldview. This is the lens through which we look upon one another.

Application: In Christ, there is no color. The application here is the church. We must not discriminate or show any kind of racism with one another. We cannot control what is going on outside the church, but we can do what is right in the Church of Jesus Christ. Listen to the words from Eph. 2:11-18 **"Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 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, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

2. Justice. There are murders in this country and the world every day. But, one of the things about our current crisis is we have the death of one man at the hand a police officer, one who has authority by the state to uphold the law and carry out justice. I am not saying Mr. Floyd should not have been arrested. I don't know. You can read the official reports. However, it is what happened AFTER the arrest that was clearly unjust. And on this fact pretty much everyone agrees. Again, I do not claim to know the motives of the police officers involved, but their actions, which were filmed for everyone to see, certainly went beyond the boundaries of law and order. And they should be rightfully tried and prosecuted according to civil law. Why? Because it is a matter of justice.

People are protesting because what happened was not just. If the police officers involved had done the right thing, the just thing, Mr. Floyd would still be alive. His death and the events surrounding his death fills our hearts with all kinds of emotions. And one of those emotions is one of justice. We say, *"How can he do that?" "That's not right."* It is a matter of justice. This is one of those principles built into the fabric of every man and woman. No matter the government, the people, the culture, the institutions, whatever the order of society, there is always the existence and desire for justice. When someone breaks the law, to not punish that person is unjust. Police arrest those who break the law. Mr. Floyd was being arrested on a matter of justice (whether right or wrong I don't know). People are upset because the police officers overstepped the bound of justice. Racism, discrimination, showing favoritism is wrong because they are matters of justice. Children, what if your parents only make you wash the dishes but doesn't require your brother or sister do the same? Is this just? Wars happen over matters of justice. Even those who demand justice in their protests go beyond what is just by destroying property and stealing from others.

So, as Christians, how should we think and act justly? Consider the following applications.

Application: We desire justice because it is God's design. Justice is built into the DNA of all people because God is just. He is righteous. He cannot do that which is wrong. Do you remember what James says, **"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God,' For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one"** (James 1:13). God is holy, righteous, and good. This is his nature. And He cannot be unjust. And we are his creation. And the idea of justice is part of who we are. It just comes out of us. Parents, when you child screams, "Johnny hit me," he/she screams out for justice. This is what we are doing as a people. And when this passes, there will be something else.

Application. Justice will come to us all. Let me explain. To obey God is always the right thing to do. And what God says IS right and just. In the Garden we see God's command: **"you can eat of all the trees in the garden, but not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For in the day you eat of it you will die"** (Gen. 2:16-17). But, Adam and Eve broke God's command. And what is the justice? It is death. And since God can only do what is just, all of us will die. With the Corona virus, one of the things the civil government is trying to do is save lives. But, we can only save lives for now, we

cannot vanquish the justice of death that comes to us all. For all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. This means our cry for justice and our efforts to bring justice can never attain to take away the ultimate justice of death. For through it all, sin and death remain. This is our problem. And this is what the world does not see. This is why justice can only go so far. Racism is ONE ISSUE. Poverty is another. Social justice is another. On and on we go! We might lessen racism here in this country, but see it flourish in other places. Poverty may diminish in one place, but pick up in another. The rule of law may take care of corruption in only place, but in another it rises. These are all pictures of our great injustice, which is to sin against our maker and fall short of his glory. This is what the world does not understand. Now, I don't preach this to say that we should not fight for injustice in this world. We must. In fact, whether good or bad, government is God's gift to injustice. It is given to keep peace, including protecting life (which I have yet to mention abortion, by far the greatest societal injustice). Therefore, as Christians we can and must stand against all injustice, and even put our feet to action. Doesn't James also say, "**Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world**" (James 1:27). In this regard we must fight for justice.

But, no matter how much we accomplish in these matters, the greatest injustice still remains; sin against a holy God. So what can we do in this regard? NOTHING! If justice will ever conquer death, there must be something more. If there is hope for this world, there must be something else. Turn with me to Ephesians 2 for some of my favorite words in the Bible. Here we see what the world does not see. It is mercy of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is God's ultimate answer to injustice. Consider vv. 1-7: "**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.**" Stop for a second. Let that sink in! According to these words, there is no hope in and of ourselves, only the justice of God. Look at v. 4: "**But God** (these are my favorite words) **being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**"

Final application: As Christians we should care the most about injustice in this world because we know what true justice is. And when we care, we must always take the opportunity to point people to this true justice that is to be found in Christ. How ironic that it took the death of Jesus to bring about God's justice. In the death of Christ God is both the JUST ONE and the ONE who justifies! How beautiful is this? Who would have thought such a plan, all for undeserving sinners. When we consider the unjust death of Mr. Floyd, we must consider the justice of God. I don't know if He is found in Christ or not. I hope so! I hope the justice of God was carried on his behalf in the gospel of Christ. But these things are out of our control. This means that the only hope for our country and this world concerning true justice is the gospel of Christ. And for this we must pray! And for this we must live. This means the battle we are engaged in is not a physical battle, but a spiritual battle for souls in this world. And as our nation is so outraged about this injustice, shouldn't we also be so concerned with the true injustice plaguing every soul of Adam. Yet, we spend more time filling our agendas with those things than we do in prayer, the reading of God's Word, the sharing with our neighbors, etc. May God have mercy on us!