

Pastoral Thoughts on Racism, Justice, and Love in Response to the Current Crisis Concerning the Death of George Floyd (part 2)

This morning I would like to finish my sermon from last week as we consider racism, justice, and love. And this message directly responds to the crisis concerning the death of George Floyd. Last week, I spent some time on racism and justice as these two issues are prominent in the news media, and in our own thoughts. So, let me begin with a recap on racism and justice. George Floyd, a black man was killed by a white policeman. We see signs and hear the slogan “Black Lives Matter” among the protesters which emphasizes what the world calls racism. And from one perspective I get this. I understand the great concerns. Our country fought a great civil war over the issue of slavery. Our own Baptist denomination split over the issue of whether a slave owner could be a missionary. The issues surrounding racism are immense. And I do not deny them. But my concern as a Christian and a pastor is on what the Bible says about both the subject of racism and how we should view it, and then how we should we respond. Our worldview as Christians must be biblical. Let me 4 thoughts from last week.

i. In my opinion, racism is not the best term. And I realize the world will not agree with our assessment. God does not distinguish between “race” through the color of a person’s skin. There is only ONE human race, distinguishable from the rest of creation and the animals as “male” and “female” created in the image of God. One person does not bear the image of God in a greater way than another. We are all equal in that regard. It seems to me that “racism” falls under a larger category of discrimination, which James identifies as sin (James 2:1-13). Now, I do see a difference, especially in the OT with “ethnicity” as the Jewish nation is set apart from the “nations” of the world. But, this is not so much in regard to skin color, but in regard to the grace of God shown to Israel.

ii. As a form of discrimination, showing favor because of the color of skin is wrong. It is a sin. As Christians we must see all people as created in God’s image. And the reason “racism” is so prevalent in this world is because of sin. And as Christians we must not discriminate. And we must fight against what our world calls “racism.”

iii. Because sin exists in the hearts of mankind, discrimination because of skin color will always be a part of this world. But this does not mean that we do not fight against it.

iv. In Christ there is no color. This means that the church should be the most beautiful place of diversity. We must display the plan of God to undo the separation of people at Babel stemming from the city of Babel. And this will only happen in Christ as we preach the gospel. As Christians we know the end. Rev. 5:8-10 says: **“And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”**

Now, let's move on to also recap justice from last week. Since George Floyd was killed by a policeman with authority from the state to uphold the law, the idea of justice is front and center. Many people are protesting Mr. Floyd's death because it is a matter of justice. It is clear that the police officers involved overstepped the bounds of justice. So, let me remind us of what we said last week as to how we as Christians should view justice.

i. 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. I believe it is part of who we are as men and women created in God's image to desire justice.

ii. We must fight against all injustice in this world. As Christians we should be the most concerned with the way people are treated. When people of any color are discriminated against or people of any class are given unfair treatment, we should be the first to stand against such things.

iii. The world's understanding of injustice in this world falls short of what is actually true. You see, the world only sees the issues at hand. They only see discrimination or the mistreatment of a certain people as the problem (which of course it is). But, this is all they see. This means that their solutions are to change systems of power and authority and put certain measures in place that fix the problem. And as Christians we have no problem with doing whatever is necessary to address and fix the problem. But, as Christians, we also know that the world's solutions only go so far. As one social injustice is eradicated, another takes its place. As Christians, we know the problem lies in the heart of sinful mankind. And out of the abundance of the heart flows injustice. Rule of law (which we should all thank God for), can only go so far. Our greatest injustice is sin against God. And if God were just, he would punish all of us, which is the righteous anger and wrath of God over against a sinful world. Rom. 1:18 says: **"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."**

iv. The answer to injustice is the cross of Christ. God's answer to our sin and rebellion is the cross of Jesus Christ. In the person and work of Jesus Christ, God provides the solution to injustice. And it is something that ONLY He can do. The cross of Christ is at the center of God's courtroom, through which all sinners must make an appearance. 2 Cor. 5:10 says, **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."** As Christians we know what is true. God sent his Son into this world to deal with justice. What is justice? For sinners, justice is death and separation from God. But God, who is rich in mercy, sent his Son. He lived a sinless life. And he laid down his life as a perfect sacrifice, the spotless lamb. And all God's punishment for sin fell upon him. Justice required death and separation from God. And then, he rose again, conquering death. And now, through the means of faith, Christians look upon Christ. And our sins are forgiven. God no longer looks upon us as sinners, but looks to the Son, who died in our place. And justice is served! The Bible says we **"died with him."** And we will be **"raised with him."** But for those who do not look upon the Son of God by faith will receive justice. This means that YES, we work for changes in society to remedy social injustice. But, also, we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, through whom justice is truly found. With this truth before us, I must ask, how many conversations have you had about the gospel of Christ with friends and neighbors and those on social media with whom you disagree? When we do not cross the line of the

proclamation of gospel, we are just like the world! And we only put a band aid on the problem! May it not be so with us.

v. Also, it is the cross of Christ that reconciles sinners to God and peoples of different colors and ethnic groups together. This means that that the church is a place of unity. And I would argue, the church is the only true place of unity. Therefore, our churches must reflect this unity.

Let's move on to our final truth: Love.

3. Love. This week, as normal, when I turn on the news, I hear the governor of New York giving an update. And I can't remember all his words. But, at the end of his talk, he says, "*We will get through this together. And I know we will because New Yorkers are resilient, hard working, caring, etc. etc.*" But, the very last word he used to describe New Yorkers was "*loving.*" Love is so important to the world. How many times have we heard the words, "*Love makes the world go round.*" Well, love is like justice in that it is built into who we are. God is love. And as his creatures, we love. We are capable of love (though this term is so complex as we need context to define it). But, the world's answer to the world's problems is still "love." Love one another! And so we should! And as Christians, so we must. For Jesus says, "**By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another**" (John 13:35). I'll come back to that in a moment.

The killing of Mr. Floyd was not only a violation of justice, it was also a violation of the law of love. It was not the loving thing to do. A Jewish religious leader once came to Jesus and said, "***What is the greatest commandment?***" Do you remember Jesus' response? He said, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**' The second is this: '**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**' **There is no other commandment greater than these**" (Mark 12:30-31). This is God's command for the world. In fact, all the law and the prophets are summed up in these words.

Jesus applies these truths in the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10. Turn with me to 10:29: A man came to Jesus and said: "**Who is my neighbor?**" This man who was naturally accustomed to dealing with Jews only, probably saw Jesus interacting with non-Jews and other "sinners." And he wanted to know, "*How far do we go? Who is my neighbor?*" And Jesus replied: "**A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'** Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "**The one who showed him mercy.**" And Jesus said to him, "**You go, and do likewise.**" The bottom line of this story is that EVERYBODY in this world is our neighbor. James says the same thing: "***Do not discriminate***" (cp. 2). **Love your neighbor!**

I think, at least in principle, we get this. We know what we should do: do unto others as we would have them do unto us. (Let me say quickly that peaceful protests are one thing. And they can even be loving. But, to loot and steal and destroy property is not loving. For which of us wants that done to us? NO ONE!)

So how are we to think as Christians and what are we to do?

God defines and demonstrates love. The world can only go so far. The world may do the most loving, caring, thing it knows how to do. But as with justice, it can only go so far. The loving thing might be to provide for those who are being discriminated against. It may be taking care of widows and orphans as James also says (1:27). But, at the end of the day it falls short. And here, again, we need God to define our terms and show us what true love is. The Law of Moses says, “**Love God. Love your neighbor** as what . . . **you love yourself.**” But Jesus comes and says this: “**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another**” (John 13:34). Here is God’s answer. It is no longer just “love your neighbor as you love yourself.” This is certainly good and right and practical. And we must love our neighbor as we love ourselves. But, what Jesus does is take this command to a higher level, in fact to the highest level of love. It is no longer love for self that is the standard, but God’s love in sending the Son. “**Love one another, just as I have loved you.**” The context here is the death of Christ. “**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends**” (John 15:13).

The problem is that the world is not the friend of God. The world is everything anti-God. It is all the evil in this world that opposes God. But what does God do? Listen to some of the most familiar words in the Bible. “**For God so loved the world . . .**” Who is the world? From this perspective, it is sinful mankind, all the Sons of Adam. All colors, all languages, all classes, all peoples! All the hateful things we are seeing are a part of this world. Consider all the evil acts of the peoples of this world from the beginning, all the wars, all the killings, the murder of infants in the womb, all the lying and deceit, all the forms of sexual perversity. And when you consider all these things, you might think, “*I’m not so bad.*” But, even if you’ve thought evil of your brother, you’ve committed murder in your heart. Or if you’ve looked upon a woman with lust, you’ve committed adultery in your heart. When I think about the world and its ways especially now in what is happening, I think, “*What a place we live in.*” And what is going here is nothing like what is going in other parts of the world.

And this is the world God the Son entered. And this is love. “**Though in the form of God he did not not think equality with God something to hold onto. But instead he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant and humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**” Brothers and sisters, the cross was the place the Romans sent the worst of criminals. And Christ laid down his life on a Roman cross because he loves us. He did this that justice might be displayed. And he did this to show his love. Rom. 5:8: “**But God demonstrated his love toward us, while we were yet sinners . . . Christ died for us.**” The cross is the greatest display of justice and the greatest display of love. And there was only ONE way to accomplish such a glorious plan! This means that we can and must love our neighbor. But, without the proclamation of this good news, we will do just as the world. So what will it take brothers and sisters. It must be the love of Christ that compels us to go. Otherwise, we are

just like the world. This is what separates, and what brings together motive and action. So what does this look like? Let me mention a few applications.

First of all, we really do not know what love is until we know the Love of God in Christ. And this is the difference between us and the world.

We must love our neighbor, all of them. As God loves all peoples, so must we, no matter how hard it is. Concerning those outside the church. We must be willing to speak with those who are different than us. Of course we must not discriminate! But, we must also speak with others and try to understand their world. Jesus took on flesh. What humility! This is our example. We must do our best to empathize with others, black folks, Latinos, Asians, white folks, whoever. I must confess I don't understand all the ins and outs of how blacks . . . and others may feel, though I certainly know what it feels like to live as a minority (3 different cultures for extended periods of time). This is love. And we must build bridges as we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. But at the same time, we must share the good news.

Finally, we must love one another in the church. Jesus' command was particularly to the church. And frankly, I've seen more disunity and lack of love among Christians than I've ever seen in my life. The Corona Virus has caused so much division. And then all of a sudden with the events surround Mr. Floyd's death, this crises dwarfs any other I've seen. We must love one another. Social media alone has cased more mess than I ever thought possible. I do not question motives. This would be slander. But, we must love one another. Christ is our example! Let me say it again. Christ is our example! Let me end with Phil. 2:1-11 as we conclude:

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”