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[0 : 0 0] So that for the past nine weeks, we've been in the middle of a series called Race and Justice, because we have this conviction as followers of Jesus that the Bible has a lot to say about justice and about race, about the ways that the gospel, the good news about Jesus, communicates something important about how we as the people of God are meant to respond to injustices in the world.

And so we've spent a long time talking about this, and hence, we're not done. Like, we're not going to close the book on this series and say, oh, okay, we're never going to talk about this again, because it's, I don't know if you've noticed, but there are still racial injustices going on in our nation and in our world.

And honestly, we spent nine weeks talking about it, and I feel like we've barely scratched the surface. And so we believe that this is something that ought to be embedded in who we are as a church. It should be embedded in our values.

This is not something that just we talk about when it's popular or when it's trendy. We're not doing it to score, like, brownie points with, like, the woke crowd or anything like that. We believe that Jesus has set us on a course of always being a place where justice can make its home, a place that we work towards justice for all kinds of people, not just in terms of race, but also ability, and also in terms of gender, and also in terms of sexuality and nationality and all of those things.

That's the work. So a little bit of review. Here's what we've talked about over the past nine weeks. Number one, we talked about awareness of the truth.

[1 : 3 9] The idea that if we are going to talk about justice and injustice, about what's happened and hasn't happened in the world, we have to have some awareness of the truth. We have to be willing to confront what's true and not shy away from it, steer away from it, close our eyes to it, which will then lead to lament.

Lament is this idea of not just being sad, but, like, confessing our sadness, of being sad publicly, of not just slapping a happy face on everything, but willing to say, this is bad, and maybe I played a part in it, or maybe I was wounded by it, or maybe I've been traumatized by it, or maybe I've traumatized somebody else by it, and we're willing to say that.

Church is going to be a place where we just say, praise Jesus, isn't life good? Hallelujah, oh boy, and not lament together. We talked about guilt and shame, a natural response that should happen when we confront the truth and when we lament the truth, that we should feel a certain amount of guilt about what has been done, what we've been complicit in, and maybe we feel ashamed about what our ancestors and the generations before us have done, or maybe what a generation right now is up to.

But we can't get stuck there, so we move into confession, about being willing to admit our part, being willing to confess that these things happened, which then leads into forgiveness, of being willing to forgive ourselves, to offer forgiveness to others, which then leads to repentance.

Repentance means to turn direction, to change our minds, to say, I'm not only aware of what has happened, I'm not only sorry about what has happened, but I'm going to do my best to make sure it doesn't happen again.

[3 : 24] And we talked about reparation, about repairing what is broken. Last week, we talked about reconciliation. And this last step is that of reproduction, the idea that we do it again, that just because we did the cycle of reconciliation one time, doesn't mean that we can just close the book and say, okay, all done now.

Now, this idea of doing it again, it means it's not a one and done process. It means there's no moment of arrival. And that can leave in us a certain sense of hopelessness, a certain sense of what's the point of it all.

And so we have to be willing to be part of a community of believers who have a sense of history and the past and aware of the two steps forward and the one step back and the progress and the regress.

And we have to be willing to hold each other up when we get tired. Because if we try to just reproduce and reproduce and try to do it again and again and again on our own strength, we will get exhausted.

And so we have to grow and we have to invite others along. And in the Christian world, the word for this has been discipleship and evangelization, evangelism.

[4 : 39] Discipleship and evangelism. Now, these are really churchy words that may spring up some feelings in you. Discipleship may remind you of things that tell you exactly who you're supposed to be and how you're supposed to act and how you're supposed to behave.

And evangelism can maybe bring up, conjure images of people knocking on the door and saying, if you died tonight, do you know where you would go? So we have to kind of wrestle with these images.

Well, I know it's popular to believe that proselytizing, confessing my beliefs to someone else and asking them maybe to believe the same thing I do, it's not exactly popular.

There are phrases like, don't push your beliefs on me, or your truth is your truth, my truth is my truth, or, you know, whatever you want as long as you're happy or as long as it doesn't hurt anyone.

But I know that you all don't believe this, at least a good chunk of you don't believe this. Because, number one, I know what a lot of you do for a living.

[5 : 45] And number two, I see what you post on Instagram. You post things like, call your senators, or call your elected non-voting congressional representatives because you live in D.C.

Share this, read the caption, get vaccinated, wear a mask. You post things, you say things, you share things that want to change people's minds.

You all, you work in advocacy work, you work in policy change, in politics, you work on boots on the ground to help people because you see the harm that certain beliefs can do, and you want those beliefs to change.

And so there may be this, like, kind of pop culture idea of, like, well, your truth is your truth, and my truth is my truth, and as long as it doesn't hurt anybody. But we don't actually believe this in day-to-day practice because we have dedicated our lives, a lot of D.C. people have dedicated their lives to changing minds, to pushing your beliefs onto others.

And, of course, there are bad and there are good ways to do that. There are shameful ways of doing that. There are ways of punishing people who don't believe you and don't believe what you believe that we don't want to ascribe to, but we don't believe that kind of pop culture idea of, like, well, to each their own.

[6 : 58] No, we have this idea that, no, there are some things that are harmful to which we say, no, that should come to an end. But when it comes to things like faith, religion, God, belief, well, then we shy away from it.

Well, that's evangelism. That's proselytizing. We don't want to push anything on anybody they don't want to believe. And evangelism, of course, has been associated with colonization and empire and really violent forms of coercion.

For instance, Spanish monarchy created a document called The Requirement in 1513. It was the declaration of Spain's divinely ordained right to conquer the so-called new world.

The Catholics said so. Must be okay. So a conquistador would stand before some indigenous peoples and say, I implore you to recognize the church as a lady and in the name of the Pope.

Take the king as lord of this land and obey his mandates. If you do not do it, I tell you that with the help of God, I will enter powerfully against you all. I will make war everywhere in every way that I can.

[8 : 07] I will subject you to the yoke and obedience to the church and to his majesty. I will take your women and children and make them slaves. The deaths and injuries that you will receive from here on will be your own fault, not that of his majesty, nor of the gentlemen that accompany me.

Yay, evangelism. Now, of course, evangelism happens today in still maybe not quite as violent ways, but still coercive, emotionally manipulative ways.

How many of you have been handed a gospel tract, evangelism tract at some point in your life? Yeah, yeah, yeah. So things like, there will be no fire escape in hell. Cool.

But can't Jesus be my savior now? Of course not. You died in your sins. It's too late. You had your chance. Now he must be your judge. What a loving God.

Cool. Or a get out of hell free card. How cute. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. This is a real gospel tract that you could be handed to convince you to believe something you did not previously believe.

[9 : 14] Hey, hey, have I told you the good news about God who loves you so much that the moment you die and you don't believe the right things, he will torture you forever in hell? Believe in that. Yay, evangelism.

Now, of course, this sort of coercion and manipulation was not what Jesus had in mind when he asked his disciples to go and spread and share this thing that we call the gospel, the good news, the euangelion, this proclamation that something good had happened.

Jesus actually rejects this form of coercion and manipulation in Matthew 23. He says, you're hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees. You fraud.

You go halfway around the world to make a single convert. Once you get him, you make him into a replica of yourselves, double damned, twice the child of hell, some translations say.

Ouch, Jesus. And there was that sort of manipulative, coercive form of evangelism, of trying to share or push your beliefs onto someone else, and you would do it in such a way that they felt as if they had no choice.

[10 : 28] But then, a couple chapters later, Matthew 28, Jesus goes to say, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you.

And so here we have Jesus going out and say, yeah, some of you go out and make converts. You make them twice the children of hell that you are. And then Jesus says, but go, disciple, teach, baptize in the Trinitarian name of Father, Son, and Spirit.

So evangelism, teaching people about the gospel, is it colonialism? Is it coercion? Should we do it? This is what Josh Scott, he's a pastor of Grace Point Church in Nashville, says.

He says, if by gospel, good news, we mean a series of propositional beliefs we must hold and profess in order to obtain forgiveness, salvation, and relationship with God, then I'll pass on sharing it.

If by sharing the gospel, we mean introducing people to a dehumanizing, fear-inducing, shame-based system that focuses on evacuation from this world to a disembodied reality while ignoring the real problems and injustices we face on the earth, then we should stop talking about it altogether.

[11 : 50] And I agree with Pastor Josh. If the gospel is one that is about a disembodied existence and one that minimizes the injustices here on planet earth, if it's about dehumanizing, about telling you about how bad you are and how depraved you are and how fallen you are and that there's only one way to get God to love you and if you don't fall into that one single way, then God has no choice.

There's some system that's even higher than God that God must obey that says he must reject you, then no, please don't evangelize that. The gospel, that euangelion, is never meant to be a spiritual message.

Euangelion was a Greek term, it was a political term, it was about the message that a herald would share when a Roman general or emperor would enter into the city and say, euangelion, good news, the Roman empire has arrived.

And the herald would sprint his marathon length of miles to go and tell everyone in the city, hey, you barbarians, the Romans have showed up, hooray. That was the quote unquote good news.

And so Jesus, who's living in the Roman empire, knows this word, knows this term, and turns it on its head. And he says in the opening of each and every gospel, repent, change your minds, change the way that you're living, for the time has come, the good news, the gospel, the euangelion of the kingdom of God has arrived.

[13 : 25] So Jesus is taking this empire message and making it into something different, not about violent empires with their armies and their generals and their swords and their blood and their violence, but about a kingdom of God where God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven, where there's proclamation of justice, about the poor being free from their poverty, about the slave being freed from their slavery, about the imprisoned being released from their chains.

Actual good news. And so Jesus' message was a political one, politics, meaning how we shape our society, what our cities, our polices, look like.

Jesus' message was about the availability of God's kingdom, not someday in the future, not in some disembodied cloud where you play on harps, but the availability of the kingdom here and now and today about a colony of heaven making its way in a culture of death.

It was about the transformation of the social order to bring about, as Aaron preached on a couple weeks ago, jubilee, redemption, freedom, a resetting of everything to the way it ought to be.

So Josh Scott continues, by sharing the gospel, we mean announcing the belovedness and inclusion of every human being in the love and embrace of God, no exceptions.

[14 : 58] By sharing the gospel, we mean engaging the practical work of announcing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind and liberation for the oppressed through concrete action in the world.

It won't be about producing converts to a religious system, but about the cultivation of human flourishing, whatever a person's label might be. The gospel, according to Jesus, is an announcement that if we choose to see and enter the kingdom here and now, a world of justice and enoughness for everyone isn't just possible, it's closer than we dare dream.

And that's worth calling your senator about. If we realize that wrapped up in the gospel are all sorts of ideas about the racial justice for every person in this country and world, about the autonomy, the equality of women and every gender, of the equality of all people, regardless of identity or sexuality or where they were born or what borders were drawn when they were born or before they were born, if we realize wrapped up in the gospel is this idea that we need to repent to change our ways from the ways that have broke people and societies in the past and turn towards ways of flourishing, if we realize that wrapped up in the gospel is the need to tell the truth about ourselves, of repairing the harm, then I believe that is worth reproducing, that is worth telling others about, that is worth that dirty word of proselytizing and evangelizing, as long as we make it not about ourselves, not about our own need to feel right, but rather to make it about others and their need to be long, their need to flourish, make it about others and their need to be loved.

Natasha Morrison, who is the author of this book, by the way, *Be the Bridge*. I've got like 10 copies in the foyer, so if you come and talk to me afterwards, I'll give you one of these copies as long as you promise to actually read it and do something about it.

Okay? She says, God didn't draw us through the process of reconciliation for our own sake. He reconciled us so we could bring reconciliation to others in his name.

[17 : 28] After all, if something has been transformational for you, why wouldn't you want to share your experiences, perspectives, and life with others? And this, I believe, is the difference between like colonization and evangelizing, sharing of the good news.

Because one is about coercion, about forcing, about making someone else believe, about giving them no other choice. Whereas one is about, it's about the sharing of something good in your life.

When you discover that good restaurant or that good TV show or that good book, when you discover that thing that is giving you life right now, especially when times seem to be getting harder and more difficult and darker every day, when you share the thing that gives you hope, maybe it can give someone else hope as well.

And so we've spent the past nine weeks talking about racial justice in America, but this ought to be true of whatever topic we're talking about. It ought to be the kind of thing that gives hope and brings up flourishing and brings life.

And if it's doing that, then it's worth sharing and it's worth talking about. And if it's not doing that, it's not worth believing. So I want to end this series with a challenge and with an invitation.

[18 : 46] I'll begin with the challenge. The challenge is this. We've barely scratched the surface on these topics. We haven't really talked about Native or Indigenous peoples.

we've barely mentioned anti-Asian and Pacific Islander sentiment. We've barely talked about our own American history or really built a biblical theology of race.

So no matter if you are white or black or Asian American or Pacific Islander or Indigenous, the challenge is to go learn something about racism and justice.

And by learn, I don't just mean read a book or swipe through some Instagram stories. I mean, go to an environment where you may actually have to have a conversation.

Go to an environment where you may actually have to take action on behalf of someone who's not you. Take a class or a workshop or go to one of the many, many protests and marches that are still happening for the sake of justice in this city.

[19 : 51] And if you've never been to a protest before, please don't show up and think that you know what you're doing. Go to one of the many, many trainings that they offer, particularly to white allies or want to be allies on how to protest well and to follow the lead of people of color who have been doing this for a lot longer than we have.

Don't take over. Be a learner. Be a student. Actually take action. When you pray, as we've said at this church before, move your feet. That's the challenge.

The invitation is this. I'm incredibly conscious of the fact that we have all heard enough sermons in our lifetime that end with you should, you ought, you need to, you didn't, why didn't?

And so I just wanted to end this series and take a moment to remind you that you are enough. that God made you good and that the way God sees you is as a child and as an heir to this kingdom we keep talking about.

In God, we can rest knowing that the kingdom of God, to quote Jesus, has arrived. It's being established as we speak.

[21 : 14] The story of scripture is one that states that boldly proclaims that God is victorious. God reigns. And no, I don't mean in the God's on the throne, don't worry, be happy kind of way.

I don't mean it in that kind of toxic positivity that numbs you into inaction. But I do mean that if we, you and I, the church, have any hope of making progress to make this city and this country a place where justice can make its home, then we need to begin rooted in the fact that God's justice will be victorious and that God sees God's self in you.

So I want to finish with this image from the book of Revelation. And I want you to notice that this is an image from the end of days or rather the beginning of a new day. And notice that the image is not one of the erasure of every nation.

It's not about race being done away with. It's not about every language being gentrified into a single language. But rather, every nation and tribe and people and race and language together united by Christ.

So if you're comfortable, I invite you to close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Maybe plant your feet on the floor. Feel grounded to the ground beneath you. And use the senses of your imagination.

[22 : 47] So as I describe this image, what would you hear? What would you smell and taste? What would you feel? This is what John writes in Revelation.

I looked and there was a great crowd that no one could number. They were from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language.

They were standing before the throne and before the Lamb that is Jesus. they wore white robes and held palm branches in their hands and they cried out with a loud voice, Victory belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

Amen. Victory belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Amen.

Victory belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

[24 : 20] Amen. Amen. Would you, if you're willing, sing that with me? Victory belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

Lamb of the Lamb. Amen. One more time.