



CALVARY MONUMENT BIBLE CHURCH  
LOVING, LIVING, LEADING FOR GOD'S GLORY

## REFLECTIONS ON THE WHITE AMERICAN CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO RACISM PART THREE: THE GOSPEL'S LIGHT OF HOPE AND NEXT STEPS FOR BUILDING AWARENESS

Pastor Chris Lenhart | July 28, 2020

MATTHEW 12:18-21 (ESV) <sup>18</sup> "BEHOLD MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN, MY BELOVED WITH WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL PLEASED. I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE WILL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES. <sup>19</sup> HE WILL NOT QUARREL OR CRY ALOUD, NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS; <sup>20</sup> A BRUISED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT QUENCH, UNTIL HE BRINGS JUSTICE TO VICTORY; <sup>21</sup> AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE."

Becoming aware is not always a comfortable activity. From the beginning of this series, I have acknowledged that these words and sentiments might make some feel a bit unsettled. I have also expressed that it is not my desire to convict, guilt-trip, or shame anyone. This is about awareness leading us towards attitudes of lament, grief, confession, repentance, and perhaps reconciliation. America's difficult and complex history, as it relates to racism, informs us that as parents of black children, we will never be able to let down our guard.

We ourselves (Chris & Sheila) have experienced a great deal of unsettling in this season of our lives. My goal in this series has been to simply walk alongside of you towards a greater awareness. I want to reiterate that these words come from a place of gentleness and humility, recognizing that for us, this will be a lifelong journey. We are praying that the Lord will guide some relationships into our lives who will commit to joining us on this journey. If something Jesus has used to help us could also help you, then that is good enough for us. Together, we might begin to move from postures of "I am not wrong," "You're not hurting," and "It's not real" to "I could be wrong," "I see you are hurting," and "Tell me about your experience."

There are a lot of true words and phrases that Christianity has abandoned out of a fear for how they are used by popular culture. Some that come to mind related to this topic are "social justice," "systemic racism," and "black lives matter." We may sometimes be guilty of throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. God loves justice. This theme rings throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus came both proclaiming justice and bringing justice and his voice was silenced by the religiously responsible of his day.

Beginning with social justice, we must first recognize that the gospel and justice are concepts that cannot be divorced one from the another. Justice is woven into the fabrics of the gospel. God gave the Israelites the law, and the law was a testimony to his concern for his glory and justice. Social justice is about how we treat one another. Pastor Crawford Loritts has used the term "relational righteousness" to describe social justice. This is about how we relate equitably one to another, and it strikes at the very heart of the new command given to the Church: love one another. The kind of love that Jesus calls us to is a love that only he can produce through us, and this because we struggle mightily with sin.

Sin is pervasive. It runs deep within our nature. It manifests itself in the systems we create to order and maintain our day-to-day lives. It's ugly. We don't like to look at it or even acknowledge that it exists. Yet in order to comprehend and acknowledge the reality of systemic racism, we must start with an understanding of our own total depravity and how the sin of humankind infects and affects every system, process, law, and code that we might create. Until freed by the blood of Christ, we are in bondage to this sin. We live on a battlefield, not a playground. It is Paul who says in Ephesians 6 that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the ruler of this world system. Our enemy would find no greater joy than in deceiving the church into believing that systemic sin is not a problem.

While we can acknowledge that it was individuals who perpetuated the heinous acts of lynching, we also must admit that their gross behaviors were empowered by the blind eye of segregation's broken and corrupt justice system. In his book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* black

theologian James Cone says, “The cross and the lynching tree interpret each other. Both were public spectacles, shameful events, instruments of punishment reserved for the most despised people in society. Any genuine theology and any genuine preaching of the Christian gospel must be measured against the test of the scandal of the cross and the lynching tree.” It would be fair to pause here and say that we could replace the lynching tree with the gas chambers of the Nazi concentration camps, or the systems that continue to fuel the enslavement of millions of children in human sex trafficking. But what we cannot ignore is that there are systems as created, ruled over, guided, and governed by humankind that aid in perpetuating a cornucopia of systemic sin and injustice.

One form of systemic sin manifests itself in racism. It would be a challenging task to find a black, evangelical church that would argue that systemic racism is not both an ever-present and ever-threatening reality. Perhaps we might consider the following question: why is it that when one race is willing to identify and define systemic racism in our culture, another race is so quick to assume a posture of both defensiveness and dismissiveness regarding it? I might gently ask, why are we so fragile about this? Have we crossed the street or yard to listen to those who are experiencing these injustices? What would it look like to have a conversation with a black or brown neighbor, friend, co-worker, or family member about how they have experienced systemic racism? Isn't it more loving to listen, to assume a posture of love, to show compassion, and be gracious? In choosing to not look away, we are choosing to no longer remain in ignorance, assuming that we have rectified an issue that has plagued humanity since the fall of humankind. There are systems in place today that oppress minority peoples. Calling out these systems, identifying injustice, and using our voices to shine light into shadowy spaces is not “victim mentality.” It is truth-loving. There can be no justice without truth. Scholar and evangelical Christian Jemar Tisby says, “Racism never goes away, it simply adapts.”

One way that racism has adapted is in many people's newfound inability to speak the following truth: “black lives matter.” Being shamed by our culture into silence is not a new phenomenon. The height of hypocrisy is being able to say, “all lives matter” without reservation, while not being able to say, “black lives matter” without reservation. We cannot allow truth to be hijacked by an organization that we might not personally support or join. A walk across the living room to our bookshelves might reveal another implicit way we have participated in racism. How many books in our bookcases are written by someone with a different color skin tone than our own? I am ashamed of the reality that of the hundreds of books I own, only a handful, like 3 or 4, were authored by a

minority! This speaks as much to my own personal problem as it does to a systemic problem in our Christian, higher educational institutions. Many of the books on my shelves were required readings for classes in college and graduate school. No black theologians, no black philosophers, no black pastors, not one commentary or biblical survey written by a minority. Eight plus years of higher education, and I cannot remember even one assigned reading from a minority perspective.

So what is our hope? Our hope is the gospel. Jesus' example, Jesus' ability that overcomes our inability. Jesus' work of justice that gives us the opportunity to be reconciled unto God. The hope of a future where every nation, tribe, and tongue will bow in glorious unity at the feet of God. Jesus gave the most marginalized a place at his table, he took time to hear their voices, he taught them to lead, he instructed them to teach, he loved, he listened, he led. His example is for us, and the promise is that by the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus can accomplish these same behaviors in and through us so that we can love others in the same manner that we have been loved. The wounds of racism can heal. Though the scars will remain and perhaps sometimes may even reopen, with consistent care and attention, Jesus makes healing a precious reality.

One of the comments that have come up during this dialogue is, “What can we do?” A good reminder is that the first step towards reconciliation is becoming aware. Growing in our awareness has been the goal of this article series. We do not want to rush through this but take our time. So what are some tangible ways that we can walk towards a greater awareness together? I want to share 5 actions that we can take to proactively pursue growing in our awareness of these matters.

### **1. Relate Broadly**

Inviting minority perspectives into our homes, around our tables, and into our lives is a great place to start. This, or accepting their hospitality and entering their homes. Go with the purpose of listening. Ask questions regarding their perspectives on relevant cultural matters. Just listen, and do not feel compelled, unless asked, to give your perspectives or opinions.

### **2. Read Broadly**

I have shared titles like *The Color of Compromise* by Jemar Tisby, or *Woke Church* by Eric Mason, also *Be the Bridge* by Latasha Morrison. You might also consider inspecting your children's bookshelves to ensure that your titles represent diverse perspectives. If not, you might consider borrowing from the local library or purchasing the following works as recommended by Sheila.

#### For Children

*God's Very Good Idea* by Trullia Newbell; *GraceFull, ColorFull, ThoughtFull* (3 separate books) by Dorena Williamson; *When God made You, When God made Light, When I pray for You* (3 separate books) by Matthew Paul Turner

#### For Tween Girls

*Lena in the Spotlight* (series) by Alena and Wynter Pitts; *The Daniels Sisters* (series) by Kaitlyn Pitts or the magazine subscription *For Girls Like You*

#### For Tweens of Any Gender

*Courageous World Changers: 50 True Stories of Daring Women of God* (available now); *Brave Heroes and Bold Defenders: 50 True Stories of Daring Men of God* (coming out in Oct. 2020) both by Shirley Raye Redmond.

### **3. Listen Broadly**

Podcasts such as Pass the Mic, Jude 3 Project, Be the Bridge, Melanated Faith, or Truth's Table might be a good place to start to diversify your perspectives on these matters. Also, perhaps you would consider trying another type or style of music? In our home, Koryn Hawthorne, Lecrae, KB, NF, TobyMac, Hezekiah Walker, Kirk Franklin, and Mandisa are just a few that get us moving, along with our favorite Kreyol jams.

### **4. Watch Broadly**

There are some fabulous documentaries and mini-series out there: *13* (free on YouTube), *The Color of Compromise Video Series* (free on Amazon Prime for Prime Members), *Haiti and the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided* (available to purchase on Amazon). A few movies based on real-life events that might help to build awareness: *Alex Haley's Roots*; *Marshall* (2016); *Pride* (2007), *Remember the Titans*, *Glory Road*, *Glory*, *Red Tails*, and many more. Please understand not all of these are family-friendly, so please watch discerningly.

### **5. Love Broadly**

I think it is appropriate that we end our series with love. Love is the essential attitude and action that the Spirit uses to draw people unto God. Racism exists because we have not loved well. There are people in your pathways that look or sound different than you. Jesus has placed them there for a purpose. They are your neighbors, co-workers, friends, and for some, even family members. With Jesus' help we must commit to loving broadly in our relationships. If you do not know of anyone nor currently have anyone in your life who is of a different race or ethnicity, pray intentionally that God would draw someone in. Then love that person in the same manner that you have been loved by Jesus.

As we address these realities, continuing the dialogue past this article series, it is important that we move from a posture of defensiveness and dismissiveness regarding these things towards a posture of humility and compassion. What Sheila and I have learned in this season is that it is very difficult to step out of the fog of the dominant culture we live in and see how racism, like a disease, infects many of the operations and systems that are a part of our day-to-day lives. How can we love, live, and lead for God's glory if we choose not to listen and learn from those who are hurting or different from us? And how might Jesus use our becoming aware to help us grow in a greater love for God and each other? This is an opportunity to listen, learn, love, and grow together. Stay tuned for more opportunities coming soon!