

Before I begin:

- This is a message you will need to listen to more than once... We will cover a lot of ground

- Remember, **we are here to worship this Sunday**. This means that everything we say and do, our feelings, attitudes, prejudices, long-held beliefs—everything we have and are today—is being offered up to God as a sacrifice. The only question is...will it be worthy of him?
 - What you are doing now, in listening—is an act of worship
 - Is your heart turned toward the Living God in all humility?
 - Do you desire his transformative power in your life, so that each day you become less like your old self, and more like Jesus?

- Remember also as we begin that **our first loyalty** is not to the USA, nor to our “race,” nor to our “gender group,” not to our “culture,” not to our “traditions,” nor our profession. — every other loyalty in your life is subservient to the Lordship of Christ. And if, in the process of thinking through these issues, you find that one of these other claimants to your loyalty has taken pride of place over the Lordship of Christ, then I hope you will see it and repent of it

Illustration:

There is a cockroach living in my truck. Leaving the elders meeting Tuesday night, I was letting Kara know I was on my way home, when it scurried across my dashboard. It was dark. I was driving. And he was moving fast. Then he stopped just in front of my steering wheel. I wasn't about to bare-hand it. Getting off the phone, looking for something to use to squash him, trying to keep the truck in my lane, and praying for a red light so I could stop and kill him. My prayers went unanswered. For the first time in my life, every light green.

I finally pulled into the Wendy's parking lot, a long 5 minutes later, only to find that he was gone. I looked everywhere. But as of now, that cockroach is still there, hiding, waiting to come out and get me one night when I least expect it.

Our lives are something like this—except instead of cockroaches, we have underlying attitudes, thought patterns, and prejudices, that come out sometimes, usually only in the dark, and they are just as dirty, just as disgusting as that cockroach. They aren't always (or even mostly) issues of racism, but let's be frank enough to admit that they sometimes are.

- Let's be frank about something else... **We are all much more sinful than we know**. We all have many flaws and failures that are hidden even to ourselves. We all need the **continual scrutiny** of God's word on our lives. We all need the continual **wise counsel** of godly brothers/sisters who will wound us as friends when our flaws are obvious to them. We all need the **humility** that allows us to receive correction gratefully. We all need the **courage** to keep growing and being pressed into Christ's mold. This is why we are such a dependent people, and we know that God is greater than our hearts when our hearts condemn us.

- ***This does not mean that we are all closet racists.*** I know that kind of talk is one of the things that angers a lot of white people. And the fact that every perceived injustice seems immediately to call forth the charge of racism isn't helpful. Add to this that the media outlets in our country seem to love fomenting division, and it's a recipe for a toxic atmosphere, where any conversation that touches on the issues of race, social justice etc. automatically seems to result in conflict

- But when I say that we are all much more sinful than we know, it *does* mean that all of us have sinful hearts and sinful attitudes, and some of those may very well be centered around the issue of race

- So let me ask you... *Do you embrace those tendencies? Do you give in to them repeatedly? Do you love and cherish them?* Then maybe you have earned that label. But if you *fight it, resist it, hate it, repent of it, and long for the day when you are freed of it*, then you are no more a racist than the man who has an angry thought about his brother is a murderer, or then man who struggles with lust is an adulterer. You *know* that's where that tendency would lead if you let it, but by God's grace, you *fight it!*

- ***We are not defined by our worst temptations; we are defined by how we respond to them!***

- But perhaps you don't fight it. Perhaps, like so many of our sins, we cherish it. Then what? What if it's buried in a special place in the back of your closet, and you like knowing that it's there? Well, I fully recognize that as your pastor, I am taking the risk of angering you by poking and prodding around the dark closet of your life. Nevertheless, I am willing to take this risk, because I know:

1. I have no choice but to speak about the things we are seeing in our culture

- I don't answer first to you, but to God. *And I will not sacrifice my conscience on the altar of your comfort.*
- We must respond
 - If the Christian worldview is to be out there in the marketplace of ideas in our culture, then we must be the ones to speak it
 - Far too many Christian church have capitulated to the secular culture so much that they can no longer be considered "Christian" in any meaningful sense of the word. We must speak truth into our culture

2. It is difficult for us to see our own flaws and our own prejudices

- We all have blind spots in our lives—and a big part of my job is to shine the light of Scripture on you in such a way that you can see your flaws—the cockroaches living just below the skin—and we all have them

- I've spent a good part of the last 2 weeks trying to see my own flaws, and it's never comfortable for us

- But if we are to grow as Christians, or even as human beings, we have to shine the light of God's Word on these, and put the foot of faith on them, and hear the satisfying crunch of their destruction

- ***So, let us not begin with the assumption that our hearts are pure in these matters.***

Rather, let us assume that "I, too, have hidden faults." And in that light, we pray with the Psalmist, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*" (Ps. 139:23-24 ESV)

The Cultural Context that makes this sermon necessary:

A. The issue of racial tensions is nothing new, and it is probably not going away any time soon

- The first *real* struggle in the early church was not persecution, not by any stretch. Jews had known persecution long before the coming of Jesus. After the breakup of Alexander the Great's empire, Antiochus Epiphanes eventually came to have power over the land of Israel, and he made it a capital offense to own a Torah, or even to observe the Sabbath
- No, the first real struggle *in* the church, was a struggle arising as Christian Jews had to cope with the influx of Gentiles into the church
- This wasn't a struggle based on skin-tone—rather, it was based on differences in cultural and religious practices – See Acts 10, and Acts 15, and the entirety of Galatians

- Racial tension, in my opinion, has much more to do with cultural differences than it does with skin color
- In Scripture, the *Ethne*, the *nations* were not simply people of varying skin-tones, but people of different *cultures*: different religious practices, different ethics, different language, different foods, different worldviews etc.
- It is usually *these* differences that make us either uncomfortable with, or even downright hostile toward, another group of people

- Right now, the cultural context in our country is centering on the Black Lives Matter movement, and their calls for police reforms and social justice, among many other things
- So, let's go ahead and try to answer this question...

B. What are we to make of the Black Lives Matter movement?

J.D. Greear's statement response:

- Our SBC President, J.D. Greear, has been widely criticized for saying “Black Lives Matter.” Some of you have been very concerned about this
- First off, let's be fair: Greear himself has said, and others have agreed, that his saying, “Black Lives Matter” was only one moment from a longer statement that was cut and used by the media at large. Taken from its original context, it makes Greear sound like he is in full support of the BLM movement
- However, if you watch his entire statement, he makes it clear that he endorses the *truth*, that Black Lives Matter, *NOT* the *organization*, Black Lives Matter

- Why would he make this distinction?
- While I'm not entirely happy with the way Greear handled this, he did clearly recognize two things that we have to keep in mind:

1. The *phrase* “Black Lives Matter” is unequivocally true

- To deny this, is to deny some of the most foundational truths in Scripture
- All of us, without qualification, have to agree with the *truth* conveyed by the three simple words, *Black Lives Matter*, because every human being is made in the image of God, and every human being has inherent dignity and worth

- But Greear understood a second truth as well, one he could have expressed more clearly and more forcefully in my opinion, but nevertheless, that truth is:

2. The *organization* “Black Lives Matter” is unequivocally one that we cannot support

- BLM emerged in 2013, organized by three women: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, as a response to, among other things, the deaths of Treyvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner

- I have read their belief statement, found on their website¹, and I encourage you to do so as well. For time’s sake, I will not read all of it. I will simply say that there are some things in the statement we can and should affirm, but let me highlight for you those things in it that are inherently opposed to the Christian worldview:

- We are guided by the fact that all Black lives matter, **regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious beliefs or disbeliefs, immigration status, or location.**
- We **make space for transgender brothers and sisters to participate and lead.**
- We are self-reflexive and do the work required to **dismantle cisgender privilege** and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence.
- We build a space that affirms Black women and is free from sexism, misogyny, and environments in which men are centered.
- We practice empathy. We engage **comrades** with the intent to learn about and connect with their contexts.
- **We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure** requirement by supporting each other as extended families and “villages” that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable.
- **We foster a queer-affirming network.** When we gather, we do so with the intention of **freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking, or rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual (unless s/he or they disclose otherwise).**

- The BLM organization joined with other groups to form the Movement for Black Lives, which is an extension of the Black Lives Matter Network. Their statement, “A Vision for Black Lives”² goes much further than this one, and is certainly not an organization that merely seeks an end to police brutality. They have a vision for worldwide transformation that in every sense of the word a political, economic, moral, and societal *revolution*.

- This is a far cry from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960, where the leaders by and large looked to the authority of Scripture and operated out of a Christian worldview. These newer movement are often critical of the Civil Rights Movement precisely because they did not go far enough in dismantling the structures that lead to inequality, structures like capitalism, patriarchy, the current political system etc.

- Indeed, the Civil Rights Leaders of the 1960s looked to the American people, and to the American Government, and said, essentially, “You aren’t living up to the ideals espoused by the Founding Father of this country, nor to the ideals expressed in the Constitution.”

- These newer movement aren’t arguing that way. They call into question everything about this country’s founding, and many of them are calling for a complete dismantling of our system in favor of, in many cases, a Marxist vision of government

¹<https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>

²<https://neweconomy.net/resources/vision-black-lives-policy-demands-black-power-freedom-and-justice>

Conclusion:

- The *phrase* “Black Lives Matter” is undeniably true, and is something we should and must affirm lest we deny the Christian faith itself
- However, the *phrase* “Black Lives Matter” does not exist in a vacuum. It is inherently tied to an *organization*, and has now become a *political movement*
- Thus, **to use the phrase “Black Lives Matter” without qualification will essentially function as an endorsement of the *organization*, and the *political movement* it has spawned**

Our dilemma: We can’t *say* “Black Lives Matter” without being seen to endorse their entire agenda, but we want to affirm that Black Lives do indeed Matter, so what can we say?

Why “All Lives Matter” or “Blue Lives Matter” is not an appropriate response to someone who says, “Black Lives Matter”:

Truth can rarely be reduced to a slogan

- Adopting the use of these types of slogans will *always* lead to the assumption that you also adopt the ideology *behind* the slogan
- And each of these phrases has a *perceived* ideology behind it
- **BLM** – associated with the *organization*; often accompanied by the attitude that all cops are corrupt, and every use of force is illegitimate and rooted in racism. The *cops* and only the cops are the problem. Hence the calls for defunding the police
- **Blue Lives Matter** and/or **All Lives Matter** – These are both self-evidently true. However, both of these responses are taken by the BLM supporters to mean, “I don’t support your contentions that there are systemic problems in law enforcement, American society, or in people’s hearts. Everybody matters! For you to say BLM is to suggest that no one else does. *I stand with the police, and law enforcement officers; if you don’t want trouble with the law, don’t break the law and everything will be just fine.*” Meanwhile, those in the AA community shake their heads in disbelief that anyone could be that naïve, that it really is that simple.

- Both of these responses are seen to be dismissive of the concerns that the BLM movement has articulated
- Whether *you* mean that or not, that is the way these responses are taken, and they are indeed a poor response to offer, and here’s why:
- To say that Blue Lives Matter/ALM is self-evidently true, but it also says that you don’t recognize or acknowledge the mistreatment that African Americans have suffered in this country, even in the recent past
- I know that some of you have a hard time believing that. Let me try to change the context for you
- Suppose you lived in Pre-WW2 Germany, with the rise of Anti-Semitism, the destruction of Jewish businesses, their harassment, the de-humanization of Jews, and someone said to you one day, you know, “Jewish Live Matter.” That would be a call to re-affirm the basic humanity and dignity of Jewish people in a culture that deemed them as less than human beings, and would soon exterminate 6 million of them.

- There is absolutely nothing wrong with recognizing that sometimes there is systemic or generational mistreatment of a particular people—whether African Americans, Jews through the centuries, the Uyghur people in China etc. To deny that some people have been singled out by various types of prejudice is simply not to be a thinking person

- Realize, that in my lifetime, there was a time in this country that a Black man was taking his life into his own hands if he spoke to a white woman in the south. Realize that all it took for an AA man to lose his life was for a white woman to accuse him of making advances toward her. Emmett Till was murdered for that very thing on August 28, 1955, and some of you were alive then. Henry Marrow was murdered in the middle of the street in Oxford, NC in 1970 for supposedly making a pass at a young white woman. The men who murdered these two men were all acquitted by all-white juries. One of the store owners later said of Marrow, “That N..... committed suicide by coming into my store and...[doing what he did].”³

- Thank God, we aren't there anymore in this country, but to believe that everything is fine right now in terms of racial equality in this country is as wrong as those who believe that *everything* is wrong, the entire system is broken, and needs to be torn down entirely. Both of those things are patently false

- And when you respond to an AA person who says BLM with a smug, and self-righteous *All Lives Matter*, you are completely ignore that racial history in this country. It is to ignore what Black people have felt for years, that they don't count in our opinion. You may deny this, you may disagree with it, but *this is what they feel*. It would be like responding to that Jew in 1938 Germany by saying, “All Lives Matter” as their stores were being burned, and their humanity questioned at every turn.

- As Christians, we have to be much more careful and precise in our language than merely to adopt a slogan, because we recognize that the slogan may take on more meaning than the words themselves imply

- Linguists call this *semantic creep*

- So, what do we say? How can we affirm both that BLM, Blue Lives Matter, and indeed, that All Lives Matter?

- Over all of these three-word phrases we must write another one, “Jesus Is Lord.” I'm not saying we simply inject our own three-word phrases without other comment. We aren't waging a *slogan war*. For many in the BLM movement this is a battle of worldviews, and we must work from within the Christian worldview as we respond to the cultural chaos around us

The Christian worldview has within it all the resources necessary to achieve racial equality and harmony even in this fallen world. The fundamental doctrines of Scripture provide us with the critical truths that help us recognize and overcome our own flaws, while also recognizing that God has also called others into his kingdom who are radically different from us culturally. Through the gospel it empowers us to live together in one body, without losing our distinctiveness, so that the world can look and see the wisdom and power of God to overcome man-made barriers to fellowship and unity.

³Timothy B. Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till* (NY, Simon & Schuster, 2017)

- We don't have to look to Critical Race Theory
- We don't have to look to Marxism
- We don't have to look to Sociology, Psychology, Materialistic naturalism, science, or any other worldly philosophy

- What does the Christian worldview teach us about the value of Black Lives, the value of Blue Lives, the value of All Lives?

- We could go to the doctrine of creation, and affirm the imago Dei in every person, and although that one is foundational, it is almost too easy for us today. We could all affirm that every human being is made in the image of God and still feel very comfortable with churches that look little different than those in the segregated south

- But there are other biblical truths that need to be acknowledged, and some of those truths might make us a bit more uncomfortable

Textual Exposition:

Eph 2 gives us a *model of unity in God's church of people from every race, tribe, tongue*

I. God has brought *both* Jews and Gentiles together in one body, the church, through Christ – 14-18

A. God did not *add* Gentiles to the Jewish people, but created a new union of the two groups in Christ – 14

- Language of one group from two

- Language of dividing wall being torn down (signifying union)

B. Through Christ's work, God removes the barriers between peoples so that one new body may result – 15

- The language of *one new man* is critically important for our relationships in the body of Christ

- The second part of the greatest commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself," so when God describes the union of all peoples, all ethnic groups, in the church as making *one man*, there is a great clue as to how we are to treat one-another in the body

- We are to treat every believer in the body as though he/she is *me* – treat them like I would want to be treated

C. Through Christ, God removes the *enmity* between people – 16

- This new man, this union, is accomplished by the cross of Christ

- How can the cross do this?

- Through our *union with Christ*, which *most fundamentally constitutes our new identity*

D. This new body, the church, is created by the indwelling of God's Spirit – 18

- Notice this Trinitarian language here

- Because of our union with Christ, we have...

- **Common paternity** in God's Kingdom (*to the Father*) – all God's children equally
- **Common pathway** to membership (*through him*) – all come through Christ
- **Common privileges** for God's people – all have the Spirit

II. The new Jewish/Gentile union in Christ has massive implications for our lives, and for what the church is to be and do – 19-22

A. There is no Jewish superiority over Gentile believers – 19

B. There is, however, a permanent Jewish foundation to the church, but that foundation is *Christ*, not the Jewish nation – 20

- At least *one* of the things this means is that we do not have to become *Jewish* in order to become *Christians*, and that Jewish cultural practices (even those tied to their worship of Yahweh) are not ipso facto mandatory for us as believers

- Some cultural practices, to be sure, may be inherently ungodly—but that is just as true for us as it is for other culture. All cultures are now evaluated in light of the gospel

C. It is our union with Christ, not genetics, that defines who we are as the people of God – 21-22

- The Cross as the triumph of *justice* and *love* that not only brings salvation to all who believe, but also creates *one new humanity* defined not by race, tribe, or tongue (although those distinctions are not lost), but by their common union with Christ

- This is the only avenue by which true racial harmony can be achieved, and it is *this truth*, not Marxism, not Critical Race Theory, not worldly models of community, that allows for true equality and true justice

- But the world rejects it because the world hates Christ

- Worldly philosophies like Marxism and CRT are rooted in hatred ultimately. Don't tell me that Marxists love the poor. How many have they murdered in the last century!? They don't love the poor so much as they hate the rich, and those two things are not the same

Goals/Conclusion:

- This passage gives us part of the biblical framework for our thinking

- Our thinking about personal identity, human dignity and value, relationships in a multi-cultural setting—all of these things should be shaped and molded based on what Scripture is teaching us here

- So what is my hope for us moving forward?

A. Greater humility before God and others

- Search me and try me O' Lord

- Greater introspection of underlying attitudes and prejudices

- Peacemaking mentality

- Willingness to critique our own culture rather than view it as inherently superior to others. Indeed, to judge all cultures by the truth of Scripture. Mindless multi-culturalism is as harmful as supercilious snobbish self-superiority (as though our culture has it all together)

1. Understanding our own depravity

2. Understanding our blindness to our own flaws and prejudices

^{NAU} 1 Cor. 4:3-4 ³ But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. ⁴ For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

B. Greater compassion for the plight of others

- Read the story of Emmett Till for example

- Get to know someone who isn't like you, doesn't think like you, and doesn't see things the same way you do
- Go read Shai Linn's response to the death of George Floyd

C. Greater grace in our dealings with others

- Remember that when you engage someone saying "Black Lives Matter" you may be dealing with someone who has no idea what the *organization* stands for and supports.

D. Greater dependence on Scripture as a guide to our inter-cultural relationships

- Doctrine is crucially important for how we think and address the issues of race, personal identity, justice
 - Grounded in the Bible's worldview and the fundamental truths of Scripture
1. The Bible's teaching that every human being is made in the image of God gives equal value to people of every race at every stage of development (from conception on)
 2. The Bible doctrine of Christ's atoning death gives equal access to God to people of every race
 3. The Bible's teaching of our union with Christ gives equal standing to people of every race without destroying personal identity
 - This is not to dismiss the personal uniqueness that each of us has, but it does mean that my *fundamental* identity is in Christ – my righteousness, my life – Gal 3 – neither Jew nor Greek
 - This means that ethnic identity, national identity, tribal identity, gender identity, socio-economic identity, are all subservient to my identity as one who is united to Jesus Christ by faith
 4. The Bible's teaching on the unity of the church, the body of Christ, gives equal importance to all members of the church
 - The metaphor of the body is used repeatedly by Paul to describe the reality of church-life
 - Many parts, one head, equal value and worth in terms of necessity for the body to function as it should

E. Greater hope and longing for the Kingdom of God

- We must not be a despairing, angry, constantly frustrated people, but a hopeful people because our hope is in a risen Lord
 - What will this look like?
1. The intentional pursuit of greater diversity in our own church body
 - Years ago, one of the African American men who attended Calvary was talking with a friend about the church. His friend asked, "Isn't that that "white" church over on the west end? To which he replied, "no, it's red brick."
 - Underlying this response was the assumption by the one man that people generally worshipped with people their own color and culture. This is usually the case. We must be the ones to try to intentionally change this
 - We should be uncomfortable with our lack of diversity—but are we?

2. A greater passion and pursuit of “boots on the ground” missions, so that we may help fulfill the Great Commission, reaching others from every tribe, nation, and tongue, and giving us firsthand experience with other cultures
3. The willingness to sacrifice our comfort with our own culture

Close:

- John the Baptist was asked by various people what repentance looked like *for them*... What would it look like for each of us?

Those **officers of the State**, who wield great power on behalf of the State and its citizens, have a moral obligation to exercise that power with humility, often with great restraint, and with an overwhelming sense of responsibility to see that justice, not vengeance, is served. They have to realize that theirs is a borrowed authority. It is not vested in them personally. When the law is broken, they are representatives of the state, not the offended party.

Citizens who lives under the authority of the State have a responsibility to obey the laws of the State, and to submit to the lawful authority of the State. We also have a responsibility to recognize and admit that there are some people of every race who are simply evil, and who would not hesitate to take an officer’s life. Just as we try to put ourselves in the shoes of our African American brothers/sisters, so also, we need to do so with our LEOs. I’ll never really *know* what it feels like to be a black man in this country. Nor will I ever know what it’s like to be a police officer, wondering whether the guy I just pulled over is just a speeder, or someone who is a violent criminal, who has nothing to lose by trying to take my life. But what I *can* try to do is consider all these men face, the black man and the LEO, and try to imagine myself in their situation...not merely out of curiosity, but out of respect and out of compassion for them and their point of view.

I won’t presume to speak for the African American community. There are many AA brothers in Christ who can do that much better than me. But I will simply offer a word of caution to those who are tempted to endorse the BLM movement because you want to support racial equality in America. America’s founding principles still stand as a beacon for us. There are those who would gladly tear down everything this nation was built upon because of the injustices that have been done over the centuries. The statements of the BLM movement, and particularly that of the Movement for Black Lives unquestionably fall under that category. And while there is no doubt that this country, our founding father, and the system of government they conceived have perpetrated many injustices, they did not do so because their ideals were inherently unjust, but because they themselves did not live up to those ideals that they espoused.

The calls for revolution, for defunding the police, and even for anarchy by some, are simply a pathway to tyranny. These agendas, should they be successful, would leave a vacuum of power which would immediately be seized by force, and leave us with a totalitarian government intent on making sure that we all toe the line. If you don’t believe that, simply take a look at the so-called C.H.A.Z. (Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone) and what happens when the mob seizes control.