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SPEAKER

Brian Frost

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Did God Really Say?

PART

3

TITLE

Precious In His Sight

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:24-27; Ephesians 2:13-22



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Well, Providence family, it's good to see you and I hope that you've had a really good week. If you're a guest here with us, thanks for being our guest. Thanks for joining us today. If you're over in Prisms, just want to say thank you for serving your church family this morning. We are grateful. And if you're at home, I know it's a pretty nasty morning outside, well done for making it through all that, but if you happen to be at home, we are also glad that you've joined us. If you have in hand a Bible, if you want to turn with me to, as I said last week, and same as this, the very first page of the Bible, okay. The very first page, we're going to start there. We're going to work through the story of the Bible. We're in a series that's called, Did God Really Say?

What we're looking at is God's plans for life to flourish. We're looking at the areas of confusion that we see around the world, in particular in areas such as authority, the sanctity of life, race, gender, sexuality, personal responsibility, justice and salvation, and each case we're going to be looking at God's instructions for restoration so that we can flourish again.

I know these sermons, there's a lot of words in them, and so I know I'm saying a lot to help you, either during the sermon or after. If you want to go to pray.org/say, you can find all the sermons there, lots of things outside of these as well that might help you to grasp just a little bit more about things that we are actually saying and looking at. And if you want to follow along, even as I'm working through it this morning, I invite you to go there and you can find a message there, it's called Precious In His Sight.

So let me pray. Father in heaven, we bow before you and we believe that you are our maker, that you are the holy one and you are the only one. You are the creator of the ends of the earth, the one who sustains all things. And one day we'll stand before you, and your voice will be the only voice that matters. And so would you please give us courage as we think about these things? Would you give us humility in our hearts? Would you help us to love what you love? Would you help us to have righteous anger towards the things in which you have righteous anger? And would you give us wisdom to know the difference? We ask that you would speak through weakness and give us grace to learn and to apply with courage the things that you say. We pray all of this in Christ's name, amen.

So we all have a story. And my story, a lot of my early childhood was in Southern California. Okay? A lot of you didn't grow up there, but I did. And I grew up in a home unlike a lot of people I suppose, to where I was really blessed by two parents who still love me and love each other, who are still here on the earth, who modeled love for all people and missionary zeal for all people. And so I had the opportunity from a very young age to see lots of different places around the world, lots of different ethnicities, peoples and lots of peoples in our home, and that was just part of my story.

At an early age, my earliest memories when it comes to childhood friends, those memories include Sean Taylor. Sean was, when I was about this tall, he was my best friend. Okay? He was funny, he was athletic, he was smart, and his skin was black. Neither of us were all that aware of the racial hostility that surrounded our friendship. We just were really good friends. We enjoyed each other and that was part of life. My first

memory at least that I can, well, that's what a memory is, my first memory of racial hostility, where I saw something, heard something and I thought, okay, I still remember where I was at. I asked about a fight. There were two kids who got in a fight during recess and they both got sent home. And I was wondering why they fought. And the answer that came back to me was our people and their people don't get along. It was the very first time that I heard humanity grouped into our people and their people.

Now, I'm 49 years old. I know I don't look it, but I am. And over those 49 years, three things have really shaped a lot. A lot of awareness have come. One is simple education, just reading and studying, and what I've found as I've become more aware of the historical racial atrocities that happen near and far. That world travel opened up my eyes and gave me an awareness that in every place I've ever been, over 50 countries, six continents, what I've found is that every single people group have a racial rival, and there's hostilities that exist between ethnicities in every space on the globe. Life experience also opened up my eyes and gave me the awareness that racial pain is very deep, that peace is very fragile, and that I contribute either to the peace or to the pain. We all do.

So whether your story this morning is populated by racial experiences that leave you indifferent, or maybe bruised, or bitter, anger, angry or maybe even hateful, let me encourage you to remember this, and that is to remember that while our lived experience is real, it's personal, it's important, it's formative to our understanding of life and to what we experience on the earth, it does not constitute final authority of how we are to think or respond to the things that we have experienced.

We live in God's world and he has spoken into his world. He is the authority. And so today what I want to do is to trace once again the story of the Bible. I hope as a church family, when we talk and we say the words, the story of the Bible, that you get excited about what you get to hear again as opposed to bored. It is the most riveting story in the history of the world, and it's the story in which all of our lives are written. In the story, what we're going to look at here, is we're going to look at parts of the story that are related to race, to ethnicity, skin color, so that we can see God's plan, how things fell apart, how they broke, and ultimately how to flourish again.

So the story of the Bible begins early. You know that and the story of the Bible doesn't begin with us. We're all written into the story, but it doesn't begin with us. It begins with God, which is one of the very first sentence in your Bible, it says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." It begins with him. He was there when the beginning began. He is the eternal one, the almighty one, the holy one, and he is the only one. S.M. Lockridge in his famous sermon, *That's My King*, he says, "He is the king of righteousness. He's the king of the ages. He is the king of heaven. He is the king of glory and he is the king of kings."

He goes on and he says, "He is the centerpiece of all civilization. He's the loftiest idea in all literature. He's the highest personality in all philosophy. He's the fundamental doctrine in all true theology. He's the cardinal necessity of all spiritual religion." And in Genesis 1:1, we're told that he is the creator of all things, and

therefore has creator rights over all things. And therefore answers to life that do not begin with God are distorted at best. If you're looking for answers about raising children, about your business, about finance, about friendship, about relationship, about origin, your life purpose, your destiny, what to do with guilt or sin or shame, if those answers don't begin with the person of God, the words of God and the activity of God, they're distorted at best.

Life begins with God and what we're told is that by his own initiative, God created a world that was fit for human habitation. In verse 26 and 27 of chapter one, we read that God said, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God, he created him, male and female, he created them." And the Bible tells us initially there was peace, perfect peace, no strife, no futile energy, energy, and no dilution to love or worship or hope or peace or joy. There was perfection.

The Bible tells us that this peace was quickly destroyed in the third chapter of the Bible. We looked at this two weeks ago when Satan, after failing to make an attempt to usurp the throne of heaven, his name was Lucifer, he was an archangel, and he said, "That's the throne I want." And that was futile. He was thrown out of heaven and he comes into this world that God almighty created. And he came with intentions to dishonor God and to destroy people who were created in the image of God.

The first thing he said was, "Did God really say?" Questioning his goodness, his trustworthiness, his justice. And the man and woman in chapter three verse six, they sin against God. And suddenly, this avalanche of brokenness sweeps over all of God's creation. They immediately died spiritually. They felt guilt for the first time. They felt insecure around each other. They felt vulnerable. They felt shameful. They felt naked. They began hiding [inaudible 00:11:38] one another. They started to experience strife. Their hearts that once said, "My life for your good," were now corrupted to begin to think, your life for my good. They began vying for prominence in the home and in the world and they began to say, "I'm going to use my strengths to exploit the other person's weakness." The sin nature of Adam and Eve would be passed on to every subsequent generation, guaranteeing only more sin to come.

And it was into this pain and brokenness that God promised a rescuer. In chapter three, verse 15 we're told of a special son that would be born, that this son would come to the earth, that this son his heel would be struck by Satan. And yet the final result of his work would be that he would crush the head of Satan himself. He would crush the head of evil. He would restore us back into a relationship with God that we would be able to flourish again. The rest of the Bible, until we get to Jesus Christ, is pointing to the one who's coming, tracing from generation to generation, this promised seed who would come and one day would be born of woman, this special son.

There's different accounts that are very, very important to what we understand and experience about skin

color, and ethnicity, and languages, and nationalities, and diversity, that are placed in and around this succession of this promise of the seed that would come to the earth. And one of those very important stories is in Genesis chapter nine. There we are told that humanity had a second rebellion against God, where they joined together under one language to proudly assert their dominion over the earth apart from God. And when God saw the pride within the human heart, he caused the single human language to be divided into many. As those languages divided, they began grouping and this became the formation of ethnic groups.

Well, the Bible continues to trace this special son, and as it does, we learn that the special Son would be a blessing, would bring blessing to all of these different ethnic groups. First, he comes to Abraham. And he looks at this man who's living in the Iraq, Abraham, and he says, "I'm going to bless you." And part of the blessing to him was that in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. He has a son, his name is Isaac. Eventually God comes to Isaac. What does he say? "In your offspring, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." He has two sons and God comes to one of the two sons named Jacob, and what does he say to him? "In your offspring, shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

God's desire was clear. We see it in so many passages throughout the Old Testament, verses that look and echo just like Isaiah 49:6, where God says, "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." This has always been his intention. And those individuals within the Old Testament who were more hopeful in the promised son that was coming, even more hopeful than their own heritage, their skin color or their ethnicity, began to sing songs like Psalm 86, "All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you."

And then at the right time, God sent the special son, his son Jesus Christ. And he lived a life of obedience. He displayed in his own personal life the perfection that was lost from humanity when we sinned. And yet his words in his life began to ignite fires, scorching every form of hatred and ideology that was opposed to his will, including racism. It didn't take him very long either. You get to Luke chapter four, and there in Luke chapter four he comes home. He was the son of Nazareth. He came home after he began his ministry. And he stands up and he reads a very important scripture about how the Holy Spirit has rested upon me and called me to be a light to the world, to bring restoration to all people, to bring justice to the oppressed, to preach good news to the poor and all the people of the town.

They said, "This is our boy, this is our son." And then he says, "Let me tell you something about my kingdom. Let me tell you the kind of people who are heroic in my kingdom." He talks about two different people who both exercise faith in God's promise. And he says, "These are the heroes, and both of them are gentiles." And his own hometown tried to throw him off a cliff because of hatred.

Six chapters later, we come to a story we love to teach our kids, the good Samaritan. There's a Jewish lawyer. He comes up to Jesus and he says, "Let me ask you something. What do you have to do to earn heaven?" And Jesus says, "Well, you're a lawyer. Why don't you tell me what the law says?" He says, "Well, we're supposed

to love God and we're supposed to love our neighbor as ourself." He goes, "That's right. Go and do it." And he says, "And desiring to justify himself," in other words, desiring to justify his own prejudices, his own standards, his own ideas about who is worthy of his own love, he says, "let me ask you, who's my neighbor, who qualifies?"

And Jesus does something that's pretty remarkable. He tells a story. It wasn't a story about individual people, it was a story that was representative of all people. It's called a parable. In the parable, he talks about a guy who's going from one city to another. He gets beat up and he's left for dead. On the basis of the question, who is my neighbor, he starts there. We're supposed to ask, "Hmm, is this guy almost dead, is he like worthy of my attention?"

And so what does Jesus do? He keeps telling a story and he intentionally selects two Jewish heroes, a Levite and a priest, two Israeli superstars. He brings them into the story and he says, "They came and they passed by and they did nothing to help the man." They just walked by and all of a sudden, it's time for a hero and he calls him a Samaritan. A Samaritan was the ethnic rival of the Jewish people. They hated each other. They wouldn't worship together, they wouldn't sing together, they wouldn't live together. They mistreated each other. They had historical hostility for ages and ages and ages that just continued to bubble up. And Jesus says, "Let me tell you, there was a man who was a Samaritan who came up and he helped him."

And then Jesus turns the question on the lawyer and he says, "Now let me ask you a question, which of the three was a neighbor?" He said, "Well, I guess the guy who helped." And he says, "Then why don't you go and be a neighbor also?" Now, what is Jesus doing in this story? The story begins. And the question is, "Who is my neighbor?" It ends by asking the question, "Am I a neighbor?" The story begins, and we're supposed to ask the question, "Man, is this guy who's left for dead? Is he worthy of my care, effort, money, attention, love?" And the story ends with us asking not about the quality of the man lying on the ground, but the quality of men walking by. And the people hated it. We teach it to our kids, but the original audience didn't like it, because it exposed something within the heart, that anger was excited inside and against him eventually, where he would take our own place, the penalty of our own sin by dying on a cross.

And after three days, he rose from the dead and you say, "Well, what effect did his resurrection have on humanity?" And this is where Ephesians 2 comes in. Ephesians 2 starting at verse 13, this is what he says. "But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself as 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." The two would be Jews and Gentiles.

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 are near. For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit.”

You see those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ are forgiven of their sin. They’re given his spirit. They’re empowered to love, enabled to flourish again. And this message of the gospel of Jesus dying on a cross for our sin and rising from the dead, when it was first preached in Acts chapter two, the initial recipients of the message were living in modern day Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, and Libya. And for this reason, one day Jesus is going to regather his people, not regather, he’s going to gather his people in heaven.

And you say, “What is this people going to look like?” You get to the end of the story of the Bible. We’re told in Revelation seven after this, “I looked and behold a great multitude that no one can number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, crying out with a loud voice. ‘Salvation belongs to a God who sits on the throne and to the lamb.’”

On the basis of this story that begins with God’s created intentions, that ends with us unified and focused on Jesus, and Jesus in the middle that makes it all possible, I want to show you a few big rocks, truth principles that come out of this story related to race. The first is that God created us in his image and wrapped us in skin. I showed you this last week, but in the Hebrew language, breaks in repetition signal meaning. In other words, when there’s a sequence that happens and happens and happens and happens and then it stops happening and something new happens, it signals significance. We’re supposed to pause and go, okay, this is different. So when God is creating the world, what we find in verse 12, he gets to the plant life, and you notice that in each one of these he says he, “brought forth the vegetations according to their own kinds ... fruit according to their own kinds.”

You get to verse 21 and he wants to talk about the birds and the fish and he talks about sea creatures and he says, “everything that’s in the water swarming according to their kinds, and every wing bird according to its kind.” Then you get to verse 25 and the same thing happens with the beast of the field. They’re all created according to their kinds, the livestock, all according to their kinds, everything that creeps in the ground according to its kind. And then you get to verse 26 and, “God says, ‘Let us make man in our image after our likeness,’” according to our kind, totally unique and different.

That means you look at a puppy, you learn something about a dog. You look at a human, you learn something about God. We’re uniquely relational, moral, spiritual, intellectual and value, because God in whose image we are made is supremely relational, moral, spiritual, intellectual and valuable. And God almighty knits ev-

ery single one of us together in the womb and part of the knitting process is wrapping us with a particular color of skin for his pleasure and his glory and honor.

You notice that there's no reference in Genesis to Adam's skin color, because the details that are given about Adam are only those that fit his role in representing all of humanity. But Adam had skin, so did Eve and that skin had color. And it was God Almighty who did all that. It was Jesus' preference. In fact, when you get to the book of Colossians, 1:16, we're told why Jesus created all things the way that he did. He says they were made through him and for him. Your skin looks the way it does for him. It was his prerogative. For him means that Jesus is emotionally invested in what he created for himself, and this should affect how we view ourselves and others.

The second big rock that we find in this story is that sin against God leads us to mistreat people made in his image. And this shouldn't surprise us. If we would look at God and mistreat him, we would surely have the capacity to look at people who are made in his image and mistreat them. Sin always hurts people. This is why in Titus 3:3 we're told about, for those of us who are in Christ, he says, let me tell you what I remember about your life. God says, "We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray slaves to various passions and pleasures." This sentence always kills me, "passing our days in malice." That means killing time by hurting people. We're, "hated by others and hating one another."

When our heart gets so twisted up in sin, even skin can incite hatred. You see, beneath the sin of racism is the distorted belief that skin color is the primary determinant of identity and the primary determinant that differentiates worth, such as when slaves were counted as three fifths of a man. When you look at this picture, let me ask you a question, how many races do you see? If you're looking at it [inaudible 00:27:07] go, "Well, that one kind of looks like that one." It's 15 pictures. Let me just suggest that any answer that's other than one is wrong.

God created one race, the human race. And although our skin color that was given to us for his pleasure and glory will impact our experience in life, because it is a fallen world, let me suggest to you, the Bible tells us that there's nothing fundamentally different among us. In other words, beneath our skin, everyone has a heart, everyone has a mind, everyone has a soul. Everyone has hopes and dreams and hopes and dreams for their children. Everyone has a sin problem. They have a guilt problem and they have a need for a savior. And every one of us is an image bear of God, and therefore, to show partiality on the basis of skin, to deny dignity on the basis of skin, to hate on the basis of skin, or to show prejudice predicated upon lies on the basis of skin, is a sin. And because all of us are fallen, none of us are exempt from racism's effects nor immune from being its source.

The third truth I want you to see is that Jesus broke the wall separating us from God and each other. I know it's hard for some of us to imagine, but just imagine a man choosing your living room as the place where he

comes to do all of his sin. When he wants to lie to his wife, he brings her over to your living room and lies to her. When he wants to commit adultery, he does so in your living room. When he wants to mistreat his children, he does so in your living room. You say, "Well, this is ridiculous." I realize it's a little ridiculous until you get to the point. And that is we all do all of our sin in God's living room. This is his world. And so if you don't feel what Ephesians 2 suggests is this wall of hostility, God did feel it. He saw it and he sent his son, the Christ, over the wall in order to break it down.

What did he do when he got here? Ephesians 2:17 we read, "He preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near." If you don't feel how miraculous it is that Jesus would come and preach peace, slap person next to you and see if they preach peace. The one who was sinned against came and preached peace, not only to people who are far near. What does that mean? It means to religious and irreligious alike. And the reason is this, apart from saving faith in Jesus Christ, he who dies in a brothel is no worse off than he who dies in a church.

He didn't just preach peace, he died for it. "He broke down in his flesh, the dividing wall of hostility ... that he might create in himself, one new man in place of the two, one new people 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." He says that by his death on the cross, he broke the wall that separated us from God, because he absorbed God the father's wrath that was directed to us when he died for us. But not only did he do that, he also broke down the wall dividing us from each other, by calling all of us to come and take our place in worshiping him together. Christ is emotionally invested in breaking down walls of hostility and that should affect how we think and how we live.

Fourth, Jesus formed a diverse family for his glory. Years ago when this room was being constructed, I remember seeing a huge crane when they were picking up pieces and bringing over these big steel beams and different kinds of pieces. And right before that, in fact, when I was sitting right out here in my truck, it was amazing. I'm looking, and prior to assembling it, they had put all the pieces in like kinds. They were all separated. They had the real big long pieces over on one side. In the middle they had the parts would have some curves. And they had some short pieces over here and they were all grouped together in their own kinds. And then what happened was they all got assembled together. And what you find in that illustration is this, difference adds strength.

And so when Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus began trusting Jesus Christ, their ethnic tensions historically led some to ask the question, "Are two churches needed in Ephesus instead of one, to keep us apart?" And his response was, "You are no longer strangers from each other. You're members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord."

In other words, when you hear the gospel, which is the foundation of the apostles and prophets, it's what they said, it's what they wrote, it's what they preached. And that sermon, that gospel is that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, that when we build our life upon Jesus Christ, it's like building on a rock instead of the sand. And whoever would put their faith and life on this cornerstone, he says that we are no longer strangers. We may look different, we may have different backgrounds, but we're no longer strangers. We're now members of the household. We are joined together. All those pieces that were separated by like kind were brought together for strength. And what is the intention? It's that we would become a holy temple, that people who would observe our life and all of our differences, coming together in unity around Jesus Christ, they would make the assumption and the belief there must be something about Jesus. Jesus' emotional investment in a diverse church should affect and shape how we treat one another.

And finally, Jesus promised a heaven that will be diverse and unified. Whatever you imagine when you think about heaven, it gives fuel for the way that you treat people on the earth. What we find in the Bible is in addition to the glory of Jesus and the restoration of all things, we're told in Revelation that one of the things that it includes is a multitude that no one can number, from every nation, tribe and people all singing together, salvation belongs to our God. In other words, every time you find within the scripture something about heaven, you find it's beautifully diverse, perfectly unified, and radically focused on Jesus Christ. So what do we do with this? How do we apply this? A number of things.

First, let's yield the God's word as our authority. I know that we have different experiences. And I know some people's experiences is significantly more difficult and more painful than my own. But whatever our experiences are, no matter how real they are or informative they are, they do not constitute final authority of how we're supposed to think or respond. This is God's world. He has spoken and the sum of his words are truth. And I recognize that throughout this series, we're only three weeks in, and I know that there are people who are already a little uptight with things that I've said. And there's other people within our church family, because we have family and friends who disagree with us, and we live in a culture that disagrees with what I'm saying right now, and last week and certainly in the next however many weeks we have left, is that some of you're even wondering about should I be publicly associated with that kind of congregation when you have friends and other family members who are divergent in their thoughts from these thoughts.

And let me just remind you of something. We all have friends, we all have families. I know some of this is difficult to many of us, but the day is coming when we are going to stand before one man's throne. And Romans chapter two tells us, on that day every mouth will be silenced except his and he's already spoken to us. And our experience in that day before his throne will be predicated on how we respond to these words that he has given us already. And so let me urge you to yield to this book.

Second, let's not close our eyes to the ugliness of racism. At pray.org/say you'll find an article there. It's called Critical Race Theory and the gospel. CRT was initially developed in the field of law to account for lingering

injustices that people could see. In that article, I try to explain what it is, show how it's compatible with what I'm saying, how it's not compatible with the Bible, and then how to respond. And that while CRT may sensitize us to real injustices in the world and potentially highlight some of our own errors, it's concerning that it presents a worldview that can be mistaken as a gospel in and of itself. That the removal so of social structures is the chief hope of man. But let me tell you something, even the parts that I would disagree with, I need to say this, any degree of disagreement with any ideology about life or race shouldn't blind us to the reality of racism.

The Armenian Genocide happened. The killing of the Kurds was real. Slavery was real. Pastors and Christian churches in America giving theological legitimacy to involuntary race-based chattel slavery, in spite of God's clear condemnation in the Bible is real. The slave Bible, which removed portions that inspired the hope of liberation, such as the beginning chapters of Exodus was really published. Discrimination that's driven by partiality, hatred, and deceit happens today. I'm not sovereign and therefore I don't know how pervasive racially unjust social structures are today, but I believe they exist. I don't believe they always disfavor the same group, but they exist. They're not always seen in one country. They're all around the world and they exist. And they're not always motivated by active hatred, but they exist. We don't have to accept every philosophy. We don't have to feel guilty for sins we didn't commit to still see and abhor racism. And so if we're following Jesus who came to free the oppressed, we'll spend less time dismissing the possibility of such things, and more time trying to help people.

Third, let me encourage us to repent of our sin. I know that accusations of racism are so common today, and oftentimes so baseless today, that they're easy to ignore. That said, don't ignore God. If he highlights sin in your life against the backdrop of the mirror of God's word, respond quickly by confessing your sin to him and turning. Be sensitive and responsive to him. It was these very passages that I've read as well as others, such as in John four that led me to repent at one point in my life of indifference. I've already told you some of my story.

I just did not have these explosive racial stories in my life. As a result of that, when I was first invited, "Hey, would you participate in a racial reconciliation?" I just thought, "I don't have a problem." With who? And God really confronted me on the basis of this, on the basis of how Jesus is emotionally invested on all the things that we have said. What I saw was this, is that indifference is never an appropriate response. And so for me, what it meant was that my turning, it meant that I was going to commit for praying for racial peace. I was going to study examples of mistreatment. I was going to read other authors to learn. I was going to commit to talk about the solution whenever I vented about racial problems in the world. And I was going to defend people by correcting people when they voiced racism in front of me. If God shows you something, respond. Fourth, let's speak to truth, to a hurting world. When injustice enters the windows of our eyes and bounces off the law within our heart, our mouth is supposed to say that's wrong. We're supposed to say more. The Bible says, let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as good for building up as fits the

occasion that it may give grace those who hear. In other words, silencing corrupt words is not the full extent of our calling. We're also supposed to use words in order to fill the space with grace and truth.

We do not have to echo broken cultural narratives to be empathetic with culture. We can speak about God's design, the power of love, the brokenness of oppression and the gospel. Speak the gospel, for its cracks appear on structures that rest on the fault lines of our understanding and our relationship with God. We need to remember that addressing symptoms without fixing the source only leads to more pain. We should pursue God's will on earth as it is in heaven. But man's greatest problem is guilt before God, and therefore the words that must extend from our mouth the most is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Fifth, let's imagine the glory of heaven and be its witness. The Bible's descriptions of a peaceful and diverse heaven should have its effect on our life in a number of ways. It should make us thankful for though we are undeserving, we'll be there. It should also make us humble. You see, this is really important. Only pride would read every tribe, every tongue, every language, every nation and think, oh, goody, goody, all those other people are going to join us. It would be wiser to imagine that we'll be joining them.

The gospel was in the Middle East, Africa and Asia by Acts chapter eight. America is a toddler in comparison to the history of the world. There are more believers today in Africa and China than in America. And so to read these passages and think that God is going to make American Christians the greeting team, passing out the Baptist hymnal and passing out the lyrics to all of our favorite Chris Tomlin, so that the rest of the world can join us in the worship is ludicrous and arrogant.

We will be as American Christians, the minority in heaven, and we will be okay with it. And it also creates hope, hope that we would demonstrate with our own lives, a love and appreciation for what we will enjoy and appreciate forever in heaven. When we demonstrate love across all these lines, it preaches a louder sermon. We do this not by laying down our culture or our nationality, but by bringing them under the rule of Christ and uniting together under new identity as children of God.

And last, let me urge you to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, because if you do not, heaven will not be your home. The Bible says we have a sin problem that Jesus alone can solve and he did, but we have to put our faith and trust in him, by believing in his death and resurrection, his life. We have to confess our sin to him. The Bible says He will forgive you today. He will bring you into his family. The question is, Have you trusted him? Will you trust him?

So let me pray. Father in heaven, we bow before you and thank you for sending us Jesus. Jesus, thank you for being willing to come. And ultimately we know that we're going to stand before you forever and ever. We're going to sing about your worth. There's no one like you. The parts that have been confusing today, would you clarify? The parts that have been clear, would you give us the courage to apply? And we ask Father, that you

would move in our own hearts, Lord, to see and to understand, to love and to respond in ways that would be honoring to you. Help us at Providence, and the rest of the churches in our city and the world, to demonstrate and to love what we will enjoy forever in heaven. Now we sing to you and we want it to be an expression of our faith. Jesus, we believe you are the worthy one. There is no other. And we sing to you now and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Would you stand? Let's sing.



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