

# COLOR-BLINDNESS: OUR STRUGGLE TO SEE THE MULTI-COLORED IMAGE OF GOD

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 6/24/18, Matt Heerema - Matthew 5:1-12

First let me say how wonderful it is to be back together with all of you. And how much I am missing our other friends who for various reasons are unable to be here live this AM. I'm glad you are joining us online, and I am praying that all the tech works out! 15 weeks! Can you believe it?

## **INTRO:**

Well this past Tuesday morning, after I had spent several days preparing to handle the tricky subjects of the fire, eternal damnation, and tribulation described in 2 Thessalonians 1, the elders decided we needed tackle something actually controversial today: Racial harmony and social justice.

In case you've been hiding in a cave somewhere for the past few months, recently George Floyd's murder at the hands of a police officer in Minnesota were captured in a gruesome 9 minute video, sparking protesting around the world, some of which turned to rioting, especially in Minneapolis.

George Floyd's name was added to an ever growing list of unjustly killed black men and women including Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, and way too many others to name or at this point even remember.

To say the very least, things are tense. This is not new. They have been tense for a very long time. And I have a short sermon today to say something about the situation. And let me tell you just how insufficient I feel to speak on this issue.

## **MY INSUFFICIENCY:**

Most of my life I would have told you that I was color-blind when it came to ethnicity. That I gave very little thought to what someone's skin color was. Over the last ten years or so, as this topic has become more prevalent, I've been told that this is not a good thing. That I am to cherish and value someone's ethnic heritage for the beauty it brings to our world. That thought always confused me. After all, didn't Martin Luther King, Jr. want people to be judged not on the color of their skin, but on the content of their character?

The actual problem though, was that while I gave skin color very little conscious thought, I came to find that I had many subconscious thoughts happening. I had a very shocking and shaming

realization one night when I was at a conference in Louisville a few years back. Walking back to my hotel from the conference center downtown, I was on a sidewalk, and a man was walking down the street toward me on his way somewhere.

And something in me told me to cross to the other side of the street. So I did. Then I thought about it. That was super awkward and a lot of effort, and why did I do that? Because the man was black and wearing a hoodie. That's not a great reason. Since then I've heard multiple stories from African American men who express sadness that this sort of thing happens to them.

Through other conversations over the past five or six years, I came to understand that I experience life in a very different way than almost every one of my African American friends. Call it privilege, it's a good term. There are simply certain things I do not have to think about when walking, jogging, or driving around town at night. Or when I go into a store.

I imagine that right now some of you are already reacting to the things I'm saying. "Of course its good to be color blind." "It's only wise to be prepared to defend yourself." "Stereotypes exist for a reason! Why was he wearing a hoodie?" or maybe "See Matt? You are inherently racist and prejudiced you were raised unavoidably by your privileged white community to be so."

So where do I even start on this issue? It's so big. Its roots are centuries old and go to the literal foundation of our nation. The current issues in play span the areas of politics, economics, philosophy, theology, business, and 400 years of American history. And I only have 25 more minutes.

In prayer, contemplation, and conversation this past week, I think the Lord has led me to a place that I think will be most helpful for us as a church, in Ames, Iowa, this morning.

And we need to start at the beginning.

## **1. CREATION: ALL MANKIND IS MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE.**

I think the most controversial claim of the Christian faith in our day and age, is that there is a real God, who created everything, and most specifically - determines our identity. Declares who and what we are!

In a culture that says "who are you to say what's right and wrong for me?" - and then answers that question by saying "well of course each one should decide what is right and wrong for themselves. You do you! Doesn't the bible even say "don't judge?" - We are so bold as to say, God does exist, and has defined you - and has told you who you are - and I know what that is, and you can know this too.

### **Genesis 1:26-28 (ESV)**

26 Then 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.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth** and **subdue** it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

And in Chapter 2 we back up a bit and slow down even more, and we find out that God bent down into the clay and formed man, and breathed life into him...

Mankind, is made in the image of God. We are in various ways, like him. If you want to know more about how we are like him, you can go listen to my sermon from 2 weeks ago. But the important point, is that mankind is made to represent God. To be like him, and to rule the earth as he does: carefully and lovingly tending it, helping each other, and the earth with all the plants and animals, to thrive and flourish.

## **2. FALL: MANKIND HAS REJECTED HIS IDENTITY**

### **Genesis 3:1-5 (CSB)**

1 Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. 3 But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.’” 4 “No! You will not die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

- “You will be like God!” - should have been answered with “We already are.”
- This is the **fundamental satanic lie**: “Did God really say?” - did he really define who we are and how we are designed to live, and what will bring us blessing?
- This is the **fundamental human rebellion**: We want to determine our identity, and good and evil for ourselves.

And ever since then we’ve been acting like we are a god, and exerting our power and our will whenever we can to stay comfortable and on top, and/or denying God’s existence and his good, loving, wise design for our own identities, and the way we ought to operate toward one another.

### 3. REDEMPTION: JESUS RESCUES US AND GIVES US A NEW IDENTITY

Into a world of hate, division, chaos, turmoil, oppression, and self-righteous religious people, Jesus comes on the scene, Colossians tells us that he is the exact image of God. God himself, in the flesh, the long-awaited, long-prophesied rescuer, and begins to preach:

#### **Matthew 4:17 (CSB)**

"Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!"

Jesus says: I'm here, and I'm bringing God's kingdom with me. And here's how God's people are to conduct themselves in the world.

As we hear the Lord Jesus's words this morning, I want you to think back over the past several weeks since George Floyd's murder. What does your heart and mind do when you think about that 9 minute video? When you think about the protestors? The police officers involved? The riots? Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the national anthem, a Donald Trump Rally, #blacklivesmatter, #defundthepolice, #alllivesmatter, #maga?

#### **Matthew 5:1-12 (CSB)**

When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to teach them, saying:

"Blessed are the **poor in spirit**, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Blessed are those who **mourn**, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the **humble**, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the **merciful**, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the **pure in heart**, for they will see God.

Blessed are the **peacemakers**, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are **persecuted** because of righteousness,  
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

"You are blessed when they **insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me**. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Let those descriptors sink in for a moment, as we think about our heart attitudes about current events in the black-lives-matter / all-lives-matter debate.

- **Poor in spirit:** a realization that we are not all that amazing when it comes to our spiritual performance.
- **Mourning:** when you look at the state of the world, your heart is broken over the brokenness of the world?
- **Humble/meek:** A realization that you have a lot to learn. A heart position that is quick to listen and learn from the experiences of others.
- **Hungering and thirsting for righteousness:** a strong desire for true justice to be done, for broken things to be fixed, and for wrongs to be made right.
- **Merciful:** extending patience and grace to those who don't deserve it.
- **Pure in heart:** Fully devoted to God and showing his love and compassion to everyone
- **Peacemakers:** seeking to bring reconciliation and healing
- Persecuted because of righteousness and insulted and slandered because of Jesus.

How are we doing? Spiritual poverty, mourning, humility, aching desire for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, and persecuted and slandered for your association with Jesus?

When we are honest, none of us measure up to this. Repentance is required. Turning away from our own ideas. Turning away from the way we've been imprinted in our politics, our schooling, in our families, and in our communities, to a new community: The Kingdom of Heaven.

"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near."

And in this kingdom, citizens are multicolored.

**God's image is in all humanity:** Race, gender, nationality, and socio-economic class have nothing to do with you being more-or-less in the image of God.

**Colossians 3:9-11 (ESV)**

9 ...you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

# RESTORATION: THE IMAGE OF GOD IS MULTI-COLORED

And this is the vision in view of the end in Revelation:

## **Revelation 7:9-10 (CSB)**

9 After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!

The vision the Bible gives for the fully restored heaven and earth, the fully restored image of God filling the earth as water fills the sea, to quote Isaiah, is a multicolored image. Mankind was created in God's image, every single human is descended from Adam, every color, size, shape, and we cannot see the full image of God unless we see all the colors, every ethnicity, every tribe, every people, every language!

If we are color-blind in this sense, we will miss seeing God.

## **SO WHAT TO DO?**

Unfortunately, I don't know. I don't have the three major steps to solving this problem. I'm not sure anyone does. A few other brainstorms do come to mind that might be helpful. These aren't original, many are repeating them recently, but they are worth repeating.

1. **Care & Listen.** Don't just blow this off as too big. Let your heart mourn over the situation. Give some serious time and thought to what you can do. Seek out and listen to black and brown people in your community. Find out what is causing the pain by listening.
2. **Look for the "third way"** - beware of false dilemmas. Here's what I mean. When every you hear an "either / or" - or "if you / then you must" - beware. "If you don't support the black lives matter movement then you must be a racist." "If you didn't vote for Trump then you must be a liberal." - Christians throughout history have always existed - not in the middle ground - but in the "tertium quid" - the third ground. Satan likes to trap us with false dilemmas of "you only have two choices". We are not moderates, we have an entirely unique worldview. We ought not try to be in the middle of left and right, we ought to be in an entirely different set of coordinates.

And I think these things will help, but they do still seem so insufficient. The reason is that the problem is so multiplex: there are structural issues that exist because of our sin problem. There are generational economic issues that seem completely impossible to remedy this side of the new creation.

And the primary problem of course is the problem of human sin that only God can fully remedy, but I think when we go back to Jesus's teaching to his disciples on that mountainside near Bethsaida, we get our starting point.

Let me frame Jesus's sermon for a minute to put it in context. This was given toward the beginning of his ministry. News of his miracles are starting to spread. The crowds are starting to gather, so Jesus pulls away to a mountainside with his closest followers and he gives them this message.

"It is time for us to start showing these people what God is like. You are my ambassadors You are to represent me, to represent God, well. Here's how you should be, to represent me well: Humble, merciful, grieving the broken state of the world, peace-bringing, pure, hungering for righteousness, and known for your close, uncompromising association with me, even when it costs you your reputation, your friends, or your possessions."

So church, let me ask: whose ambassador are you. When people think of you, do they associate you with MAGA hats, #blacklivesmatter, or do they think - that person talks about Jesus a lot, and really is compassionate toward everyone." It can only be one thing. Which is it?

The words of Jesus's sermon on the mount are staggering and convicting. In the middle he sums it up: "you must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect", and there we know we are sunk. They are not an invitation to perform better. They are an invitation to repent and turn to Jesus in humility, acknowledging our failure, and asking for forgiveness and help, which he gives gladly.

We will not be able to muster up the willpower to live out the beatitudes, we need the Holy Spirit. We need to pray to have God's eyes on the situation. We need his power to help us repent of our own sin, and our own lack of compassion. Or, liberal-or-conservative, the buying of the world's attitudes solutions rather than our King's heart and ways.

Do you want to make a difference in this world? So do I. Start with a change of mind. Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. Follow Jesus your king, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with wisdom and grace and good ideas. And then act in courage knowing he's with you.

Pray with me.