



Epiphany (Part 2) – Racial Harmony

Matt Chandler – January 14, 2018

Good morning. How are we? Doing well? If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. Ephesians, chapter 2. If you were here last week, we set up the month of January around the idea of Epiphany. Epiphany is about the manifestation of Jesus Christ. What we meant by "manifestation of Jesus Christ" is that Jesus has shown himself to be not just a good teacher, not a moral philosopher, not one piece of a multitude of pieces that make up what's spiritually true in the universe, but that Jesus has revealed himself to be God in the flesh.

He is not *a* piece of the truth; he *is* the truth himself. So as Christians during Epiphany we're rejoicing that Christ stands over all and is in all and through all as the reigning King, sovereign of the universe, and that's what Epiphany is all about. Last week, we looked at the promises concerning the coming of Jesus Christ in Isaiah, and we showed that there was a physical aspect as well as a metaphorical aspect to that. (I don't have time to preach that again. It lives free online for you if you get bored this week.)

We looked at the fact that Jesus has come to proclaim good news to the poor, to give liberty to the captives, to recover sight to the blind, to set those bound free, and then ultimately to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, or as Jesus would put it, that the kingdom of God was at hand. We said as we looked at that that you cannot just think that's metaphorical. What we mean when we say *metaphorical* is it's true that, metaphorically, if you're a Christian, you were blind but now you see.

That's how we would describe becoming Christians. We couldn't see, and now we can see. That's Jesus fulfilling that, but it's also true he physically healed the blind. We could do that with each of these statements. You can't jam what Jesus accomplished into an ethereal spiritual realm. It lives on the ground in the muck and the mire. So that's what we talked about last week, and I want to now apply that, second week of *Epiphany*, to racial harmony, what Jesus has done in regard to racial harmony.

I want to do that without anybody getting nervous or anybody going, "Chandler, dadgummit. I brought a friend. Don't do this." I want to address it, and here's why I want to address it. First, *racial harmony is one of the great themes of the Bible*. When the world is broken, we see a promise come to Abram in Genesis, chapter 12, and then reaffirmed in Genesis, chapter 15, that through Abraham... If you don't have a background in church or you haven't been through the training program or anything, the Abrahamic covenant leads to the Davidic covenant that gets us to Jesus.

What happens here is a promise made to Abraham that through the line of Abraham all peoples of the earth will be blessed. God's plan was always to go bigger than one ethnic group. It was always more than just the Jews. It was always going to be to the ends of the earth. Then the Bible ends in Revelation, chapter 7, with men and women from every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth, this multicultural expression of faith, crying out before the throne room of God.

Then in between the beginning of the book and the end of the book are all of these prophecies concerning this reality coming to bear in our day. So that's the first reason. The second reason is *Jesus taught on this a lot*. Maybe you grew up in a world of felt boards and you missed that part, but we're prone to read the Bible through the lenses of 2018. That's not always helpful. Let me show you some of Jesus' teaching.

This is John 10:16. He's in the middle of a sermon. He uses this sentence: **"And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."** We're at the kitchen table. We're just flipping through. We love the gospel of John. He's simple and poetic. He's not all bogged down like Luke and it's so confusing. It's just sweet John, the apostle Jesus loved.

We just blow past that, but Jesus is preaching to a group of people who felt that they were the ethnic elite. They felt that anyone who was not the same ethnicity as them was unclean and that it was against the law to not only be in their home but to associate with them in any way. In the middle of his sermon, Jesus drops this line. Here's what I've learned as a pastor: the inbox was full on Monday, because what Jesus said to this group of men and women who believed they were ethnically elite...

They believed the work of God among man was going to be just theirs. He said to them, "Hey, I have other sheep. They're not of *this* flock, and I'm going to find them, and they're going to hear me, and they're going to follow me. There's going to be one shepherd and one flock. It's not going to be you

and them; it's going to be *us*, and I'm going to do this thing." For us, that's just a sentence. I cannot overstate how offensive that sentence would have been in the first century.

If you remember the story of the good Samaritan... Such a great little heartwarming story about mercy to someone in desperate need. Well, again, in the first century, he made the Samaritan the hero of the story. The Jews hated the Samaritans. They considered them half-breed sellouts and actively prayed in the temple that God would not forgive their sins. Now how badly do you hate someone that part of your liturgy was asking God to ignore prayers and not forgive their sins?

Jesus tells this story. A man was robbed and left bloody, beaten, and naked on the side of the road, and a priest walked by. Oh gosh, a priest. What's a priest? Well, a priest is varsity-level Judaism. This is the best of the best. This is pure-blooded Jew, and what does he do? He walks on the other side of the road. Then the Levite. Oh my gosh! The Levitical order? Hello! Whole book in the Torah: Leviticus. He walks by. Does he show mercy? Nuh-uh. Who's the hero of the story? The Samaritan.

I've preached before in a room that got awkward, and I can't even get my head around this illustration. Then there were these other things Jesus would do that showed he didn't just teach it, but he lived in such a way that was counterintuitive to the day and age he was walking on earth. Again, in the gospel of John... We're going to walk through the gospel of John in the fall. I know the fall seems like a long way away. I promise you it'll be here before we know it.

In John, chapter 4, you have this Samaritan woman at the well who we know is an adulterer, so, according to the pure Jews of the day, was double dirty. Not only is she a half-breed Samaritan but she's also exchanging sex for rent right now. A despicable, worthless human being is the Samaritan woman at the well, yet it is at that well that Jesus reveals for the first time to any human that he is the Messiah. Even the first person to ever hear that Christ was not just a teacher or a philosopher but was God in the flesh was a Samaritan adulterer at the well in John, chapter 4.

So it's not just the way he taught; it was actually the way he lived his life. Here's the third reason we need to address this: *every generation will drift toward the mirror*. Here's what I mean when I say we'll drift toward the mirror: *the ease of likeness will always pull on us over the beauty of diversity*. The ease of likeness will always be our drift rather than fighting for the beauty of diversity. I'm going to argue today that every generation from here to glory will wrestle with the questions of race, ethnicity, and harmony between them. It's just our turn.

The ease of the mirror will be everyone's drift. To sit in front of those like us who have experienced many of the things we have experienced is going to be our drift, because diversity is messy and difficult. Amen for anybody who has tried? Yes. It's messy and difficult. There are land mines, and nobody can really tell you where they are until you blow your ankle off. If you haven't tried it, then you don't know these things to be true.

It's a little bit nerve-racking, so it's easier for me to just sit in front of the mirror, because I get my culture, I get where I'm from, I get my background in a way that requires very little effort. So the drift in every generation is toward the ease of the mirror rather than the beauty of diversity, and it's our turn to fight the good fight. We are a forgetful people. I'll show you this biblically. There's this story in Acts, chapter 10.

Peter is on a roof. He gets this vision from God, where God says, "Hey, nothing is unclean. You guys are wrong. I've been trying to help you with this. Nothing is unclean." He tells Peter, "Take and eat something out of this kind of blanket I've lowered from the heavens." There was bacon in there. You aren't allowed to have bacon if you're a Jew. There's some bacon up in there. He's like, "I can't eat that. I'm going to follow you, Jesus." He's like, "No, no. Nothing is unclean. Take and eat." "This is free. I'm just believing." He just... Bacon sandwich, man. He went and got it.

Then there's a knock at the door, and there is a runner from the Italian cohort, a soldier, who knocks on the door and says, "Hey, my commander, Cornelius, had a visitation from an angel, and we are to come here and bring you to Cornelius," the Italian cohort leader. So Peter went. He's a little bit confused, discombobulated. It was illegal for him by the law of the day to associate with Gentiles, and it certainly was illegal to go into the home of a Gentile.

So he walks in there nervous-like, and he's like, "Okay, an angel visited you, and I had this vision of a bacon sandwich, so I'm just going for it." He shares the gospel with Cornelius, the ruler of the Italian cohort, and the Holy Spirit falls, and his entire household believes. They're baptized. There's this, "Oh my gosh! The Gentiles are saved!"

So if anyone was never going to drift back to the Jewish mirror it's our boy Peter. Right? I mean, come on. He was there. He was the one through whom the Spirit flowed to save the first Gentiles, the first Gentile Christians. So surely, if anyone won't drift back to the foolishness of homogeneity it'll be Peter. Right? Well, in Galatians, chapter 2, starting in verse 11, we read this. This is the apostle Paul writing.

"But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party [the Jews]. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy." Look at verse 14. "But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel..."

"When I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I confronted them to their faces." These micro-aggressions that are being shown here by separating themselves out, choosing the mirror over the difficulty of diversity are called, according to the Bible, out of step with the truth of the gospel. This is not a social issue; this is a gospel issue, and it's our turn to enter the fray. We're always going to wrestle. It's just our turn.

We always *have* wrestled, there will always *be* a wrestle, and yet what we get the opportunity to do is give ourselves over to what Christ has purchased for us in the cross and leave something better for our kids. There is a false notion that time will take care of this. Time cannot take care of this unless we're talking about the second coming of Jesus Christ. The drift will always be toward the mirror.

I'll say this just because it needs to be said. I'll talk more about it in a little bit. It is the majority culture that will struggle with the mirror more than the minority culture. African-American, Latino, Asian, Indians... Wherever they go, they're rarely looking in the mirror. They're looking at *us*. It's the majority culture that will struggle most with the mirror, and the idea that just time will solve this is false. Here's how Martin Luther King Jr. put it in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

"For years now I have heard the word 'wait.' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'wait' has almost always meant 'never.' We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.' [...] Time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will.

We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of

inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be coworkers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation."

King's argument is that every generation is going to have to make a stand here and fight for what's right and true according to the Word of God. To be neutral, to be silent, gives us over to stagnation, not moving the ball forward. So I want to talk about racial harmony in light of the manifestation of Jesus Christ because this is one of the great themes of the Bible, because Jesus teaches on this consistently, and because our drift will be toward the mirror and away from God-purchased, beautiful diversity.

Let me show you a picture of all of these pieces at work. The Porters have been at our church for eight or nine years. Just kind of a story where you see all of these pieces. You see the drift toward the mirror. You see the power of God in reconciliation. You have a picture of what we're going to see all the more of at The Village Church. So let me show you their story, and then we're going to dive into Ephesians, chapter 2.

[Video]

Rick Porter: Rick and Dana Porter. We've been members at The Village Church for eight years now. We had probably been dating about six months or so when we realized it was different than just a standard dating deal in college.

Dana Porter: I intuitively knew even though my mom and daddy raised us to love everybody that being in a relationship with Rick at that point would be something they would struggle with. I told him, "Daddy, I've met a man, and I love him, and he is a black man." Mom and Daddy asked me to leave the house. At that point, I wasn't allowed to come back home. My parents were absolutely resolute that they were not going to accept our marriage, that he would not be welcome in their home.

Rick: You can just fall victim to this rage and this anger, and I think that was ultimately something I had to come to terms with, because dealing with this for three years on the other side of us being married was also just something I was constantly battling.

Dana: I was only focusing on my parents' sin. I was only focusing on "How can they not see how wrong they are and how the Lord would not look at this in a sinful way?" I didn't see my own sin,

that I cared so much about what others and the world was thinking about me, and he showed me that I was just as guilty as they were.

I remember we had been three years into it, and I was so weary. I couldn't even pray anymore, because I just felt so heartbroken, because I knew there was nothing more I could do. You just wrapped me in your arms and said, "Lord, we can't do this anymore. We give this to you." I just remember feeling at peace, that I needed *him*. I needed more of the Lord. I needed more of assurance of the Lord.

Rick: This just might not be the thing that works out. We just don't know, and we don't really ever have the luxury of fully understanding what God's plan is.

Dana: I picked up the phone, and my parents said, "We're ready to meet Rick." I just remember thinking I wasn't hearing it. In the middle of the night, just breaking down and crying again, and God so lovingly saying to me, "This is my battle. This isn't yours." I just remember feeling a peace. It was within a couple of weeks of that phone conversation that you guys actually met.

Rick: It was literally almost like I had met them before and that I was their long lost son, or something, from the first time we actually met. Reconciliation is a process. It's not a moment. There were certainly moments along the way that stand out, from the time we first met her parents and the time that they first saw their grandkids. Those are very special in their own right, but overall it was a long journey. It's a process.

Dana: He worked it all in his timing to show that I so struggled caring about what people thought about me until this situation, and then in that he illuminated that I am fully accepted by him and that is what is the ultimate.

[End of video]

Matt Chandler: It's our turn. It's just our turn. Throughout human history, this has been the drift, these have been the difficulties, and here we are in 2018, and it's our turn. I want us to look at what Christ has done. We're talking about the manifestation of Jesus Christ, the power of Jesus bearing its weight on humanity. Let's look at this together. Ephesians, chapter 2. We're going to start in verse 11.

"Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is 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..." If you write in your Bible, I'd have you circle that word *new*. We'll talk about that in a moment. It's super significant.

"...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 were 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."

We see at the beginning of this text the hostility and the alienation that existed between the ethnicities. That's how this text starts: hostility, alienation, being separate. Really, this hostility was seen in multiple ways. First there was the law itself. The law itself was unjust. We read in Acts 10:28... This is Peter at Cornelius' house. **"And he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.'"**

So you have the law of the day that shows this hostility is present. The second thing and the thing the ears of the Ephesians would have perked up at is the idea of this dividing wall of hostility. In the Herodian temple in the first century, which was the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, there were three courtyards with an inner courtyard. If you were here for the tabernacle, the Diaspora happened, Jerusalem was conquered, and the Jews were scattered globally.

The temple in Jerusalem had an outer court that was for Gentiles, an inner court that was for Jewish women, and then an innermost court, which was for Jewish men alone who had walked and operated in the law in such a way that they were viewed by not just the written law but the law and the sub-laws, which were numerous, of that time period... They and they alone were allowed in the inner court.

When archaeologists discovered the Herodian temple and began to dig it out, they found on the outer wall, the Gentile wall, a sign built into the stone wall that basically said if a Gentile crossed that line, climbed over that fence, they would have no one to blame for their death but themselves. Now that's hostility. If the law says you're less of a human being than I am, so I can't associate with you, because you might dirty me up in your ethnicity, that's hostility.

If there are places and spaces in which your color could get you killed, that's hostility. But what Jesus said, what we see in this text is that in the manifestation of Christ by the blood of Christ the walls of hostility are gone, and in their place we have what he calls a *new man* or a *new humanity*. Look back in verse 15. How does Jesus accomplish this? Here's how.

"...by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man 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 were near."

Now there are two Greek words for *new*. The Greek word for *new* in this text is the Greek word *kainos*. Here's its definition: of a new kind, unprecedented, unheard of. So you don't need to think the iPhone X; you need to think Antonio Meucci's first primitive phone. If you're Canadian you're like, "That's Graham Bell. *He* did that."

Well, there's beef between the United States and Canada over this. The United States says, "No, it was an Italian immigrant who did the first primitive phone," and the Canadians are like, "Eh. No, it's not," and they come back with Alexander Graham Bell. So pray for reconciliation and restoration there. We don't want that heating up between us and the Canadians.

So you don't need to think the new iPhone X; you need to think of, "This is unheard of. This is unprecedented. This is something brand new." It's not a *new* car; it's the *first* car. Are you tracking?

That's what this Greek word *kainos* is. So how has he torn down the wall of hostility? He has created a new man, a new people group, the people of God.

Now let me tell you what this means and what this doesn't mean. What this *doesn't* mean is that we're color-blind. No, there's a celebration of diversity like there's a celebration about the triune nature of our God. It's not that we don't *see* diversity; it's that the church has been empowered to celebrate that diversity.

I am *more* than a white man, but I am not *less* than a white man. My last name is Chandler. My people made candles in England hundreds of years ago. I'm just really white. I'm going to be straight. I don't feel guilty about that. I just am what I am. I was born from white parents of English descent. I hardly have any cool mixed in with that whiteness.

You always want something, like a little Comanche. Just something fierce. And I don't. I've done the test. I'm just white. I'm *more* than that, but I'm not *less* than that. I don't feel guilty about that. I've tried to track my own heritage in that. It's something to be celebrated. Chandlers are to be celebrated. We celebrate our family in my family. That's what we are, but we're more than that too.

Our African-American brothers and sisters are *more* than that, but they are not *less* than that. Our Latino brothers and sisters are *more* than that, but they are not *less* than that. Our Indian brothers and sisters are *more* than that, but they are not *less* than that. What happens in the church of Jesus Christ... We celebrate our differences because we've been made one.

If it's too hard for you conceptually, think about the differences in your kids, if you have children. Aren't those things to be celebrated and rejoiced? Don't you draw out of each one those good things and celebrate them, and where you don't understand you kind of seek to understand? That's what the household of faith is: a celebration of what Christ has done at making us one. So we're not color-blind, but we do celebrate the diversity God has birthed among us as the people of God.

This is why we celebrate this in Epiphany: because Christ has done this. Christ has torn down the walls of hostility. Christ has made a way for us to be different and yet celebrate our differences. This is what the church of Jesus Christ is called to. This is what we have in common. Look there in verse 18. **"For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."** All of us have access to God the Father through the Spirit because of the Son.

Isn't even that sentence a celebration of diversity? Is not the Godhead diverse in that I have access *to* the Father *through* the Spirit *by* the Son? This beautiful dance in the Godhead, not the same but the same, like his church, not the same but the same, to be celebrated and rejoiced in. **"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God..."**

I'll keep saying it. I have more in common with an Iraqi Christian than an unbelieving American. My ultimate citizenship is with the kingdom of God, and although I am the son of a military man, although I wore out *Red Dawn* on VHS over and over and over again and cheered my face off for Rocky against Drago in *Rocky IV*, I am first and foremost a citizen of heaven and believe that the United States with its democratic republic is the best plan of human beings for human flourishing, and it will always flounder because there are too many sinners involved.

There will be a day where she ceases to exist, and the kingdom of God will not be shaken. Rome ruled the known world for 1,500 years (that means the United States is in diapers), and for 20 euros you can walk through their ruins. The kingdom of God has just become more visible and more powerful since her fall. We're to be good citizens, actively involved in the systems and structures in which God has placed us and given us life, but our allegiance is first and foremost to the kingdom of God.

We are citizens of that kingdom, and we belong to the household of faith, which means I have more in common with an African-American, Latino, Asian, Indian believer than I do with any unbelieving white man or woman on earth who would share my exact background and story. I have more in common with my brothers, I am more dedicated to my brothers and sisters, I have more allegiance to the kingdom than any other kingdom. We hold this in common.

That's not all we hold in common. We are built on the same foundation. You see that in verse 20. Then we have to talk about verse 21. Verse 21 says, "**...in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.**" Now let me tell you why we have to talk about that. That word *grow*... I just praise God it's there like it's there. It means we're growing but we're not there yet, and that's what I'm trying to say.

Every generation will have to face this head-on and fight against the drift toward the mirror, because this has always been a struggle. Even in the Bible, when the Holy Spirit is breaking out across the ancient world, this continues to be a struggle. In Acts 11, right after Peter shares the

gospel with Cornelius and the Spirit of God converts his whole house, Peter runs back to Jerusalem. He's all amped up, and he tries to tell the story.

He's like, "Okay, man. I was on the roof just trying to get a nap in. We have just been working, burning the candle at both ends. I mean, healing people, raising the dead, seeing people converted. I was just trying to get a nap in, middle of the day, a little siesta, and then I had this vision. This vision was this bacon sandwich. It was calling me to it. I was like, 'No, I'm not going to do it,' but then God spoke to me and said, 'You eat that sandwich.'

I was about to bite into that sandwich, and there was a knock at the door, and there was this Gentile there. He was an Italian dude, and he was like, 'Hey, man. An angel said to me, "You have to come check..."' So I followed, because the angel. The bacon sandwich and the angel. I was confused. Have you ever smelled bacon? Then I followed him. I knew it was illegal. Gosh, guys, I know. Listen. God forgive me. I know it's illegal, I know I shouldn't have done it, but I was just compelled by the Spirit.

I walked in, and I said, 'Man, this has to be of the Lord,' and I just shared the gospel. I just told them what Jesus had done, and in the middle... I didn't even get to finish it. I didn't even get to my altar call with the music in the background. I was just in the middle of presenting. The Holy Spirit fell, and the whole house was converted, and they were all baptized. Guys, isn't that amazing?"

Their response was, "You did what? You went where? Whose house did you go into?" You can read it in Acts, chapter 11. This was a huge deal, and it was a huge deal to the religious establishment not because Gentiles were converted but because Peter had associated with and entered into the home of a non-Jew. This has always been a struggle. It's just our turn.

Also in Acts, chapter 11, great persecution breaks out against the church, and the church scatters. Now Jesus' last charge to them before he ascended was "Go into all the world and preach the gospel, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. I go with you. Tell everybody." Persecution happens. They flee Jerusalem, and who do they share the gospel with? Anybody know? Jews. They literally refuse to share the gospel with Gentiles.

We've already covered Peter's racism. It's our turn here. This isn't new, and it won't be new to our kids. We're just going to try to help them by moving the ball along, by asking the Spirit of God to shape and mold us in *this* day to be the people of God who are a prophetic witness to the brokenness of the world around us.

Here's a question we have to ask. It's a question that makes us a little uncomfortable...*If we see in the Bible the promise of peace and the absence of hostility among ethnicities and we see in our day, instead, unrest and hostility, then how are we to think as Christians?* Well, anytime the Word of God lays before us the heart of God and we see an inconsistency in our lives and in our time, the response must always be repentance, but it can't be an ambiguous repentance, so what do we repent of?

Let me just lay a couple of things before you. I think the first thing you have to do on this issue is look at yourself, and then we can roll to institutions after that. I think there's no real change until there's significant change in us.

The first thing I would ask you to consider for your own life is if in every generation there's a drift toward the mirror, if in every generation our tendency is, over a period of time, to have our dinner tables be filled with people who look just like us, to have our friendships be people who look just like us, to have one perspective, one point of view, one way of seeing the world, I would ask you to think about your table, those you do life with, those you walk with, those you confide in, those you ask questions of.

Are you always just talking to yourself in the mirror? Does everybody you do life with look just like you? If so, that's a drift toward the mirror and not a step toward the beauty of diversity. How about *this* one? What are your inputs? By *inputs* here's what I mean. What do you read? What do you watch? What do you listen to? What are the things that shape how you see the world around you? Is it all just the mirror? Are you constantly looking at the mirror or are you charitably curious about your brothers and sisters?

This is going to be a far more significant struggle for my white folk than our people of color. Why? Because we're a majority culture, which means wherever our minority culture brothers and sisters go they will be looking at *our* culture. They have a hard time finding the mirror, where we are always staring in it. Listen. I'd better not get an email about white guilt, because I'm not talking about that.

If you have that kind of weird, been watching too much Fox News, all busted up, then you can save it, because I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about a charitable curiosity about our brothers and sisters and coheirs with Christ. Sometimes we just don't even know where to begin. I've got

you, fam. I love you. We'll start with something that will take an hour all the way up to "Come on a trip with me." Are you ready?

Since Martin Luther King Jr. Day is tomorrow, I would encourage you to get online and download and read "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." It'll take you, depending on how quickly you read, anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour. It's not a book. It's just a letter he wrote clergymen while he was in Birmingham. It's a helpful read to shape and reorient one of your inputs.

If you want, one of my favorite books ever that really helped me think a little bit differently on these lines was Isabel Wilkerson's book *The Warmth of Other Suns*. That book is about the great migration that occurred over a period of 80 to 100 years of African-Americans out of the Jim Crow South along the rail lines to Los Angeles and Chicago and New York and all of these different places. It's really helpful to understand the geographic layout of today's hostility in regard to race and ethnicity.

Lastly, I'll invite you with me... April 3 and 4, there's a conference in Memphis called the MLK50. I'm speaking, Don Carson is speaking, John Piper is speaking, John Perkins is speaking, Charlie Dates from Progressive in Chicago, one of my favorite preachers of our day, and Dr. Eric Mason who has been here several times to preach in our church. We love Epiphany in Philly. They've been a great partner church for us for over a decade.

John Perkins marched with King, was part of the civil rights movement, and also has so been a voice among evangelicals about restoration and reconciliation. So come hang out in Memphis with me. During our announcements I'll roll that out again, and you'll even get a promo code that'll give you 20 percent off. Let's check out Memphis together.

That's just a way for you to get inputs that are different than our regular inputs. That's going to matter if we're going to be the people of God in our day and age, if we are going to, with our opportunity at this, walk in what Christ has paid. So what do we do? We have to do some thinking. "Who's around my table? Am I always staring in the mirror? What are my inputs? Am I always just reinforcing my own way of thinking or am I charitably curious?"

The last thing is we need to look institutionally at this issue, and, namely, the institution I'm most concerned about is the church. The church is meant by the grace of God to be... I don't know where in history we lost this. I think it might have been the 80s/90s religious right, but we have lost our

stomach for being a prophetic witness to culture. We've just lost it. We're afraid, we're confused, and the church has always been meant to be a prophetic witness, a bold...

There is no sacred/secular divide. Christ's reign and rule sits on top of every domain, every institution, and we are ministers of that reconciliation, so wherever we go we carry with us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, ministry of reconciliation, which means wherever we go where we see things are out of step with the gospel we bring the gospel light with our words but more with our lives. The idea that there are sacred spaces and secular spaces is not a biblical idea.

Do you know there can't be a Christian muffler shop? There's no such thing as Christian music. There are Christians who run muffler shops, and there are Christians who sing worship music, but music itself, mufflers themselves, campgrounds themselves are neutral. What determines their usage is the prophetic passion and witness of the people involved.

King would say it this way: "In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard so many ministers say, 'Those are social issues with which the gospel has no real concern,' and I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion which made a strange distinction between body and soul, the sacred and the secular."

The argument King is making is the argument we made *last* week, which is Christ has come to preach good news to the poor but also to lift up the poor. He has come to cure spiritual blindness while he heals physical blindness. He has come to liberate spiritual captives while he liberates physical captives. This disembodiment, this ethereal Christian faith is not found in the Bible. Christian faith is lived on the ground every day waiting for glory.

This is why we're so bored and our worship is so thin. We've been called to such greater things. We're happy attending church once or twice a month. May he crush that. May the tide of suffering and difficulty just smash that on the rocks of God's glory so the church might be purified and refined for the great fight of God's glory in this day and age, 2018...our turn.

Stare in the mirror or fight for the beauty of diversity. It's going to require greater inputs, which is going to be so humbling. Gosh, those other inputs are so humbling. It's going to require being charitably curious, and it's going to require us wanting, longing, being passionate about, being willing to sacrifice in order to be the prophetic witness of God in this day and age.

Now here's what's great. The Spirit of God that lives in you and me is all about these ends. This isn't going to be "White-knuckle this thing. We're going to pin this thing..." No, no, no. We've been empowered by the Spirit of God who dwells inside of us. We need only walk in step with the Spirit as he has revealed the will of God in the Scriptures.

I'm eager for us to be this kind of community. I see traction moving us in this way. Anytime I see traction, I get more emboldened and more excited. If this is too much for you and you're not interested in any of this, I just want to lovingly tell you there are a lot of churches that aren't. We *are*.

That's it. That's all I was going to say. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your love for us. Thank you for your mercy and compassion. Thank you for your patience generation after generation after generation. We thank you for our shot at this. Thank you for our opportunity. I pray we would fight against the echo chamber. I pray that we would fight against staring at ourselves in the mirror.

Give us charitable curiosity about one another. I pray that our inputs would begin to change, and then our tables would begin to change, and that all the more we might look like Revelation, chapter 7. We desire to get there. We're going to need your help, as always. We ask you, Holy Spirit of God, help us. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.