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SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

RACISM: AN HONEST CONVERSATION

Three Commitments for a Church for All People

> A racially well-integrated church does not happen on its own. It takes intention: a commitment to listen, a commitment to cover, and a commitment to greater honor.

MAIN TEXT
Colossians 3:11-14

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SERIES
We're Honoring to All People, Week 5 of 5

BY
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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Being a church for all people means being intentionally, racially well integrated, and that requires intention and instruction because it does not happen on its own.
2. Racism is not only overt hate: it includes attitudes, assumptions, policies and systems that advantage some racial groups and disadvantage others, often without conscious intent.
3. Everybody is racist to some degree, including Pastor Jason, because everyone makes snap judgments about people based on what they have taken in over a lifetime.
4. He declines to work the systematic racism argument and prefers the term symptomatic racism: we are not where we used to be, but we are not where we need to be.
5. Commitment one, a commitment to listen: James 1 says be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, so when a person or a people group tells you what their experience is, believe them and do not argue.
6. Commitment two, a commitment to cover: 1 Corinthians 12 says the parts that lack honor get greater modesty, so when someone walks in who does not look like the rest of the room, take the attention off what makes them different instead of highlighting it, and do not claim to be colorblind.
7. Commitment three, a commitment to greater honor: God gives greater honor to the part of the body that lacks it so there will be no division, so the tension between race, culture and heritage, illustrated with the Confederate flag, gets resolved by yielding your symbol rather than defending it.
8. The close is a prayer asking God to send the church people who make them uncomfortable, people other churches are not for, so the church will be challenged and changed.



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READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/racism

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This message closes the last series in a year of preaching through the church's eight core ministry values, and it closes the series on being honoring to all people. It names the real intention behind that value: a church that is racially well integrated.

Three cautions. First, set expectations early and with humility: this message will not solve racism, and it does not try to. It stays in the zone of what a local church can actually do. Second, the room may get tense. Expect some people to hear "critical race theory" and others to hear "not enough." Name that up front, then preach as a pastor, not a politician. Third, this message deliberately uses no statistics. Keep it that way: the point is listening to people, not winning an argument with numbers.

Adjust the illustrations to your setting. The Confederate flag is used because it is a familiar example in the Deep South. The principle applies to any symbol that means one thing to you and something painful to someone else.

Introduction

Open your Bibles to Colossians 3.

Since August 10, 2025, we have been preaching through our core ministry values, a series of series. Today we close out eleven and a half months of intentional, focused preaching. Before we get into the message, here are all eight values:

- We're Building Everything on Jesus
- We're Rooted in the Bible
- We're Openly Spirit-Filled
- We're Generationally Intentional
- We're Passionate About Giving Generously
- We're Hopeful for Tomorrow
- We're Relentlessly Driven by the Mission
- We're Honoring to All People

Three of these values made it into the vision statement this church says all the time. For the last month we have focused on the last of them: being a church for all people.

> **COLOSSIANS 3:11-14** ESV
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> [11] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. [12] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Over the last several weeks we have talked about a lot of different people. Everything I have preached, I believe. I have not tried to sneak anything in on you. But today I want to tell you what is really behind this value.

I want us to be a racially well-integrated church. If we go to the grocery store together, go to school together and go to the hospital together, I wish we would go to church together.

That will require intention. It was within the lifetimes of people in this room that it took the National Guard to integrate the University of Alabama. It stands to reason that it will take at least some intention, and some open minds, for us. It does not just happen. If "can't we all just get along" worked, we would already be there.

I see a diverse church, full of white and black and brown and every other kind of person. A church where "Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11).

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

So today we are talking about racism. Let me say from the outset: I am not going to solve racism today.

I say that less for this room than for people watching online, including friends and ministry partners who are people of color. They know there always seems to be a white guy who gets a microphone and finally sets it all straight. I am white. I have a mic. But I have not solved racism.

WHAT RACISM IS

When we think about racism, we usually think about overt racism: explicit acts of racially motivated hate. That is not all racism is.

A word about who is welcome here. The only people not welcome in this church are people who would endanger children. If you are overtly racist, you are welcome to come to this church. But I will do everything in my power to make you as uncomfortable as humanly possible, and we believe the gospel will change you.

Here is a working definition:

> "Racism is prejudice or discrimination based on race, expressed not only through open hostility but also through attitudes, assumptions, policies, and systems that advantage some racial groups and disadvantage others, often without conscious intent."

Notice the last phrase: **often without conscious intent.**

I am not going to deal with systemic racism today. Not because I do not have thoughts, but because there is nothing we can solve at that level from here. I would rather stay in the zone of what we can deal with, help and improve as a church, rather than what someone far off ought to fix.

NOT WHERE WE USED TO BE, NOT WHERE WE NEED TO BE

I am going to get accused by the end of this message of embracing critical race theory. Let me be clear. I have strong opinions on politics, race and education. To be honest, I have strong opinions on nachos. I do not embrace CRT, but I also do not embrace "we're all good now." The truth is somewhere in the middle.

I do not particularly love the phrase "systemic racism." There are things in our history, like redlining, where that is the right word. But today we are living in what I would call **symptomatic racism**: things that still affect people today as a by-product of things that happened historically. We are not where we used to be, but we are not where we need to be. Anyone who takes five seconds with that will say, "That's probably fair."

EVERYONE IS RACIST TO SOME DEGREE

Racism is something that gets on us without our realizing it, because it is actually very natural. So let me rip the band-aid off: **every person in the world is racist to some degree.** Not just white people, not just people of color. I am racist to some degree.

Why? Because we make snap decisions about people based on everything we have taken in over our lives. We make assumptions based on gender, age, and yes, race.

Illustration: the McDonald's window. Pull up to McDonald's and see a teenager at the window, and you have already made a snap judgment about how your service is going to go. Even if it turns out to be the best service you have ever had, that young person started at a deficit. The same thing happens with race, based on our experiences and what we have seen on television.

Mobile has a uniquely palpable racism problem. I have lived all over the South: Birmingham, Huntsville, Atlanta, Memphis, Florida. I have also lived in Michigan, and if you think it gets better the further north you go, you would be wrong. But there are places here I walk into and can feel it in the atmosphere.

I want our church to be able to welcome people who do not look like us, and that takes intention and instruction. Sometimes the more well-intentioned we are, the more awkward we get. You have seen the white guy with one black friend who shares every joke he should not share with him. Some people just do not know how to act. I want to help.

I am not running for Congress, so I am going to treat this the way a pastor would. For some of you this will be too much, and for some of you it will not be enough. I am just going to try to be faithful to the Word.

Here are three commitments that will help our church be welcoming to all people.

1. A Commitment to Listen

> JAMES 1:19-21 ESV
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> [19] Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. [21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

"Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19). It is almost as if we get dyslexic when we hit this verse: we become quick to anger, quick to speak and slow to listen.

Illustration: 2020. In 2020, in the middle of COVID, George Floyd died. So much information has come out since then that it is hard to get people back to that moment. But set aside the commentary for a minute and go back to it with me. Watching that man die in the street shook me.

Around the same time, Breonna Taylor was shot and killed in her own apartment when police forced their way in at night; she had been asleep. (I am not anti-police. I love the police. I am only anti-police when I have been speeding, just like everybody in this room.) And Ahmaud Arbery was jogging through a neighborhood in Brunswick, Georgia, when two white men in a pickup truck followed him and shot him. He died in the street, and the men who shot him were not arrested for months. There was video of that too.

All of this rattled me. So I did two things.

First, I picked up the phone. I called friends who are black and brown and asked direct questions. I was stunned by what people I had known for years, people in ongoing relationship with me, told me. One of them is the man who married Ashleigh and me. One friend told me he was standing in his own front yard, at the house he had lived in for years, talking on the phone, when police sirens came through the neighborhood and someone threw him onto the hood of his car. Why? Someone in the neighborhood did not recognize him. I have never been thrown on the hood of a car.

Second, I ordered books. Most were by authors I disagree with on a lot, but I wanted a perspective outside my own. (I ordered more than I read, just like you.)

One of them was *White Fragility*. I would probably struggle to get through an agreeable lunch with the author, and my copy is full of screaming notes in the margins. But the basic idea is sound: white people often struggle when the conversation turns to race. We get tight and defensive, because race conversations often feel like an indictment of white people. We are ready to take the hits and stand our ground: "I haven't done anything wrong," which can be true and untrue at the same time.

But when we put our guard up every time race comes up, we cannot do what James tells us to do. When you have a defense ready for everything that comes out of someone's mouth, you are not quick to hear.

You are quick to speak.

When a person or a people group tells you how they think or feel in relation to something you cannot identify with, believe them, or at minimum, don't argue with them. When someone tells you what it is like to be black in America, or Hispanic, or a third-generation Mexican American, just listen.

And do not find one person who seems to defy the odds and let a handful of voices on one news channel define a whole race for you.

A pastor taught me years ago that when I hear something I do not understand, and it feels like an attack, the best response is: **"I hear you say _____. Help me understand."**

If every time race comes up your response is "Well, statistics," "Well, this person said," or "Well, it ain't easy for white people either," that is the same argument kindergartners make. We are not competing. You will not grow, you will not contribute, and you will not be for all people until you commit to listen.

2. A Commitment to Cover

> **1 CORINTHIANS 12:23-24** ESV
>
> [23] and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, [24] which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,

"Our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty" (1 Corinthians 12:23). We cover the parts of the body of Christ that need covering.

When someone is different from the people around them, they feel exposed. On Sesame Street we used to sing, "One of these things is not like the others." When it is a person, they feel that. They feel they do not belong.

Illustration: the room of 35. If I walked into a meeting with 35 middle-aged black women and me, I would probably feel out of place. Don't get it twisted, they would be tickled to have me. But I would be worried about saying or doing the wrong thing, not so much offending anyone as making a target of myself. Now imagine walking into a room and not looking like anyone else.

When people come into our church who do not look like the others, we cover them with greater modesty. **That means we take the attention off the things that make them different.** That is often the opposite of our instinct. We want to highlight the difference to show approval, but no one needs our approval. They need greater modesty.

I am not talking about being "colorblind."

Illustration: "I don't see color." Years ago I was a music pastor at a church in Florida that was about as white as a church can be. A black man joined the worship team, a very tall man, and I mentioned him to a church member. She did not know who I meant, so I said, "The black guy on the stage that sings with

me." She said, "I don't see color." No. Colorblind nonsense is one of the most offensive things you can do, especially to black Americans, many of whom feel they have not been seen the entire time they have been in this country. Pretending you do not see it is an insult.

When people feel exposed, they are vulnerable to greater embarrassment. When people feel embarrassed, they retreat and get defensive, and they will not receive. When they feel relaxed, they receive. So we have to be mindful of anyone who comes in feeling exposed.

A word of correction, with a smile. I know some of you get excited when black people come into our church, because I get excited about it too. We are a church for all people. But play it cool. We do not have someone walk through the front door and then run through the building shouting, "Preacher, we got a black boy in here!" That will not go well, and it makes people feel exposed. You have good hearts. Help me cover our friends of color with greater modesty.

3. A Commitment to Greater Honor

> **1 CORINTHIANS 12:24-25** ESV
>
> [24] which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, [25] that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

God gives "greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body" (1 Corinthians 12:24-25). **The solution to the divide is greater honor.**

Race, culture and heritage have a complicated relationship, especially in the South. I could give five examples. Here is one we can all hear and stay calm: the Confederate flag. I am not picking on it. Adjust the illustration to your own area of life.

Illustration: the Confederate flag.

- To many people, the Confederate flag is no more than a symbol of Southern pride. (I am from the South and proud of it: cold air conditioning, fried food and sweet tea.)
- For some, it is a legacy passed down for generations: "My granddaddy fought under that flag."
- For some full-blooded Americans, there is just something about it that means something to them.
- For others, it has nothing to do with the Confederacy. It is the General Lee, Bo and Luke Duke running from Boss Hogg, and a time and place that meant something.
- But for others, especially in the South, that flag is a reminder of oppression, slavery, and being treated not as a person but as property. And that means something to them.

What do you do with that tension? It is easy to honor people in the things that do not matter. When there is real tension, greater honor becomes a job.

So maybe it is time to get a really nice box. Take the flag down off the wall, the flagpole or the car. Fold it up, treat it with respect, and put it in that box. Once or twice a year, take it out and have your moment to remember Paw Paw or Meemaw. Keep Bo and Luke in the den or the man cave. Maybe the Confederate flag T-shirt is for yard work, not Walmart runs. **That is called greater honor.** What is no big deal to you could be a big deal to someone else.

There is nothing wrong with it and everything wrong with it at the same time. That is exactly when we treat people with greater honor.

Conclusion

If we are going to be a church for all people, really for all people, it will take:

- A commitment to **listen**.
- A commitment to **cover**.
- A commitment to **greater honor**.

I do not really have a close for a message like this. But I keep coming back to Romans 12.

> **ROMANS 12:2 ESV**
>
> [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

> **ROMANS 12:3-5 ESV**
>
> [3] For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. [4] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

The beauty of the body of Christ is that, for the first time in history, people of every racial and ethnic background, every class, education level and age, can come together under the same banner of the finished work of Jesus. So you cannot look at people who are different from you and assume your life experience should be good enough for them to just get on board.

> **ROMANS 12:15-16 ESV**
>
> [15] Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. [16] Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

This is not a “be smart enough” game or a “have the right answers” game. The statistics do not solve this. That is why I have not used any numbers this week: depending on who you ask, they say opposite things.

We live combat-ready with our opinions and are rarely open to understanding. But isn't that part of the thing? Being "transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Romans 12:2) by the continual touch of the Holy Spirit is part of living for the Lord.

What we can do is look at people and say: if you are hurting, I will hurt with you. If it does not affect me, I will still stand with you. **I see you, I hear you, I stand with you,** even if I go home and still do not fully understand.

Ministry is about people. Like John the Baptist, we make the path straight for people to receive the gospel. We do not make it more complicated to get to Jesus than it has to be.

THE PRAYER

Have the congregation lift their hands and ask the Lord to send people to this church who make them uncomfortable, so God can teach them how to love people different from themselves. It will not always be easy or clean. A well-integrated church will have its share of tension, and that is what we are asking for.

Pray along these lines:

- Father, send us people who make us uncomfortable, including people who make me, the pastor, uncomfortable.
- Send us people who do not look, sound or act the way we expect, so we can be challenged and changed and grow.
- Send us the people who are not welcome anywhere else, the people other churches have rejected.
- We are not asking You to make it easy. Anoint us with the Holy Spirit to be open and available for all people.

In Jesus' name, amen.



ABOUT

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Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, an author, and the creator of POWER 27. He has given more than 20 years to the local church and helps pastors and ministry leaders lead BIG.

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