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Hey, I want to welcome you wherever you may be joining us from around the world. It is so good to have you as a part of our Traders Point church family.

Well, many of you know that last week I sat down with a friend of ours, Pastor Kenny Hart from The Gathering in Harlem. We had a conversation around the subjects of systemic racism, justice, and hope.

I sincerely hope that it was a helpful conversation to you. I've heard from so many of you who said you learned a lot and you were encouraged as well as convicted. But the primary motivation for us to have that conversation was to model what a conversation like that might look like so you may be inspired and equipped to do the same in your own personal life.

And yet, with that said, I am fully aware that this issue is much, much bigger than a single conversation. We can't just have a single conversation and leave it at that. So, the question I've been asking, and that you've maybe been asking is, "Okay, well we had a conversation last week. Now what? What are we supposed to think now? What are we supposed to say now? What are we supposed to do now?"

And most importantly, "What does God's Word require of us as his people?"

When God's Word says to us in 1 Peter 4 that, "Judgement begins in the house of the Lord," it says that because as believers, as the Body of Christ, what happens within the church spills out into society.

As followers of Jesus, we need to lead the way. We need to lead the way in speech, thought, and action. But most importantly, we need to lead the way in love. I'm reminded of what Hosea 4:1 says:

*"My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge."*

And we have a whole lot of information right now. There is more information at our fingertips than ever in the history of the world, but that doesn't necessarily mean we're growing in knowledge.

We are getting a lot of information from social media and from news stories, but when was the last time we really went to the knowledge of God's word? And what does he have to say about it?

What I want to do over the course of the next few moments, as your imperfect pastor who doesn't have all the answers, is just walk through the story line of the knowledge of God's word. Because God has a whole lot to say about systemic racism and injustice, and he doesn't stutter. He is undeniably clear.

Now I do want to offer just this very quick disclaimer, just for a little bit of context. I am shooting this message on a Wednesday, which I normally do not do, nor do I like to do, because there are so many

things changing in our world during this season that I want to record the message on the weekend so it is fresh.

But I had a death in our family this week, which requires us to be out of town on the weekend. And I felt really convicted that it was important that you hear this message from me. So, I am recording it early in the week. I just ask for your understanding and your grace. I just want to acknowledge that.

So, in our time today I want to walk us through the collective storyline of the Bible to help us see the heart of God on the issue of racism and injustice. For many of you, this is going to be review. You already know it. Others of you, this is going to be brand new information.

I pray that our eyes might be opened. I pray that we would be willing to learn and grow from this. Now I realize that tensions are still high, emotions are elevated, and opinions run deep. So, I think this verse right here out of James 1:19 must set the tone. It simply says this:

*“Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.”*

And we just don't see enough of that verse lived out in the world today. We need to let the wisdom of James 1:19 bake into all of our hearts and minds, regardless of our background, your perspective, your politics, or your opinion.

There are a couple of ways we can apply that verse to our situation. For example, I want you to know that talking about this issue does not mean we don't support the men and women who serve us in law enforcement. In fact, I have a great amount of empathy for the men and women serving us in law enforcement because, as a pastor, I know what it's like to be judged by the worst of those in your profession. And I want you to know right now that if you are in law enforcement we love you, we're praying for you, and we support you.

Another way we can apply the wisdom of James 1:19 to the situation is last week when Pastor Kenny said that, “Rioting is the language of the unheard,” that doesn't mean that he or we condone looting or violent rioting. A few of you didn't hear that because you weren't quick to listen and slow to speak.

You see, the fact that anyone doesn't feel they have a voice to be heard should first of all break our hearts. And the only way it does is if you're quick to listen and slow to speak, and slow to become angry or defensive.

Now I'll be the first to admit that I'm not even close to having all of this figured out, nor do I have nice and tidy answers. Quite frankly, if I could be honest with you, I'm exhausted and overwhelmed.

Now, this is not the first time I've addressed this subject from this platform. My very first message at Traders Point back in 2008, I spent a significant part of that message talking about God's diversity for his church and the desire for us to be a church that grows in that diversity.

I've preached on this subject before from this stage, and every time I do I just brace. Because I know I'm going to take arrows from people on both sides of the issue. It's impossible to please everybody when you talk about this, and I'm not trying to.

I've read books and listened to lectures, and I've had multiple conversations with my black and brown friends. I still feel absolutely overwhelmed and ill-equipped to talk about this, primarily because the issue of systemic racism and injustice is complex. And it's got a deep, deep dysfunctional history.

Therefore, I'm often overwhelmed and I don't know where to start. And I don't know what to say or how to help. But I do know silence is not the answer. And we live in a really broken and sinful world. We've got to acknowledge that and realize that as much as we strive for this, we are not going to resolve the issue of racism fully on this side of eternity.

Yet that doesn't give us permission to give up or to be silent. As followers of Jesus we are consistently commanded to be growing in love toward one another, to lay down our lives for a friend. To speak up on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are in pain.

In Proverbs 31:8 it says this:

*"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed."*

And we cannot do this if, as white Christians, we are regularly interrupting with, "Yeah but," or "What about," or this one right here, "I'm not a racist." When we do that we come across as tone deaf and unloving. And speaking as a white Christian, can I say that there are far too many white Christians who have a PhD in statistics, but a third-grade education in empathy.

So, this has to start with humility. And that's what James 1:19 is all about. You can't do James 1:19 without humility. And humility requires us acknowledging that we don't know what we don't know or have ever experienced. I will never fully understand what it means to be black or brown in America. I will also never fully appreciate the privileges that have been handed to me just because the color of my skin is white.

And I realize those sentences might offend some of you because you don't think you are explicitly or personally a racist. You hear terms like white privilege and you bristle at that because you say, "Wait a second. I've worked really hard for what I have. And my life hasn't always been easy."

Can I lovingly say, "That's a big part of the problem?"

I heard somebody say that white privilege does not mean that your life has been easy, or that you haven't worked hard for what you have. It just means the color of your skin has not been a factor that has made your life hard. And humility calls us to acknowledge that we live in a system that benefits you just because your skin is lighter than someone else's.

Humility calls us to see the world through someone else's perspective, without any objections, defenses, or qualifications, and just sitting in that with this for a minute with your mouth shut, and feeling it with them.

Humility requires that I come to realize that my life has not been made more difficult because of the color of my skin. I've done a lot of personal reflecting over the last couple of weeks. And to my knowledge, I don't think I have any intentional racism in my heart that I'm aware of.

I've never once looked at somebody else with a different skin color and thought, "I am better than you because of my skin color." I don't think that's in there. Yet I wouldn't be fully honest with you if I didn't say that there is probably some sort of conscious or unconscious prejudice that is lurking around in my heart somewhere due to the lens by which I see the world because of my upbringing and my experiences.

I don't believe the answer is to say we need to be color blind. I don't think that's possible. I also think that's unbiblical because God created diversity within humanity. That's to be celebrated and acknowledged. I think the answer is that we pray.

And the prayer in my heart is just, "God, would you please search me? Would you please find anything in me that is not pleasing to you or that might indirectly hurt someone else? Would you root that stuff out of my heart and give me the humility to face it and to do that hard work to remove it?"

And there is no room whatsoever for racism or injustice within the Kingdom of God, therefore we should not allow it or tolerate it here on earth. And Jesus was not passive about this issue; therefore we will not be either.

So, what I want to do is I want to walk us through the story line of God's word and I want to show you this is really close to the heart of God. I want to start with this statement right here.

Every human being is an image bearer of God

regardless of background, regardless of gender, regardless of skin color, or ethnicity, or language. We see this in Genesis 1. At the very beginning God's crowning achievement was human beings. And he created them different, but equal. And he said, "You are man. You are woman." And he looked at that and said, "This is really, really good."

Humanity is God's most cherished creation. And each one of us reflects his image to and within the world. And this is why the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless others are sin. They were not looked upon or treated as the image bearers of God that they were.

The second truth is this.

God's purpose in salvation is to restore, reunite, and bless ALL people.

So, in Genesis 2 and 3 we see that there is man's rebellion against God. Sin enters into the world. All of this comes to a boiling point in Genesis 11. And human beings got together and sinfully and collectively rebelled against God at the tower of Babel.

The result of that was that their languages were confused. The result of their sin was that people were scattered, cultures were scattered, and ethnicities were scattered at Babel. Sin separated us.

And then God begins the work of reunification of the nations in the very next chapter. He wastes no time. In Genesis 12 we see that God comes to Abram and says, "You are going to be the father to this nation, and I'm going to begin this reunifying work."

God says to him, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous. You will be a blessing to others." The Israelites would be God's chosen people and the conduit of that blessing to every other nation around the world—all tribes, all tongues, all ethnicities. God's intentions were to bless all of humanity.

You fast forward to the time of Jesus in the New Testament and we often forget that Jesus, the Son of God, was both fully God and fully man. And he was a person of color from the Middle East who lived in a world of oppressive, explosive racial tension.

In ancient Israel the culture was Jew versus Gentile. Jewish people had created these laws. For example, it was illegal for a Jew to have a meal with a Gentile. And then the Jewish people, they lived under this oppressive Roman system. There was just racism everywhere. And that's the world in which Jesus begins his earthly ministry.

And he confronts it head on. Jesus was always stepped between the oppressed and the oppressor. One of my favorite examples of this was when he decides one day to go through Samaria, not around it. And the Samaritans were a hated ethnic group. The disciples couldn't believe what Jesus was doing.

But he goes through Samaria, sits down at a well, and has a conversation with a Samaritan woman, and through that conversation completely changes her life. And she goes back to town and tells everybody about it. It's ironic that the very first missionary that we get sent out was not Paul, and it was not Peter. It was a Samaritan woman.

And in John 17, before Jesus goes to the cross he prays for all of us. In his prayer is the unity of all people. It's the diversity of God's people. Jesus prays for us. He prays for every race and culture, that they may become perfectly one, he says, "so that the world may know that you sent me." It is directly tied to mission. He said, "A unified church is going to be a church that's on mission."

And then we come to the Book of Acts, which is the birth of the early church. And in Acts 2, the day of Pentecost, all the believers were together in one place, and suddenly a sound from heaven like a mighty windstorm and the Spirit of God fell over them. And we saw that there were different ethnic groups as the Spirit fell. Here is what it says beginning in verse 7:

*“They were completely amazed. ‘How can this be?’ they exclaimed. ‘These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!’”*

You see, Pentecost was a reversal of Babel. The Spirit was uniting what sin had divided. If you go a few chapters later to Acts 10 Peter receives this vision from God. You’ve got to read it. It’s an amazing story where the sky opens up and this sheet falls from heaven. It’s filled with animals, reptiles, and birds. He is so perplexed by this dream.

He gets up and he’s not quite sure what it means. Then he has a meal with a man with a different ethnic background from him, a guy named Cornelius. That’s when Peter gets it. And he declares in Acts 10:34.

*“Then Peter replied, ‘I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.’”*

Jesus is for everyone. The Spirit of God is uniting what sin has divided. You go to Acts 13 when God is establishing the church in Antioch. We are given the name of five specific leaders in that church. You’ve got Saul and Barnabas, who were ethnic Jews living in a Greek culture. You’ve got Manahen of the aristocracy. You’ve got Simeon who is also called Niger, which means black or dark. You’ve got Lucius of Cyrene, which is modern-day Libya.

Now of those five leaders, get this, one of them is from the Middle East, one is from Asia, one is from the Mediterranean, and one is from Africa—all over the place. Here is what’s interesting about that. Most of those names we never read about in the Bible ever again.

And so, why tell us this specifically their names and where they are from? It’s because God is making a point that in the very beginning of his church the leaders were diverse. The Spirit was uniting what sin had divided.

You go to Acts 16 when God was establishing the church at Philippi. In those days there was this tragic prayer that many Jewish men were taught to pray. The prayer went like this. “Thank you, God, that I’m not a woman, I’m not a slave, and I’m not a Gentile.”

That tragic prayer reflected the racial supremacy that had been concreted into the soul. And in Acts 16, when the Spirit begins to save people and build the church at Philippi, we get three specific conversion accounts—Lydia, a slave girl, and a Roman jailer.

I want you to see that the first three converts were a woman, a slave, and a Gentile. The Spirit of God was uniting what sin had divided. You just can’t deny it. It’s more than coincidence. The overarching narrative of God’s Word is extremely clear. God has set out to destroy the dividing wall of hostility and

create one new man from every nation of man under our brown-skinned, Middle-Eastern Savior named Jesus.

And then you come to the final act of the Bible in Revelation 7. Where John shares a vision with us of what the new heaven and the new earth is going to look like. John said this in chapter 7 verse 9:

*“After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, ‘Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!’”*

And these brief glimpses into heaven are where we see diversity in ethnicity, yet we are united as one in and through Jesus and we all call him Father. The Kingdom of God includes diversity, and Jesus is King of all people and for all people. God’s aim is not homogeneity, it is unity in diversity. Revelation 21 says that there is the “glory of the nations.”

So, what now? And the truth is that I will never fully understand what it is like to be a person of color living in America, but I do know there is no room for racism in the Kingdom of God. Not because the news or the social media tells me that, but because God’s Word tells me that.

And when Jesus went out of his way to rescue and bless everyone, he commands us to do the same. And I don’t have all the answers, but I do know the solution to systemic racism and injustice in America will only be found in and through Jesus.

The solution will not be found through further violence. It won’t be found through more peaceful protests and other social media posts, or changed legislation, even though there is a place and a purpose for those latter three.

No, the only solution is when the hearts of men and women are changed. Jesus is the only one who can change hearts. It’s why he went to a cross. It’s why he laid his life down. And right now, more than ever, our divided nation needs Jesus.

And we, Traders Point, declare the name of Jesus, which means our divided nation needs a united church behind the name of Jesus—people of all colors, creeds, and ethnicities standing together, standing up for the oppressed, speaking against violence of all kinds, speaking truth and hope and grace and peace and reconciliation into the world and living those words out through direct action. We need to treat each other as the image bearers of God that we are.

So, what do we do? And where do we start? Like I said, I don’t have all the answers, but I think it has to start here with James 1:19 and listening, learning, and empathizing, really hearing each other, not talking over each other. And let Jesus change our minds so that our hearts are softened and our actions will follow.

For any white person listening to this, if you are finding yourself a little uncomfortable, agitated, or defensive, before you fire off the email, can I ask you very lovingly to really take a hard look at what is

in your heart? Ask why you are responding that way. More importantly, is your emotional response in line with the heart and the character of Jesus who willingly laid down his life for others.

Please, let's not let this erode into a political issue where you feel like you've got to pick a side. You see, when you become a Christian a true thing about you is you are no longer from Ohio, Germany, or Asia. You are not primarily Anglo, African American, Asian, or Hispanic. No, you are citizen of God's Kingdom. Our allegiance is not to a red donkey or a blue elephant, but to a slain lamb.

I'm not fully sure of all the steps toward resolution and reconciliation, but I'm committed to the hard work of it. I know this has to be the first step:

Repentance.

We've been talking a lot about it lately. And repentance isn't just lip service. It's not, "I'm really, really sorry." No, repentance is pretty gut-wrenching. Repentance is painful, it's uncomfortable, and it's where you ask for forgiveness, not just from God but from the people that you've hurt so that your mind can change and your heart can soften. And your actions can follow. We cannot emphasize or live out James 1:19. We cannot speak out for or join together with until we repent.

So, I'll go first. I repent for staying silent when I should have said something. I repent for the undetected or unacknowledged prejudice that's in my heart. I repent to being too passive in building bridges to others who don't look like me.

I'm truly sorry for the injustice that many of you endure on a daily basis that I never will. I'm sorry for America's shameful past and divisive present. That doesn't mean I don't love the country in which we live, it just means that this country needs Jesus more than ever and God is still working on us. Things must change. I'd love to walk with you through this really emotional, complex problem together, not separate, but together.

I would really hope you feel welcome and comfortable at Traders Point. I would love it if we could all join together in declaring the glory of God's Kingdom to a hurting world that when the world looks around and sees all this division, they look at the church, they look at our church, and they say, "How can you guys be so diverse, yet unified and loving?" And we can say, "It's because of Jesus."

I really look forward one day to a new heaven and a new earth, a place where there is no more pain, there are no more tears, and there is no more virus, there is no more racism, there is no more hurt. And there is just joy. We can join together in our diversity and sing to King Jesus, our heavenly Father, together.

Until that day, I want to see healing in our nation. I want God's Kingdom to come to earth and for us to begin to experience it in the here and now because his Spirit is within us and with us. That will not happen without humility.



Our nation needs healing. Our nation needs Jesus. Since we remove unnecessary barriers, Traders Point, that keep people from Jesus, that means our nation and our city need us. And we need Jesus as we point our city to him.

And I know right now that it would be really easy to look at our nation's history and our current state of the world and to feel really tired, frustrated, hopeless, and defeated. And maybe you just feel like giving up in your spirit. I get that.

But I want to encourage you. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, it says, "There is a season for many things." There are 28 seasons listed in the Book of Ecclesiastes. There is a season to live, and a season to die. There is a season to laugh, and a season to cry.

There are 28 seasons listed, but you know one season you will not find in Ecclesiastes? It never says that there is a time to quit. Don't ever quit, because everything you are believing for is on the other side of not giving up.

Psalm 27 says, "Surely, you shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living," and it is to that end that we pray. I want to encourage you in your homes, and later in your groups, that you would pray that prayer. I want to encourage you to reach out to someone who looks different than you, who has a different experience than you, and have a hard conversation with both of you keeping your eyes on Jesus. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to be angry to the glory of King Jesus.

Father, we come to you right now, and we just cry out to you. We repent. God, I pray you would convict the comfortable and you would comfort the conflicted. God, I pray that your Spirit right now would begin this healing process in our nation. May it first begin with each one of us individually, to check our own hearts and spirit, to evaluate what we are allowing to put into our minds and hearts.

May we go, not just to get information from social media, but we would go to the knowledge of your word. You are very, very clear.

Father, I pray that your Spirit would fall freshly upon our church family, and that we would be a representation of what heaven might look like one day here on earth.

We ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.