

Rooted
A Grander Glory
August 2, 2020

Good morning everyone.

I appreciate all of you who are in the room with us today as well as everyone who is currently watching online or is watching at a later time.

As Shannon said, we are continuing in our series, *Rooted*, which is based on the scripture that came up on the screen just a minute ago; something the Apostle Paul once wrote to a fledgling group of Jesus-followers in the first century.

*Just as you received Christ
Jesus as Lord, continue to live
your lives in him, rooted and
built up in him, strengthened*

*in the faith as you were taught
... Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV)*

*See to it that no one takes you
captive through hollow and
deceptive philosophy, which
depends on human tradition
and the elemental spiritual
forces of this world rather than
on Christ. Colossians 2:8
(NIV)*

I want to take a few minutes this morning to dive a little more deeply into the reason *why* Paul expressed this concern and point out a significant parallel to what's happening in our culture today.

But before I get to that, earlier this week, I got a couple of really good questions about last Sunday's message.

And they were so good that I decided it would be well worth repeating my responses for you

all because I think it will put what I've been saying (and will continue to say in the rest of this series) in a context that hopefully ratchets down any unnecessary tension.

Good Questions

And there is potentially *a lot* of tension in what I'm talking about because I'm making a very strong case that we, as a nation – and particularly our young people – are being inundated by a cultural gospel that is telling us “this is how you ought to think and act about things like identity and glory and atonement for wrongs and justice” ...

... all of which are religious, moral, and spiritual issues ... though, most of us perceive what's going on to be “just political.” But it's not.

We are being inundated by a gospel

proclaiming itself to be “good news about a better way” than the current reality but is, in fact, *not* a better way and is, I believe, *demonic* in origin.

Of course, if you’re already convinced of this, you’re thinking (and some have actually said this to me), “so, what’s the big deal? I don’t see anything offensive in what you’re saying, Rick.”

But, if you’re someone who, for whatever reason, *leans* in the direction of this way of thinking, your reaction is likely much different.

Your reaction is somewhere between “Hmmm ... I never thought of it that way. I’ll have to consider that” to “I can’t listen to this guy anymore because he has been blinded to the truth by his white, Eurocentric, male, heteronormative privilege – a blinding so

severe and thorough that he doesn't even realize it."

And that's tension.

So, here are the questions (and I'm condensing for time and clarity):

1. Does "civil rights" fall into your category of "cultural gospel?"
2. There seems to be a lot of similarities between BLM efforts and "civil rights" work. Shouldn't you have researched them more?

Really good questions. So ...

As to "civil rights" question ... that is NOT what I am talking about.

"Civil Rights" as classically defined says that ...

- *All people* must be treated fairly and equally under the law regardless of who they are.
- *All people* should have equal opportunity to pursue life, liberty, and happiness.
- *No person* should be discriminated against because of who they are.
- And whatever structures prevent those things from happening should be challenged and changed.

All of those things I contend are, in fact, rooted in the Gospel according to Jesus.

In fact, the greatest proponent of classical Civil Rights in my lifetime was actually a *Baptist minister*. Perhaps you've heard of him.

Long before he became famous as a civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. was a pastor.

And if you go back and listen to or read his sermons (as I have done over the years), it is very clear that it was the teaching of Jesus that motivated his work.

Furthermore, I think it's just as clear that he would hardly recognize or support much of what is being communicated culturally these days about issues such as identity, glory, atoning for past wrongs and justice ...

... which is, again, why what I am talking about in this series is *not* "civil rights" as most of us understand the term because the "gospel" we're hearing isn't really about that.

And I think that will become clearer today and in the weeks that follow.

As to the second question about similarities between the efforts of the BLM organization and “civil rights” work ... and whether I should have done more research on that group for this series ...

I probably do know more than I am letting on ...

... which is true of every message. So much of what I initially research and write doesn't make it into the final cut because I don't want to talk for an hour, and you don't want to listen for an hour.

But, in this particular case, I'm intentionally omitting any commentary about that organization not because of time concerns but because I do not want them to become yet another lightning rod of division.

- "Oh, so you *support* them? You think they're *good*?"
- "Oh, so you're *against* them? You think they're *bad*?"

Quite frankly, those questions are just "gotcha" questions which, if you answer "wrong," gives people "permission" (in their minds) to dismiss you and what you're saying.

People did that to Jesus all time.

- "So, Jesus, should we Jews pay taxes to the Romans?"

"Because, you know, we're not supposed to have any other gods besides YHWH and Caesar claims to be a god ..."

- "So, Jesus, is it lawful to heal someone

on the Sabbath or not?"

"Because, you know, even though healing is a good thing it requires some of your spiritual energy to make it happen ... which is work ... which good Jews don't do on the Sabbath ..."

But Jesus was smart. He knew that if He gave a direct answer to those kinds of questions, He would be dismissed by people on one side of those issues or the other.

So, He didn't.

Instead, He would always redirect the conversation to the issue that was far more important than the "gotcha" game that they wanted him to play.

And that's why I really don't have anything to say about the BLM organization or *any other*

organization.

It would only be a distraction to the bigger point I'm trying to make, which is that ...

... what is going on right now in our culture is not a political battle. It's a spiritual one.

It *seems* political because that's the stage on which the play is taking place. But it's really not.

It's a *spiritual* battle – and one that began long before BLM came into existence.

The Real Battle

In fact – and I'm going to let you in on a little secret – the battle actually didn't even begin *on this earth*.

The battle, according to the Hebrew prophets

(and corroborated by Jesus) ...

And by the way, the only reason we care or even know what Jesus "corroborated" is because <WORDS>.

And the fact that He rose from the dead is why Christians believe, according to Jesus and the Hebrew prophets, that ...

The battle began when Satan – the highest and most amazing angel God created – believed that God was an *oppressor* who was *oppressing* him.

Now, if you've ever read the Bible, you've probably never thought of it like that before, but this is exactly what was going on.

Satan said, in essence, "This whole setup is rigged according to God's cultural preferences. He is imposing His values, expectations, and norms on everyone and

everything else which is unfair and unjust. It's systemic Deism."

"And He needs to check His privilege. He needs to get out of the way and let me and, those I represent, rise up so that I will be like the Most High God."ⁱ

... which is *exactly* what Satan said. "I will be like the Most High."

But The Most High God did *not* check His privilege which, by the way, was the only right and reasonable thing to do given that God is totally and completely righteous and holy and it would be a cosmic travesty for Him *not* to be in that position.

So, Satan rebelled. And he convinced a multitude of other angels (who we now refer to as "demons") to join him.

And they set their sights on the destruction of the crown jewel of God's creation – you and me and every other human who has ever lived and will live.

And since the very beginning, they have tried to sell us on the same exact idea.

“God is an *oppressor* and He is oppressing *you*.”

In the Garden, in essence, that's what Satan said to Adam and Eve.

“Now, you guys *do* realize that God really isn't interested in your well-being. This whole thing about eating the fruit of whatever tree is just a power play designed to keep you in your place. You get that, right?”

“The *real* reason He doesn't want you to eat it is because He knows that when you do, you will be like Him, which will mean the end of

His *divine privilege* over you because you'll be on the same level."

Obviously, Satan was lying to them because when he rebelled, he did *not* become like God. Instead he was cast out of God's presence.

And to this day, he and his demonic forces of evil continue whispering the same idea to you and me: "God 'rules' aren't designed to give you a fulfilled and flourishing life. They're oppressive. They're an attempt to limit your freedom and keep you down because He is an oppressor."

And you know what I'm talking about because you've experienced that. You've had that thought.

Now, the reason I tell you that story – and, again, you know I try not to make a big deal out of this demonic stuff because I don't want to give anyone the impression there is a demonic cause to every bad thing that happens ...

The reason I tell you this story is because I find it *literally stunning* – mouth-open, jaw-hanging stunning ...

That the overarching narrative of the world according to Satan is one of *oppression* ...

... which just happens to be ... coincidentally ...

... *the exact same overarching narrative of the world* which is being constantly communicated these days by what I am calling the “cultural gospel” ...

... except that, in this case, it's not about God because God isn't even present in this

particular narrative.

Instead, the role of *oppressor* is played by whoever created the dominant culture and is, supposedly, benefiting from that structure to the detriment of the *oppressed* ... which is everyone else.

And *this* – oppressor vs. oppressed – is the fundamental problem of the world according to the cultural gospel.

This is the problem that must be solved in order for there to be “full flourishing” not just of humans but of our entire world.

Now, I want to be very clear that I don't think people who believe this are necessarily *bad* or *evil*.

In fact, I think most people who believe this is how it is *sincerely do mean well*. I really do.

- They want the world to be a better place ... just like you and I do.
- They want a world where people who are oppressed are oppressed no longer ... just like you and I do.

But *I also think* they're deceived because, according to Jesus, the problem with our world ...

- Isn't the oppression from privileged classes and groups.
- And it isn't systemic racism or systemic injustice or systemic greed.

According to Jesus ...

The problem with our world is *systemic sin* – rebellion against God and God's design for our lives.

And by “systemic” I mean that it is embedded in the heart of every human being as well as in every cultural structure we have built, including the church.

Now, please don’t hear what I’m not saying: there are oppressors and oppressed in this world. And it’s wrong and it’s evil and it ought to be stopped.

But oppression is only one of the problems; one sin among many others. It is not the root issue.

Of course, at this point, someone might say, “well, OK, Rick, maybe you’re right. But what’s the harm in buying into the oppression narrative? After all, it *does* exist. You just said so.”

Well, that's the point of this series. I'm trying to describe the difference between the Gospel of Jesus and the "cultural gospel."

And last week we talked about how when you see everything in terms of oppressor vs. oppressed, the single most important issue is *identity* – specifically, the cultural groups to which you belong and associate with ...

- And why that approach is so divisive and ultimately demoralizing and even destructive
- And why the Christian approach is not only *truer* but demonstrably *better*.

And I won't go back into all of that again.

If you weren't here, I strongly suggest you check out the message in the media section

of our app or on our website.

Worthy of Glory

Instead, what I want to do today is to highlight another significant contrast between the Gospel of Jesus and the cultural gospel.

Specifically, what kind of person and behavior deserves to be honored and praised and exalted? Who ought to be glorified?

... which again, is primarily a *religious* concept, not a political one.

Well, in a system where the world is basically made up of only two kinds of people – oppressor and oppressed – it's certainly not anyone who is in the perceived oppressor class!

In that kind of a system, if you want to be highly thought of ... if you want to be honored

and praised and exalted ...

- You want it to be very clear that you are among the oppressed.
- You want it to be very obvious that you have been *victimized* by the hegemonic system that only “the privileged” benefit from.

In fact, the more ways you can demonstrate that you are a victim, the better ...

... because, according to the cultural gospel, glory is to be found in *victimhood*.

I think you'd have to be living on a deserted island somewhere not to see that playing out day after day in our culture.

You'd intentionally have to be closing your eyes to miss that there are a whole lot of perks that go along with being a victim of

oppression, even if they are only “micro-aggressions.”

- a. For one, as a victim, you are automatically imbued with a moral superiority that means your word and your experience cannot be questioned ... especially by anyone of the “oppressor class.”
- b. For another, you are immediately accepted as a member of the community of the abused (although, as we saw last week, if others have more “intersections of oppression” than you do, they’ll eventually come to see you as an oppressor, too).
- c. As a victim, you’re also held to a different moral standard than the oppressor.

Specifically, you can do to them exactly

what they did to you but because you have been oppressed, it's not evil. (This is why it's morally OK to burn down businesses when you feel oppressed).

d. Finally, as a victim, you're owed reparations whether it's from an individual or from the oppressor class in general.

I mean, with all that, who wouldn't want to be a victim!

Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. *I'm not saying there are no true victims ...* because there are. Many of them.

And I have been one of them.

I've told you before that, unbeknownst to my parents, from the time I was in third grade through sixth grade, I and my sisters were

bullied pretty much every day by a crazy family that lived up the road from us.

I won't go into all the details of what happened other than to say that it took me many years to connect the dots between that experience and why, as an adult, I approached so many challenges feeling one-down to everyone else and why I felt so intimidated in situations where I clearly should not have been.

And my sisters had it even worse.

Point being ... I understand, personally, in at least a small way, what it means to be victimized and the affect it can have on you.

Furthermore, as a pastor, I've seen it in much greater degrees in some of the people I have known and counseled over the years.

So, “being victimized” happens. It’s real. It’s part of living in a world filled with sin and sinners.

What I’m getting at ... what I’m questioning is ...

... whether or not encouraging people to think of themselves primarily as victims truly is good for them. And is it good for the world in general?

Actually, I’m really not *questioning* it because I think it is *not* good. I think it’s destructive personally and culturally.

And I could go into a lot of detail on why I believe that is true, such as ...

- It makes you feel entitled
- It keeps you always on the lookout for the next offense

- It causes you to be ungrateful for what you have
- It leads you to see and treat people as objects rather than people

... but two reasons stand out in my mind as being particularly destructive.

First of all, I'm sure you remember Jusse Smollett.

He's the guy who hired two brothers who he worked with to beat him up so he could claim he had been the victim of a racist, homophobic attack at the hands of Trump supporters.

When police investigated and determined that he was, in all likelihood, *lying* about what happened ...

... Chicago Police Superintendent Eddie

Johnson was infuriated.

At a press conference following Smollett's arrest, Johnson said, "Why would anyone, especially an African- American man, use the symbolism of a noose to make false accusations?"

"How could someone look at the hatred and suffering associated with that symbol and see an opportunity to manipulate that symbol to further his own public profile?"ⁱⁱ

I understand Johnson's frustration, but the answer to his question is very simple.

This is what happens when you believe that glory is found in being a victim.

And Jusse Smollett – who is no worse than any other normal sinner like you and me – did believe it and wanted it. So, he did what he did.

The second reason why glorifying victimhood is so destructive ...

... and this is going to bring us to why Paul was so insistent that the Colossian Christians should be on guard against deception; why they needed to work hard to stay firmly rooted in Jesus and in what they had been taught of *His* Gospel ...

In Paul's day in that part of the world, there was a new spiritual movement known as Gnosticism. And Gnosticism is a word comes from the Greek word *gnosis* which simply means *knowledge*.

And what was happening was that people were going around saying "well, it's one thing for you to believe in Jesus but ...

- Unless you have had a special experience (like we have) ...
- That has allowed you to see and know and understand things ...
- That others simply *can't* see and know and understand ...
- Because they have not been enlightened ... or awakened ... or woke (like we have been) ...

"Unless you have had this experience, you're not really *all that*. You're not special (like we are), so you just need *to be quiet and listen to us* because we know what you simply cannot know."

And if you think I'm making that up because I'm trying to slam "woke culture" (which says

many of the same kinds of things), I'm not.

Go research Gnosticism sometime and you will see that what the cultural gospel is claiming about victimhood is pretty much the same thing.ⁱⁱⁱ

It claims that only victims of oppression – only those who are “woke” (and stay woke) to the reality of that oppression^{iv} – can really see and know the truth ...

... which means – *and this is why it is so deadly* ...

It means that no one can legitimately question them.

It means that their claim to what is “true and right and just” must be taken as *inerrant* and *infallible* ... like the Bible ... like the Pope.

And, that friends, has been shown by history as a dangerous place to be because that kind

of hubris and arrogance does not lead to peace, love and understanding to say nothing of the full-flourishing of creation ... which is what we all want.

Furthermore, this is another place where this "cultural gospel" stands in complete opposition to the Gospel according to Jesus ...

... which says that all of us are blinded by sin and all of us are deceived by our own sinful nature and, therefore, we cannot trust even our own hearts to guide us.

One of the ancient Hebrew prophets put like this:

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)*

And if you're a Christian that's why ...

- You need the influence of the Scripture
- You need the influence of pastors and teachers
- You need the influence of other believers who personally know you and can speak truth and grace to you
- You need the influence of Holy Spirit

Because without those things you will not stay rooted in Jesus. And you will be deceived. You will be swept away and adrift in this current cultural storm.

A Better Way

And I realize that not everyone watching or listening to this message is a Christian and

so, obviously, it doesn't matter to you whether or not you're rooted in Jesus and what He taught.

But based on all the negatives associated with the cultural gospel, I think you might want to look into what *He* thinks about victimhood and where glory is truly found with respect to that issue.

So, let's do that very quickly. And we can do it quickly because it's pretty simple and one of Jesus' best friends, John, recorded a story to illustrate it.

And if you've been around church for any length of time, I'm sure you're familiar with it.

John tells us that ...

*Jesus returned to Jerusalem
for one of the Jewish holy*

days.

John 5:1 (NLT)

... and that upon his return he decided to make a special visit to a very interesting group of people. He says that ...

Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches.

Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches waiting for a certain movement of the water, for an angel of the Lord came from time to time and stirred up the water.

And the first person to step in after the water was stirred was healed of whatever disease he had. John 5:2-5 (NLT)

Now, we're not sure if that's what really

happened, or if that was just a myth associated with the fact that the underground spring would occasionally belch and cause the stirring.

And we're not sure if people really were healed or if that was just the belief.

John goes on to tell us that ...

*One of the men lying there
had been sick for thirty-eight
years.*

Now, when you first read that it's easy to feel sorry for this guy. I mean, for 38 years he had been sick, and the impression from the story is that, for many of those years, he had been waiting around this pool for the magic moment.

But, for him, that moment had obviously never come.

I wonder why?

Let's find out.

John continues:

*When Jesus saw him and
knew he had been ill for a
long time, he asked him,
"Would you like to get well?"
John 5:6 (NLT)*

What a strange – and even offensive –
question to ask!

I mean, what kind of person would *not* want
to be well after 38 years of being sick?

Well, think about it. It would have to be the
kind of person who has grown comfortable
with being a victim; someone who has come
to believe it is *better* to be a victim than not to

be.

... which explains why, in the original Greek what Jesus says is actually, *"Will you be well?"* Or, even better, *"is it your will to be well?"*

And Jesus' asks it like that because, as it turns out, that is the issue with this guy ... as his response is about to reveal.

Jesus asks, *"Is it your will to be well?"*

Listen to what the guy says.

*"I can't, sir," the sick man said,
"for I have no one to put me
into the pool when the water
bubbles up. Someone else
always gets there ahead of
me." John 5:7 (NLT)*

How strange. The guy doesn't even answer the question!

Jesus wants to know about *his will* and all the guy can talk about is who and what is keeping him down; who and what is keeping him stuck by that pool; stuck in bondage to his victimhood.

He is so used to seeing himself as a victim that the thought of *overcoming* the situation is completely beyond him.

And Jesus will have none of that. So, He looks this guy in the eye and says ...

"I'm going to overthrow the systemic injustice of this whole setup that has been created by the dominant culture of privilege so that you can be first into the pool."

No, that's not what Jesus says. At least, not on that day.

Instead, He says ...

*"Stand up, pick up your mat,
and walk!"*

"Stop looking at everyone else and how the system is stacked against you. Exercise your will to be well."

And apparently, he did because John tells us that ...

*Instantly, the man was
healed! He rolled up his
sleeping mat and began
walking!*
John 5:8-9 (NLT)

And the point of this story – at least as it regards what we're talking about today – is that in the Gospel according to Jesus ...

Glory is not found in victimhood. It's way better than that. It's a grander glory that is found in seeking to be victorious over it ...

... in seeking to not become defined as the oppressed ... by the oppression ... and the oppressors in our lives.

That's why Jesus asked the man about *his will* and not about his circumstances.

But why?

Why does God care about how we respond to victimization? Why does He care that we seek to be victorious in spite of it?

- It's because we were made for more than that.
- It's because we were created in His image which means that, in His sight, we are royalty.

And when you are royalty, you don't live like a

victim even when the circumstances are against you.

The Apostle Paul once described it like this:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

*"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:35-38 (NIV)

In other words, "It is our will not to give in to people and circumstances that want to defeat us and destroy us. We are not victims.

We are victors."

And just to be clear, once again, that is not an exercise in "the power-of-positive thinking," the reason Paul can say that and believe that and live like that – and the reason you too can say that and believe that and live like that is because of Jesus.

More than any other person who ever lived, Jesus was mistreated and abused. In his death on the cross, He was the ultimate victim.

Or so it appeared until that first Easter Sunday morning when God raised Him from the dead as the victor over the worst kind of injustice that all of Hell and all of our sin could muster.

And because that's who He is, when you belong to Him, that's who you are.

Conclusion

The question is ... is it your will to be well? Is it your will not to be sucked in by the supposed gospel that says the way to glory is in becoming and remaining a victim?

And friends, this is so important because what you think of yourself, how you see yourself, your "self-talk" ... is what defines your life.

And so I've asked the band to come and lead us in a song that's an exercise in the kind of self-talk that characterizes ...

- Someone who seeks to be victorious over the circumstances of their life
- Someone who believes that they are made for more because of who God

made them to be

- Someone who desires to be more than a conqueror in spite of all the pain – all the trouble, hardship and even persecution,

And I'm going to invite you to stand and put on your mask and sing along as a way of affirming those things.

1. Next week – “cancel culture”: specifically what should be done about people who don't measure up. Very different answers between the cultural gospel and the gospel according to Jesus.
2. Next Sunday night ... food trucks, live music in the parking lot. Great opp to be here esp if you are worried about being in the room.

3. We had a lot of rain this week ... getting the roof fixed before fall is out is really important. Cool & Dry Summer Challenge up to a little over \$200K which is awesome.

Endnotes

ⁱ Isaiah 14:13-14

ⁱⁱ <https://www.ccn.com/the-jussie-smollett-scandal-the-lefts-alarming-fetishization-of-victim-culture/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Dr. Voddie Baucham, a well-known African American pastor, calls it "ethnic Gnosticism." See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ip3nV6S_fYU

^{iv} VICTIMHOOD IS NOT A VIRTUE, Brian G. Mattson @ https://www.christianlegalsociety.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/CLSJournal_Winter2019_web.pdf