

**Rooted**  
***Name Above All Names***  
**July 19, 2020**

Good morning everyone.

I'm really glad you're with us whether you're here in the room or down the hall in the café ... OR whether you're joining us via livestream or at a later time.

And I *really do mean that*. I'm glad you're taking the time to connect with us *even if* you're not onsite.

And I'm emphasizing that because I heard from several folks after last week's message that it felt like I might have been casting aspersions at those who have decided not to join us onsite at the present time.

So, before I say anything else let me make it as

clear as I possibly can.

- If you have chosen not to be physically present with us or have chosen not to have your kids here because you're concerned about you or them getting sick from COVID19 ...
- If you have chosen not to be physical present or have chosen not to have your kids here because you're concerned that you or they might get infected and then put someone else in danger ...

If that's why you're not here, I get it.

*More importantly, I support you* in your decision.

I myself am not concerned about getting sick but my dad, who lives just over a mile from this building, is 86 years old. I've only been in his house twice since this whole thing began. And I

was worried about it both times.

So, I get it. I understand the concern – whether it’s for you personally or for someone else – and I support you.

Furthermore, I want you to know that we plan to continue livestreaming our services as well as providing online materials for kids and students *indefinitely*.

I need to say that because last week, we had a technical issue that caused those materials not to be posted until 9:45 am (instead of the normal time of 9:00 am), which caused some people to wonder if maybe we were sending a message:

“You’d better be *here* because there’s nothing else for your kids unless you are.”

We weren’t.

And if we *were* making that kind of a change, we wouldn't do it like that. We would tell you straight up.

But we're not.

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Now, for those of you who missed last Sunday's message, right now you're thinking, "Dang! Rick must've gone off the deep end last week. What did I miss???"

I'm going to tell you what you missed – at least, part of it – although I really don't think I was "off the deep end." I just expressed what to me are some very grave concerns.

And, according to more than a few, I did so with *a little bit of passion*.

And not just about *this* church, but also about what's happened to Christians and churches all

over the world – including this one – since the coronavirus began.

## **What I Want**

But, before get into that and into what I intend to cover in today’s message, I want to “pull back the curtain” just a bit, and talk to you about what it’s been like to be the lead pastor here at North Heartland since mid-March.

Actually, I’m speaking for all of our pastors because we work as a team. We’re in this together. I’m just the point person.

And the reason I’m going to do this is because, after last Sunday’s message, one of the members of this church came to talk with me about it; to let me know how it had come across to him and his family.

*And I was glad he did*, first of all, because that’s

how Christians are supposed to handle these kinds of things. We go face-to-face instead of to Facebook.

Do you have any idea how much better this world would be if just Christians did that?

Secondly, I was glad because his purpose wasn't to be critical or adversarial. It was to get clarity for himself and to help me do "this" – speaking to you all – better, which I really appreciate.

Now, the reason I'm telling you this is because, at one point in our conversation, I shared with him some of what it's been like to be the lead pastor of NHCC since mid-March ... after which he said, "that was really helpful to know."

So, I decided I should tell *you all* because I think it would be helpful for *you all* to know the heart behind what I'm saying and doing – what we *as pastors* are saying and doing – especially during this time where everyone is amped far more

than we normally are.

Sometimes, in the heat of the moment – or in the middle of a sermon – it doesn't always come out or I don't express it clearly.

Now, what's kind of interesting is that the best way to summarize it is found in the verses immediately preceding the passage on which this whole series is based. It came up on the video just before I began but, I want to put it up one more time.

**The Apostle Paul wrote:**

*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, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

*Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV)*

That's actually Paul's reason for writing to them

– the purpose of his letter. And it is also the purpose of this whole series.

As I said last week, we're living in such a crazy time. And, if we're Christians, we need to be rooted in our faith or we're going to blown away and left adrift in the middle of the storm.

But right before Paul gives his readers – followers of Jesus in the first-century city of Colossae ... right before he gives them this instruction, this guidance, this wisdom, he shares with them the heart behind it.

And when you read it, it's kind of a progression of thought.

**Paul writes:**

*My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love ...*



“I want Christians to be *encouraged* and not *discouraged*,” Paul is saying. “And I want them to experience unity instead of division with other followers of Jesus.”

**So that ...**

*... they may have the full riches of complete understanding ...*

“I want them to have more than just a surface level knowledge of what it means to believe in and follow Jesus. I want them to get the whole picture,” Paul is saying. “The full riches of complete understanding.”

**“And I want that for them,” Paul says, ...**

*... in order that they may know the mystery of God ...*

... which sounds really deep and really spiritual.

But it's not.

The mystery of God isn't some secret knowledge hidden from the uninitiated.

“The mystery of God – the thing God has been working on since the beginning that no one has figured out until now,” Paul says, ...

**... is a *person* that everyone knows about.**

*... namely, Christ ...*

The Messiah of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified and then resurrected as the first step, the building block, the cornerstone of what God is going to do to redeem this whole screwed up world.

Paul is saying, “I want Christians to be encouraged. I want them to be united and I want them to be informed and intelligent about their faith *so that they can better know a person – Jesus.*”

**“Because,” Paul says ...**

*... in whom (in him) are hidden  
all the treasures of wisdom and  
knowledge.*

What a glorious phrase: “all the treasures.”

Paul is saying, “Everything you need not only to survive in this life but to thrive in it is found in Jesus.”

- In knowing Him and following Him
- In believing in and receiving him as your savior from sin, and in making Him your mentor and your Leader.

That’s why Paul not only wrote this letter but why did what he did with his life. He himself had experienced “all the treasures” of being “in Christ” and he wanted others to experience it as

well.

And, friends, that's my heart, too.

It's why I am a pastor. It's why, at age 30, I changed careers and moved from NJ to KC so I could go to Midwestern seminary.

It's why all of our pastors – Ladell, Shannon, Mica, Julie, Andrew – are pastors.

It's why the rest of our staff and our volunteer leaders do what they do.

We want you – *I* want you – if you're a Christian

...

- To be encouraged and not discouraged.
- To be in fellowship with and experience unity with other believers.

- To be informed and intelligent about your faith.

... so that you can know Jesus better and enjoy all the “treasures” that go along with that.

And if you're not a Christian, I want you to *become* a Christian so you, too, can have all those treasures and experience those things!

So, the reason I said what I said last week that may have been hard to hear ...

- Is not because I'm mad at anyone.
- And not because I'm judging anyone who feels like they shouldn't be onsite right now.

I said what I said because I am seeing things happen right now in our culture that are pulling you (and me) away from what I want – and,

more importantly, from what *God* wants – for you.

## The Big Picture

And that’s part of what a pastor is supposed to do.

In fact, in this letter from Paul to the Colossian Christians, he expressed the exact same concern for them.

In the very next sentence ...

**... he writes:**

*I tell you this ...*

“I’m telling you what my goal is,” Paul says ...

*... so that no one may deceive you  
by fine-sounding arguments.  
Colossians 2:4 (NIV)*

Paul was worried because they were beginning to hear things from the culture and even from other Christian leaders, that were deceptive.

In fact, he was so concerned that he repeated the thought just a few sentences later.

**See to it, he wrote ...**

*... 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)*

And I said last week that I think that's happening in our culture right now and in an accelerated manner. I think there's a demonic deception at work these days at a level I can't ever remember seeing.

I mean, if you had told me in January that millions of Christians all over the world would soon become convinced that it's their sacrificial and heroic duty to stay away from church (and, in many cases, it is ... which is why I said what I did at the beginning of this message) ...

If you had told me that, I would have said you're crazy.

But that's exactly what has happened.

**Christians and churches have been extremely hampered if not immobilized by the coronavirus at the exact same time as a new and dangerous “gospel” is being proclaimed in our culture.**

And I talked about that at length in last week's message, so I won't go back all the details of it again today.

But what I *didn't* say in the message – and this gets to what's behind the curtain of being a



pastor these days – is that I doubt that even the most committed followers of Jesus have even thought about that.

And I don't say that to be critical at all because we're in a situation with this pandemic that requires us to be incredibly focused on what's right in front of us.

For example:

- What am I going to do about sending my kids to school?
- What am I going to do about my finances now that I've lost my job?
- What about the people who work for me now that I've had to shut down my business?
- What about my family and friends who are at risk?

- And, to top of it all, if I leave my stupid mask in the car one more time when I'm going to the store, I'm going to scream.

And the list could go on and on, right?

And because all of that is such an additional drain on our lives – to say nothing of the cultural and political turmoil brought on by the strife over how bad racism is – or is not – in this country ...

**We're maxed out and we're not seeing the big picture. We just don't have the energy for it.**

And, quite frankly, when I said last week that I personally have had days where I'm lazy, apathetic, and self-centered, this is what I was talking about.

As a pastor, it's my calling, my duty, my job –

however you want to put it – to see this kind of big picture.

But many days, I just don't want to. I don't want to try to connect the dots because I just don't have the energy. I'm tired of feeling so out of control.

What I would rather do is to look away and focus on things I think I *can* control:

- Like my yard and “why, after all the work I've put into this year, is it turning brown?”
- Or Jetta's new-to-her truck and “I wonder – just how hard would it be to put a navigation system in that thing?” (It was hard but, thanks to *YouTube*, I was able to do it).
- Or “what kind of a series could I do where I wouldn't have to talk about everything that's going on? Where people wouldn't

take what I'm saying personally or politically?"

And, in case you wonder, surveys show that I am not alone in that. Pastors all over the world are experiencing the same kind of thing.

However, because I have a really good team and because of the Holy Spirit, I'm regularly reminded of what I've been called to as well as what I want for you and for myself. And I cannot get away from what I am seeing.

And this is what I explained to the guy who came to talk to me last week.

There are three things that are constantly in my mind as I watch what's going on in this world, and particularly what's happening to Christians and churches.

I try to look away and not think about them because, as I said, I'm lazy, apathetic, and self-

centered. And I don't want the blowback that might come from talking about them.

But here goes – three concerns that I have that are driving me these days because I'm a pastor.

**Concern #1. What about “ecclesia” (the “assembly”)?**

We've talked about this on many occasions, that the Greek word that gets translated “church” in the NT is “ecclesia” which literally means “an assembly” or “a gathering” of people.

And I understand that in some situations (like a pandemic) you might have to avoid doing that for a while, but the truth remains: *if you never gather or assemble, you're not a church.*

And I don't want us to lose sight of that.

Now, as I said earlier, we're going to keep livestreaming and Zooming but, unless you're someone like my dad who is old, or you're

someone who has a medical condition where you just have to stay at home, that should never be accepted by Christians as “the norm.”

Furthermore, throughout history, in countries where Christianity is outlawed, Christians have still gathered. They’ve still assembled. *They’ve done it in secret* and at great risk to themselves and to their families.

Some of them have even lost their lives over it.

... which is why I said last week that ...

- If you’re a Christian ...
- And you are unconcerned about your own health
- And unconcerned about endangering others ...
- And you are OK with going to restaurants

and stores and parties with strangers without wearing a mask ...

- *But* you are not willing to come onsite ...

When you consider what “ecclesia” means, and what people have given up to be a part of it, it just seems like – I don’t know – laziness? Apathy? Self-centeredness?

Maybe it’s not. Maybe you have a really good reason. But it’s something you ought to think about.

The second thing I can’t get out of my head ...

**Concern #2. The first Christians changed the world by engaging, not by disengaging.**

One of the things for which Christians were noted in the beginning was the fact that, when everyone else retreated because of the plague (which killed as many as 5,000 a day in the city

of Rome), they did not.

Instead, they cared not only for their own sick and buried their own dead, they did the same for the pagans and for their enemies.

And it cost many of them their lives.<sup>i</sup>

Now, I know things are different today than they were back then. And I'm not saying we should do what they did and ignore what we know about how germs work.

I'm just saying that, big picture, in a world where we would *never* experience 5,000 people a day dying in our town from COVID19, it's so odd that the "right thing" for Christians to do is to disengage.

So, we should do it for a while because we have to. But we should never accept this as "the norm." Jesus walked *towards* the mess, not away from it. And so should those of us who follow



Him.

That said ... and this is probably going to sound contradictory, but this is also in my head constantly these days ...

**Concern #3. As a church, we must not leave behind or marginalize those who are hesitant to participate at this time.**

I did a whole series on this a few months ago. It was called “We Survived” and it was based on Romans 12 and how Christians are to handle disagreements over matters of conscience *like how to handle a pandemic.*

If you missed it, it’s online in the media section of our app and website, so I’m not going to go back through it other than to say that I have *diligently* held the line on this principle.

We have had many debates among our pastors about if and when to reopen and, quite frankly, I have dragged my feet.

I have frustrated them (and some of you) because I've said "no, we're not going to leave behind or marginalize those who, for reasons of health and conscience, cannot bring themselves to participate."

And what finally made me comfortable enough to do what we're doing now with this "soft opening" is what the American Academy of Pediatrics said in their initial statement (before it got all political)

What they said was that research shows that the vast majority of children ...

- Do not get COVID19 very easily.
- When they do, it is almost always very mild and almost always asymptomatic.
- They are not the super-spreaders

everyone thought they would be at the beginning.

That's what changed my mind. The science says that it's safe to have kids in the building with appropriate precautions.

That said, we are not going to disrespect or marginalize anyone who doesn't *feel* safe.

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Anyway, those three concerns are like mental pillars for me.

And believe me, I have tried to ignore them, but I can't get them out of my mind.

And, as a pastor, it is my duty to call those who are followers of Jesus to look up from time to time and see them and integrate them into our thinking.

Not because I want to slam anyone or say “what’s wrong with you? You’re such a terrible Christian!” but because I’m with Paul.

I want you to get everything you can out of knowing Jesus and following Jesus; everything you can about being an integral part of the community that knows and follows Jesus (a.k.a. “church”).

Anyway, that’s me, friends. That’s what it’s been like to be the lead pastor of this church over the past four months.

That’s where I’m coming from and what my heart is even if I don’t always express it clearly.

## **“In Christ”**

Now, with all that said, in the brief time that remains for this message, I want to take a step forward and lay the groundwork for what I am

hoping to accomplish in the rest of this series, especially for those who are Christians ...

Though, if you're *not* a believer in Jesus, I'm very confident that this will be helpful to you as well because it will help you understand the differences between ...

- The good news (or “gospel”) of Jesus ...
- And the gospel that is being constantly promoted by our culture (and even more so now that Christians and churches have been, again, basically pushed to the sidelines).

And, friends, there *is* a gospel being promoted and proclaimed in our culture right now and the target, the primary audience, as I said last Sunday, is our younger generations.

- Young adults, teenagers and even our

youngest children.

- Your kids and my grandkids.

And you can hear and see this “gospel” ...

- In our music.
- Our movies.
- Our news media.
- Our educational systems.
- As well as in your social media feed.

And what makes it so deceptive is that *you and I think it's all “just political.”* We think it's simply about right vs. left, conservative vs. liberal, and so on. But it's not.

That's because what we're hearing deals with

the exact same issues that “religion” deals with.

And I gave you this list last week but I’m going to lay it out again because it’s so important and because we’re going to look at each of these issues – one per week – beginning next Sunday.

**What you hear these days coming from all of those sources ...**

- Deals with identity – how we should define ourselves.
- It deals with glory – what achievements should be encouraged and celebrated.
- It deals with judgement – what should happen to people who don’t measure up.
- And atonement – what should be done about past failures.
- And righteousness – how people should

handle “privilege” (or lack thereof)

- And it even defines “hell” (at least metaphorically) – how to punish those who disagree and dissent.

And what concerns me so much for all of us but especially our young people, is that what the cultural gospel promises seems right and good and just and even noble, but the end thereof is death.

In Paul’s day, as I mentioned earlier, the Christians and churches in the region of Colossae faced the same kind of challenge. They were beginning to hear some things from the culture (and even from some Christian teachers) that promised a better way than the way of Jesus ...

... which is why Paul exhorted them: “don’t be deceived. Stay rooted in Christ and built on Christ and in the faith which you have been



taught.”

Of course, that sounds a little closeminded on his part doesn't it? It sounds a little too exclusive and even exclusionary to our modern ears.

So why would Paul say that? And why would he want Christians to do that? Why should *you* do that?

Well, let's see what he says in the very next sentence of his letter.

**He writes:**

*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form ...*

*... and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.*

*Colossians 2:9-10 (NIV)*

... which is quite a claim to make.

Actually, it's two claims.

In the first place, Paul is saying ...

- If you're looking for something or someone that transcends "everything there is" (which, quite frankly, is the quest of every human being in one way or another) ...
- If you're looking for something or someone who can lead us beyond where we are (which is the quest of those who are frustrated with "the system" however they define it) ...

**If you're looking for the ultimate in transcendence, Paul's claim is that you can't get any higher than Jesus.**

"The Deity" (or God) and "all that God is" was (and still is) somehow encapsulated in his physical body.

In fact, earlier in his letter, Paul writes that in Christ and through Christ and for Christ all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, including even the spiritual forces that turned against Him.

Jesus, Paul says, is behind it all and above it all.

And, second, when Paul writes “in Christ you have been brought to fullness” ...

**He is saying to Christians, you can't get more than what you've already been given in Jesus.**

No matter how good an alternative gospel might seem at first, Paul says, don't be fooled. What you already have in Jesus, if you're a Christian, exceeds that. His gospel is better than any other in the world.

## **Evaluation**

Now, again these are extremely bold and brash claims to make.

The question is ... should we believe Paul? How can we even evaluate his claims?

**Well, as to whether or not Jesus of Nazareth truly is “the ultimate being,” that comes down to whether or not he truly did rise from the dead.**

If He didn't – if that didn't happen, then Jesus might be “someone special” in the realm of all the religious leaders who have ever lived, but Paul's claim that he is *the ultimate* is merely speculation on his part and easily dismissed.

On the other hand, if Jesus *did* rise from the dead after his crucifixion and then physically crossed over into the dimension we call “heaven,” that would be a pretty good reason to believe Paul. It would be a pretty good reason to list the name of Jesus above every other name.

Now, personally, I believe that the historical evidence we have supports the claim that Jesus did rise from the dead, which is also the position of classical Christianity. In fact, it's not hard to make the case that Christianity wouldn't have even *begun* let alone *survived* had Jesus not been resurrected ...

But that's a topic for another day (and one which I have addressed on many other occasions).

Instead, I want to focus on Paul's claim that the gospel of Jesus exceeds every other gospel ...

**... because this is something each of us can evaluate and decide for ourselves.**

In other words, you can compare the good news offered by Jesus with the good news offered by the culture. You can actually test it out.

And that's what we're going to do in the rest of

this series.

In fact, let me just give you the basic overview using those same categories I just listed out so you can have some sense of where this is going.

- When it comes to identity, our culture says it must be achieved; Jesus says it can be received.
- When it comes to glory, our culture says it's found in being a victim; Jesus says it's found in overcoming our victimization.
- When it comes to cancel culture, Jesus actually has one, too. Whereas our culture cancels people for their "sins"; Jesus cancels sin and forgives the people.
- When it comes to atoning for our past mistakes, our culture judges and condemns us while Jesus promises to redeem us and our past.

- When it comes to “privilege” our culture says if we don’t have it we should demand it; Jesus says if you have it, you should lay it down and serve others (especially “the least”).
- Finally, when it comes to those with whom we disagree and dissent, the culture says to label them “haters” and to hate them back. Jesus says to love them, pray for them and do good to them.

The question is – and again, this is something each of us can evaluate – which way is better? Which “gospel” truly will lead us individually and collectively to a better future?

Now, obviously, as a Christian and a pastor, I believe Jesus’ way is better which is why I think we should follow Paul’s instruction to “live our lives in Him; rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith we were taught.”

And, as I said, we're going to talk about *why* that is each week.

But, as we close today, what I want you to have in your mind as we leave is that the greatest difference between the gospel currently being proclaimed by our culture and the gospel of Jesus comes down to one thing: *love*.

- Love is what motivated Jesus
- Love is what characterizes his way of living
- Love is what makes His "gospel" truly *good news*
- And love is what is to motivate his followers.



*“A new command I give to you,”  
Jesus said. “Love one another. As  
I have loved you, so you must  
love one another.”                      John  
13:34 (NIV)*

It all begins with the love Jesus has for us and for this whole world which is why the invitation to believe in Jesus and follow Jesus and to root our lives in Him is actually an invitation to build our lives on His love and to let that be the foundation.

And we have a song we sing about that ...

## Endnotes

1. Next week – Identity achieving it vs. receiving it
2. Finances

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/march-web-only/contagious-diseases-compassion-public-health-hospitals-hist.html>