**Text: 2 Corinthians 4:6-10**

**Subject: What Treasure Do You Treasure?**

 For the past few weeks, I have really been grappling with trying to understand the root of racism. And for the life of me, I just can’t seem to get a grasp on it.

 On the one hand, I believe it would be easier to understand if something actually happened, where one group did something to another group that the other group never forgave the offending group for.

However, as I think about it, that can’t be it because in this case, in America, to the best of my knowledge, African-Americans have not done anything to anyone that would justify a never ending grudge that just seems to be getting worse as time goes by.

Therefore, I am left to try and find another cause. Perhaps it is hatred. Well, if that’s it, that doesn’t make much sense because to me, hate is a very a strong and very exhausting emotion that only destroys the person who is holding it. Thus, that can’t be it because hating just to be hating someone just does not make any sense.

On the other hand, maybe it’s fear. That’s it. It must be the fear of the otherness of someone’s skin color, or the otherness of someone’s ethnicity, or someone’s religion.

Now, if it is fear based on these things, then I am still perplexed because for the most part, that still does not make good sense because no matter how different someone might be, otherness should be a basis for fear because truth be told, once we peel back our skin suits, underneath, we all bleed red blood, and we all have hearts that are prone to love.

At the same time, what makes us all alike is our desire to uphold what has been declared in the Declaration of Independence which says: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Since that’s the case, what is there to fear if every person is giving it their best shot, and if no one is inhibiting the next person from achieving whatever opportunities they want to achieve?

Family, I think we might be on to something here and as a result, let us peel back some more layers so that we can gain more understanding as to why someone might be afraid, or why someone might interfere with somebody else’s opportunity to live life to the fullest extent possible.

One reason why someone might fear or interfere with the progress of another is because there might be a perception that the person who is being feared is stronger than the person who is afraid.

Now, I make this claim today because I would not be afraid of someone else if I was confident of myself and my own ability to achieve whatever I am trying to achieve-- notwithstanding what somebody else might be trying to achieve in their lives.

To take it one step further, I would not need to try to cheat nor would I need to interfere with anyone else’s attempt to achieve especially if I knew for sure that I had what it took to achieve whatever it is that I was trying to achieve.

Therefore, the fearful and racist person must be suffering a little more than hate or fear. Instead, underneath the hate and fear, there must also be a sense of low self-esteem, and perhaps the paranoia driven by demographic data that suggests that afterwhile, there will be a takeover of the dominant gene.

And because of all of this, there appears to be an over-compensation for the low esteem which is manifested by making pseudo claims of superiority based on race, and purity--based on genes.

I say this because someone who is truly superior does not have to tell anyone else that they are superior, they just go about doing what they do, and by letting their actions speak more loudly than their words.

For example, when I was in college, there were some smart cats at Morehouse College. But, I never heard any of them ever I say, I am the smartest or the brightest—they just were. They would be in the library, or they would be in their dorms studying while everybody else was doing whatever they were doing.

But, at the end of each semester, it would be evident who the smartest and brightest were because they 'would have the 4.0 Grad Point Averages to show for it.

And now, most of those guys are millionaires or are doing some great things in the world because they kept operating in their greatness instead of talking about how great or how superior they were.

Now, this notion of fear and low self-esteem was researched by the late Dr. Frances Cress Welsing who wrote in The Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism (White Supremacy) that that racism was a worldwide behavior – and that whites' status as a global minority feeds a fear that leads to oppression and violence.

Also, in 1974, in an interview with Tony Brown, she said, "I think that... even though most white people are not consciously understanding their problem in genetics, they are certainly aware that they are genetically dominated by people of color – that's why there's the statement that one drop of black blood makes you black. Because people of color have the genetic capacity to annihilate white people."

Therefore, fear of genetic annihilation drives some to go overboard in saying, believing, and insisting that others buy into these pseudo-realties.

This fear is strong that indeed, it turns into a rage that manifests into harsh and heartless treatment of anyone who triggers those fears. And let me just say that, that trigger is hair thin and is usually triggered by the mere presence of someone with melanated skin.

 Given all of this, I believe we can safely make the claim that fear and low self-esteem and fear are roots of racism.

At the same time, I would like to peel back another layer to discover another root, and perhaps the most prevalent and destructive root of racism and that is greed.

At the outset, we can draw from 1 Timothy 6:10 which reminds us that the love of money is the root of all evil. And if we think about racism in America, we can certainly and easily conclude that it is evil and that it is based on economics.

In this context, money is what people treasure even at the expense of someone else’s right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

And if we look back on the so called “discovery” of America, really, it was not about religious freedom, instead, it was about economic opportunity at the expense of the indigenous peoples we call Native Americans—who I have since learned have an African heritage. They were just as brown and dark brown as we are.

Therefore, there was no consideration for their right to exist in the land they originally inhabited. Rather, there was such a desire to conquer the land for economic purposes that the only option was the systemic genocide of the indigenous peoples who lived here first.

To add insult to injury, when the Transatlantic Slave Trade got underway, the insatiable desire for productivity in order to produce wealth, led one group of people to enslave another group of people without even blinking an eye at the unthinkable atrocities which occurred then, and still occur now.

Family, it was all about the money and power that was treasured and as a result, it took precedence over the rights of the enslaved Africans who were thought of as property instead of being treated as human with the same rights expounded in the Declaration of Independence.

Therefore, we must look deeper into the notion of treasure. First, we must realize that what we treasure is a matter of the condition of our hearts. We know this because in Mathew 6:21, The Lord Jesus Christ said, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

In the Greek, treasure is defined as deposit. And in this case, the Lord Jesus is saying that whatever we have deposited in our hearts is what we are going to treasure the most. And whatever we treasure the most, ultimately, is going to drive what we do and what we think.

In the case of someone who is racist, if fear of genetic annihilation, or greed of filthy lucre is deposited in their hearts, then most likely, harsh, unfair, or downright demonic actions will surely follow especially since the love of money is the root of all evil.

At the same time, for those who are oppressed, if we are not careful, then whatever we have deposited in our hearts can drive us to make unwise, or decisions as well. For instance, just last night, a bunch of protestors down in Atlanta burned down the Wendy’s where Brother Rayshard Brooks, who was shot by police, was found sleeping in his car, in the drive through line.

As it has been said, that Wendy’s didn’t have anything to do with anything, they were just there. But, because of the anger and rage that had filled the hearts of the protestors, they burned down a franchise that most likely wasn’t making that much money in the middle of this pandemic and now we have a number of minimum wage workers who are out of work, and we have a franchisee who is out of his or her investment.

In other words, even if we understand the rage and anger, it doesn’t justify the actions that don’t really make any sense. Therefore, for everyone—the oppressor and the oppressed—we must search our hearts and determine what has been deposited, and therefore, what we truly treasure in our hearts.

It is hate? Is it fear? Is it greed? Is it rage? Is it anger and bitterness? Whatever it is, if it ain’t from God, then we need supernatural heart surgery where God extracts the hardness of our hearts and then inserts a softened heart.

Now, we know God can do that because He said, in Ezekiel 36:26, and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

And when that happens, then I do believe that we will see an eradication of racism, fascism, nazi-ism, classicism, and radicalisms which have given rise to the subjugation and destruction of black and brown people around the globe and throughout the history of this world.

Call me a polly-anna but if this were not so then God would not have told us so—that not only is this possible but this is also His will for all humankind.

Let’s press on this a little further because having a heart that is supernaturally softened also means that it will contain a new spirit within it. That’s why the Prophet Ezekiel proclaimed that God said that He would put a new spirit within our hearts.

This new Spirit is the Holy Spirit which then begin to produce a different yet Holy type of fruit. Galatians 5:22 says, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Imagine that. Imagine a world filled with people whose hearts have been softened and filled with the Holy Spirit whereby we are led to exhibit acts of love, joy and peace towards one another.

And imagine if we were patient, and kind, and good, and gentle with one another. What a world we would live in. Well, it is possible but the catch is, what will determine if this world is actualized or not depends not on how we judge what is in someone else’s heart. Instead, it is determined by what we have deposited in our hearts.

Therefore, let me ask you: what has been deposited in your heart? What Treasure Do You Treasure?

Now, let me take this deeper because God has made it very plain that He has given us a treasure that we can treasure. And when we receive it, then we are given something that will keep us and sustain us through whatever we are going through in our lives.

For example, our text, in 2 Corinthians 4:6, it says, for God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This light is the light of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Holy Spirit. Remember that the Tri-unity of God is God the Father; God, the Son; and God, Holy Spirit. So then, with the Spirit living in our hearts, He will produce the fruit that will transcend our perceived differences, and as a result, we all will be able to get along.

In other words, God is the answer to all of the difficult questions that humankind has been grappling with for a very long time. However, even with all of our grappling, God’s message, and God’s provision of His presence has not changed. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever more.

Therefore, as Christians, we have a personal and Spiritual responsibility to treasure what God has deposited within us, and when we do, we will find the love, joy and peace that we have been seeking after for all of our lives.

In order to do so, we must realize that what God has deposited in us, is indeed, a treasure that should be treasured. We know this because our text, in 2 Corinthians 4:7 says, But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God, and not to us.

Let’s park here for a minute because even though we have this valuable treasure deposited within us, the truth of the matter is, we don’t really treasure it as much as we should. I say this because our world would not be filled with so much anger, and bitterness, and hatred, and fear, if we did.

Now, I get it. I know your initial, visceral response might be: I’m good. It’s not me that holds anything that is not from God in my heart; it’s them; or it’s him; or it’s her; but it’s not me.

 Or, perhaps you might be saying why should I acknowledge that I have some work to do, if the person who exhibits negative behavior towards me is not willing to search and try their own hearts?

Well, to that I say to you, we are not responsible for changing anybody else’s heart. Only God can do that. However, we are responsible for making sure we have the right stuff deposited and operating correctly in our own hearts. And when we do, then God will deal justly with us, and will deal justly with them.

Therefore, let me ask you again, What Treasure Do You Treasure? What is deposited in your heart?

Let me just say that when we treasure the treasure that God has deposited in us, then we will be able to stand in the face of whatever we are facing in our lives.

We know this because our text, in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 tells us that with the excellency of the power from God that has been deposited in our hearts, we can be sure that even though we are afflicted in every way (or in the King James Version—troubled on every side), we do not have to be crushed or distressed.

In other words, the powerful treasure that God has put in our hearts keeps us from being completely consumed by our troubles and our afflictions. What that means is that we don’t have to go all the way there, beyond where we are supposed to be in Christ.

Now, what this verse does not say is that we will not be troubled or afflicted. But what it does say is that we will not be crushed or distressed when we are troubled or afflicted.

At the same time, although we may be perplexed, and truly, I am perplexed by all that is happening in our community, we do not have to be driven to despair which means that we have lost all sense of hope.

Now, let’s park here for a minute because there are some amongst us who may already be close to this edge. There are some who may already believe that our situation with COVID-19 and with racism is hopeless and that we have no way up and no way out. and if that’s the case, that means that we have we will live out the rest of our days in misery.

However, what I want you to know is that we are not hopeless. Instead, with the treasure that we have in these jars of clay, we might be perplexed, but we still have hope because our hope is in Christ.

And with the treasure of Christ living deep within our hearts, we might even be persecuted, but we have the hope that lies within us, that we will not be forsaken. We know this because the Lord Jesus Christ said that He would never leave us nor forsake us, and that He would be with us even until the end of time.

We might even be struck down, in this way or another, but as the Children of God, and as a people, we will not be destroyed. And that’s because we have this treasure--this powerful treasure, that is able to keep us from falling even if we have taken hit after hit, and hurt after hurt, throughout the course of history, or even right now in these times in which we live.

However, the only way the power of this treasure will work is if we Treasure This Treasure, by faith, in our hearts.

That means we have to desire it;

and that we have to yield to it;

and that we have to walk in it;

and that we have to share it with others around us—even with those who hate us, or fear us because of the color of our skin, and not the content of our character.

We must do this because our text tells us that we are always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies.

Therefore, we have to let the life of Christ live through us, so that His death for us, will not be in vain.

What Treasure Do You Treasure? Amen!