

The Weapon Of Love

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Hello everyone! Thank you for joining us at Victory World Church this weekend. We appreciate those of you here all over our main campus, whether you're viewing from our family rooms or in The Chapel, we're so glad to have you. Let's also take a moment and extend a welcome to Victory Hamilton Mill and Victory Midtown as they join us, as well as those streaming live right now via FB and at VictoryATL.com.

Discussing race in America is extremely complicated. Forgiveness... repentance... reconciling cultures... all very opinionated and touchy subjects. And what God has to say about it can be even more complex. So this message will be unlike any other you've ever heard from me before, because I've never done this before. I'm going to share with you a collection of thoughts and stories and scriptures and let Holy Spirit deliver the message.

It is customary to begin a message like this with a funny story, and anecdote or what's commonly known as an icebreaker. It loosens the tension in the room, builds trust and warmth, and disarms the listener— positioning the communicator for a later moment where conflict is then introduced or injected into the story. And as I was preparing this message, this was the direction we were headed... until I felt in my spirit the Lord saying, "sometimes you can't sugarcoat healing."

This is the final message in our **ONE** series, where we have been discussing healing the racial divide. The topic I'm sharing today is titled, "**The Weapon of Love**" [2x] As a words guy, that title presents an interesting dichotomy as most would not consider love to be a weapon—but we'll address that a little later on.

For the past three weeks we have been in this **ONE** series, and I'd like to begin by saying that Pastor Dennis has delivered some of the most profound teachings on racial reconciliation that I have ever heard and experienced in my lifetime. Pastor, thank you for your courage to speak out and share the vision God placed in you for such a time as this. The anointing to heal the racial divide is all over those teachings. If you haven't seen or heard them, I encourage you to go to our website and bless yourself. All combined, I believe this series is a timely word from The Lord, not just for **this** church, but for **the** church. Will you all pray with me?

Jesus, Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give me the boldness to say what you've told me to say, and the courage to stand on your word. Give **us** the mind of Christ to hear and pray and *then* respond to your word rather than react to the world. I pray that your church would awaken, in Jesus name.

If you have your bible or an electronic device, on silent, in just a few moments we will be reading from Matthew 12. And as you are locating Matthew 12, I'd like to begin with a disclaimer regarding *racial reconciliation*. Now, I've found that normally it's not a good thing when you have to start out with a disclaimer...

So here's my disclaimer: the following 2 statements are not meant to offend, yet may cause some mild discomfort.

1. (For outside Victory) If you are a Christian, a pastor or ministry leader of a mostly one-race church; this message (and this series) is for you. Meaning, if your congregation lacks diversity, is culturally deficient, or... variety challenged; all-White, all-Black, all-Latino, all-Korean, all-whatever... this message is for you.

2. (For both outside and inside Victory) If you are a Christian and nearly all of your daily interactions, conversations, friendships, relationships and gatherings around meals—your circle of influence—if your very existence revolves around people who look just like you and think like you; this message and this series are definitely for you.

Many of us are allowing the world around us to determine what the God inside us looks like. So today, I'm calling out ***Convenient Christianity***. ***Complacent Christianity***. ***Casual Christianity***. ***Closet Christianity***. ***Comfortable Christianity***. How did the church go from being the first option to the last resort when it comes to coming together? Pastor Colleen mentioned in the Dr. Bernice King interview that during the Civil Rights movement in the 60's the church missed their moment—their opportunity to use love as a weapon to show the power of Christ by uniting, but instead white evangelical Christians allowed our nation's past, and the division that was occurring in their present, to continue into the future by remaining silent or indifferent to injustice.

But thankfully, and graciously, God gives us a do-over. That do-over is called *today*. That do-over is called *right now*. History does indeed repeat itself, but the outcome is not always the same. Protests. Black Lives Matter. Lemonade. Social media posts. Deportation of immigrants may not bother you until it hits close to home. A minority's mistreatment at the hands of law enforcement may not affect you, until you hear "oh Montell, I didn't know that happened to you. I'm so sorry."

And I know for a fact that this millennial generation would rather get their answers from the streets than from the church—even if the answers are incorrect—because at least the streets are talking while the church remains silent. ***The church has gotten too comfortable.***

What about this church? How about Victory? I'm glad you asked.

(I asked) How did 7 lily-white people (one with a little Cherokee in him) in a small daycare center in the Deep South of Georgia over the course of 27 years become a church of 13,000 + members across multiple campuses with 139 nations of people

represented? How does that happen? First of all, God's hand has got to be on it. And secondly

The way you get a culturally diverse church is through intentionality.

The same way you get a segregated, one race church... is also through intentionality. You intentionally or unintentionally do nothing to change it.

I'm not suggesting you try and model Victory. That's your church... do you. However, I'm suggesting you model Jesus. But that may cause you to have to choose if you want to follow the traditions of your church or God's church. (Some of y'all missed that... is it your church or God's church?)

Now, I'd like to make an amendment to my previous disclaimer.

I said it is not my intent to offend anyone. That remains true. But I've changed my mind in regard to the "mild" discomfort part. I hope some of the things you hear are extremely uncomfortable to you. **Comfort has never been the catalyst for change.**

In case you are unaware, we have racial issues in America. We had racial issues in America and we still have racial issues in America. And just in case you're not picking up what I'm putting down, no matter what nationality you are, if you personally don't have any racial issues or see any racial issues, ***you're a part of the racial issue we have in America.***

[If you can't say amen, say ouch!]

I remember the very first time I was introduced to race in America.

Grocery store story: the man with the colored neck (**Stay here until I complete the story and begin the next line**)

Many of you would agree that we are divided as a nation; by gender, religion, political affiliation, economic status, but mostly by ***race.***

As our church is now in a season of transitioning from impact to influence, we are exposing our spiritual DNA of racial reconciliation to the world and to the church—in efforts to look more like the bride that Christ loves and promised He would return for.

I'm not deceived. I get it. Not everyone wants to be reconciled. There are great reasons and compelling arguments to remain in our spiritual silos... But the reality is, God gave to us the gift, this message of reconciliation, as a ministry, yet we treat it like it's an option:

Matthew 12:25 (NIV)

25 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.

Our nation is divided. So we began this series asking the question, “how should the church respond?”

And over the course of several weeks we *explored* the racial **challenges** in our country, we *examined* **freedom** and how to become **free** from prejudice, and we *explained* the church’s role in aiding to **heal the political divide** in America

- And now we’re ending with this *weapon of love*.

The conversations following these teachings (this one included) are meant live on long after the services have ended. You’re still talking about them and sharing them. Dialoging about it and posting them. One has even gone viral. You’ve embraced them, contemplated and wrestled with them and taken action to respond rather than react to the modern day challenges with our racial issues in America.

Y’all should know me by now and I’m extremely transparent. And I will always do my best to speak God’s truth to you in love. True confession: There are things that I still struggle with today in regard to race in America.

Just last week I was in Washington D.C., chaperoning an 8th grade class trip for my 13 year old son, Skyler. 4 brave chaperones and 14 teenaged middle school students traveled to our nation’s capital and toured this historic city and surrounding landmarks in a way that I had never experienced it before. Over the last few years I’ve had the honor of visiting The White House under the previous administration, but I’d never experienced D.C. like this. On this trip, we found ourselves immersed in American culture through the lens and influence of our current administration. It was eye opening. “Make America Great Again” is alive and well in our Nation’s Capitol. The buttons and hats and souvenirs... I hope he’s at least getting his publishing off that, cause that would have been the move.

We saw all the major landmarks and monuments. And then our journey took us to Arlington National Cemetery where we paid tribute to military men and women, saw the gravesite for the Kennedys, and witnessed the changing of the guard at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We observed the playing of TAPS and having many family members who served our country, this was extremely moving for me. Then, our tour guide shared with us that the very ground we were on was actually once a plantation owned by General Robert E Lee of the Confederate army. It was a plantation; Slaves worked there, died there, were buried there, and then exhumed, and relocated to another marshy area under the Lincoln Presidency near the end of the Civil War to (1) make a showing of Lee by taking his land, and (2) create a historical burial place for honored American soldiers from that time on. Today it is an active military national landmark. And it was once a plantation. This is a fact in American History.

The next day we hit Virginia and visited the home of our very first President of these United States of America, George Washington. *The Mansion at Mount Vernon*—which also happened to be a plantation. Now I’m processing through the sensory overload

of “Make America Great Again” paraphernalia—but slavery is a part of American history. When we actually acknowledge it is a part of American history.

So I didn’t get sensitive—but I did get really aware. Observant. Like, on the drive back I started noticing all the neighborhoods that had the name “plantation” in the title. [A lot of them] Then I remembered how it’s the same here in Georgia. And if I can keep it 100% with you, I’m not trying to live in any subdivision that says plantation on it, or visit you if that’s where you live. (I mean, I’m just observant like that) Then while traveling back from the ***mansion, our entire group got on the Metro (70% white- 30% black) and they all just naturally gravitated right to the rear of the bus. (Laughs) Oh, but no... not I. No sir. I don’t care if they are giving away winning lotto tickets and Starbucks gift cards... I’m sitting at the front of the bus making the driver all nervous. Cause *I’m not going back, I’m moving ahead...*

(That was a civil rights joke combined with a contemporary Christian music reference)

Near the end of our trip, I was a little overwhelmed and a little discouraged... so I called my Nana, Mattie Lee Gray. My Nana will be 88 this year. I love going to sit with her and I always crawl my big self right up into her lap as much as I possibly can... and I hold her hands. [There's a song by Bill Withers called "Grandma's Hands."] She gently rubs my hands and I rub hers. Her beautiful hands tell a story. And as she began to speak to me on the phone, I thought of her hands.

She said, “Montell, I picked cotton. I picked cotton for \$.33 a day. Each day, me, my half-sister and my brother got a dollar that we split 3 ways—and my brother got the extra penny because he was a boy.” Cotton trivia: 480lbs of lint comprise what is known as a bale—or measurement of cotton. At 19yrs old, Mattie Lee gave birth to my Uncle Samuel—and two weeks later was right back out in the field in Alabama, where she picked 460lbs of lint—almost a bale of cotton. [2 weeks after giving birth]

Now the reason any of this is even relevant is because of context. These stories don’t take place at the same time. I’m no longer referring to Harriett Tubman and the Underground Railroad runaway slave days in the 1800’s. I’m speaking of my Nana, the hands that I held a few weeks ago. My Nana picked cotton. This was 1948. I’m talking only **69 years ago.**

President Donald Trump was two years old while my grandmother was picking cotton.

I said all that to say this: racial tensions are boiling over across our nation. And even though the media headlines have shifted, cultural injustices still occur, law enforcement is still on edge, children are being trafficked, girls are disappearing, black youth are senselessly murdered in Chicago at an alarming rate and it barely makes the news, and the church needs to say and do something.

If the church doesn't make change to effect the world, the world will make change to effect the church. [That'll preach right there]

So let's talk about this weapon of love. *Not all weapons are used for offense.* Some weapons used in combat are used for defense.

I. Love is a Weapon that Covers.

1 Peter 4:8 (NLT)

8 Most important of all continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.

Almost every time I am speaking, I make reference to the truth that I committed adultery in my marriage.

I don't do it so that I can feel bad. I don't do it so my wife can feel bad. I do it (first) to acknowledge what I did but (next) to remind myself from where God brought us.

God used to have the children of Israel set up small altars... or reminders showing from where HE had brought them.

When I look at who I was then and what I did then, I can identify who I am now and how I am different now. Too many times we desire to look at the "now" without acknowledging the "then." America is still trying to look at the *now* without acknowledging the *then*.

Identifying sin is not as difficult as we make it. In the marriage between black people and the history of America, there was an affair-- just like in my marriage. In my instance, it is called adultery. In our instance, it's called slavery.

Love covers a multitude of sins. But we need to be able to call sin ***sin*** in order for love to cover it.

As a words guy, we need to know the difference between what we call something and what it actually is.

Cheating= experience an indiscretion (but it sounds better to say—like sin “light”)

Racism= politically incorrect

Hungry= dietary challenged

Homeless= displaced

Slavery= involuntary immigration

Not "involuntary immigration," *Ben*. Sometimes instead of calling it like we see it, with the covering of love, we need to call it what it actually is.

What next? Child sex trafficking become underage brothel employment???

I said this in the beginning; love won't cover what we've sugarcoated.

II. Love is a Weapon that Defends

John 13:35 (NLT)

35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

What Jesus is saying here, is that the way we love others is the proof that we belong to him. When love is your defender, you don't have to prove anything to anybody. When love is not your defender, the weapon is turned against you and the world puts you on trial.

This court is hereby called to order: [All Rise] Christians; do you swear to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God? In this here open court the world is watching to see how those who call themselves “Christians,” are responding accordingly.

Ok Christian... Where is your proof? What's that? You say by the way you love others? Your honor I'd like to submit exhibit A. Here is a list of comments from FB, instagrams, the twitters and some very bad selfies that do not seem to line up with the witness's testimony of loving others.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I do believe the world is changed when they see Christians... not “Christians,” but actual Christians who are loving one another... and you don't seem much like no Christian to me. Tell me something

Do you love gays?

Your honor, the Christian is nonresponsive; permission to treat the witness as hostile?

I asked you a question. DO YOU LOVE GAYS? You don't have to agree with homosexuality to love gays I did not ask for your commentary or opinion on homosexuality—I asked a simple question. Do you love people who are gay? Do you love Muslims? Do you love immigrants? Do you love whites? Do you love blacks? Do you love refugees? Do you even love yourself?

Your honor this witness has no defense—for if your love for one another is the proof to the world that you are a disciple of Jesus, I submit that your lack of love for one another is also proof to the world that you are NOT a disciple of Jesus. This Christian is guilty of identity theft; I rest my case!

For some of us, the Jury is still out.

Love is a weapon that defends us. I don't expect you to comprehend how much I love God's church and His people. The church, unified, has the ability to change the entire racial landscape of our nation.

But it takes more than checking the “I went to church today” box off your list of things to do. You've been a good person. You believe in Jesus. You believe if you do just enough of the right things and not enough of the wrong things you will spend eternity in heaven ***one day*** ...and yet ***today*** we leave the same way we came. Segregated, separated, unchanged, untransformed, and unchallenged.

Recently, I've heard the prayers of a lot of people who have been crying out for revival. I've heard stories of the healing and miracles that took place in the Brownsville revival and the Azusa Street revival... Another revival in the church can impact the world. But the church cannot experience revival until the church has an awakening! You can't revive something that isn't awake. Even someone who is unconscious is awake. How is it that in the hood they're telling everybody to "stay woke" and yet the church is still asleep? Pastor, why do you say the church is asleep? Because when something happens, we are often reacting rather than responding.

III. Love Is A Weapon of Action

Love is NOT passive. Love is Active. Love is an action word. It's demonstrative. *It requires action and prompts a response.*

Some don't believe that prayer changes things. Do you understand that everything negative currently playing out in the natural world started out in the spirit? We have the ability to call those things that are not as they were, so the will of God can be done here on earth as it is in heaven.

I Corinthians 13: 4-7 (NLT)

4 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud **5** or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. **6** It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. **7** Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

That scripture shows us when we experience something that incites us to react, patience is a weapon that allows us to respond rather than react.

Ever heard the saying, "kill'em with kindness?" When people desire to see your downfall, **being kind is a weapon** that not only kills the enemy but also drives them crazy in the process.

It keeps no record of being wronged. Hey married couples... you're called to be reconciled to one another as well. **Remember, if you're keeping score in your marriage, nobody wins. The weapon of keeping no record of wrongs simply means sometimes you've got to learn to lose to win.**

There are Lots of weapons in that one scripture. As we take this conversation beyond this message into our homes, places of business, conversations within our circle of influence, this is the scripture I'd ask you to keep close to your heart. For those viewing this and sharing it with your church, we are ambassadors for Christ. He reconciled us to himself, while we were yet in our sin. He died on a cross and paid a penalty so that we would not suffer an eternity apart from Him. And He rose

again, so that we might have the same opportunity to die to ourselves to love others. To do what He did. Healing the racial divide is a part of the ministry of reconciliation. This is how the world will know we are His disciples.