

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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The Doubters Club: Hope for the Crushed

Joshua Symonette

I'm so grateful to be sharing this weekend, in the words that we find in the opening of many of Paul's letters to the church "grace and peace to you from God our Father". This weekend, I actually wanted to invite you all into what we are doing in Baltimore, what God has called us to, so grateful for your support. And so speaking of support I brought something to share with you all this weekend. So if you would just take about two and a half minutes to just pause and take a look.

{Video} Baltimore, more affectionately known as Baltimore, from all of its sides, there is beauty and grace ingrained in the people, embellish on its walls, echoing from its history. The charm is not relegated to just certain parts of the city. There's value in the vacant emptiness and the exclusive. Both are primed for hope and glory to fill those voids. Not with the kind of hope that's cheap and shallow, but a fulfillment in the soul that unlocks the depth of your spirit. For this reason, a new faith community is formed, not new as in better or exclusive, but a continuation to join a movement already in progress. Our mission - to connect people to Jesus and to one another. Why? Because we want to share a new or a renewed hope, to the young cats trying to find their way, to the professionals setting their sales towards success, and even the old heads with long routes and perspective. We're creating space to grow and to be known together, striving to be one in spirit, and one in mind, celebrating the uniqueness of our hues, breaking down the division in our diversity and an openness to embrace questions of all kinds. Because that's what Jesus did, and is still doing. We aim for our actions in the streets to be like the acts of the Scriptures, sharing things in common, breaking bread together, sacrificing for the greater good, because this honors God and reflects his glory. We want to invoke his presence in our city. And we also invite your participation in this hope. We are "Hope Baltimore". {End of video}

It was a little difficult to watch that without getting emotional. Please consider praying for us, participating with us, promoting Hope Baltimore. I didn't anticipate getting so emotional and there are a lot of reasons for that. Will you guys also follow us on social media @hopebmore (wearehopebaltimore.com)? I think we have a slide. Yeah, that's our slide there so you can take a picture of that and I'm grateful for you.

If you have a Bible, we'll end up in Jeremiah, chapter number 29. We're continuing our series, 'The Doubters Club'. And Pastor Mark kicked us off last week so brilliantly. Man, I'm messing with my time. I gotta get back on track. All right, if you have a Bible, meet me in Jeremiah 29. We're continuing our series, 'The Doubters Club', and man I just love how Pastor Mark kicked us off last weekend. And man, I love science and experiments and research. And I love how he's able to weave all of those things into the message and so if you have not seen it, I want to encourage you to tune in. I will piggyback on a couple of things that were mentioned last week.

But Monday, as I began to sit down and process and put together my notes and collect my thoughts on what I will share with us this weekend, my mind went to a children's song.

{singing}

Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world. {end of singing}

Now I know that song is familiar to a lot of us, we've heard it, brings back certain memories. And, you know, I won't talk about the history of the song and I may get into the inspiration in just a moment. But I just really wanted to highlight the simplicity of the message of that song to children, which is Jesus loves all of you. And your hue, and your color, and your culture and your race don't matter. And it's a sweet, sweet sentiment, right? And it is a powerful message. That is true. Until one day, you realize, especially in this country, we call the United States that color and hue and culture and race does matter and they don't all have equal value historically. And all of our individual identities carry with it some complexity. And so, the imago dei, which means image of God, the imago dei, of this song, the messaging of this song, Jesus loves the little children it becomes in question. Not because the song is inaccurate, but because our experiences have been in congruent with this song. Now in part that's kind of maybe how we might interpret and process or misinterpret at times, but a big part of it has to do with trauma that we've experienced in our lives.

And so I'm thinking about this trauma this week, as I'm processing what's happening in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Our eyes are already focused on what's happening there with this trial that's related to the death of George Floyd that sent shockwaves throughout our country. And then we also see this flashpoint this week, this past week, or a few days ago, with the shooting of Daunte Wright 20 years old father of a two year old. And then on top of that, to add insult to injury, we see the release of a video, where second lieutenant Caron Nazario in his uniform held at gunpoint in his car by two police officers in Windsor, Virginia. Now, I know, I know bringing all that up elicits certain responses in us a multiplicity of responses, maybe all over the place. But before our frustrations, opinions, limited perspectives begin to heat up inside of us and before we categorize, retreat to our corners begin to stand on our righteous soap boxes I want to ask you, will you just listen for a moment? Will you just create some space for openness for just a moment? And the reason I want you to do that is because I have something that I want to share with you this weekend and tell you that's a little personal this weekend.

I don't know if many of you know that there are many people who look like me, who are black and brown like me in this country who do not believe that Jesus loves them. And it's not about apologetics. It's not about sermons. It's not about songs. Even though we could make some adjustments, and be more aware, but it's because of our experiences, historically. This is what causes this question to arise. This Jesus that you say does he does he really love me, all of me, the black and brown me? The thing that is so interesting to me is that the Bible is written by poor people of color. And Christianity and its origin is not Western European. Jesus was a person of color. He was not blond hair with blue eyes. But these are the images that are perpetuated and shown to us and this is what we wrestle with. Pastor Joshua, why are

you talking about this? Why are you bringing this up? This is a series about doubt. What does that have to do with doubt? Well, I'm so glad I'm in your head and I knew you would ask that. Because it has everything to do with that. One of the things you must understand is that doubt is emotional before its intellectual.

And so, Alec Ryrie, who wrote the book, *Unbelievers: An Emotional History of Doubt*, he says, "Anger, anxiety, historically, are catalysts for unbelief, especially those walking away or denying Christ." And if we zoom in just a little bit, and I make this personal, from my own background, and my own heritage, the reason why many black people in the US don't believe that Jesus loves them. And as a matter of fact, the black conscious groups are growing in number, because of people who are rejecting Jesus. And they're embracing these ideologies that empower their personhood. But the reason for this is because there's a history of oppression and trauma, and the constant degradation of black identity and as Jemar Tisby writes in *The Color of Compromise*, at the hands of the church, who has been regularly complicit. And I hear it all the time. I hear it, I hear it. Pastor Joshua, aren't we all we passed that day? That only happens in certain parts of America, these are isolated events. This is the sensational liberal media; the stats are inflated is not that bad. He or she shouldn't have run or resisted and this wouldn't have happened. Did you know that Daunte Wright had a record? I hear, all of those things and it makes me sad, because there's not enough compassion and empathy to realize that that response is inhumane.

It's like my brother, Carlos Whittaker said, "If my father died of a heart attack, you wouldn't come to me and say, "Well, man, he should have had a better diet. If he had only exercised. If he had only paid attention to some of the things in his family history." You would never say that. It's inhumane.

Now, listen, I'm not talking about people who don't profess to follow Jesus. I'm talking about the people whose comments I read on social media are just crazy. So despite this sweet sentiment of Jesus loves all the children of the world. Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. So many times unfortunately, my white brothers and sisters who claimed to follow Jesus, show and tell something a little bit different. And there's more care given to explaining situations and trying to point out the wrong as opposed to listening, why I grieve, why I feel crushed.

I want to just show you something. Imagine having to carry these emotional and psychological weights. Imagine from a young kid being told Joshua, you, you, you've got to be, you've got to be, you've got to be twice as good. You got to be twice as smart because you're young, black boy, Joshua. You imagine, imagine from a young person, not feeling like you can, you can go by your real name. So you got to change your name to Mark because Markale (sp?) sounds too black. Imagine, imagine constantly having to be cognizant of what you put on and how you dress. Imagine having to think about a routine when you get pulled over and keep your hands on the steering wheel. Imagine, imagine having, having to walk through your predominantly white neighborhood that I live in Baltimore, and smile at people so they don't think that I'm a threat. Imagine, imagine having to make sure that I have my ID in my pocket so in case the authorities roll up on me, they can see that I'm a homeowner in this neighborhood based off of

my address in my pocket. Because this same neighborhood, I've been told, has a provision that you couldn't sell your house to a black person. You were prevented from doing it. And I was told that is still in the covenant, it just has a line through it. Imagine feeling that you need to take down anything in your house that gives away that you might be black when you're selling your home just in case. This is a real thing in my group chat with some successful black men in my neighborhood this is the real thing.

Imagine a tragedy happened in your community and you're been told, "Just look at the facts, it don't matter what they're... just, just look at, look at the facts. Imagine knowing that certain, that trauma is only dignified if it's certain situations and for certain people. Because we would never tell a domestic violence survivor, "You need to get past that." Or, "What did you do to elicit that abuse?" We would never say that. We would never say to our Jewish brothers and sisters, "Why are we still talking about the Holocaust that happened so long ago? We got museums to go talk and see about it." We will never, no, we honor our Jewish brothers and sisters for what they went through. We will we will never disrespect our country of people who've given their lives or soldiers. I'm thinking about 911 what is the slogan for 911? Never forget! But yet, but yet, we are told as a people, "Oh, we need to get past that. Oh we over that." In spite of things that are continuing to happen, how could you not doubt that Jesus loves you? How? How could you not? How? I mean wouldn't this opened the door to anything that would dignify my humanity, that would that would dignify my personhood? And this is why many followers support anything that will dignify their humanity that will elevate their voice. So it feels like the people who sing, Jesus loves all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white it seems like they lied.

And listen, if you're tired of the black/white narrative, take the black/white narrative out and insert any other group that you want to that felt oppressed. Any gender that felt oppressed, regularly, LGBTQ community that's felt oppressed. This is about humanity. This isn't about siding with certain issues. But there's good news, ya'll there's good news. And the good news is that there's hope for the crushed. There's hope for the crushed. That's why I love the scriptures. They speak from and look through the lens of oppressed people, people who are not glamorous, who don't have perfect lives, people who were really seen as nothing. These are stories of nobodies and castaways with whom God did miraculous things. And I'm thinking about Israel, God's people in the Old Testament, oppressed the majority of the time in the Old Testament. And that's why I want to shine a light for just a few more minutes because Jeremiah is a prophet during Israel's time in exile. And what that means is that they were stripped away from their country. They were taken away, taken captive. And they were conquered. They were dehumanized. They were seen as inferior. They were crushed. And I'm thinking of this, even though it's not an apples to apples comparison to the black experience in this country, because historically, and I need to be theologically accurate. Israel brought some of these things onto themselves because they disobeyed God's commands. And I'm not suggesting in any way that that is the case for black people at all. I'm joining a hopeful comparison here that has to do with oppression. And I think these two verses that I want to read for you, give us hope for the crushed in the context is a letter that Jeremiah sends to those who have been exile words from God Himself.

Starting in verse 10, it says, *“For this is what the Lord says: “When seventy years for Babylon are complete, I will attend to you and will confirm my promise concerning you to restore you to this place. For I know the plans I have for you” – this is the Lord’s declaration – “plans for your well-being not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*

Doubt and waning hope, are cousins. And often it doesn't take too much for our confidence and our trusts to be shaken. As a matter of fact, a couple of weeks ago, my wife and I were in a discussion. Now we've been married for 18 years and so you know, they are discussions now. And so we're having this discussion, and we're going back and forth, and then it really kind of turns into a discussion about how certain things should be handled biblically according to Scripture and so forth and so on. And it was a church related, you know, issue. It turned to hypothetical and she says to me, “Don't you think about ever putting me in that position?” Whatever we were talking about, and it bothered me, because I felt like she should have more confidence in me that I would never put her in a compromising position. But in that moment, there was doubt because her emotions were stirred. And so she's presenting that from her emotions, not her intellect.

And so Israel is kind of in this place now worth no doubt it's emotional for them. And they've been in this exile situation, it is a waning hope situation despite them knowing the character of God. Despite them, seeing what he has done, and knowing what he has done for their ancestors, there are still questions. Jeremiah himself in chapter number 12, he says, “God, how long will you let the wicked prosper? Why are you letting them prosper? And how long will the land mourn?” Those questions are emotional questions. Those are not questions of intellect. That's not an intellectual inquiry. What we see in Jeremiah 29:10 & 11 is God offering hope to his people knowing that they are in an emotional state right now. And he basically says three things from what we read. I see you, I have a set expiration, and I have a set expectation. I see you, I have a set expiration, I have a set expectation. God wanted his people to know number one, you are seen. Even in the midst of your hard place, even in the midst of your doubt, even in the midst of it being an oppressive situation, I still see you. Because to be seen and heard equates value. This is part of the reason why Jesus in the New Testament hung out with who he hung out with. He wanted people to know, especially those who were oppressed, those who were looked down upon, those who were outcast, I see you. And not only do I see you, I want to touch you.

One of my favorite miracles in the Bible is the leper who comes to Jesus and says, “If you are willing, will you heal me?” Jesus said, “If I'm willing.” And he could have just said be healed, but he touched him. Because he wanted them to know you are seen and I want you to feel me.

Secondly, God is saying to his people, there's no expiration date. Specifically here he gives a time in the in the scripture for when these things are going to come to pass. And the truth is we don't know the time because God is not downloading time to us sometimes, and obviously, he takes too long when we need him to move. And sometimes we don't feel like he's moving at all. And we don't know why these things are happening. And we have to stop giving people these empty platitudes and just be with them. Because

we don't know, even though there is an expiration, and how do we know that there's an expiration bill because one, the text tells us that but then also, it confirms it over and over again in Scripture. And I'm listening and hearing the words of Solomon, it says, "To everything, there is a season, there is a time." Hey, we might not agree with the time or the season, but to everything there's a season.

And then thirdly, God says there is a set expectation. Disaster, ruin, harm it's not God's expectation even though we experienced that. These are products of evil forces in this world. And so my message to all of my brothers and sisters, particularly my black brothers and sisters, is John 10:10. It says, "*For the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy; but I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.*" Even if there are people who say they're with me are saying different. This is what I have to offer.

Let me see if we can land a plane like this, this weekend. I want to go back just very quickly and briefly to last week's message. Because Pastor Mark talked about Thomas, Thomas was the disciple that doubted. Thomas was the one dude that was like, "I don't want to hear it. I need to see his hands. I need to see him. I need to feel them. I'm not buying all of this. You saw him, where is he?" Jesus waited a week. The nerve waited a week, shows up. But then he doesn't just show up. He lets Thomas feel him. That's called empathy.

I love the way my friend and artist, Jason DeMaio says he said, we can't skip that part. Thomas's response, my Lord, my God shows us that his hope was restored. And here's the thing. The church has been said, been known, been called the hope of the world. Well, what if we actually responded like Jesus? What if, what if we actually let people feel us before we try to fix them? And to my white Christian brothers and sisters who are here who are listening? What if we listened and learned and listened and learned and listened and learned? And listen and learn before we got loud? And what if our loud sounded like, laments with us, as opposed to lessons for us? And what if we went to the Scriptures, to learn from the people of color who wrote it, and not learn how to deal with the people of color, in the words of A.J. Swoboda . The church, all of it, red, yellow, black and white, has a chance to be Jesus to the Thomas's of our day, who are angry, who are anxious, who are brokenhearted, and we can show up, let them feel us and be hope to the crushed.

Let's pray. God, we thank you so much for loving us. There's so much confusion in our world, there's so much anger and anxiety, disappointment, hurt and there are many of us who feel crushed. I really struggled with this message this weekend, God, but I'm asking you to clarify anything that will be misinterpreted. I'm asking you God, to help us to receive the hard things not as ridicule or rebuke, but as an opportunity to be reconciled to you and to one another. And the doubt that many of our brothers and sisters feel that is the result of trauma in their lives. They've heard the messages about Jesus loving them, but they don't feel him. Let the people of Jesus your church show up so that they can feel your hands, they can see you. Help us those who follow you to humble ourselves, and to prioritize justice and righteousness, which means restoring and right relationship. But we can only do that in your power and

your strength because our emotions will get in the way. Our intellect will get in the way. Our strategic planning will get in the way. So we need your help, lead us and guide us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Last thing I'll say before our worship team leads us into worship. If you're with us this weekend and you've been on the fence about trusting Jesus, about getting in a relationship with him and you've got doubts but you're weighing them and you're processing hey, we just want to invite you to just take that step. There's a button, you can press on the screen. We'll pray for you. And here's the thing, there are always going to be doubts, because there are things that we just won't know in this lifetime. But there's a God who wants you and all of your doubts and he's waiting. Jesus name Amen