Multicultural Panel Discussion

RON BENEFIEL: Hi. My name is Ron Benefiel and we have a panel here today that will be looking at the multicultural, not just communication of the gospel, but how the gospel is heard in different languages, different cultural contexts, different situations that bring different perspectives to the gospel that also help us understand the breadth and depth of what it means to be the church of Jesus Christ. So in these next few minutes we’re going to have an interesting opportunity to talk about what it means to be the church in a rapidly changing world.

To begin with we are thinking about our discussions out of the narrative of the Pentecost. So this is – anybody can jump in first – but when you think about Pentecost, you think about the multicultural nature of the church, what are some of the things that come to mind?

JUNIOR SORZANO: I think it’s important that people hear the message in the different contexts. And, you know, in our, the church where I serve, you know, I have people who have different, you know, understanding in their dialects. I preach in one language, and I’m always conscious of are they hearing the message and how are they filtering that message in their context? And it’s always interesting to dialogue with them and see how they perceive what I said differently. And I think it sometime creates great dialogue for the gospel.

RB: I think that’s a really good point. So that in the Acts 2 narrative here people are from all these different countries, different languages, and each is hearing in their own language, but if you unpack that it’s not just that they were able to understand a single gospel, but they were understanding it within their own contexts? What does that mean for you as you think about that Acts 2 narrative?

CHARLES TILLMAN: Well, I was thinking in terms of the black church and how we hear the gospel. You know, the black church was the catalyst for the civil rights movement. So in hearing the gospel from our vantage point coming from the history of dealing with racism and injustice in America it was a liberator. As we read that gospel we saw that all men were equal and created equal in the eyes of God and how that propelled us, and we use the black church as a rallying point. Dr. King and many other civil rights leaders used it as a place to gather to mobilize and to strategize and to then go out and reach the black community. And that was the message, I think, that resounded in the black community. And that’s the benefit that we have received in the black church.

RB: So we certainly want to come back to that ‘cause I think the African-American church in the way that it has not only heard but embodied the gospel. We’re going to wanna come back to that. So I wanna get some other responses. But we want to hear a little bit more about what that has meant within the black community to be the church out of the distinctive black historical narrative. So think about that some more. Rodrigo, you were going to say something.

RODRIGO QUEMA: Yeah. I was just thinking of that first phrase in Acts 2 that talks about that the whole world was together in one place. And that was a particular occasion that happened and yet we live in a world today where everybody is in one place all the time. It’s a reality in our situation. So for me it’s, I see that as a great opportunity for the gospel because we’re all together in one place. And for whatever reasons we’ve come together that becomes the context or the language where the gospel can be shared.

RB: Part of the way you’re thinking is the new culture or the new, the third language. Say just a word about that and then we’re gonna wanna come back to that, too.

RQ: Yes. As I was reading through Acts 2 I was just thinking in those days the Lord kinda used that opportunity to bring people of different contexts together into one language. Today what we have is a diverse amount of people speaking in what I believe is already one language and that language has been the globalization of the community through the internet. And so even, they don’t even consider, when they think about diversity they don’t think about it in ethnic terms. They just think about it as far as ideas. And they’re more attracted and more, they’re more interested in coming together under common ideas and don’t even consider ethnicity as an obstacle to them. They don’t see that at all. And so I’m thinking if we could figure out that language, see what the anchor points are, that could be a great way to leverage our communication of the gospel. Gospel’s still the same but the form in which it takes in that one language would be awesome, would be beautiful.

RB: Just a, yeah, go ahead.

SHAWNA SONGER GAINES: I think about the languages in Acts chapter 2 and there was this unifying sense in which, but it wasn’t just one language. It was many languages. And one of the incredible things I think is that it doesn’t erase particularity so here we have this event unlike any other in the history of the world where people are gathered from all over and they can still participate and engage. There is a sense in which no one is excluded from the good work that the Holy Spirit is pouring out. And yet it’s okay that they speak different languages. And they come from their particular places and they’re a particular people. I think about the congregations that are represented here today. There are some very particular things happening in your contexts. And so thanks be to God that there are these different languages, and yet I love where you’re getting that does technology, right, almost present an opportunity to be a unifying voice even while we maintain our particularity.

RQ: Yes. Yes. In fact that’s the beauty of it is that you don’t really need to highlight your difference because you’re so passionate about your unity, the passion that you have for that idea, in our case, the gospel. Sharing that in the language that they understand transcends their particularities. It doesn’t erase it but it doesn’t have to be a primary entrance point because the idea is enough. The idea’s strong enough, it’s compelling enough that people are saying, “Yeah, I understand that. And that’s what I’d like.” And I think during the Pentecost that’s what everybody was saying. I mean, in the other discussion that we had it’s sort of like, okay, so how did they perceive the good news? Well, to them everybody has a different perception of what good news is. And yet when you say good news an idea comes up. Now will that idea be the same as your idea? Like Charles was saying, to them, in their time it was justice and equality. And for us it can be different, but it is good news still. And the point of the good news is still Jesus Christ.

ALBERT HUNG: Yeah, and I think Rodrigo hits upon a very important blind spot we have as pastors. It’s not just that people hear the gospel differently; we actually define the gospel differently.

ALL: Yes.

AH: Jesus comes and he says the gospel is that the kingdom of God is near. Paul comes along and says the gospel is that Jesus died, was buried, and rose on the third day and was seen by many, many witnesses. Here in Acts 2, getting back to what we’re talking about here, Peter says that the gospel is that if you repent and are baptized you will receive not just forgiveness, but you’ll receive the Holy Spirit. And so he puts even a different emphasis on that. So depending on where we come from certain things that might be good news in one culture just go over the heads of certain people. If you don’t come from a culture where the afterlife is a big deal then the idea that we gain eternal life just doesn’t register, but maybe the power of the Holy Spirit or the inheritance that we receive, the honor that we receive through Christ – maybe that is the touchpoint for us. So I think that’s important – not just how we hear it, but what is the gospel in the first place?

JS: And also, I mean this is interesting, a celebration of what we are hearing is important. Presently in our church we are focusing on life in the Spirit, and I preach a series out of Acts 2 especially focusing that when the Spirit comes there there’s times of refreshing. And how does that, you know, portrayed? How is it portrayed? And even in a different context and different cultures? And what I found was that people felt that there was that acceptance to just be themselves. And it was like what Dr. King used to say. Being black means I may be different but not deficient, you know? And in different cultures it’s to say, hey, you’re culture is as equal as mine. So you celebrate, celebrate that experience, and you will see the joy that will come. And to me that’s important, especially when we have different nationalities, different ethnicities, that we could say hey we have a common bond. We are hearing that message, one message as Peter was saying. The message is that this Jesus isn’t dead, but he’s alive.

RB: Yeah. Jonathan, Annette, things to add here?

ANNETTE MONDRAGON: I would add that in Acts 2 it’s also important to note that there were those who heard and did not understand, and those who accused and made accusations and said, “Hey, what’s going on here?” I think it’s important that we evaluate ourselves as leaders and our congregations as well to whether we are resistant to what the Spirit wants to do in our context sometimes, you know. We have met with people as well who might be resistant to the idea because they don’t understand that context and because they’re not open perhaps to what the Holy Spirit wants to do through the diversity of the church. And so we can sometimes keep the Spirit from leading and opening and doing more.

RB: Well said.

JONATHAN NELLS: I think speaking for the Native American people being a minority and receiving the message of Acts 2 where the Native American people are already a spiritual people and to hear and to see this God and for them to grasp the idea that he went to great lengths to bring the gospel, the good news, to a people, a very minority people, and that we represent over 560 tribes within the United States and for that the gospel message to come into each of those different tribes it’s very moving. It’s very…it speaks to the native people. It’s encouraging ‘cause we live in an age where there’s a lot of darkness. And for them to see the hope is very encouraging for them. So that’s what I would add.

RB: That’s good. When I think about this Acts 2 narrative sometimes it is contrasted with the story of the Tower of Babel. So in the story of the Tower of Babel, of course, people gather east of Shinar – this is right after the story of the flood – and they being building this tower and it says in order to make for themselves a name – and so they’re building this tower up into the heavens that basically takes the place of God. And so it’s unity and this could be…actually there’re a couple of ways to think about this. One is that within each of your cultural contexts there can be something that is making for ourselves a name that is really more about our ethnic identity than our Christian identity. And that God comes and moves among the people challenges that and brings confusion, which is what Babel means, and that’s in contrast to the story in Acts 2 of Pentecost where, instead of it being one people that then become many and there’s now confusion, but there are many people, who by the Spirit are made one. So when you think about in your particular contexts how that might play out in terms of how do you keep this from being about your own ethnic identity and making for ourselves a name that’s sort of using religious language, and how do you keep it centered on this is something that God does that brings all of us together in the unity of the church?

AH: I think it’s important to recognize that the Tower of Babel story happens before God calls his people out. Here in Acts 2 we like to think of this as being the whole world coming together. But it’s really not. It says that there were God-fearing Jews from every nation. So it’s not just random people from every nation. God is within the context of what he’s already been doing through history has gathered a people to himself and they are dispersed, but he first calls them. So even within this diversity there’s already a sense of unity. There’s common ground. And from that then God begins to work out his plan again. And so I think how…what does this mean for us? There’s a…we always start with gathering around God and the gospel first, not around our common, you know, our different cultures and make that the point. And so what are the common touchpoints where we all have some understanding of God whether we come from a Christian background or not, and we start with a strong spiritual emphasis and then within that we can celebrate the different iterations of how God has expressed himself in every culture. I think, I think there are gospel truths embedded in every culture, buried beneath the surface, and as we excavate and exegete the culture we bring those things out. I think people find that we have a lot in common but they’re spiritual things. And I think that brings that unity in diversity that we’re looking for.

JS: And if I were piggyback on that, you see, the emphasis of the presence of the Lord in Acts 2:38 – you know, times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. And what I’ve discovered is when everyone in their own context has that desire for that presence. And that’s a unifying experience. And in Acts 2 to me that embodies Acts 2, the very fact this was the mission of God being accomplished and God revealing himself and that presence just brings us in a oneness, you know.

RB: Good. Thank you. Over here?

RQ: I think one of the pitfalls that we’ve fallen into at times has been trying to make the minor to major in the sense of trying to be more inclusive intentionally and then trying to give that some emphasis but in doing so losing the actual message along the way. So we’re giving a nod to the fact that people are different and so we make space for their differences, and yet we don’t let the gospel kinda lead in that acceptance. So what happens is we end up being, shall I say, being politically correct for the sake of saying, yeah, we’re, hey, we’ve got these little holes here that you can fit into rather than say here’s one big body and we’re all different parts. And we can all be part and we don’t have to have a celebration for the hand, the left hand first before the right, but we can all just be one body and we have this one message to share that is centered on a person who is Jesus. So when we go back to the presence of Christ through his Holy Spirit then the ethnicity or the diversity kinda just goes back to where it should be. And I don’t mean to downplay it as if it’s not important. It’s just that it just, it becomes subservient to the overall message of the gospel which is that unity through the gospel.

SSG: And I’m so glad that you said that, that the good news is a person, right? The good news is a person; that person is Jesus Christ. So the good news isn’t even necessarily this phrase or these ideas that we assent to. It is the person of Jesus Christ who came to us as a Jewish man in a particular time and place. And I think that the fact that God came to us in flesh, in flesh that had a color and that had a culture and that had all of those things that Jesus came to us in flesh lets us enter into the good news from our particular places without having to make those the majors, like you say, and yet the major can be Jesus Christ in the flesh who is our good news. Yeah.

RB: If we can come back, Charles, to pick up the question again…in fact if each of you, any of you who would like to respond to this, thinking about how maybe broad-based American evangelicalism is generally understood and what that narrative looks like. How maybe the… starting with you, how the narrative of what it means to be Christian in the Black context, in the African-American church, how that might be similar but also distinctive, and in that sense maybe even different from what’s sort of like the general narrative is out there in evangelicalism. Do you see differences there? Or maybe just the particularity of what that, what the, in the African-American context, how the gospel is heard and lived out.

CT: Well, I don’t know if I see a big difference in how we live it out in terms of the Black community. But I want to talk maybe more from my experience in that regard. Of course I came up in, you know, a black home, a black neighborhood, everything around me was black. My experience in the Church of the Nazarene, though, has afforded me a different view of the gospel and how it’s lived out amongst Anglos and other groups. And it’s been a wonderful journey for me. I came from a Baptist background where I was, you know, black in a predominately African-American movement. Now I’m a part of a predominately Anglo movement – at least here in America – of we know we’re very diverse in our world areas. But it is certainly enlarged my vision in terms of what the gospel is all about. I really didn’t understand it. And you have to understand in my background coming up with the type of oppression and racism that I saw, in my mind, you know, I had a hard time thinking that the majority culture was even Christian. You have to understand that because, you know, how can you be Christian but yet oppress me and my folk and people that I love. Of course my world view has since changed and not really dictated by the actions of a few misguided individuals. I really see the gospel now being lived out and the mission of the church and reaching all people and that I can be accepted for who I am and my cultural background and understand the distinctives that I bring as a Black man with my experiences, but I can say, “Hey, here at the foot of the cross we’re all equal. We’re all brothers and sisters in Christ and we really all have the same objective.” I wanna see folks, I wanna see lives transformed, I wanna see people walk in holiness, and I wanna meet on the other side of the Jordan one day.

RB: All right. Meeting on the other side of the Jordan. So let’s go with just that and let me bring you out a little bit more on that.

CT: Sure.

RB: There are times, and you may agree or disagree with this, that the, in very broad terms, that the African-American church has especially identified with the narrative of Exodus that given the sense of being freed from slavery, having been led by God, that has real social dimensions to it, political dimensions to it, but that emphasis upon sort of that narrative that is heard in the African-American context perhaps a little differently than in maybe middle-class white evangelicalism. Would you agree or disagree? What do you think about that?

CT: I agree, and understand that in the Black community if we go all the way back to the days of slavery, the one book that we were allowed to hear from was the Bible. And you would note that even working out in the fields the slaves, they would sing these spiritual songs – “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, comin’ for to carry me home. I looked over Jordan…” You know, from that context they saw that one day that this God would deliver them and they learned how to communicate through spiritual songs and hymns, to one another. We think about people like Harriet Tubman and so forth. They had a language that they spoke, but they were very spiritual people and they believed that if God was God he would not allow this oppression to continue this. Somehow, some way that he was gonna lead we as a people out of oppression and into a land flowing with milk and honey so to speak, into our own Canaan land. And that day actually did come. But again we all mobilized around the message of the gospel. We were brought together. And I think that even today there are still…I see fragments of that still in our thinking today. Although we do have an African-American president and we have made a lot of strides as a race, there’s still a lot of areas in which, you know, we need to make progress.

RB: So I think of even MLK’s “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I’m free at last.” So that that’s heard differently in the black community than it would in the middle-class white American community, white evangelical community. Good. All right. Yeah. Anything else? From your particular contexts ways that you specifically, that people in your particular context hear the gospel perhaps distinctively or maybe even differently than what would be broad-based evangelical.

JN: I think speaking for the Native American it’s, we’re so different. And each tribe is different. It’s almost like they have their own unique different culture. So it’s very difficult for me to speak for my Sioux people having been Navajo. It’s very different. They believe in a whole different type of religion. They believe in a whole different, their spirituality’s different. So, yeah, it’s very…

RB: What tribe do you identify?

JN: I represent the Navajo tribe. And for our tribe we appreciate our land. We’re very land, we’re very agricultural. We raise…a lot of our people are still operate like third-world country. My grandmother, my own grandmother, she does not have running water or electricity in her home. And she loves it. And she won’t trade it for anything. Here in the United States, in Northern Arizona, Utah, and there’s still no running water going to her home. And she still follows the sheep. And she watches over the sheep and that’s important to her. And so it’s gonna be different to ministering the good news to them opposed to the northern tribes, the Sioux tribes, the Cherokee tribes, and they all have different beliefs. But in order for us to minister to them we have to understand where they’ve come from, understand their history and understand that there has been some bad history as far as even through the church and understanding that they’ve gone through a lot. And that’s what kinda has been getting in the way of the gospel, the good news, of ministering to the people. So…

RB: That’s something that we may wanna pick up on again ‘cause that opens up a whole different…for so out of your Navajo heritage, is there…when you think about Navajo culture, it’s sense of the land, how does that, and even Navajo spirituality, how does that connect with, do you have to leave that behind to be Christian or is that now then sort of a way that it intersects with what people who are Navajo think about being Christian?

JN: Yeah, there’s certain parts that we do because they’re very…they believe in different gods and rather than the one true God. And so, but we do identify…one of the things that we identify is us being shepherds, we’re shepherds, we’re Navajo people are shepherds. So we identify with Jesus being the Great Shepherd and him caring for the sheep. And so we can identify in that way. But as far as leaving behind our culture, for my tribe we have Navajo songbooks and we have the hymns translated into the Navajo language. And there’s some things that we to, like, take for instance tithe. There’s no word for tithe in our Navajo language. So have to try to explain it, take different portions of it to try to explain what tithe means. So language is important, and they perceive the gospel in a whole new way. And it’s deep, even more spiritual to them when they receive the good news. Yeah, it’s very…

RB: When you think also about the Navajo respect for the land do you see that that for Navajo Christians is there something that connects with what it means to be Christian and the cultural heritage of the respect of the land?

JN: We understand that, you know, that God has given, God the creator, he’s the one that created all. In that respect, you know, respecting the land, and we’re very family oriented and seeing how God created everything kinda helps us to understand the good news even at a deeper level. So…

RB: So from the perspective of women reading the gospel…you wanna think about that a minute or do you have some thoughts?

SSG: Well, if you don’t mind me talking off the cuff a bit, thanks for asking that. Yeah. You know when we talk about Jesus coming and the particularity of the flesh, this male body, right? So for a long time female theologians have tried to wrestle with what does it mean that Christ came for my body as well? And the history of the church has struggled to really know what place women have in this story of salvation, and then now particularly in ministry as well. I have really been blown away these last few years becoming a mother and starting to think about what that means for me as a minister of the gospel. There are so many ways in which I see the world differently. In fact one of the women in our church came to me after our daughter was born. I took about a 7-8 week maternity leave and then got back into preaching and teaching, and a woman in our church came to me and said, “You know, since your daughter’s been born you are preaching with a passion and authority that I’ve never heard you preach with before.” And there was a sense in which I can’t even quite explain it, but becoming a mother has made me see my congregation differently. They’re all someone’s children, right? And even just the very real physical stuff, if it’s okay for me to talk about, but nursing an infant child and you think about what Paul talks about – spiritual milk – and raising people to maturity that I’m never gonna be the same again. I’m never gonna see the gospel the same again after having…have a child be grown in my belly and then held in my arms and nurse that child. I’m never gonna see the gospel the same again. I think that that’s part of the particularity that perhaps I bring to ministry that for me as a woman, as a mom, is very specific. Is that where you were…I probably took that a totally different direction.

RB: No, that’s good. And actually I’m gonna come back to you in just a minute with some thoughts about the power dynamics and the doctrine of entire sanctification. I’m gonna come back in just a second. But I wanna bring Annette into this and see if you have anything to add to how you think of this not only as a woman but as a Latina with regard to how that gospel is heard and maybe received and lived out.

AM: Well, first off you don’t wanna know what I think of Paul.

RB: All right. We don’t…we won’t.

AM: Just kidding.

RB: We might wanna know what you think of Paul.

AM: Me and Paul are gonna get into it when we get to heaven. No, you know, coming from a Latino perspective, and more specifically coming from a Nazarene heritage where my father was a minister, my mother is a deacon, I have never felt as though being a woman kept me from ministry. In fact they were my first encouragers to pursue ministry when I felt that calling. And I think within the Hispanic background women play such a large role in the spirituality of the family and the leading spiritually of the family that stepping into that role of ministry has never been hindered and, in fact, has been well received by congregants because the women are those spiritual role models in the homes that lead the charge and so to have a woman as a minister has really never, I’ve never come across any misunderstanding of that. As well we have African-American people in our congregation and who have well received having a woman at the pulpit and speaking. We have another woman in our church who is black and she’s studying for ministry, and she preaches regularly. She speaks with authority. And I believe in the black community as well women lead spiritually in the homes many times. Women are the ones who are present and who teach their children about the Bible. And so we have that in common. And my experience has never been – neither by the institution of the church nor by our culture – ever been looked down upon to minister.

RB: Thank you. That’s really helpful. For either of you, I believe I’ve heard Diane Leclerc and others talk about the doctrine of entire sanctification and how it call us, of course, to the surrender of ourselves completely, and so it is a sense of denial of self. And one of the things that Dr. Leclerc has said is that that plays out differently for men and for women because of power dynamics, that women who traditionally have not had as much power in society to ask those who have less power to become powerless, plays out differently than for people who actually have power. So do you have any response to that in terms of how the gospel or even the particular doctrine of entire sanctification has heard differently for maybe women than it might be for men? What do you think about that?

SSG: You know, I think about an ad that perhaps some of you have seen in the news recently. They just went under a lot of heat for a couple of guys who I believe are real estate agents and they put out this ad recently of comparing these two different pictures. And they basically were saying who do you want to sell and market your home? One was a picture of a young mom who has, like, kids and she’s all frazzled and she’s on the phone and it says, “A part-time real estate agent or…” and it contrasts them with these two very professional looking men in business suits that really obviously have it together, “…or full-time professionals?” And when I think about then for women what it means to be saved, right. Sometimes the church can play into that narrative of what it is to be male in this society and what it is to be female. And it’s almost as if women need to be saved from this kind of mess that we are and somehow that that’s…I even think back to, is it the Gospel of Mary? The Gospel of Thomas, right? The Gospel of Thomas in which, which obviously is not a part of the canon of scripture, but in the Gospel of Thomas Mary has this conversation in which she kind of comes to understand that to be saved she must become male and not be female anymore in order to be saved. And I think in a sense that that has pervaded even our understanding of the gospel a little bit that for women we have to be saved from the particularity of being female. And so I see what you’re saying that to say well you must become less, right, you must kind of submit and surrender in that kind of way. We hear that very differently. And some have taken it to the point of maybe perhaps over-emphasizing that and I think that there’s a lot of women’s Bible studies out there right now that play into that narrative to say that this is actually this great act of spiritual strength to become the most submissive and most subservient ones. And you look at Jesus’ teaching that if you want to be the greatest you must become the least. And for some women that just resonates. They get that because they are so constantly a servant. And yet what does that say when we look back at Acts chapter 2 in this wonderful way that the Spirit is empowering and breathing new life and speaking this word of, yeah, a great life and strength into such a diverse people?

AM: And I think that is a perfect example of having it being viewed from a specific culture. Because I understand that perhaps in the white middle class evangelical culture women traditionally didn’t have those places of leadership spiritually to then become ministers of the gospel and view this entire sanctification differently whereas as I’ve shared in the Hispanic culture the women are leaders spiritually in the home. And in the black community women are the spiritual leaders in the home. And so that never plays into having less value. If anything that empowers you to preach louder and to speak louder, and so I think culturally that’s a perfect example of how it’s viewed differently. And I’ll share, you know, when I was in seminary preparing for ministry I started reading a book. I picked up a book by Elizabeth George. I don’t know if I’m allowed to say that. And it was a great book about how my role was to just serve my husband as he ministered. And it really confused me because I grew up with this understanding that I could minister and that God could use me and then here I am reading…wait a minute. My role was to iron my husband’s shirt for Sunday morning so he can preach. And my role was to cook his meals and just serve him. And I struggled a little bit with that for the first time during my seminary years because I’d never grown up hearing that message from the Hispanic background. I’d never heard that message from my cultural perspective. I heard it then from an Anglo white perspective. And so that’s where my cultures clashed because I was born and raised in the States and so I have both mindsets, so to speak, to think about as I went into ministry.

RB: And even Paul said no distinction between men and women.

AM: Right.

RB: So you like that part of Paul.

AM: That part of Paul.

SSG: And I think that that’s where we take that and say well then women should be equal just like men, right? And so women to be equal and to be seen as equal have to be just like men and that there’s no sense in which, that men also become humbled in the presence of this other who are different for women to really gain equality they need to be like men. They need to act like men and think like men and talk like men and have the jobs that men have. And so I’m definitely not going down a complementarian route – trust me on that – but that there is a sense in which I think we need to begin to look at genders differently that for us as women to gain a place of equality in either ministry or just in the story of sanctification; it’s not necessarily to have everything that men have and to look and sound and talk like men. It is to be completely given away to Jesus Christ where we do become less and Christ becomes more which looks different than achieving all that men have achieved in society.

RB: That’s interesting. Yes. Just to summarize some of that – two things that are both important in the gospel. One is that message of complete surrender, taking up our cross. Philippians 2 – kinosis – having this mind in ourselves which is also in Christ Jesus which is this emptying and this identification with the cross of Christ that we may then also be identified with the resurrection. So that call that we all often see as really central of complete consecration, surrender of denying ourself as it says in Luke 9. On the other hand, another part of the gospel is that sense of freedom, that sense of we were in slavery, we’ve now been freed, we’ve been empowered, it’s that Acts 2 – that we have the power of the Holy Spirit. So in some ways actually different cultures or different people who are engaging the gospel narrative they may see themselves identifying with one maybe a little bit more than the others or the balance between those two might be a little different. Which comes back to even how the African-American experience may be picking up on one of those a little bit more than the other, not that you would not include both of those. Do you have any thoughts about any of that? Any additional thing? Power dynamics and how you see the gospel lived out in your particular context with regard to that?

RQ: I would just…as I was listening to all this, speaking now as a husband, it seems as though we need to look at the template in which we define what it means to be equal or to be together with. Dave Gibbons, in one of his books, talks about the idea that for the Western mind we always look at things through categories, and so when you say I need equality, you find equality through categories. So I want the man’s job; I want to do whatever the man can do. I’d like to be able to do that. But in the Asian mind, which is very similar to the Latino mind, I believe, lots of similarities there, it’s more of relationship. It’s more relational. It’s how we perceive our relationship to each other. And so we really don’t have to have a category. Women are confident among Filipinos, who are Asian but have Latino background, in their role and in what they do they get things done. They don’t need a category to define them. They find that they are doing what they need to do for the family. So for them this is what I’m doing for the family. Now whether I want his job or his title is not an issue with the Asian mind. And I think Albert can add to this in the sense that it’s about the relationship that I have with the people that I’m committed to. So they’re not really fighting. Now when the west started giving these ideas in Asia then says, yeah, well, I think the title of president of my family business is a good thing. But it used to be before that that wasn’t really the case because it’s all about relationship in the mind. So that’s sorta like another dynamic. If we remove that template and we just say, ok, if it’s relational then when we think about sanctification, when you think about entire sanctification then we see it as okay, my relationship with Christ is such and therefore now I belong to the body in this relational way. Who needs to be defined in any other way? That disappears and so there’s no sense of in what we would perceive as injustice and justice being done. Anymore you go straight to the core of being able to express God’s unconditional love because you don’t have this hanging over you that I need to pay for this or somebody needs to pay for this before I move forward. Now I can simply move forward because I’m in relationship.

RB: That’s well said. And I’m moving over here. OK. Yeah, Junior.

JS: And I’m thinking in a very multicultural context the fact of seeing different cultures come together. I observe even in Canada we have a very integrated culture and we have women who are leaders in our culture. As a matter of fact, even in our district in the Church of the Nazarene we probably have the most woman pastors on any district throughout USA/Canada. And one of the reasons is because we have noticed like in our context in our own local church a lot of African women – they are great spiritual leaders. They have that freedom to express themselves. Yet I see a sense of humility in them. Because even though they seek to lead spiritually yet you see the respect they give to their husbands, to others, but yet there’s little question of, “Well, you are female so you should be silent.” It an opportunity to say I express what God has done in my life. I have the joy of showing forth, you know, that the gospel is for all people of all classes of all races in that equal platform. And as I’m listening to both of you I’m thinking, you know, how people respond differently. When my wife preaches we see a different response than when I may preach or another one of our ethnic leaders would preach. And it’s so interesting to note that we do respond in the context.

RB: So what’s the different response when your wife preaches?

JS: For example women tend to always lead more to the altar than men. And I wondered why? Is it that a woman hears better from another woman, you know? Is she hearing that heartbeat? And that may be a reason as well. But then also I see it makes others think, because as you rightfully said, you know, as a mother you speak out of that context. And so others will identify. And we know in the church, even in the multi-cultural church we still have a greater percentage of women than men. And with that you find then that they are more responsive. And that has set the tone. That set the tone.

RB: Albert, so in the…thank you. In thinking about the broader Chinese context, so are there things that are distinctive about Chinese culture, especially in America, that engage or that are particular also to sort of like a Chinese way of hearing the gospel?

AH: I think we have some barriers in embracing the person of Jesus because something we take for granted in North America is we often talk about that you need a personal relationship with Jesus. It’s almost like that’s unquestioned. But that comes from an individualistic culture. So when you go to communal cultures we don’t know what it means or what it looks like to have a personal relationship with somebody else. We don’t see ourselves as individuals. We see ourselves as part of a community. For me in particular it was very hard for me to have a personal relationship with my parents. They worked for us and provided us, very hard workers, but I don’t remember having deep conversations with my father and to this day. And I know he loves me, but it’s hard…so to this day I have problems being intimate with God. And I’m very upfront about that with my congregation and they get it. And so sometimes when we continue to emphasize you need to have a personal relationship, personal relationship, we end up heaping shame and condemnation on people and they feel deeply inadequate. Why aren’t I getting this? So do we…what do we do? Do we try to help everyone have a personal relationship? Or do we set that concept aside and recognize that it’s, to a certain way, cultural and say, well who are we and how do we have a communal relationship with God? And it’s okay that I, you know, don’t always know what to do in my personal times with God ‘cause I know what to do when we’re all together, and I know how to engage with God. So I think we have to question at some point when do we try to reform our culture? There’s some things that need to be reformed. And sometimes when we don’t, when we set something aside and say, well let’s focus on something different, you know. So I think we constantly have to question that.

RB: You mentioned shame. So sometimes in the way that the gospel is heard differently that there are shame cultures and guilt cultures and that do you wanna make the distinction there or is it overdone or how is that heard, how does that play in to…?

AH: I don’t think it’s overdone at all. I think we really don’t understand, and actually tomorrow when I preach at the NTS preaching conference I’ll be speaking specifically on that because guilt is something that lives in a courtroom and we use a lot of legal language to describe what Jesus has done for us – he paid for our sins and so on and atonement – and I think we overlook the fact that the majority of the world’s cultures are shame-based cultures. So it’s not so much a journey from, you know, guilt to innocence – it’s not that I need to have my sins paid for – it’s that I have to have my shame lifted and my honor restored. So looking at the gospel through the lens of honor and shame as a journey from being rejected and being exiled and being alienated and having no honor to being, to reigning with Jesus and being given a cloak of righteousness and a crown of glory to honor. And you look at how…when you look at the church in shame/honor-based cultures you’ll see a lot of hierarchy because people are trying to figure out how do I have honor within the church. So is that a bad thing? Or is that a good thing? Is there just a thing that we have to work with? I’m still working through a lot of that.

RB: So with regard to the doctrine of the atonement or what happened on the cross in the way that that is preached or heard is that different in a guilt-based compared to a shame-oriented culture?

AH: I think that what resonates with me more and more is not so much the pain that Jesus went through – the physical pain that he went through on the cross – but the utter humiliation that he goes through on our behalf. The God of the universe being spat on by human beings touches me in a very deep way.

RB: So from that context is there not as much emphasis upon sort of the substitution, the sacrifice, or…

AH: I think we’re still working that out in our context because we’re so…especially those of us who are trained in a North American context. We’re trained to speak in those terms but we’re discovering it just is not resonating with people. And they go, “OK. Wow. That’s great.” But you don’t see a person that the lights go on and this desire to draw close to Jesus. So I think we’re still working that out.

RB: So when do the lights come on?

AH: I think the lights come on when…you see in Asian cultures we are used to earning things. We are used to striving. We are used to if you do this and this, you get this education, do this, then you will be more acceptable. You will have more honor. So the lights go on when we realize that God makes the first move and that he draws close to us and when I see the lengths that he goes to when despite my continual failure, and I think the lights begin to go on and I think dwelling in that love is very, very healing for us. So it’s not that I have a personal relationship with God; it’s that God desires to have a personal relationship with me. And when I have no idea how to do that that’s okay because God does.

JS: And he’s at work.

RB: Yeah. All right. So we’ve been over here a little bit. So coming back this direction, picking up these things…Jonathan?

JN: I can relate with brother here, Native American. The same way. We don’t know personal. It’s, we’re very communal. We’re very family-oriented. And we respect our people. I come from a Navajo tribe where I possess four different clanships. I have my mother’s clan, my father’s clan, my mother’s father’s clan, and my father’s father’s clan. And in that way, amongst the Navajo people, if I share a clan with another individual on the other side of the state and we share our clans with one another and if we’re, if we are related or if we share the same clan right then there we become family. Never knew one another, different place, but we become family. And so understanding that, with brother I can understand that personal. It’s hard, it’s difficult for us. And for us to see this God who’d go to great lengths like brother was saying and that’s why we can, we find hope in Acts. And going back to Acts chapter 2 where it says, “The promise is for you and your children, for all you who are far off.” And we receive that as far off. And God went to great lengths and here all the way to native area, native lands, and we receive that. And so there’s great hope. So I can identify with that.

RB: So if the, perhaps the litmus test and be evangelical in America broadly speaking is do you have, not just do you consider yourself Christian, ‘cause there are cultural Christians, but do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Some of you would wanna say back to that, wait a minute. You would wanna say what?

AH: Well, my first gut response as I said is I don’t know what that means, you know. I think we really need to make the litmus test less on us, you know, and just more on God. Just to say God wants to have a personal relationship with you. Are you okay with that? Yeah. You know, and it’s just saying yes. That’s the litmus test, you know.

RB: All right. And you might even…would you still stay as you are with that particular metaphor, I suppose, personal relationship? Or would you want to bring in another metaphor, too that is in some way…?

AH: Yeah. I think what was pointed out is very important that God wants to have a relationship, personal relationship with you and your children and all those who are far off. And you kind of extend it to that, to a larger context. And so when I make a decision I’m not just making a decision for me; I’m making a decision for my family. And as a father, you know, that’s…I feel honored by that.

RB: The story of the Philippian jailer. That’s just…and all of my children. Jon, anything to add to that, Jonathan?

JN: I think almost like breaking the cycle comes to mind because, you know, the good news, how the good news has come to us and we made that decision. And for me my cycle was alcoholism and how it affected my people and still affects my people. And I could speak for my family and God came into our lives and he broke…because the decision of my grandmother accepting Jesus Christ through Sunday school, and because of that, you know, came generations of Nazarene ministers. And it broke the cycle kind of thing.

RB: So I really like that language – breaking the cycle. That has to do with sort of generational, communal, and also narrative. So it’s changing the story in a sense. So the story was one, in this case, you mentioned alcoholism. This is a new story. Charles, we’re gonnna bring you back into this.

CT: Yes.

RB: So the new story, so that story that is the Christian story in the African-American context that is maybe a little different from the narrative that is the Black narrative in America. So do you resonate with all of that? What, how does that play out, that changing the narrative, the new story?

CT: I’m not quite sure what you mean. Give me a little bit more.

RB: All right. Just that if we think in terms of not only how the gospel is heard in black society and black subculture, but also what the narrative, the dominant narrative, the dominant African-American black narrative is, how the gospel when it’s heard and embodied ties into that, but also is a different story – a new narrative that’s maybe different from the dominant American black story.

CT: Let me say this in terms of the new narrative in terms of my understanding from the black community. Not only was the gospel, hearing the gospel in be accepted – I heard him talking earlier about that personal relationship and that’s what, you know, really resonates with me. And I’ve taught that to my children, and that’s what really changed me in terms of you must have a personal relationship with the Lord to break those, albeit, we could call it generational curses or things that have plagued us, our thinking, you know, when you have been oppressed for so long, the only thing you think about is how can I get out of this situation. Really had not even begun to think further than that just, you know, I need to get out of these chains before I can think about anything else. I need to get out of this situation that has plagued me and my people for generations. So I think that in many regards we were behind the greater society because, you know, that dominated our thinking, now that we are free, you know, what are you gonna do with that? You know, how, even now, you know, I think about growing up and, you know, wanting to go to college and do different things and, you know, first generation college student, because, you know, in our community, we didn’t think that far ahead, you know. We were just trying to, you know, be free and enjoy the American life. Now what does that look like now?

RB: You mentioned that the church where you pastor, that it is in area where there are a lot of social problems.

CT: Yes. Very much so.

RB: So in that sense is the way that the gospel is heard and embraced and lived out. Is it perhaps a little more holistic than might be heard in a…certainly middle-class white America has its own social problems but they may not be aware of those. They may not be as obvious as they are in a black community where there a lot of social problems. So is the gospel heard maybe in more holistic ways in your context?

CT: Yes. Yes. Certainly. And applied, you know I think about crack dealers and people who I’ve…I had a lady who testified just a month ago in service about being delivered from alcoholism, prostitution, you know, a lot of…and she just said it right out and I was sorta thinking I don’t know if I wanna share all of that, but she was just so proud of the fact that God had delivered her from a life on the streets and things that had, you know, we would look at it and say, man, I don’t know if I would wanna share with other folks that I did that, but that’s what the gospel’s meant to her. She said it has really changed me from the inside out and not just her. I have another person who was a staunch crack addict and what the gospel meant to them that they could be delivered from that crack cocaine habit. And we actually won her to the church. We saw walking across the street and she was just sort of rambling and looking. We said, “What are you doing?” Well, she was actually looking for what she talked about roaches or just a little fragments left from where somebody has smoked a crack or whatever and had dropped it. And she was just, and somebody went over and talked with her and shared the gospel. And praise be to God. She was delivered from a crack habit. Now we had to stay with her. It meant going into rehab and some other things, but, you know, wow, what a difference the gospel made to her. So in that regard when I preach the gospel and communicate the gospel I’m talking about that he could deliver you from these things that have plagued our people, you know, for many years, whether it be addiction, abuse or prostitution or whatever it may be.

RB: So not only the language of forgiveness, so think of sort of the dominant American middle-class white narrative. We are sinners through the cross of Christ. We are guilty. We ask for forgiveness and we confess the name of Jesus. And so obviously every situation is different. But in some ways what you are working with in your context has additional dynamics to that which has to do with not only forgiveness, but also freedom and deliverance and be empowered. Does that also, does that have economic implications in the sense of if many of the people are poor does this change in terms of how they then think about their own self-determination, their ability to re-enter society? Does it have economic implications?

CT: Oh, certainly, yes, certainly. It affords them the ability now to go on and to reach that God-given potential for their destiny in terms of, you know, I let them know, “Listen. Anything that you want to be you can be,” because that’s what the gospel does. It brings us all to a level where not only are we equal but then, you know, if you wanna be president, if you wanna be a lawyer, if you wanna be a congressperson or whatever it is, you can be that. That’s what the gospel allows us all. Each and every one of us can reach our potential that God has placed inside of each of us.

RB: So that message of empowerment – do you have to balance that with sort of sometimes what becomes a prosperity gospel that is preached?

CT: Certainly. And, you know, unfortunately I see all too much of that in our community where so many of the…I see larger, growing African-American churches…that message of prosperity really is appealing to them because you’re dealing with people who’ve been oppressed, who haven’t had much, and now they’re saying well, this gospel will make you rich, you know. You put a thousand dollars in this plate and God’s gonna give you back a million dollars. You know, I’m still looking for my million, you know. But in the black community that message has resonated. And that really bothers me because that’s not what the gospel is all about.

RB: So the gospel is empowerment, but it is not…that’s what the gospel is about is to become healthy, wealthy, and successful.

CT: Yes. For all too many it has been.

RB: All right. OK. We’re about ready to take a break, but before we wind up this particular session what else are you thinking? What would be your summary comments of where we are so far? What else would you add?

JS: I’m also thinking about Paul speaking in Acts 17 in Athens the very concept that as I listen to this dialogue we have to become all things to all peoples so by all means we can win some.

RB: We’re gonna pick up on that next. That’s exactly where we wanna go so hold that thought ‘cause that’ll be a great introduction to our next session. Excellent. Thank you. What else?

JN: I think it’s important to understand our cultural context in what we’re still struggling with as far as culturally. I can identify with my black brother here. We as Native Americans have been forced…we’ve been murdered…we’ve been driven to great lengths almost to be secluded even to reservations, and we’re still dealing with that today. And our people are still dealing with it. And it’s important to understand that a lot of our people have that resentment still, that bitterness still. And it’s still being taught to their children and those children, even though they may not have experienced it, they’ve been taught by their grandparents or by their parents and they have that bitterness. It’s very hard for, especially for…my context for me to, once they have it to present the good news, you know, God has come. He’s not just a white man’s God but he’s a God of all nations. And so they’re still trying to struggle with that.

RB: That’s again, an excellent point. And I think we’ll wanna pick up on that as well that obviously a diversity panel. What does it mean, and so just for next session, for you in your particular context – ethnic, cultural, gender – what does that mean to be part of a church in American that is basically dominated by middle-class white American males that is sort of the dominant culture? So what is it like for you to be part of that? And so we may wanna pick up…that’s really good. Other summary comments from this morning?

JS: You know, I like the phrase about breaking the chains. And as you think about the gospel and the whole context about our discussion today, no matter our heritage or the history that is there, we see just in the Acts 2 narrative the very understanding that God came to set the people free. Freedom to come out of bondage remembering where we have come from but the joy of looking forward to where we are going. I think that’s important for us in all cultures.

AH: I think it’s important for us to remember that we need the gospel, too, and that we’re human beings, and so it’s just as important for me to exegete myself, you know, as a person and find the areas of my brokenness and where I’m still learning and growing and allow God to transform me. And if I don’t speak out of that experience I’m gonna have nothing to say, really, to anybody else.

AM: I think it’s been beautiful to hear just how we do hear the gospel differently and yet how it’s unifying. We hear from our Black community how we see God more as a deliverer, this freedom, this way maker. And we hear from our Navajo brothers how God is the shepherd that resonates that’s leading his people. With our Asian friends and how God has made us just a little lower than the angels and crowned us with glory and honor and that resonates, you know, the common thing that we share whether God is our deliverer or our shepherd or this idea of being given our honor back. Where we’re all unified, I believe, is that no matter how diverse we are if one of us is well, if our neighbor is well, we’re all well. We have this community that pulls together our…it’s not about just me. And that might be different growing up in this society, predominantly white, where it’s all about me and my personal relationship with Jesus and then my minority mindset, my Hispanic background know when I am well with Christ it’s good for my whole family. It’s good for my community. It’s good for my church. And it builds the kingdom so when one of us is well we’re all well. When one of us is ill we all hurt.

RB: Yeah.

SSG: It’s so helpful for me, and I feel so humbled and honored to be in this company of pastors and brothers and sisters, because I do recognize that I’ve pastored a congregation that began and still is predominately white and yet is trying to reach into a community that is rapidly changing. And there was always a bit of a challenge to help them to understand that there is a particular narrative that they’re living in. Being part of a dominant culture you don’t always see it. You don’t even recognize that the people that they so desperately and truly, genuinely want to reach out to, the community that they genuinely want to share the gospel with is speaking a different cultural language and has different images and different ways of talking about the gospel or the ways that the gospel resonate with them. It’s a challenge to even see. When you talk about what is the new narrative sometimes we have to witness to the dominate culture and let them know there is a narrative that you are living into whether you recognize it or not.

AH: And I think…speaking from your context reminds me of something from Acts 2 – which is where we started this discussion – in that there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven and they all, 3,000 people get baptized. But the miracle continues into Acts 2:42, and we often divorce that from what just happened. So the miracle is that there were people from every nation under heaven devoting themselves to the teaching and the fellowship. There were people from all of these different places eating at the same tables, gathering in each other’s homes, so when it comes to how do we bridge a homogenous congregation with a diverse community, I think that idea of table fellowship, you know, with people from many different cultures and many different nations, that’s a beautiful thing. And that really points to the coming kingdom, I think.

RB: Yeah. It does. That’s right.