

Engage360 Episode 119 | A Rallying Call to Evangelicalism: *A Burning House*; Brandon Washington

Intro [00:00:04] Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.

Don Payne [00:00:15] Hey, friends, welcome again. This is Engage360 from Denver Seminary. We are really glad that you have chosen to spend some time with us. My name is Don Payne, your host. And over the past couple of years, we have had several conversations here on Engage360 about evangelicalism. That word has been hijacked in service to political agendas and ideologies and often seems to be more of a liability than an asset depending upon who you talk to. Many of us have labored hard to recenter that conversation about what it means and what it does not mean to be evangelical. But it seems like the deeper you dig, the more you uncover that needs serious attention, at least within the American version of evangelicalism. And we think that work is worth it. And we want to keep at that reclamation project. And to help us with that, we are honored to have our president, Dr. Mark Young, back with us again. Welcome, Mark. And Pastor Brandon Washington, also a return to the podcast. Brandon, welcome.

Brandon Washington [00:01:20] Thanks for having me back.

Don Payne [00:01:21] Yeah. Brandon has been a guest at least twice, I think, but it's been a while. Brandon is lead pastor of Embassy Christian Bible Church in Denver and has just published a new book that we want to use as the prompt for our conversation today. The book is called "A Burning House." The subtitle is "Redeeming American Evangelicalism by Examining its History, Mission, and Message." It's published by Zondervan. Just came out. It's a strong title. It's intended to convey a strong message. And Brandon is uniquely qualified to speak into this topic because of where he sits in relation to evangelicalism and some of the unique pressure points, he has experienced that may not be quite so obvious to many in the movement. I guess as we get under way, Brandon, and maybe Mark, you may want to add some color commentary here, but Brandon, give us maybe a high-level flyover of the context of the book and what you hope it will accomplish.

Brandon Washington [00:02:26] Okay. So, in 2020, I believe, 19 or 20, I wrote an article that was published in Christianity Today and it was entitled "Black an Evangelical: Why I Keep the Label." And that article was prompted by a conversation I had with a friend because he found out I am a member of the Evangelical Theological Society. And in fact, I was registering for the conference at the time. We were in a coffee shop together. He noticed me doing that and he just exclaimed, you're an evangelical? And that prompted a conversation between us. Now he has decided to remain orthodox, but he has very deliberately eschewed the term evangelical. He's turned away from that altogether. And as you mentioned earlier, his primary reason for doing that is it has been co-opted. It is as much, if not more, of a partisan term. It is more tribal than theological. And he wants to disassociate. In fact, I would call this, and I took note of it, it's not so much the ideas of the party that he has issues with. It's the fact that it's partisan at all. It's not theological. And he and I had a very good conversation about that. And I noticed the need to concede his concerns and try to move us toward actions that will redeem the movement instead of entirely turning away from it. And I had to defend several of those arguments, and that was what gave rise to that article in Christianity Today. And then the book is an expansion on the article that I wrote for CT.

Don Payne [00:04:24] A burning house. Where the title come from?

Brandon Washington [00:04:27] In the 1950s. So, one of my favorite writers is a man named James Baldwin. He grew up in the church. In fact, his father was a very, I'll use the popular language here, his father was a very religious man. And one of the ways he related to his father is as a teenager, James Baldwin became a very popular preacher in Harlem, New York. But he turned away from the faith in his young adulthood. And he did so, he argues, because he saw that the language of the church and the behavior of the church was so inconsistent that he turned away. And he's a very gifted writer, playwright, and he did lots of nonfiction work. And he was also an activist from a literary perspective. Malcolm X referred to him as the poet of the movement, and he wrote an essay entitled *The Fire Next Time*. And it's a

brief essay, it's 100 pages. You can read it in the day. It's probably the work for which he's best known. And he used a line in it that resonated with me. He asked, Do I wish to be integrated into a burning house? Now, that's not where I got the title from though. I got the title from Martin Luther King, who co-opted it from James Baldwin. Martin Luther King is known for the I Have a Dream speech. And whenever he's quoted, it is usually a reference to content of character versus color of skin and some of the others. Because he was such a gifted orator, he gave you what I call the repeated big idea. So, people would run with those. And sometimes they snatched them from the context, and they missed the broader indicting tenor of the I Have a Dream speech. But we always stop Martin Luther King's ideas in 1963 when he delivered that message. But what's overlooked is a year or two later, he started to regret some of the language he used there. What he said was it was naive. It was delusional expectations. He recognized that it is possible for you to legally outlaw segregation without a community experiencing integration. And in 1968, only a few months before he passed away, he was in a conversation with Harry Belafonte. And he said to Harry Belafonte, I believe we've integrated our people into a burning house. And he was paraphrasing. He's borrowed that language from James Baldwin. And I have often wrestled with that because almost from the moment of my conversion, because I grew up as a part of a segregationist racist cult, the Nation of Islam. And upon my conversion, I was troubled by the fact that the church looked like the cult out of which I'd come. So, I made integrating the church a part of my life's mission because I wanted to turn it away from that worldly perspective. But I now wonder, and I have for some time now, have I spent years integrating people into evangelicalism's burning house.

Don Payne [00:07:53] So this really grows out of a question you've been wrestling with.

Brandon Washington [00:07:58] For years. For at least ten years now.

Don Payne [00:08:01] Mark, why do you think this is such an important conversation, an important work?

Mark Young [00:08:05] There's no doubt that the language, the phrase evangelical or the term evangelicalism has been co-opted in ways that we're all uncomfortable with. I think what Brandon has brought to the table is an important consideration of how the term and the movement as a whole has been shaped not just by culture and theology. It's also been shaped by race and racism. And so, you know, we can write books about the partisan political failure of the church, the loss of gospel as the primary identity. But we can also realize and recognize in our history that even when we were saying we were about the gospel, we were still a segregated church and we hadn't come face to face with the history that brought us to that place, the deep values that had brought us to that place or that had sustained that place, that segregated identity. So, when I read Brandon's book, I remember you sent me the PDF so I could write an endorsement of it. I felt that the book created a perspective on the crisis in evangelicalism that went beyond what those of us in the white community writing about the crisis of evangelicalism had been willing and able to identify. And so, I see this as a very important book to bring to light a part of the crisis that many of us hadn't laid out as clearly as he has.

Don Payne [00:09:38] I love the way you put that, because when we do think about digging into the subterranean layers of the problem or problems with evangelicalism, we do find more than we thought we were going to find. And maybe some things that we didn't expect or didn't want to find. And one thing I want to visit in our conversation today is this issue of the gospel. And on what basis or by what criteria do we say that something is or is not a gospel issue. And that seems to be a theological Ping-Pong match that's going on these days that never stops. You know, parties claiming, well, this is a gospel issue and parties claiming, well, it's not a gospel issue. But nobody ever seems to clarify the criteria by which they would make one claim or the other. And I picked up in your book that you do something, you make a theological move that helped me begin to answer that question. And we'll use that as a teaser because we're going to come back to that. I think it was a really important work. But Brandon, say a little bit more specifically about why you and so many of your friends have been tempted to leave evangelicalism, not the theology, as you mentioned, your friend remaining orthodox, and I assume you mean Orthodox theologically, not Eastern Orthodox, but why have you and so many of your friends been tempted to leave evangelicalism?

Brandon Washington [00:11:04] If I were to put it into one sentence, I would say they're leaving because of the racialization of the gospel, and that's why the historical discussion is so important. So, if you attend church, even today, we don't even have to go back into the middle of the 20th century, if you attend a black church today as opposed to a white church, you'll notice that the liturgy displays of its values. Frankly, that's something I learned in seminary. Dr. Buschart drove that home. Pay attention to what the church does during its worship gatherings because it's indicative of its values. And I noticed that often in black churches, the songs that we sing, they emphasize the eschaton, the future hope, because an emphasis on the future hope. And when I would attend, I have the benefit of to use Bryan Lorrits's language, I kind of walk in two different worlds. I am I'm the bi cultural person. I've had to code switch quite a bit. So has he. That's why we have that language in common. And when I'm with my friends in predominantly white churches, I notice that the emphasis is on God's goodness in the present. The songs emphasize what God is doing now. And I would argue that those two distinct emphases are the product of the distinct experiences. One of them is saying, these circumstances are horrible. We cannot wait until God comes to deliver us. And one recognizes the circumstances as good, whether we want to use the word privileged or not. They recognize the circumstances as good and they're blessing God for the good circumstances. And I think that those two different perspectives determine the scope of the gospel. So, one of them is saying, Jesus died so I can have eternal deliverance. And the day will come when he will return and he will be king, and he will usher us into his kingdom, and we will have an opportunity to experience bliss with him for all eternity. And the other camp is saying, we want to have a God whose gospel is relevant to us now, who delivers us from the complexities, the brokenness we have. And I would argue that is a legitimate expectation of the gospel. And so, the idea of that one of them says, wait until he gets back, while the other says we serve a king who is concerned about our heartache, our brokenness now, I think that is the product of a racialization of the gospel. And one has to do a read of the history to figure out, to determine how we got there.

Don Payne [00:13:48] I want to ask you to think ahead a bit. What do you think would happen or could happen if the word evangelical is genuinely reclaimed or scrubbed? I think you use that terminology. If it's reclaimed, scrubbed, and lived out as it should be, what do you envision?

Brandon Washington [00:14:10] I think that one of the mistakes, I'll start with the mistakes so I can get to the vision. I think one of the mistakes in America, and I want to be careful here because when I use the word evangelical here, I'm referring to American evangelicalism. This is not an indictment of global evangelicalism. And I can't do that for a couple reasons. One. Globally, the term is defined in such various ways that it's hard to do that. But I also think that pure global evangelicalism at the international level is healthier because it's much more integrated and it's communally based. Whereas in America, the decision was to isolate. And it gave rise to fundamentalist schools. In fact, just giving my hand, I'd argue that much, on the whole, I want to be very careful to not say anything sweepingly. But on the whole, American evangelicalism is actually fundamentalism cloaked behind the term evangelical. And I think that was a very strategic thing. And the solution to that is to adopt the communal values, the social values that are common to many global evangelical movements, especially in the global South. If you look at Latin America and Africa, you'll notice that communal values, the church is thriving there because of being much more open to, and this is from Philip Jenkins. I'm borrowing this language from him but being much more open to supernatural things. But it's also because of the communal values that are common to those cultures. And that cultural value shapes how they do Christian theology. If America adopted that much more communal value, then much of what we're doing would shift. Instead, though, because we're Western, we're much more of a pull yourself up by your bootstraps individualistic approach, which I think is in direct opposition to a biblical evangelical movement.

Don Payne [00:16:10] Is that what you have in mind on page 14 when you describe how you think American evangelicalism would be more robust with the perspective of non-Western evangelicals?

Brandon Washington [00:16:23] Absolutely. That's a lot. But it's precisely that. I believe that had American evangelicalism adopted non-Western, evangelical, and orthodox, theologically orthodox views, voices into the conversation during the height of segregation in America, they would have had to grapple with some aspects of their ideas, with the implications of their ideas in ways they didn't because they were functioning

as an echo chamber. They were functioning in isolation and then had to hear what Desmond Tutu was saying to these matters. And the Anglican Church is strong on the continent of Africa now. Bringing that voice to how we approach the evangelical movement here in America today would provide a more comprehensive perspective of our identity and the way we live it out. The orthopraxy, the values that come out of our theology.

Don Payne [00:17:19] You and I have had a lot of conversations about this kind of thing, and I know that it would, as a theologian, I know that it would certainly shift or at least shape and nuance some of the conversation points we have theologically. The kinds of questions we give attention to, the kinds of questions we try to answer.

Mark Young [00:17:37] Yeah, I think one of the things we have to realize in North America is that evangelicalism as a movement is populist and revivalist. And so, as a result of the revival foundations, the revivals that were the foundations of the movement, really, individual salvation and a salvation that is essentially ticket to heaven, a vision of conversion that is related to a siloed approach, that really forms the foundation of the way most evangelicals at the broad level believe. That's what the gospel is. And the populism is simply the fact that we've created a movement whereby for many people, the concept of community as a whole and a community of believers is considered optional. It's my spirituality, my walk with Jesus, my individual satisfaction that really dominates at the broad level in evangelicalism. And I think it's important to say that there have been good conversations about reframing the gospel around social and communal commitments that have taken place for a long time, even among white evangelicals, it's just that at the populist level, at the broad level, at the pew level, that understanding of the gospel definitely does not predominate. It's very highly individualistic.

Don Payne [00:19:01] Yeah, that's where the work has yet to be done.

Brandon Washington [00:19:05] Yeah, I'm glad you did that because I'm a fan, and Dr. Young, you I have discussed this. I'm a fan of Bebbington's Quadrilateral. But while researching for this book, something that jumped out is he emphasizes crucifixion and conversion and the Bible and activism, which is one of the reasons that has my attention. But I did notice an absence of the church. He doesn't emphasize ecclesiology, and I think that is evidence of his scholarship. That was an honest assessment of the circumstances he was recognizing. He recognized that evangelicalism did not spotlight community, neither at a non-Christian level or at a church level. The issue was Jesus is my personal Lord and savior, and I have an eternal destiny that comes out of that. And the idea of bearing the burdens of my brother and sister in the kingdom, or even a person based solely on the reality of their humanity, bearing their burdens as a part of a community, that was never an emphasis. It was sometimes incidental. It was sometimes an inadvertent byproduct; I need to be very honest about that. But the fact that it was never deliberate, and you have to be deliberate in a racialized society, which America was from the day of its inception. You cannot expect something good to cross racial lines organically in a deliberately racialized society that has a caste system as one of its explicit and unspoken values.

Don Payne [00:20:52] It's really interesting because just the placement of certain theological emphases, certain doctrines, the placement of them in our systems of thought is very indicative of the value that we place on them and the way we even think about them. And there's a reason to your point Brandon, there's a reason that in typical discussions of theology, ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church is one of the last things we talk about. And one signal that seems to send is that, at least among evangelicals, however broadly we want to define that, the doctrine of the church is a byproduct. It's a sociological expression of the gospel. It's not intrinsic to the gospel. Now we could have a long conversation about why that is. At least in part, I suspect it's because of the fear of being Roman Catholic for so many. You know, we've got all this pushback, centuries of pushback, paranoia about the church being overly elevated and what its authority is. You want to keep the church detached from anything salvific anything soteriological. And once you do that, you have a doctrine of the church that's merely sociological or it's merely descriptive of what people do. It's never theological.

Brandon Washington [00:22:11] Okay. And I'm sitting with my two favorite people. So let me say this. You just did something I needed for you to do because I want to be careful to say, I'm also standing against the opposing error where social justice becomes the gospel. I want to be careful that we avoid that.

Don Payne [00:22:29] We've been equally paranoid of that.

Brandon Washington [00:22:30] Exactly. I want us to be deliberate in that we're preaching a whole gospel for which social matters are an innate value. You can't get around it. In an effort to avoid treating social justice as the gospel, we've turned away from social justice. But I also want to avoid the mistake of truncating the Gospel so that it doesn't include that value. The two of you attend a church pastored by the man who I call my friend. And I tease him all the time because I tell him, because of my time with him, I am Anglican adjacent. And in fact, I had lunch with Bishop Ken Ross last week and I told him the same thing. I say, you the more I hang out with you, the closer I am to that Anglican movement, the liturgy, the values, your orthodoxy gives way to a solid orthopraxy. The liturgy stands out for me. But I think that everyone's afraid of that Anglican camp because of how much it resembles Roman Catholicism and that creates this fear. And therefore, you miss some of the practical application of our ideas. Our notions remain notions instead of real-world application because we're afraid of the camp that's doing it well.

Mark Young [00:23:57] I think it's important to for us to be really honest about our history. And that history is always mixed. So, on the one hand, you have evangelicals who are heavily engaged in the development of schools and hospitals, really building the infrastructure as the American population moves west, while at the same time you have evangelicals who are proponents and those who execute the harshest forms of slavery and Jim Crow following the Emancipation Proclamation. Our history includes both a misuse and engagement of the Gospel in negative ways in the social arena, and a use of the gospel to help build that which is good and creates human flourishing. And in that history, if we're willing to tell the truth about what was negative, what was wrong, what was bad, then we have the potential to build upon that which was good and express it in ways that are more comprehensive and more universal. What is most troubling to me is an unwillingness and even a backlash when we begin to tell the truth about the history of evangelicalism and racism, particularly chattel slavery, reconstruction, Jim Crow, and all that's remained that's kept us segregated and kept us divided as a nation and as a church.

Brandon Washington [00:25:28] The consistent pushback I get since this book came out is why am I accountable for what my predecessors did? And my response to that is we cannot own the virtues and deny many of the shortcomings. We cannot do that. So, in the same way we inherit the blessed works of Jonathan Edwards, and we celebrate him, and we read his works in seminary classrooms, I think that it's a disservice to history and it's a disservice to the victims of that history for us to ignore the fact that his anthropology included a right to own children. Many of the people enslaved by Jonathan Edwards were teenagers. And it does not eliminate the excellent work and religious affections in his many other works. It doesn't deny the value of that when we concede that that same person enslaved children so that he could have the freedom to write much of what he wrote, to do his pastoral and missiological work, he had enslaved labor at his home to assist his wife and his children so he could be away doing much of his work as a missionary.

Don Payne [00:26:52] As Mark had just noted, we're a mixed bag, and I think it was Alexander Solzhenitsyn who used the vivid phrasing of the line between good and evil, not running between people, but running through people, running through every one of us. And to your point, Brandon, that has to be owned rather than only the bright, shining, virtuous side of every story being told. And that makes us uncomfortable, doesn't it?

Brandon Washington [00:27:23] It does. We want to look to our past. This is one of my moments where I'm less careful, because for me, that is revisionism, that is mythologizing. It's not lying because everything we're saying about that past is true, but we're deliberately selective regarding what we will say. And that is a misleading story. It's okay for us to tell the whole story. In fact, I would argue that telling the whole story increases our witness. If you turn to the world and say, here are horrible things that are in the legacy of a

movement that I value, I know this firsthand, I gain credibility when I concede those moments and I bring them back to a gospel that, in fact, is an indictment against those moments. That witness is weighty. And we're losing an opportunity for the sake of telling the story we prefer.

Don Payne [00:28:27] Yeah, hear, hear. I remember not too long ago; I was listening to a respected evangelical leader who was interacting with criticisms about Christianity in general from the non-believing world. And in response, it surprised me, he said, oh, it's worse than you think. And yet here's the gospel.

Brandon Washington [00:28:51] Here's the gospel. You can't set the good things up without first conceding the bad.

Don Payne [00:28:57] Right.

Mark Young [00:28:58] I think one of the conversations that has to be had over and over again is around the question, why is it that many white evangelicals immediately react negatively when we begin to talk about this history. Are we so insecure in our own identity and faith, we're unwilling to admit our past? And so, we create the arguments around why. Well, it wasn't that bad. Or why do we want to linger there? It's behind us now. And very seldom does someone say, here is my own personal engagement in sustaining what has essentially been a racialized society. And until we're willing as individuals and as a white evangelical community, to begin to have that kind of conversation, it's going to be very difficult for us to move forward and really begin to repent, to recognize, and to resolve to move forward in ways that truly do live out and proclaim to the world the fullness of the gospel and the reconciliation that it brings.

Brandon Washington [00:30:12] I want to underline here the need for us to use the word we much more often than we do, because I would argue that not only did, we silo ourselves, but we also isolate ourselves culturally, and we did that in the present tense, separating ourselves from others. But we've also done that historically. We have adopted this separation, a deliberate, careful separation from our past. And it's a siloing on a chronological level as well. The way I illustrate that is a few years ago the church I pastored met in a school when we first planted the church and the school district without much notice, increased our rent. And they did that because they did a quick review of how much was coming in. And it turns out there was another church at another school that was renting space but had not pay their rent in a year. And somehow it slipped through the cracks. The custodian did not know to not let them into the building. And so, they were going in and the explanation for their behavior was we just assume that someone else was taking care of it. We didn't ask any questions. And so, I sat down with the director of community use. He explains that to me, and he says, that's why we're having to increase everyone's rent. He concedes it was a bit punitive because that one church did it. Everyone's going to suffer. And I said, okay, we'll have a conversation about the increased rent before we leave today. But I need you to hear me say this. On behalf of the church, I apologize to you for that happening. And his reply was, but you didn't do it. And I said, the group to whom I point when I say we, representatives of that group did that. And because I'm a part of that movement, I am owning what they did. And I'm apologizing to you on behalf of the movement.

Don Payne [00:32:03] And that's where I suspect lots of people get stuck is confusing or conflating just owning something with knowing how to resolve it. And the intractable tentacles of all those centuries, literally, of egregious abuse are sometimes so entangled that all of us get sort of stuck and paralyzed, knowing, well, how do I fix this? But if owning it means I got to know how to fix it, then nobody's going to own it. Right. But I think you're detaching for us, the power and giving us the liberty to simply own it. Doesn't mean you have to know how to fix it. Just own it.

Brandon Washington [00:32:50] I will concede the complexities. Okay. I think that what we're dealing with here often is not the complexity. It's the lack of ownership. So, when I have a conversation, okay, I need to lean against the elephant in the room for just a moment. One of the things that, another accusation that comes my way is the book is a work of critical race theory. And we've actually had a podcast about that. I am not a critical race theorist. In fact, I wrote a chapter in a book called Urban Apologetics Volume two, in which I present two concerns regarding critical race theory. CRT does not have a gospel. Because it doesn't

have a hope for a future, it has no eschaton. The ideal must be pursued in its fullness now, and those two realities are creating complications. When I'm accused of critical race theory, the thing that they're noticing is critical race theory and Brandon Washington have a historiography in common. But I would argue that we inherited it from the same place, that it came from the civil rights movement. Some of it was informed early on by the Marxist camp. But most of the actors of it were inheriting it from the civil rights movement and the black church. And one of the responsibilities there is to avoid the mistake of being ahistorical and concede how our present moment is the last chapter in a series of events. We got here by what occurred in the past, whether we were the actors in the past or not. We are the participants in the present. So, we're living out that past now, which requires we look to the past and say, I've inherited some things, you've inherited some things, some things occurred to you that are our reality now. And just looking to the past and conceding that history will gain us so much credibility.

Don Payne [00:34:54] Just own it.

Brandon Washington [00:34:55] Just own it. Sometimes you don't have the solution. Just conceding that it occurred is an act of respect to another human being.

Mark Young [00:35:03] I would add one more thing, though, that I think is important Brandon. Conceding it is a baseline. I think the next hardest step is saying as a white man, I benefited from it. And once were willing to admit that we benefited from it, then a whole row of dominoes begins to teeter. Your sense of worth, your sense of accomplishment, all the things that you think you did yourself. Now you're able to frame or you're being forced to frame with a different understanding. I think that the threat of those dominoes falling is one of the reasons that we're afraid to own it. And definitely a reason that we're afraid to say I benefited from it as a white man.

Don Payne [00:35:51] I do want to dig into this theme of the gospel, or I should say the criteria by which we would say something is or is not part of the gospel. And as listeners will tell already, we're going to go a little longer than we typically do, because I want to do a deeper dig into some of this. So, the move you made Brandon here that I really appreciated was when you brought the ascension of our Lord into the conversation, the ascension, which leads to what we love to call theologically the session. His current rule and reign. You know, court's in session, right? Judges holding court. So, that's always a part of any good evangelical theology. Christ rose and ascended to the right hand of the father. Good. Let's go have lunch. I mean, that's about as far as that goes sometimes, right? But what you did there was to say that if Christ is as a result of the ascension currently ruling and reigning, that gives theological clamps on the prayer he told us to pray, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And you reference this in the book.

Brandon Washington [00:37:17] I do.

Don Payne [00:37:19] And at first, I wanted to express appreciation for that move, and I wanted to draw attention to it because that is probably part of what we need in order to navigate that current debate, that theological ping pong game about what is and is not a gospel issue. A gospel issue, if I'm correct and I want you to correct me here, a gospel issue would be anything that echoes the redeemed life that God intends for his people and that he secured and works out for them through the work of Christ, including what he's doing in heaven right now.

Brandon Washington [00:37:59] You're spot on. Much of my understanding of the work of Christ, let me do it this way. I had to repent of my definition of the gospel because I spent the entirety of my Christian life emphasizing the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. And I behaved as though Easter was the point. But the fact that after he resurrected, he then commissioned his disciples to continue a mission inaugurated by him. And then he took his seat on a unique and peerless throne. And from that throne he reigns present tense. He made us officers in his kingdom. Paul was not being dismissive. He's not being glib when he used the language of ambassadors. We are officers in his kingdom, and we are responsible for nurturing the culture, the values, the distinctive, the ethics of that kingdom in a fallen world. Will we do it to completion?

No. When he comes, when he returns, he will consummate that culture. He will consummate that kingdom. But he has commissioned us to move toward that culture until the day of his return. And we have, I would argue, that we have separated that responsibility from the gospel message.

Don Payne [00:39:41] So maybe the question is whether we have a heaven-oriented gospel or a kingdom-oriented gospel. If you have a kingdom, now heaven's real, okay. That's a that's a thing, as we love to say these days, but a kingdom-oriented gospel depends upon the ascension and the ongoing session, the rule and reign of Christ right now.

Brandon Washington [00:40:04] I would argue that when Carl F.H. Henry identifies the removal of social justice as a truncation, that's him recognizing that the practical language but the theological language is we have severed the ascension and his enthronement from the gospel. We treat that as a future hope. We treat his enthronement as a future fruit instead of a present reality. So, we're not waiting on a king. We have one, and we're to live according to his culture, his values, his character now. And that means when you ensure a hardship, and I'm to love my neighbor as myself, and the kingdom's display is to be on Earth as it is in heaven, your hardships are mine, and I'm to act to do all I can to deliver you from them.

Mark Young [00:41:04] I think it's really important in this part of the conversation to recognize as well, that from Genesis Chapter 12 forward, God executes his presence, his reign through his people. And so, we come right back to this whole question of where ecclesiology, the church, the presence of God's people today play out, live out the reign of Christ. They live out under his kingship, the values of his reign, and they bring about at every level, socially, personally, interpersonally, relationally, otherwise, the reconciliation that he will bring to pass in its fullest consummation at the end. So not only do we need to focus on the reign of Christ, the ascension of Christ, but the presence of Christ through his people, bringing about his reign and executing his reign.

Don Payne [00:41:59] That's what's going to give us a bigger gospel. That's what's going to give us the criteria for knowing or navigating these conversations about whether something is a gospel issue.

Mark Young [00:42:09] Yeah, and let's be clear. We're not making this stuff up. I'm just rereading some of Leslie Newbigin's thinking. This is exactly the way Newbigin sees the whole narrative of Scripture, the way he sees God's people. This has been present in white evangelicalism, but not at the populist level.

Don Payne [00:42:30] Brandon, I thought it was fascinating that in the book you, because you mentioned just a moment ago Karl F.H. Henry and his work in 1947, the uneasy conscience of fundamentalism. I loved the analysis you did there, pointing out that the term evangelical acquired new prominence and distinctiveness in that mid-twentieth century as a self-conscious effort to avoid fundamentalism's disaffection with social justice being the gospel. And now those origins have flipped around, and the term evangelical is used to convey the very thing it was originally, or at least in the mid 20th century, designed to avoid.

Brandon Washington [00:43:15] Right. It is. I think that that was probably one of the biggest miscarriages of history. And it was done in plain sight because that was done, that was the point in history when the term was taking on more directly, more explicitly taking on its present politicized identity. The observation was because of people like Carl F.H. Henry and Billy Graham and our Vernon Grounds, the term was adopted at a popular level among many people who identified as born again. And I think that, and I want to be careful how I use this language, too, because I'm not using the word conservative in a partisan way necessarily. I'm referring to the ideology, the tribalized ideology of conservative, the desire to have a call back to the way things were in the past. But that movement recognized that if we can invite those who identify as evangelical into our conservative camp, we will have more political success just do this due to the sheer number of them. And that was a part of the turn. I think a lot of people think of evangelical as we experience it now as its present iteration as an old thing. But I would argue, I'm 47 years old, I would argue that evangelicalism, as it's understood now, and I are roughly the same age. The way we use the term now, came about in the early seventies. Prior to that, it was used in the way that Vernon Grounds and Carl F.H.

Henry would use it. It was a turn against the mistakes of fundamentalism. And then strategically, fundamentalism co-opted the term because of its present, as a move towards present political identity.

Don Payne [00:45:18] That's a really important diagnostic if we're going to make any kind of headway in scrubbing or reclaiming this term, evangelical.

Brandon Washington [00:45:28] It's the reason I think it can be reclaimed. It's the reason that chapter, I believe, Chapter 11. I've talked about this book so much that I forget where everything is now, but I think that Chapter 11 is the chapter where I deliberately try to highlight, because my concern is that everyone will hear me use language that is dismissive of evangelicalism, but that's not what I'm trying to do. The first word in the subtitle is redeeming for reason. And I want to bring everyone's attention to leaders who did this differently, who use that movement differently. And so that's what Vernon Grounds comes up. That's why Wheaton College comes up. That's why Jonathan Blanchard comes up. I want people to see the stories of these institutions and these people who embody the term, as I'm using it in a more comprehensive sense, instead of its isolated, racialized partisan segregated definition.

Don Payne [00:46:32] A burning house. So now I'll ask you the same question I asked you when we got started. What do you hope for?

Brandon Washington [00:46:39] My hope is, I don't want this to be a recruiting podcast, but if that's what it is that's fine. I love Denver Seminary. I graduated from Denver Seminary a couple times. And I'm from another city with a celebrated seminary, and I did not attend that school. I came to this one and I would argue is probably while there were hard times, it was probably one of the best discipleship decisions I've ever made because I learned theological method at Denver Seminary. I learned at Denver Seminary, that I'm not as good a theologian as I thought because I had the ideas, but I didn't have the foundation for them. And I learned in church history class to be a good theologian, you had to first be a good historian. And I learned to source my ideas in theological method. And I learned in one of our systematic theology courses the value of theological retrieval. I don't think we have to reinvent anything. I think we have to repent of the adulteration and return to the love we had at first. Retrieve the old good ideas and deploy them in the world we have before us. So, the point that Dr. Young was making earlier. These are not new ideas. This is not a new thing. Carl Henry was addressing this 70 years ago. Dr. Grounds is addressing these same concerns 70 years ago. All we have to do is go back to that neo evangelical background, that foundation, and stand firm on it and be in the line of the John Wesley's and the and the Charles Spurgeons of our history. And I would say that is a comprehensive, a balanced approach to our orthodoxy and our orthopraxy and the impact we can make on the world.

Don Payne [00:48:49] Well said. And that animates me because often when we think of terms like return or retrieve or go back to something, we're thinking in terms of re securing or re anchoring something. And it's a narrowing. It's a tightening. But the way you're talking about that retrieval or that return is actually broadening. It's getting the bigness of the gospel back. It's getting the scope back.

Brandon Washington [00:49:17] There you go. We narrowed it. For I would argue culturalized, racialized reasons going back would be re incorporating the broader perspective to use the language of Philip Jenkins, this is not a new thing. The explosion of the church in the global South is merely a replay of what occurred in the first millennium of the church. He's saying instead of us running from that past, we would do well to return to it and embody those values in the world today.

Don Payne [00:49:55] Hear, hear. Friends want to urge you to get a copy of this book. It's a Zondervan publication. A burning house. Brandon Washington. I would love to see discussions about this taking place all over the land. The Gospel and our Lord will be well-served. Brandon, you've done good historical work. You've done good theological work. You've integrated your own personal story very well and very appropriately in this, and I want to commend you for the work. It's a good read, well worth your time. Mark, thanks for joining us. Brandon, thanks, both of you for being here again. Friends, we're grateful that you've chosen to spend some time with this. If you get the chance, please leave us a rating or review

wherever you listen to podcasts. And please send any questions or comments to us at our email address, which is podcast@DenverSeminary.edu. Our website, DenverSeminary.edu has plenty of other resources you can explore, such as events, degree programs, and also more episodes of Engage 360, including full episode transcripts. We're really grateful for your interest, for your support, and for your prayers. Until next time, may the Lord bless you. Take care, friends.