

Title: The Ugly Reality of Tribalism
Text: 2 Samuel 19.41-20.22(26?)
Theme: Unity is supernatural
Series: 2 Samuel
Prop Stmtnt: Tribalism is no match for the gospel

I met a guy who started a church for people who rode motorcycles. He told me that a lot of people who ride motorcycles are loner types, who feel like they don't fit in. Traditional church (whatever that is) doesn't appeal to them, so he wanted to start a church where they would fit in. In other words, it would be all about them. I didn't question his motive, but I don't think he understood the book of Ephesians, nor did he understand the church. What on earth does that introduction have to do with 2 Samuel 19 and 20? Actually, a lot, as I will seek to explain.

Read Text: 2 Samuel 19.41-20.2

This situation picks at a scab that reveals a deep wound for many of us, if not all of us. The words of Sheba relate to a major theme in the Bible. We live in a world pot marked by the ugly reality of tribalism. Israel is a case study on this issue. Let's go back and connect some dots. Israel was a people group who came from Jacob. They lived as slaves for over 400 years before God rescued them from Egypt and eventually gave them their own land. 3 points of intro:

1) – People who understand the grace of God are humble; but people who don't, are proud.

What is true of Israel, is typical of others. God was gracious to them, rescued them, defended them, led them, provided for them, fed them, loved them, did amazing things for them, taught them, and gave them their land. He made them a nation. He gave them a constitution. He gave them a name, a structure, organization and a place in this world. Israel was organized by tribes and the land was allotted by tribes. Israel should have been amazed by grace.

2) – Pride causes a sinful view of tribes and groups.

The tribes of Israel were intended to be for their benefit, so that families would be able to have land and pass it on to their children for generations. This was to protect their inheritance. But, over time, the tribes became a point of sinful pride. In the book of Judges, we read about some of the tribes attacking each other. Toward the end of the book, 11 of the tribes almost completely wipe out the tribe of Benjamin. There was deep animosity between the tribes.

3) – Most people don't understand the grace of God and have a sinful view of tribes.

If we really understood the grace of God, we would not view ourselves as being inherently better than someone else. But, most people don't. Tribalism, racism, cliques are different terms that describe the same root issue. My group is better than your group. But, if you drill down into that, you will discover that at the heart of that thinking is this ugly lie. I am simply better than you. Now, you and I identify with certain groups. There is nothing inherently wrong with that.

God recognizes that we are in different groups. God talks about people who are from tribes, languages and nations. That is not the problem. The problem is sinful pride.

Now, let's say that you say, "I am proud of my family." Or, "I am proud of my people." Is that wrong? Not necessarily. If you mean, I am so grateful for God's grace to us. I am so delighted in how the Lord has saved us, grown us, provided for us, used us and allowed us to accomplish a number of things. Then I am with you. If, however, you mean, "We are just a cut above others. We are careful not to associate with people who don't fit our mold, because most of this world is just not as good as we are." Then I am not with you. But that is how everyone is tempted to think and that is how most people do think. Therefore, they don't see their own failures and are quick to point out the failures of others.

Throughout the historical books of the OT, you read a lot about Israel and Judah. Initially, Israel referred to the entire nation. But following the death of Saul, David was anointed and accepted as King by the tribe of Judah. Judah was in the south. The rest of the tribes were in the north, except for Simeon (map). The northern tribes made Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, their king. The nation was divided. David's military conquests added territory to Judah, to the point where Judah was the largest tribe in the nation. Simeon was surrounded by Judah and eventually absorbed by Judah. For about 7 years, the northern tribes were known as Israel and the southern territory/kingdom was known as Judah. David was eventually accepted as the king overall and he made Jerusalem the capital which was on the border between the north and the south, but that sense of division was never lost. Us vs. them. The tribes of the north vs. the tribe of the south. When Saul was king, the tribe of Benjamin had pride of place. Now, it was Judah's turn because David came from Judah. They were first to recognize David as king. Military commanders came from Judah. The northern tribes assumed that the tribe of Judah felt and acted superior because David was from Judah and since they were the first to anoint David as king, they were charging ahead without waiting on the rest to bring him back.

1. **We make assumptions and level accusations based on tribalism.** (19.41-43)

Look at the 19.41-43. What assumptions do you read? What we read here is how we not only make assumptions, but we tend to assume the worst.

A. **Israel assumed that Judah tried to outmaneuver Israel in bringing David back.** (41)

That is not really the case, is it? David had to prod his own tribe to call for his return. The rest of the nation had at least started the conversation, but Judah, whom you assumed would make a move, hadn't yet come to the table. But they did and when they did, Shimei was with them and brought 1,000 men from Benjamin. So, it wasn't all Judah. When we are making assumptions, we tend not to let facts get in the way but those assumptions do not serve us well.

As you can imagine, I am called upon to help resolve conflicts. In one of those, I listened to the one side who assumed that I was showing favoritism or would show favoritism to the other side because of a long-term relationship that I had with them. When I listened to the other side,

they assumed that I was showing favoritism because of a long-term relationship that I had with the other side. Both sides were saying, "I know how these things work." Both sides assumed that I was against them from the beginning. We make these assumptions because this IS what happens quite a bit. In fact, ...

B. Judah assumed that because David was their close relative, it was natural for them to do this. (42a)

This was not a helpful comment. He is our close relative, so what if we brought him back! Besides, we haven't taken advantage of this. We haven't received any preferential treatment. The men of Judah know that this is what typically happens, so they justify what they did, (not waiting on the rest of Israel) by saying that they didn't take advantage when they could have.

In 1983, two struggling congregations merged in order to form one stronger church. One of the congregations, sold their building. They gave up their space and joined with the other. The other gave up their space in the sense that they had to accept the fact that others would park in the spots they were used to, sit in the places they were used to and serve in positions they were used to. The one congregation was about twice as big as the other. If this was going to work, both sides had to be very considerate of the other. Next week we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of that merger and the founding of this church. For years after that merger, both sides were very mindful of the other in order to make certain there was equal representation. The one side could have said, this was our building first. The other side could have said, we have more people. Both sides could have assumed the worst about the other, but they didn't and the result laid the foundation for a very sweet congregation. This is usually not the case.

C. Israel assumed that because they have 10 shares, they have more of a right than Judah. (43)

See what I mean? We're bigger than you. That means that we are more important than you. You despised us. Whoa, hold the phone! Did you notice that? Watch how this happens. Here are the facts. The men of Judah, along with some men from Benjamin went to David to bring him back to Jerusalem. The men of Judah did not wait for the men of Israel. The men of Israel were ambivalent. Those were the facts. Right here, the men of Israel went from facts to motive. You despised us! The men of Israel just assumed that they knew the motives of the men of Judah and accused them of despising them. How do you know that? It may have had nothing to do with despising the men of Israel at all, but everything to do with, we need to get a king back so that we can start putting our country together again. Sure, the men of Israel may have been the first to talk about it, but they didn't act on it.

Oh beloved, this is so critical for each of us. First of all, we often do not know all of the facts of a situation. And we most certainly do not know the motives of someone's heart. Only God knows that. When we claim that right, we are creating a right that only God has and we are contributing toward a rupture that may not ever be reconciled. Instead of David's return being a time of reconciliation, forgiveness, humility and plans to move forward and put the interests of

the country before them, this whole thing starts disintegrating, with the words of the men of Judah being more fierce, more pointed, weightier, more threatening than the men of Israel.

D. Judah assumes that Israel is accusing them of leveraging their tribal relationship for unfair advantages.

Both sides made accusations because both sides assume that they know it all, and they don't. Both sides could have handled this better. Both sides needed to ask questions (not accusatory questions), but good questions, such as: what did we do that gave you the impression that we were ignoring you? What did we do that gave you the impression that we were undecided? What could we have done? What should we have done? The truth is, most of the time, none of us handles situations perfectly. Only Jesus does that. We all have room to grow, all the time. But, when we act like we know it all, then we act like judge, jury and executioner and both sides dig in their heels. Tribalism makes it so easy for that to take place. Sadly, it is the story of our world. Now, we are ready for the disaster of chapter 20.

2. Tribalism is the norm. (20.1-2)

There is no gap between chapters 19 and 20. 20.1 tells us that there happened to be there, (at the crossing of the Jordan, where David and his entourage are being escorted over, in order to go back to Jerusalem as the king) and man from Benjamin named Sheba. It is very possible that he was on one of the 1,000 men who accompanied Shimei. Sheba exploits the conflict by blasting a trumpet, in order to make a pronouncement. His pronouncement has three parts:

- 1) This king does not belong to us and we don't belong to him.
- 2) We have no future with this king.
- 3) We are on our own. We will create our own kingdom.

v.2 So all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba.... But the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem. In Absalom's rebellion, it was many of the men of Judah who deserted David and now it is the men of Israel. On the one hand, it just blows your mind, doesn't it? Didn't we just go through this? Yes. Didn't we just bury 20,000 of our citizens? Yes. Didn't we learn anything from that? No. You know the definition of insanity: repeating the same thing and expecting different results.

3. Tribalism is at the heart of rebellion and violence. (20.3-22)

The rest of the chapter tells the sorry story of another rebellion. In this case, David responds quickly and decisively. True to his word, he promotes Amasa as commander of the army and orders him to assemble the men of Judah and report back to him with the men in 3 days. This matter demanded urgency. Amasa, like Joab and Abishai, was David's nephew. But Amasa takes too long. So, David now turns to Abishai and orders him to lead the army and pursue Sheba. David has overlooked Joab twice now. So, Abishai takes the men that he has and heads north. Part of the men that he takes were the forces that Joab commanded (7a). Where's Joab in all

this? We don't have to wonder about that for long. When Abishai gets to Gibeon, which is about 5 miles north and a tad west of Jerusalem, Amasa finally shows up with the rest of the army. Then we find out that Joab was there as well with his brother Abishai. But Joab simply takes over. He pretends to greet his cousin Amasa with an embrace (*"is it well with you, my brother?"* v.9) but instead rams his sword into his stomach. It seems to me that Joab pretended to accidentally drop his sword as he moved toward Amasa. That way he could pick it up and have it ready without alarming Amasa. Too bad. The text delicately states that he *"spilled his entrails to the ground."* There was no need for a second stab. If you are counting, this is the 3rd person that Joab has personally killed whose name began with an "A"; Abner, Absalom and now Amasa. Amasa was a threat to Joab, so Joab took him out. But, why not Abishai? Abishai was his brother. Abishai was closer in the tribe to Joab.

This is crazy, right? Who is in charge? If this is confusing to you, can you imagine being a soldier? Your captain Joab has been replaced by Amasa, who was replaced by Abishai, who has just been overruled by Joab who killed Amasa. And here is Amasa's body again, delicately put, *"wallowing in his blood in the highway."* We all know that gawkers tie up traffic on 696. So, one of Joab's men tried to tell the other soldiers to keep moving. There is nothing to see here and if you are for David, then you need to follow Joab. It didn't work. So, he picked up Amasa's body, carried it out of the highway, and threw a blanket over it. Then the army got moving again.

So, Joab is still killing people, people are still rebelling and the kingdom is still in chaos. What happens next sounds just like the book of Judges. Sheba and his army, which apparently grows smaller and smaller, ends up in far north Israel in a walled city called Abel. Joab has apparently taken over leadership again and is preparing to destroy the city when a wise woman from the city asks Joab what the fuss is about? After all, this city is an old, peaceful city full of good people. Joab explains the current problem. The woman then tells Joab that he could expect to see Sheba's head without benefit of his body in a few minutes. Sure enough, she talks with the people of the city and they behead Sheba and toss it over the wall to Joab, who then heads home with another threat eliminated.

The chapter ends with a list of David's officers and once again, Joab is commander of the army. The more things change, the more they stay the same. This list is very similar to the one back in chapter 8 with two notable exceptions. The previous remark about David administering justice and equity is now gone and a previously favorable comment about David's sons is gone as well.

Conclusion

- 1) Tribalism (and other forms of sinful pride) is why every kingdom of man cannot and will not endure.

The kingdoms of man do not have glue that is sticky enough to keep broken people together and they just keep inflicting more and more pain on people. The powerless are the sad, sad carnage of abusive power. (20.3) Adam's rejection of God's rule in Genesis 3 set in motion the one-world order that attempted to replace God in Genesis 11. God responded to that rebellion

by dividing the people up with languages. Tribalism set in. You don't sound like me, look like me, live like me, etc. became the natural way. Get out of my way. Here, let me step on you in order to get what I want. It is not how it is supposed to be. Ever since that, the only unity that the world has ever known has been one forced upon them from the top. And those do not last. We are simply incapable of maintaining unity because the kingdoms of man are built upon man. In spite of every spectacular Olympic opening and closing program celebrating and calling for unity, we will never achieve it on our own. There are some things that we simply cannot fix. Our nation is coming apart again at the seams. This is part of the appeal of Christian Nationalism because we love our country and we grieve over what is going on and we are desperate to fix it. But, the kingdoms of this world cannot stand over time. Even the good ones, like David, are full of holes. Praise God there is a better way.

2) Only the gospel can change a heart and create a new people.

When people come to genuine faith in Christ, they are changed. They are fundamentally changed from the inside out. They become a new person, a new creation. They are adopted into a new family and are made to be one holy nation that is made up of people from every tribe, language and nation. No tribe, no race, no language, no people group has an insider's edge. In the church, there are different tribes, but no tribalism. There are different races, but one body. There are different languages, but one message. There are men and women, but neither are more important than the other. The ground is level at the foot of the cross and only by means of the cross do you become a member of the New Covenant people of God. What happened on the Day of Pentecost? What happened on the birthday of the church? These initial believers spoke in different languages that were foreign to them and others understood them. What was that about? God was making a statement. The curse of Babel was being reversed by his church. The people of God were going to be one holy nation. Only the gospel can change a heart and create a new people. It does. And it will. And we will enjoy that, forever.