

## SEE THE INDIVIDUAL, NOT A TRIBE!

The price of unity – defeating ourselves

***Luke 10:30*** And Jesus answering said, *A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.*

***Luke 10:31*** And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

Tribalism is an aggressive, adversarial stance towards those who belong to a tribe or ethnic group other than one's own. Thoughts, attitudes and actions are evaluated through the overriding interpretive lens of tribalism. Tribalism can never lead to peace because it thrives and is sustained by mistrust of the intentions of other tribes, whether real or imagined. Satan understands the capacity of tribalism to engender evil throughout the generations so he stokes the flames of tribalism ever so often. For tribalists, the sins of other tribes against them is "sacred". This is recorded in the collective memory and repeated dutifully to the next generation. Tribalism is a sin in the sight of God because it rebels against the command to love your neighbor as yourself; it refuses to see others as individuals made in the image of God – rather, it prefers to see entire communities as suspicious groups worthy of contempt.

***Genesis 1:27*** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

***Leviticus 19:18*** Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

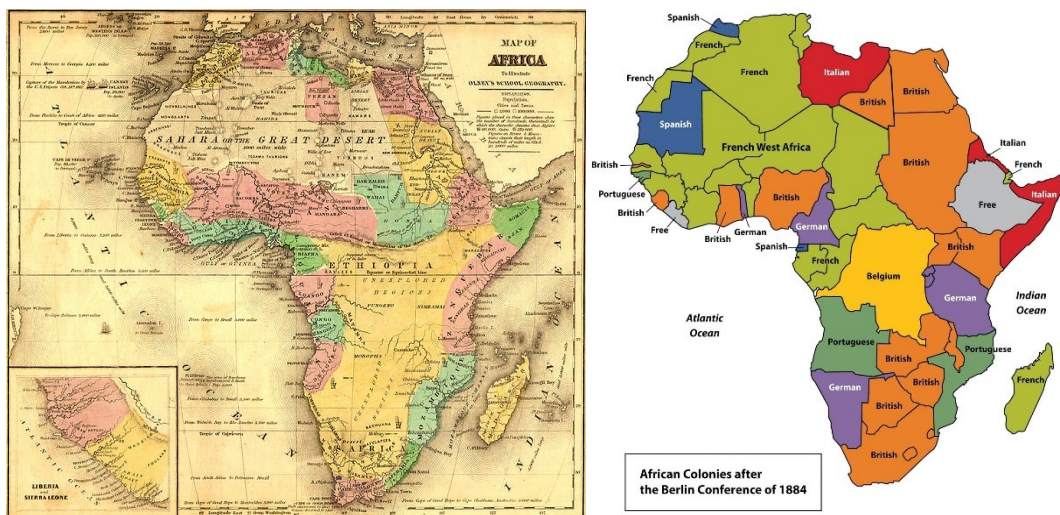
This is why the story of the Good Samaritan shocked the Jews – it painted the picture of a Samaritan who was free of the sin of tribalism because he loved his neighbor. Remember that we do not really know the ethnic identity of the victim; Jesus referred to him as "a certain man", although many people assume he was a Jew. This is proof that we all are guilty of thinking in terms of groups and categories, what the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, called the "fetish of taxonomization" (obsession with grouping people). The Good Samaritan saw "a certain man" made in the image of the Almighty God, he did not see a member of a tribe or ethnic group. The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 was the world's fastest genocide with 800 000 people killed in 100 days. ID cards introduced by the Belgians helped to differentiate between Tutsis and Hutus. This difference was not physically visible, which is why ID cards were introduced in the first place. The enemy works overtime looking for ways to separate and divide us.

May the Lord help us to see humans as individuals made in the image of God – NOT TRIBES! God did not make tribes in his image, but individual humans. When we see humans made in God’s image, there will be peace, love and healing. On the contrary, if we insist upon seeing tribes, there will be distrust, hatred and war. Clearly, the Good Samaritan feared God above all else. “And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him” (Luke 10:34). He put aside whatever business he had and made this victim his first business. It cost him much in terms of time and money, but he showed us his faith by his works, as James said.

**James 2:22** *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?*

**James 2:24** *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

If we do not use the identity God gives us, we will receive the identity the Devil is always ready to give us. Let us all proudly declare that we are “sons of God” (includes men and women). “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). Remember that the world does not often recognize or respect the identities we may profess and hold dear. Consider the maps of Africa before the Berlin Conference in 1884-85 (left hand below) and after the conference (right side).



The one of the left has just a few countries named and placed in the wrong places while the second one has the names of the European colonizers alone. No one in Europe cared about the variety of local ethnicities, tribes, languages and cultures. In other words, the

powerful will always want to impose their identity on other territories and peoples. God came in flesh to call us out of this world, not deeper into this world and its changing identities.

**1Peter 2:9** *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

The Greek words for “holy nation” are “hagios ethnos”. Ethnos is where we get the word “ethnicity”. This is remarkable indeed – we are a different and unique kind of ethnic group: we are the church of the living Christ. We have put on Christ through baptism in his name and, hence, we have a heavenly ethnicity. Hallelujah! Next time you hear people quarrelling about ethnic groups and tribal identities, why don’t you invite them to be a part of the heavenly tribe! “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14). Let us further explore this important topic of identity through the story of Jacob and Esau.

**Genesis 25:31** *And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.*

**Genesis 25:32** *And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?*

Jacob had a selfish desire, call it tribalism, to steal his brother’s inheritance. This inheritance was God’s inheritance and hence identity. This was the beginning of the tribal war between the two brothers. James speaks about the origin of wars (selfishness). “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (James 4:1). Jacob’s own mother, Rebekah, was his accomplice. In tribal war, even one’s closest family becomes blind to the lust of the flesh to have power. Notice the fruit of lusting for tribal and ethnic power – Jacob was forced to separate from his family for 20 years and he lived in great fear for his life due to the anger of Esau. Tribalism leads to strife, distrust, separation and war.

**Genesis 32:6** *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him.*

Jacob was shocked to discover that his brother had almost six times the number of people that he had. Tribalism never ends: the tribe of Esau was much stronger than that of Jacob’s. It was at this point that Jacob had a revelation which changed his life, his children’s and the world’s forever. He realized that the problem, the source of pain and misery was not with Esau or Laban, but with himself. This is the first revelation we need through the Spirit of

Jesus if we are to defeat tribalism and win unity. Jacob let everyone go ahead of him until he was alone with God. A tribalist will call upon the numerical strength of his tribe, but a man or woman of God will seek to be alone with God. Talking to humans (e.g. his mother) will only lead to more war and confusion – the beginning of deliverance from the curse of tribalism is to be one with God and God alone. God does not wrestle with the many anymore; he wrestles with us one by one – repentance is on a one by one basis. Thankfully, God stopped wrestling with humans on the basis of entire communities in the days of Noah’s flood. “And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years” (Genesis 6:3). If repentance was still on the basis of entire communities (world), we would have been wiped out. Now, his mercy is on an individual basis. The Jews asked Peter, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), but Peter replied “Repent, and be baptized every one of you ...” The Jews thought in terms of “we” but God replied “every one of you”.

***Genesis 32:24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.***

Slowly, but surely, God began to defeat Jacob. God colonized his time (until the breaking of day). God depleted Jacob’s strength otherwise he would have continue in tribal warfare for many years more with Esau. Finally, God crippled Jacob so he would not cripple others with his greed, selfishness and tribalism. Let us pray the Lord will sap our strength for his glory so we have no strength left for evil! Jacob became Israel – the one who strove with God and defeated himself so he could become a prince with God. Usually humans become princes among humans by defeating other humans (essence of tribalism), but God’s logic is the opposite – the problem is not another tribe or individuals, but ourselves. Let us remove the focus from others and put the spotlight on ourselves. The boxer, Muhammad Ali, refused to be drafted into the US army and fight against the Vietnamese in 1967. In his own words:

*But my conscience won't let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, or some poor hungry people in the mud for big powerful America. And shoot them for what? They never called me nigger, they never lynched me, they didn't put no dogs on me, they didn't rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father.... Shoot them for what? How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail.*



Ali was stripped off his world boxing heavyweight championship, his passport and his career, but he refused to hate and go and kill people who did him no harm. Today, Ali is considered the greatest sports personality who ever lived, not only because of his fantastic boxing career, but equally for his moral example. What if we all, like Ali, we refuse to

hate and fight against so-called “enemies” which the world constantly invents?

Returning to Jacob, let us look at the rewards he gained for recognizing his problem and permitting God to wrestle with him. Jacob won against tribalism – he brought no weapons against Esau, but GIFTS. He brought no pride against Esau, but love and submission. No one will hate and fight a person who is fighting himself! What were the effects on Esau? Esau got off his horse; he was disarmed. The spirit of tribalism was quenched by the transformed character of Jacob. Self-transformation through the Spirit of Jesus defeats tribalism. In the end, Jacob became the Good Samaritan – his humility and love for Esau delivered his brother from years of hatred. The man who became the father of 12 tribes, had to first be cured of tribalism. Let us defeat ourselves with the help of the Lord Jesus and deliver others from the sin of tribalism.

Questions for reflection:

- How do we see other humans – as God’s creatures or as members of a particular tribe?
- What can we do to defeat our tribalist tendencies – what price do we have to pay?
- What long-held and dear memories of the sins of other tribes do we have to repent of?