

September 6, 2020

A Monumental Event

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our father from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. I'm sure that you have all heard the phrase blood is thicker than water. If you look it up on the Internet, go to Wikipedia, you will find that it is a phrase that means that family love is greater and stronger than all other forms of love. Wait a minute, I can understand how blood would represent family love because we are of one blood within the family. But how in the world do you get from water the idea of all other loves? You see the problem is Wikipedia doesn't go far enough back. Originally, if we look in the Hebrews language, in the rabbinical writings, we look back to scripture we find that the concept of blood is thicker than water is actually a reference to the blood of the Covenant is thicker than the water of the womb. In other words the Covenant with God was sealed with blood and the Hebrew people were reminded of this yearly at the atoning sacrifice where both a bull and a goat were slaughtered, were sacrificed; and their blood was sprinkled on the Ark of the covenant. But this blood of the Covenant extended to more than the two covenants made before the Lord such as the Covenant that was made between Jonathan, the son of Saul and King David. They made a covenant with each other in 1 Samuel 20 which made them brothers. But they did this before the Lord. How serious was this covenant? It was so serious that Saul, King Saul, Jonathan's dad, tried to kill him because of his alliance, his covenant with David. You see, the blood of the covenant of God, which then also sealed the covenant made before God, was greater than the relationship between Jonathan who was born of the womb water to King Saul.

We see how serious the Covenant, the blood of the Covenant is in the Old Testament. It goes along with what we talked about in the sermon two weeks ago. The midwives of the Hebrew people in Egypt were told by pharaoh that they were to take any Hebrew baby boy who was born and toss them into the Nile. But the midwives did not do it. Why? Because they were under a covenant with the Lord. A blood covenant that required them to do what God said, instead of man. Paul echoes that in Romans, we must obey God rather than men. The apostles

echo that an Acts before the Sanhedrin, we must obey God rather than men. And so, we see the blood of the Covenant was thicker than the relationship with mankind of which pharaoh was one. Who was born of water, they were water or born of water. They were all part of humankind, but the blood of God's covenant was sticker then the edicts of man. We see the same thing with Rahab in Jericho. She did not go with the Jericho government, she went with the covenant of God. We see it with Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego. They did not bow down to the image of Nebuchadnezzar and worship it because they were under a covenant with God. We see it with Daniels who would not pray to Nebuchadnezzar but continued to face Jerusalem and pray. All of these people they didn't do it to stick it to the man, or poke the bear in the eye. No, they simply did what was required by God; because the blood of the Covenant was thicker than the relationship to all others in the human race.

Now let's fast forward to the New Testament where Jesus says this Cup is a New Covenant in my blood. Let's consider what Jesus also says in Matthew chapter 10 versus 34 to 39. He says that He did not come to bring peace, but rather a sword. Such that because of Him, father would be set against son, mother would be set against daughter. He then continues and says and whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. In other words, this new covenant in Jesus's blood, which we will celebrate in our service today in communion; this is thicker than the water of the womb. We are to take up this covenant and follow just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the midwives, Rahab and Daniel did. How did it come to be what Wikipedia says? It actually took place in the very early church the great reversal we could say. Those who had been baptized sometimes forsook the waters of their baptism to keep peace in the family. The blood of the family became thicker than the water of baptism.

Now, let's consider the water a baptism for just a moment. What does scripture tell us about baptism? We are baptized into the death of Jesus and His blood; the blood of the Covenant covers us. So, the waters of baptism still represent the blood of the Covenant. And our families really are still the water, the water of the womb. That message has been lost over time. Now this idea of there being a dispute between father and

son, or mother daughter, or division within the church; is that biblical? Does that happen? Absolutely yes. We heard it in our New Testament reading from Acts 15 this morning. The issue was John-Mark, Barnabas' cousin. He had abandoned Barnabas and Paul on the 1st missionary trip and gone home to Jerusalem. We don't really know why he went or anything behind it. But we know that when Barnabas and Paul were getting ready to go out on their second missionary trip Barnabas wanted to take John-Mark. We later know him as Mark, the writer of 2nd gospel. Paul did not want to take him. Why? All we know is that there had been this occasion where Mark left. That's all that is cited, but what happened it was so tenuous, they broke up. Now you might say, big deal, breaking up happens all the time. Actually, it was a pretty monumental event. I remind you again of what Paul writes in Romans about all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose. There is no doubt that Mark and Barnabas and Paul and Silas all love the Lord; so, the Lord took this division, the strife between them, the blood of the family being thicker than the covenant relationship between Paul and Barnabas. And he took it and turned it into good.

Let's take a look at Barnabas. Barnabas was from the tribe of Levi. That means he was a priest. He was a native of Cyprus. He likely served in the temple as a priest, and as such he would know the basic Law of the Torah. He'd understand the blood of the covenant, the atoning sacrifice and all. This is why he is a leading contender for being the author of the book of Hebrews. Originally his name was Joseph, but the apostles renamed him Barnabas which means son of encouragement because, and I quote from Acts "he sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet." That's found in Acts 4 verse 36. This encouraged people that somebody was so committed to this new ministry, this new gospel message; that someone took it so serious, that they sold their property and gave all the proceeds. In fact, what kind of impact did that have? Well again the apostles changed his name to son of encouragement because it gives such encouragement to others. At the same time in the immediately following verses in Acts, chapter five we find Ananias and Saphira mimicking Barnabas, selling a field bringing the money, putting it before the apostles and saying here's everything we got. They actually skimmed off the top, yeah both of them died as a result.

But this Barnabas he is the one who vouched for Paul. Originally his name was Saul, he was a pharisee, he was persecuting the church, he was stopped on the road to Damascus by Jesus, he became a follower of Christ, he wanted to meet with the apostles, those original disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem. They didn't want anything of him. They thought this is the guy that's trying to arrest us, he's just going undercover. He's giving us a story and it's Barnabas who steps in and says, 'no I know him. I know where he's coming from. He was really a disciple. He's a follower of Jesus. Please meet with him. And as a result, this encouragement from Barnabas caused them to meet with Paul and we see a dynamic change within the ministry. It goes from being Jerusalem centered to evangelism centered. Immediately after this we see that the apostles send Barnabas out. They send him to Antioch to preach to the Jews there in the synagogue. When he gets there, he is confronted by the Pharisees in the scribes in Antioch with legal questions under pharisaical law. So, what does he do? We read in 11:25 he went and got Saul, the former pharisee, an expert in the law. And in Acts chapter 13, we see that both Paul and Saul and Barnabas along with several others who are called teachers and or prophets and they were meeting together. They were worshipping and fasting and asking, 'Lord what should we do?' We read the Holy Spirit said, 'set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them.' What were they called to do? They were called to go and be witnesses throughout the eastern Mediterranean. And so, they were sent on their first missionary journey. They traveled and taught in the synagogues throughout the entire region and after going to all the places they were told to go to by the people in Antioch, the church the elders in Antioch they began to return. That's when John-Mark left them and went to Jerusalem.

Now when Paul and Barnabas get back to Antioch, the Jews there revolted. You see while they were gone there were some Judaizers who were saying Gentiles can't be saved unless they become Jews. The men had to be circumcised. and Saul Barnabas they disagreed with this and said to those Jews in Antioch; 'since you thrust it, that is the word of God, aside we are returning to the Gentiles. Again, we see them being put together. But now is when we see it is Barnabas and Paul. It's interesting that it's listed that way because Barnabas is the teacher, Paul

is the mentor. This is the way the Hebrew people would write it. They left Antioch and went to Jerusalem because the people in Antioch said, 'go and talk to those apostles. Find out what's the ruling here on the circumcision business.' The apostles agreed with Barnabas and Paul and sent the message back.

Now in this process they passed through a little city a town called Lystra where they preached. They shared the gospel and all the Jews there were not happy with the message either and they took more out in stoned him. He lived through it. Some would say he died, and he was raised from the dead because God wasn't done with him. But from that point on we see Paul being always listed before Barnabas. Anyways they did get to Jerusalem, the apostles agreed with them sent a letter back to Antioch with, them along with two individuals from Jerusalem. Telling them no, you don't have to be circumcised, but as a Christian live the new life. Abstain from immorality and abstain from Pagan worship.

Then they were sent out on the second missionary trip and that's the big break. Why? Obviously say did not want them to go on a second trip, he tried to stop it, and he used that concept of family. Barnabas wanted to take his cousin. Paul didn't. All we know is that he had abandoned. But there must have been something more in that. But scripture is silent. Barnabas chose family, I'm going to be with my cousin, and they split. Again, amazing how the Lord used it. Barnabas and Mark became a powerful witness team. Paul and Silas became a powerful witness team. What Satan wanted to stop became twice as dangerous to him. Why? Well part of it is because there was reconciliation which brings us to our gospel.

There will arise times in the church that just like with Paul and Barnabas there's a break, there's a misunderstanding, there is a side being taken between two people or between two groups. What does Jesus tell us to do? If your brother sins against you; and now notice the wording. If your brother sins. If he breaks the commandments of God and in so doing, he's doing an action against you. Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. This brings up something very big. There's a lot of times that we have conflict within the church today and its over feelings. Someone giving offense, but most often someone taking

offense at what someone has said or done. They put themselves in the position of judge and jury and someone does something and 'oh that was done it was done against me on purpose to make me feel bad.' Now if it was something where someone lied to hurt someone's reputation, yes that's a sin! You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. But if someone just did something and unknowingly offended; the problem is the person who is taking offense. They're judging that individual and they are ascribing to them a sin or a wrong that most likely wasn't a wrong. So, it's very important that we understand the difference here. Jesus says if your brother sins against you, you need to take action with that. If your brother has just offended you, it's a whole different lower level. Again, go talk to them, but take yourself out of the judgment seat first. But if he sins against you go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. Do you notice what that does, it keeps it private, kind of like the issue between Paul, Barnabas and Mark. They were following what Jesus said. It's not using Twitter, emails, Facebook, Instagram, the phone tree, or anything that has to do with the cancer culture. It is to protect both parties.

But if your brother refuses, take one or two witnesses along with you so that every charge may be established by two or three witnesses. So again, let's take a look at that. There's you, there's the brother who you believe is sinned against you, and at a maximum two witnesses to grant total four people. See again can how this is protecting both but if he refuses to listen even to the witnesses if the witnesses agree with the person who says my brother sinned against me; if he refuses to listen to the witnesses then it is tell it to the church. Here is a place where some people will say it's up to the church, that means we air The Dirty laundry in front of everyone. And I would say, 'no it isn't,' again the goal is reconciliation. Stay quiet so that there's no preconceived notions there's nothing like that amongst the entire congregation; the person will not feel so terribly embarrassed to come back. And why do I say that? Because that's exactly again what we see between Barnabas, Paul, Silas, and Mark. We don't know the whole story they kept it quiet. They worked. Both groups respected each other. We know that Paul felt that this was something so bad that it was worthy of exclusion. But Paul kept quiet. What happens if we tell it to the church? Well the goal is reconciliation, that they come back. But if they don't, let him be to you

as a Gentile and a tax collector. There we have a little bit of a message to us within the church. Trust; if your elders have dealt with a situation like this and someone is removed from the congregation, you don't need to know what happened. Trust your elders they know what happened but they're not making it public because their hope is that like the father in the story of the prodigal son, they're standing at the gate waiting for the brother or the sister to come back home.

Now let's go back to Paul, Barnabas, Mark and Silas. There was reconciliation. When we look at 1 Corinthians 9 verse 6 and Colossians 4 verse 10, Paul speaks in a positive way concerning Barnabas and Mark as they go on their journeys and the work they do. In fact, when Paul writes to Timothy his protégé, in 2 Timothy 4:11 he says I quote, "Get Mark and bring him with you for he is very useful to me for ministry." There was healing, so much healing, that he was totally accepted by the apostles because we read in 1 Peter 5 verse 14, that Paul refers to Mark as his son, and he became the scribe of Peter, and most likely his gospel, is really the gospel of Peter.

Reconciliation, what does it mean? To bring into balance or to bring into agreement. Which takes us back to the blood of the Covenant. The wages of sin is death Christ death. His blood, He shed His blood to reconcile us to God; to bring this into balance; to bring us into agreement. It is through this blood of the New Covenant, that we are forgiven, and it is this Covenant where Christ has reconciled us to God. That is our driving force to reconcile with others. If Christ has done it for us, we should do it for others. It takes our action to seek it and to forgive and/or repent. Every day we should come before God repenting and asking for forgiveness, asking for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us, asking Him to make it clear to us that we see, we live according to the blood of the Covenant, which Christ has instituted for us instead of well everything that society says around us which would be mankind the water.

Blood, the blood of the covenant is thicker than water. And that is what we remember as we celebrate Holy Communion. It is a New Covenant. It is the blood of Jesus in that Covenant that reconciles us to God, makes us His redeemed children, and therefore we seek to reconcile

with each other within the church because we are under the blood of the Covenant. We have been baptized, baptized into the death of Jesus, baptized into His family the church, and therefore we are to reconcile. Because the blood of the Covenant that binds us together is thicker than anything else. Think about that every time you see someone baptized, they are being baptized into the blood of the Covenant. And every time we celebrate Holy Communion, we are partaking, literally in the blood of the Covenant.

What then should we do? Just as God has reconciled us to Him, we should make every effort that we are always reconciled to each other. In our savior's name Amen

Receive now the blessing of our Lord, May the Lord God bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you. May He lift up His countenance to you and give you His peace. Amen.