

The Dangers of Tribalism

Sermon Synopsis: In this interaction between Jesus and his disciples, we see a deeply engrained tendency for people to close themselves off to other people, and to find their primary source of identity and power in their tribe
Themes: tribalism, politics, kingdom, listening

Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!"
He said, "Nobody loves me." I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?"
He said, "Yes." I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?"
He said, "A Christian." I said, "Me too! Protestant or Catholic?"
He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me too! What denomination?"
He said, "Baptist." I said, "Me too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?"
He said, "Northern Baptist." I said, "Me too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"
He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist." I said, "Me too! Northern Conservative Baptist Santa Barbara Region or Northern Conservative Baptist Goleta Region?"
He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Santa Barbara Region." I said, "Me too!"
"Northern Conservative Baptist Santa Barbara Region Council of 1879 or Northern Conservative Baptist Santa Barbara Region Council of 1912?"
He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Santa Barbara Region Council of 1912?"
I said, "Die heretic!" And I pushed him over.

John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and **we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.**" But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you." (Luke 9:49-50, ESV) **API!**

Condemning people's actions because they aren't part of your tribe

A. **Tribes** are necessary sometimes, but be careful. **Tribalism:** the behavior and attitudes that stem from strong loyalty to one's own tribe or social group

1. **Believing that your church or denomination is superior to others** (sectarianism)
2. **Believing that your nation is superior to others** (nationalism)

This can be broken down further...

3. **Believing that your political party is God's party** (partisanship)

1. Now, if having an ideology/party helps give you categories, that's fine. What's destructive is when your allegiance is to that ideology.

Thanksgiving, politics, religion!

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. **But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"** But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village. (Luke 9:51-56, ESV) **API!**

Condemning people themselves because they aren't part of your tribe

1. Racism (systems of advantage based on the color of skin¹) **AP!**

Note: the difference between prejudice and racism²

– There is certainly prejudice in the exchange. But also more...

- Vindictiveness is what makes this instance in the text racist (using power and influence to control others)

Some of the biggest obstacles to the Evangelical church in America

1. Sectarianism (our church is the church chosen by God) **AP!**

2. Nationalism (our country is the country chosen by God)³

- With it's close cousin...

3. Partisanship (my political party is the party chosen by God)

- Elephant, donkey, or Lamb?

4. Racism (our race is the race chosen by God—as shown by systems of advantage)⁴

The way of Jesus:

2. Jesus rebukes our tribalism

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Listen to his rebuke

1. Jesus redirects our tribalism

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Surrender to his redirection

The simple (but challenging solution)

AP!

The kingdom perspective

1. Ecumenical (which requires humility)
2. Set apart (which requires otherworldly-ness)
3. Multi-cultural (which requires justice)

One word...

LISTEN

*Unity or uniformity?

Litmus test: Can you listen with empathy to believers on the other side?

Maybe we should start by listening to Jesus || Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.

¹ This definition was coined by David Wellman, and quoted by Beverly Daniel Tatum in her landmark book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race*. (Basic Books, 2017) 87

² For a helpful, gentle, winsome, but thought-provoking treatment on the subject of racial inequality, read Ken Wytsma. *The Myth of Equality: Uncovering the Roots of Injustice and Privilege*. (IVP, 2017)

³ For a helpful but challenging read on this topic, see Keith Giles. *Jesus Untangled: Crucifying Our Politics to Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb*. (Keith Giles, 2017)

⁴ For a heavily researched treatment on how the topic of race and how it has impacted the Evangelical church in America, read Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. (Oxford, 2000)