

Love Beyond: Love Beyond Division

08.14.2022

There are different kinds of sermons

With different topics

That take different approaches

Today's message is a serious one

They're all consequential

But the tone of this one

Is a little heavier than normal

We're in a series

Called Love Beyond

Where we're looking at the calls from God

Throughout the Scriptures

To love beyond the lines that we draw

This is all over the place

In the Scriptures

Colossians 3:11 states

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

I highlighted "Here"

Here... In the church

Here... In the family of God

There is no divide

Along the lines we normally divide by

Normally – in their context

They *would* divide by Jew & Gentile

That's ethnic divisions

Normally – in their context

They *would* divide by Circumcised or uncircumcised

That's religious divisions

Are they practicing Jews or not?

What's their belief concerning circumcision

That often-caused division

Barbarians were compared to the Greeks

So, it was civilized and uncivilized

And a Scythian

From modern day Russia

A Scythian was like an uncivilized barbarian

It's like bad & worse

Dumb & Dumber

Normally – in their context

They *would* divide by barbarian and Scythian

That's a societal divide

And slavery was not typically

Like 19th century American slavery

A slave was often somebody

Who was loaded down in debt

And working to buy back their freedom

Sometimes they sold *themselves* into slavery

Because of debt

So, when Paul says there's no slave or free

In the Colossian church

It's about finances

It's about poverty and affluence

So, the American application to "slave & free" in Colossians 3

Is not Union vs. Confederate

The American application is that there is to be no divide between

Edward Jones & Advanced Financial

I mean normally, there is a divide

Between folks who frequent Edwards Jones

And folks who frequent Advanced financial

That's an economic divide

What would it look like

If America – 2022

Had no ethnic / racial divisions

No religious divisions

No socio-economic divisions

And when I say no divisions

I don't mean everyone is the same

They had all of those categories in the Colossian Church

But those categories

Were not allowed to divide them

Those categories

Didn't create priorities

This is big – do you follow me

The city of Colossae had ethnic, racial, religious and socio-economic divides

But Paul said

Not here

Not here

In Galatians 3

Paul – same author

Writing to the Galatian church

Similar context

Creates a similar list

In verse 28

But this time,

Before he gives the similar list in verse 28

He precedes the list in verses 26-27 with these words:

**So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.
(Galatians 3:26-27)**

So those divisions are still there

But because we're clothed with Christ

Those divisions do not divide us

Picture a marching band

Or a military battalion

People from different walks of life

Different ethnicities

Different socio-economic upbringings

But they all wear a common uniform

They all have common marching orders

They all share common direction

So, there's unity

Superseding the diversity

The power of unity

Underneath the diversity

That's always gonna be present
Is substantial

Jesus prayed, in John 17

For His 12 disciples

And He prayed often, in that last prayer

For their unity

He prayed, in verse 11:

Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your Name, the Name You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one. (John 17:11b)

“The name You gave Me”

Do you remember this scene in the Christmas narrative?

The angel says:

Matthew 1:20b-21 - “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”

So, look again at Jesus' prayer

And let's insert the name that God gave Him

“Holy Father, protect them by the power of ‘He will save His people from their sins’, so that they may be one as We are one.”

He's saying, these disciples

One's a tax collector working for the Romans

One's a zealot wanting to kill the Romans

James & John are wanting to kill everyone

Calling down fire from Heaven

They have lots of diversity

But "Holy Father,

If you will protect them by the power of the Gospel

They'll be one, just like we're one

They'll be UNITED under the canopy of My leadership

Jesus says

Under the canopy of My grace and My forgiveness and My mission

And then later in His prayer

He turned the attention of His prayer out to us

He prayed:

That they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.

Our unity

On top of all of our diversity

Ethnic * Religious * Socio-economic

Our unity will tell the world

That Jesus is legitimate

Sent from God

And that God loves them

Even as He loves Him

Do you see that?

A better question

Are you *seized* by it?

Are there things worth dividing over in church?

Certainly

But it's a small list

In fact, in another place,

Jesus told us that our top priority

The greatest command, is to:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (Matthew 22:37)

Love of God deserves everything we've got

Love Him with all our emotion

Love Him with all of our intellect

Our full purpose and our full devotion

But second

Second only to the devotion we have for loving God

The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:39)

This is so countercultural

That's why Jesus emphasizes it so much

Human nature calls us to divide into camps

Rich & poor

Young & old

Democrat & Republican

Black & white

Human nature divides us

Our enemy divides us

But not here, Scripture says

Not here

Because our devotion to each other... here

Is second only to our devotion to God

Everything else is fighting for 3rd place

I had originally titled this message:

Love Beyond the Politics

Because I just knew that things would be heating up

About this time

But this topic is bigger than politics

It's the division in our country

The title of today's message

Is Love beyond division

Now politics certainly qualifies

So, I could've kept the title

Because politics comes from the Latin word "Poli"

Which means "many"

And tics

Which are blood sucking parasites

So, politics certainly qualifies

But it's bigger than politics

It's the division

And that cannot be true... here

Because here... we're clothed in Christ

Here... we're protected by the power of the Gospel

The name of Jesus

Here... our devotion to each other

Is only 2nd to our devotion to God Himself

Have you ever noticed how

In crisis

In times of great import

People come together?

Have you noticed that?

There's been several natural disasters

Over the last year

Floods... tornadoes...

And I've never seen a single report

Of people offering to help clean up

Black people's homes but not white people's homes

Or to help white families but not black families

In fact, saying that

Sounds so heinous

I almost cut it from the message

Because we all agree that would be so wrong

These people are in crisis

This is no time for division

Like we'll help you clean up from the flooding

If you're a republican, but not a democrat

Or we'll help you if you're a democrat but not a republican

That's ridiculous, right?

When life is hard

When challenge is steep

We have a clarity about what *really* matters

That's hard to replicate

During better times

During *easier* times

I'm going to show you a picture

See if any of you recognize it

It's from the front steps of the Capital Building

In Washington DC

On September 12th, 2001

The members of congress were singing "God bless America"

Together

The day after planes flew into the buildings

In New York City

Coming together:

From every state

From both parties

From different backgrounds & ethnicities

To invoke... the blessing... of God... on our country

Now I know God Bless America is not deep theology

But can you imagine

This picture being recreated today?

Mitch McConnell and Nancy Pelosi

Are on the front row of this picture

You pick the song

Can you imagine them singing *anything* together publicly?

God says, listen

I get it

The worlds a divided mess

But not here

Because here... we're clothed in Christ

Here... we're protected by the power of the unity

That comes from the Gospel

Here... our devotion to each other

Is only 2nd to our devotion to God Himself

So what if

This is a crazy thought

What if we could build a community *here*

United under the banner of Christ

United under the power of the Gospel

United behind our devotion to love each other
And what if
What if we could build that kind of a community
Without a crisis

What if we could build that kind of community
In the church
Because of our deep devotion to Him
And our deep devotion to each other
Which supersedes every.other.category.

So back in October
I had an unusual experience
In fact, I'd say
I began an unusual season of my life

I still remember the first day I noticed it
Amy and I were in our living room
Having a conversation
And I just broke down in tears

And that's not like me

I mean, sure, when we watch the Notebook or something

But otherwise... that's not like me

And I tried to just shake it off

Maybe I'd had a long week or something

But I couldn't shake it

This was last October

I reached out to some friends

And got their support

Let them know what's going on

That's great advice, by the way

Don't ever go through

Something like this alone

If you're going through it

Get some people around you

And one of them suggested

I talk to a counselor they know

He only works with pastors

So, he'd understand my situation

Which was great because I felt like

From the very beginning

I was dealing with a multi-faceted deal

Emotional – physical – but also spiritual

Some combination

So, I wanted to talk to someone

Who would understand ministry

And spiritual attack

Someone who would understand my life

So, I met with the counselor

That's great advice, by the way

Don't ever go through

Something like this alone

If you're going through it

Get a counselor to support you

When we met

The counselor didn't do this

But it was like he was just checking boxes off

Like a list in his head

Like in a good way

Nothing I said surprised him

Everything I was saying surprised me

But nothing I said surprised him

During our first call

Our first call!

I teared up... twice

Not even the Notebook gets me to tear up twice

By the way, I'm just kidding about the Notebook

I hate that movie

But here's a man I've just met

Who's impacting me... deeply

Counselors have the ability to do that

They're trained to diagnose and heal

And get to the root of stuff

After I'd got off the call

We did it by zoom

And after I'd got off the call

It hit me that some of the very specific struggles that I had raised with him

Didn't seem to surprise him either

Some of my symptoms were pretty general

I wasn't surprised that he expected those

But others were very specific to me

And he didn't seem surprised by them either

So, our next appointment

I asked him again about those things

I said, "It seemed like nothing I said surprised you"

And he agreed, that it hadn't really

And I said, "I figured some of the very specific struggles

Would have"

I said, "Does everybody have those too?"

Because I thought they were weird just to me"

And he said "no – those not common..."

But paranoia is... common...

And that's what you're describing."

Oh shoot

I just paid a man to smack me in the mouth

I described how I felt

To a few close friends in those days

I described it like a blanket of sadness

I would just have this blanket of sadness come over me

And I'd be very insecure

Like no self-confidence

And I would obsess over things

And sometimes it was debilitating

I can't really describe how debilitating

It rarely hit me on Sunday mornings

I think that God was protecting me

And I was trying really hard to hide it

But it rarely hit me on Sunday mornings

Two times it did

Only twice

One day – I wasn't preaching

I was just making an announcement

But as I was making the announcement

My voice cracked

And I felt the knot in my throat welling up,

You know what I mean

Like I was about to cry

And I was sure everyone could see through
My effort to keep it together

And I thought, "I'm going to lose it on stage... over a silly announcement"

It freaked me out

Like – what if it gets worse

Like – what if I can't do this anymore

Another time, I was scheduled to preach

And I was backstage

Before first service started

And it hit hard

Blanket of sadness

No self-confidence

Lots of obsessing

And I thought, I can't get up in front of people to speak today

I just can't

I honestly don't want to

I mean, I was praying like crazy

But nothing was changing

Amy found me

I was kind of hiding that morning

And Amy hadn't seen me so she came looking

To make sure I was ok

And she found me

In fact, it was the Sunday that we began praying

Back in the prayer room during the service

Which I don't think was coincidental

And we had the elder team praying during that service

While we scheduled people for future weeks

And she went and grabbed them out of the prayer room

Told them I was having a tough morning

And at this point, the service had already begun

And I had no interest in preaching

I had no ability to preach

And God and I were discussing this

As you might imagine

But nothing was changing

It's hard to describe

The anxiety that comes

Hearing the band behind you

Knowing you're about to walk out on stage

To present the Word of God

Feeling like you have no interest

And no ability

To do so

Terrifying

I still remember

Chad & Larry, two of our elders, came and prayed over me

I was right back here in a hallway

And they prayed

And if you don't know Chad

He's since rotated off the elder team

But he's in great physical shape

Very strong

Large arms

Looks a bit like a model

People confuse us all the time

And Chad's a passionate guy

And he believes, passionately, in prayer

And he grabbed hold of me

The band was playing right behind us

The service had already begun

And he grabbed hold of me

And was praying... passionately

And I don't know what he was saying

He was callin' something in

Or callin' something out

I don't know

But he was movin' me around...

And it broke

The sadness

The insecurity

The obsessing

It broke

For that morning...

And I was grateful

So grateful

So, the counselor began to implement a plan with me

We'd meet and talk... regularly

And that was very helpful

He encouraged me to go to my primary care doctor

Which I did

And check my levels

Which they did

And begin to take medication if they proscribed

Which I did

And all of that helped

It was weird

I started at the smallest dose of medicine

Because I didn't want to do medicine

And she said it might take a bit to kick in

And for three weeks...

Nothin'

But after three weeks

Almost to the day

I noticed, one morning, I felt better

After taking that dose for a couple months

I went back for a follow-up with her

And talked to her about increasing it

Which we did

For three weeks – nothin' – no changes

But after three weeks

Almost to the day

I noticed I felt noticeably better... again

Not myself

But better

Apparently, that's common

The counselor also told me I was depleted

He knew me well enough

At this point

To know that I had gotten used to

Running at a red-line pace

Both physically and emotionally... spiritually

And he said I was empty

He said a lot of pastors

And people in caring professions

Doctors, nurses, counselors

Lots of people in caring professions

Were facing the same thing these days

I said, "well, what do I do?"

He said "you need to fill up"

I said, Well I take days off

And go on vacations and such

He said, you'll go on a vacation

Or you'll be off a couple days

And it's like adding a couple dollars

To your gas tank

You'll feel a lot better

But almost immediately

You'll be empty again

You need to fill up

I said, what's that look like:

He said you need a break

And I don't mean a couple days off

He said you need an extended sabbatical

At least 90 days

Now, in my head, I thought

That's ridiculous

On the outside

I nodded politely

And said, "hmm"

But on the inside, I thought

That's completely ridiculous
90 days?!?

So, I tried to negotiate

I presented an idea that was like 60 days

And then easing back in

And he said there's clinical studies

Of the impact – on depleted people – of 90 days

I still remember this:

He said, "I didn't ask you to take 90 days

So, you'd take 80

I want you to take 90 days!"

So, at church, we have accountability and such

I can't just give myself a break like that

So, at our next elders meeting

They asked for an update on my counseling

And my depression

Because I had been telling them what's going on

That's great advice, by the way

Don't ever go through

Something like this alone

Have I mentioned that enough yet?

If you're going through things

We want to help

And so, they asked for an update

And I gave it to them

And I was a little kid

Not wanting to bring up that last part

About the sabbatical

Because I thought it was completely ridiculous

So, I gave my update

But hadn't mentioned the sabbatical

And I think they even said

Is there anything else?

I don't remember them saying, "Buddy"

Like "Is there anything else, buddy?"

But it would have fit

Because I didn't want to bring it up

I don't remember what I said next

But it was something like, "You're not gonna believe what he said..."

And I told them

90 days

And there was a long pause

And they said, “Ok, when’s that gonna start?”

I was shocked

I tried to talk them out of it

I thought it was ridiculous

That was probably March or April

And they’ve not let me talk them out of it

So, we’ve spent the last few months

Along with the staff

Getting ready for me to take an extended sabbatical

And now we’re telling you

So, between now and October 9th

Nothing will be different

I’ll continue to preach most weeks

As I have for the last nine months

By the way

I think I should mention this

I have felt consistently better

With the counseling

And medication

And adjustments to my life

I feel better now than I have

In the last 9 months

We're gonna get through

God is getting me through this

But for the next few weeks

Nothing will be different

But then starting October 10th

I'll be out of pocket

For 90 days

Amy & I are going to travel some

I'll spend more time at home with my family

I'm going to really unplug and rest and pray and seek after God

Then I'll be back in the office on January 10th

And if I were you

I'd plan on January 15th

Being a bit of a longer sermon

Cause I'll have some things to say

Now, I'm sure you've got questions

I've had a few months to get my head around this

You've only had a few minutes

But let me answer some of the questions

That I would be asking

If I were you:

1. Did ANYBODY do ANYTHING immoral?

No.

Sometimes churches

When a pastor does something immoral

Will send them away

To get their life back together

Which is wise

But there's nothing immoral here

There's no secret tape of me cursing at the staff or something

There're no secret affairs

No financial indiscretions

Did anybody do anything immoral? No.

2. Am I Quitting?

No.

Sometimes churches

Will “give somebody a break”

To talk them out of quitting

That’s not happening here

You may not realize it

But being a pastor is not a stable career

½ of pastors leave the ministry

Within the first 5 years of becoming a pastor

Give me one other career like that

That stat is one of the main reasons

We started the residency program

½ of those entering ministry will leave the ministry within the first 5 years

And only 1 out of 10 people who set out to be ministers

Retire as a minister

The other 9 burnout

Or have a moral failure

Or just quit

It’s tough... caring for people... spiritually & emotionally

And all those stats are pre-covid

All those stats are pre-divisive climate that we're all currently living in
So, I'm sure the reality today, is in fact, worse

Our church is in it for the long haul

Our leaders care about the long haul

I'm in it for the long haul

And our leaders are more interested in my long-term health

Then in my short-term production

So, they're encouraging me to take a break

But I'm not quitting

So, what's going to happen while I'm out?

Rob is going to take on a bulk of the preaching

In my absence

He's going to do a great job

Students, don't worry

Gabe is going to take on a bulk of the preaching in student ministry

While Rob is teaching a lot here

So, you're both in good hands

In terms of leadership

Our elder team will continue to lead effectively

And our executive team
Will continue to lead our staff in the day-to-day operations of the church
And Rob & Gabe will both still be very involved in student ministry
So, you're all in good hands

Maybe the biggest question:

What about missing my charm and rugged good looks?

Well...

You're in good hands there too

I'm going to ask our elder team to come forward

We're putting their pictures on the screen

In case you don't know some of them

And I'm going to ask the executive team from our staff to come forward

Because you are blessed

As a church

With good leadership

Now none of them have the rugged good looks and charm that I have

But they are Godly men & women

Who have partnered with me to lead WellSpring

And they'll continue to be partnering with you while I'm out
And we'll all partner together when I get back

Because there's a world

That desperately needs

Us to be united

Because it desperately needs

What only the church has to offer

And they'll know it's true

They'll sense it's legitimate

By our love for each other

Our devotion to each other

And our unity *with* one another!
