

THE GREAT DIVIDER

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ January 3, 2016

⁴⁰ On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” ⁴¹ Others said, “He is the Messiah.” Still others asked, “How can the Messiah come from Galilee? ⁴² Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” ⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. (John 7:40-43)

Dear Christians who are still rejoicing in our new-born king,

2016 is here and you know what that means, right? Maybe it’s the year you finally are able to drop those few pounds. Maybe it’s the year you’re set to graduate. But something that will affect all of us living here in the United States in this next year is the constant barrage of political candidates telling us how they will be the best President of the United States of America. And come November 8, we will all be sick of the promises of each and every one of the candidates.

Now that I’ve been cognizant for the last few election cycles, The same themes always seem to play out. Each candidate promises all the things they would do if elected. They promise to be a great unifier. They promise to reach across the aisle and bring Democrats and Republicans together towards a common goal and move forward. And if that would actually happen that would be great, I believe most people are in favor of unity, but much of the time once a politician gets elected, there is much less effort placed on unity.

The Bible also talks about the desire for unity, but not in a political sense, but a religious sense. There is the desire of God for all be united and come to heaven with him. There is also the desire of God for all Christians to be united in faith and teaching. But in addition to unification, we mustn’t forget that the Bible also talks about division. It is the natural division that occurs when sinful man encounters a holy God. It is the division that occurs when sinful man is faced with God’s truth. It’s the division that occurs when sinful man comes face to face with that new-born Savior we call Jesus. In addition to being Savior, Jesus is THE GREAT DIVIDER.

1. Dividing believers from non-believers
2. Dividing truth from error
3. Dividing a sinner from their sins

(1)

The apostle John, the writer of the gospel of John, opens his gospel talking about Jesus as THE GREAT DIVIDER. It was a part of our gospel on Christmas Day. John writes, **“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it.”** The light that John refers to is Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Already when Jesus was born he was THE GREAT DIVIDER. Yes, there were those who came in search of the Messiah – the shepherds, the wise men. But there were also those who did not seek him. King Herod, threatened by even the notion of another ruler, sought to kill Jesus by having all the baby boys in Bethlehem slaughtered who were two years old or younger.

This continued for Jesus into his adult life as well. We see it happen here in John chapter 7. This occurrence takes place in Jerusalem only months before Jesus would be sacrificed on the cross. It took place at one of the high feasts of the Jews called the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus' followers had wanted him to make a public appearance here, to validate his claim as the Messiah of the Jews. Except, Jesus didn't need to validate his claim as the Messiah to anyone, especially those who saw the Messiah purely to benefit their own selfish interests.

Instead, Jesus went to the feast in private, without much fanfare. Instead of wowing the crowds with miraculous displays of his power, he amazed them with his teaching. Teaching that was discredited by the religious leaders because Jesus had not been "trained" in the proper schools. Jesus responded by asking them to compare his words with the words of God. Jesus did not come up with his own teaching, but he taught what he learned from God the Father.

This is where the division took place, this is where Jesus was seen as THE GREAT DIVIDER. We read once more from the gospel of John, **"On hearing his words, some of the people said, 'Surely this man is the Prophet.' Others said, 'He is the Christ.' Still others asked, 'How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?' Thus the people were divided because of Jesus."**

THE GREAT DIVIDER caused people to pick a side, there was no fence-sitting – either you believed Jesus was who he said he was, or you didn't. At the Festival there were a number of different opinions about who he was. Some thought he was a great prophet, maybe a forerunner to the Christ. Others thought he was the Christ himself. But others didn't want to believe Jesus, they were caught up in who they thought the Christ should be and used a portion of Scripture to confirm their belief – Jesus couldn't be the Christ because they assumed he was born in Galilee, not Bethlehem. THE GREAT DIVIDER caused divisions between the believers and non-believers.

Jesus is still causing divisions today, divisions between the believer and non-believer. You don't have to look very far to see the same confusion about Jesus. A good person, a teacher ahead of his time, maybe even a miracle worker. But he really didn't mean it when he said he was going to rise again, he didn't really mean it when he said we had to give up *everything* and follow him. Jesus didn't say anything against homosexuality, it was just Paul's personal opinions he put in his letters. Thus a division is created between the believer and the non-believer.

C.S. Lewis hit the nail on the head when he wrote about Jesus in his book *Mere Christianity*, "Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up as a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

(2)

But Jesus didn't just come to divide believers from non-believers, he came to divide truth from error. Jesus says, **"I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."** Truth and error are like light and darkness. If there is truth, there is no error. If there is error, there is no truth. If something is partially true, it means there is error present

also. As followers of Christ we cannot allow error or darkness to blot out the light. As John says, **“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.”**

Truth and error cannot live side-by-side as equals. The apostle Paul confirms this in his letter to the Corinthian church, **“Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”** When we set forth the truth of God’s Word, we not only see the errors present in other people, but the errors present within ourselves. Sometimes we might have to dig a little deeper, sometimes we have to be a little honest with ourselves, but THE GREAT DIVIDER penetrates our heart.

We may not be divided with God’s Word on such central matters of faith like Jesus saved us or a six day creation. But our sinful hearts have been divided by God’s Word. Do you really like hearing you’re a rotten sinner? Do you really like hearing that your sins put you in the same category with the likes of some of the worst people in history? Do you really like hearing that God came to save abortionists and suicide bombers? Do you really like hearing to turn from your wicked, but oh so enticing sins like lust, like gossip, like worry, like greed? Do you really like hearing that if you don’t turn from your ways you have walked away from Jesus? It is these divisions from God’s Word that we need to set aside (we’re never going to win an argument with God) and repent of.

(3)

Because THE GREAT DIVIDER has come not only to divide believers from non-believers, not only to divide truth from error, but to divide a sinner from their sins. That is what Jesus is about. He’s not about making a public spectacle, he’s not about a show of force, he’s about saving us from our sins – and he did what was necessary to get that done. Jesus showing everybody up at the Feast of Tabernacles was not going to get it done, rather it was his sacrifice on the cross that ripped us away from our sins and the punishment they deserved.

And when Christ, THE GREAT DIVIDER divided me from my sins he was also the great unifier. He united me forever with my Father in Heaven. There was no longer sin separating me from my God. All of this took place on the cross, some 2,000 years before we were even around to thank Jesus for it. So now as believers, we kind of have a love/hate relationship with our sins. Since we are still sinners and have a sinful nature within us, there will always be that lure towards that which is sinful. But as redeemed and forgiven children of God, we will detest our sins, particularly our habitual ones and do what we can to avoid them.

But God does not want us to keep this news to ourselves, he wants us to be able to share this news. We’re less than two weeks removed from Christmas where we heard about simple shepherds sharing the news of the Savior’s birth. If they can do it, so can you. In fact, if you need any help with that, there’s a special workshop being held at Grace-Tucson this Saturday. The focus of the workshop is sharing your faith with Mormons, but the lessons learned can transfer into sharing your faith with anyone. I strongly encourage each one of you to attend.

As we embark upon a new year, we know there are things that will change – maybe some for the better, others for the worse. But either way things change, our God will never change. He is still

THE GREAT DIVIDER and also THE GREAT UNIFER. He does not change circumstances for our lives, but he changes our lives for the circumstances. May THE GREAT DIVIDER and THE GREAT UNIFER live in your heart this New Year. Amen.