

"Your Spiritual DNA" 1 John 3:11-18 Trinity 2 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

DNA testing is becoming more and more common. The police regularly use it of course to track down criminals but law-abiding citizens are also having their DNA tested. They want to see if they are descended from anyone famous. There's a good chance of that if you are from mainland Asia including the southern part of Siberia. According to a 2003 study, 16 million men or 8% of the male population from that area are descended from the feared Mongol ruler, Genghis Khan. If you double that figure to include women, close to one out of every six people living between the Black Sea and the Pacific Ocean today may be able to claim the Mongol warlord as their forefather! Genghis Khan not only conquered a vast empire in the 1200's, but he apparently also populated it!

What kind of person would you be if you were descended from Genghis Khan? A skilled horseman? A ruthless warrior? A talented organizer? We may not have any descendants from Genghis Khan here to answer that question, but a study of our past would no doubt reveal some famous and infamous forefathers. Today we're going to inspect our spiritual DNA. In so doing we'll learn that we're more like

the world's first murderer Cain than we would like to admit. But we'll also see that as believers in Jesus we're more like Christ than we perhaps realize.

Scientists have identified certain genes that can lead to cancer. This should help us take better care of ourselves. For example, if you carry the gene that can lead to skin cancer, you dare not forget to put on sunscreen when you spend a day at the beach. Better yet, stay out of the sun as much as you can.

Are there any such weaknesses in our spiritual DNA? There certainly are. We've inherited Adam and Eve's knack for rebelling against God. The Apostle John explains just how bad things are when he writes: "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous... "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (1 John 3:11, 12, 15).

Not only are we like Adam and Eve, we're like their son Cain, the world's first murderer! "Come on, Pastor. John is exaggerating!" If only that was the case. The truth is we're more like Cain than we'd like to admit. What caused Cain to bludgeon to death his brother

Abel? John tells us. Cain was jealous that God accepted Abel's offering but not his. That jealousy ballooned into anger, and anger exploded into bloodshed. But Cain had done away with his brother before he took his first swing at him, for hatred is nothing other than wishing that the other person didn't exist.

With that definition in mind, how many times have you murdered your parents? How often have you wished they would just disappear so you could do your own thing at home or with your friends? And parents, how often have you thought your children a bother? How many times a day do sighs of exasperation escape your lips when you bend down to pick up their toys and clothes again? Work is an especially homicidal place, isn't it? Lazy co-workers. Inept managers. It's great that there's an app for your smartphone now that allows you to pelt your co-workers and managers with imaginary pies and other, less savory objects. That may sound hilarious, but John checks our laughter when he writes: "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (1 John 3:15). Have we been kidding ourselves? Do we honestly think that we can continue to bear that grudge and look down "those kind of people" and still be welcomed into heaven? Don't bet on it, says John.

Instead of hating, we're to love one another. Notice how John doesn't qualify those words. He doesn't tell us to love those who are nice to us. He simply says to love one another. Love every person that you meet whether they are deserving of your love or not. Jesus demonstrated that kind of love John said: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16).

Can you imagine giving up your spot in line at the Emergency Room so that someone with a lesser wound or ailment can be treated first? You might do that for a baby who needs a few stitches even though you require dozens of stitches because of a car accident. But if you were bleeding to death, would you let someone with a paper cut butt in line? No. "Me first!" you'd cry. Jesus too cried, "Me first!" but it was the shout of one who distracts the bear so that he doesn't attack the other hikers. Jesus' shout was answered when God poured out his full wrath on him for the world's sins. That wrath has now been spent like a storm cloud dumping all its water in one burst so that the dark skies are replaced with blue, and cold wind gives way to warm sunshine. Those who know and believe this will show love to others explains John. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14). Just as a

sick person doesn't get well because he smiles, but smiles because he's gotten well, so John is telling us that we don't pass over from death into eternal life because we love, but thanks to Jesus, we love because we have passed from death into life. If we don't love others, it means that despite what we might say, God's love is not really in our hearts and therefore eternal damnation our future.

But isn't God asking too much of us? I know and am grateful for Jesus' love for me, but I can't love others like Jesus can! Well, let's inspect our spiritual DNA again. Jesus said in the Gospel of John, "On that day [the day of Jesus' resurrection] you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:20). We may be like Cain more than we'd like to admit but believers are also more like Christ than they may realize. What does it mean for our day-to-day existence? The Apostle Paul explains. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life...For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Romans 6:4, 6).

Just as an electric power bar goes from "dead" to "live" when it's plugged into an outlet, through baptism we have gone from dead

to alive in Christ. What does that mean? It doesn't just mean we have forgiveness. It doesn't just means that Jesus' love is racing to us. It means that his love is pulsing through us the way electricity pulses through a power bar to give life to half a dozen appliances that are plugged into it. In the same way, Jesus' love is strong enough and plentiful enough so that it flows through you to everyone you meet. When we're plugged into Jesus there is no limit to how many people we can love! See, you're more like Christ than you realized.

But now John closes by reminding us that loving others is more than just saying, "I think you're neat!" John wrote: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:17, 18). As far as John was concerned, the heart and the hand are connected. In other words, if I have love for you in my heart, I will show it with my hands. I will willingly take out the garbage. I will happily write you an encouragement card. I will show and not just speak about my love. The strength to consistently do this comes from staying connected to Jesus.

You might be able to impress someone today with the bit of trivia that 16 million men are descended from Genghis Khan but it's

more important for us to remember that we are more like Cain than we'd like to admit. Whenever we let our sinful nature get the best of us so that we don't show love to others, we're murderers. But Jesus gave his life for that sin. Continue to put your trust in him for forgiveness and acknowledge that you are now like Christ. Because of him you have the power to love others just as God loves you – not just with words but also with actions. Amen.