

Sermon for Sunday, April 5, 1981, by Andrew A. Jumper. D.D., Pastor
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"THE BRAND ON GOD'S SHEEP"

Genesis 4:8-16, St. John 20:20-28; Galatians 6:14-18

Text: "Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus."
Galatians 6:17

About 20 years of my life were lived in Texas. There are some great ranches down there. For example, there is the famous King Ranch which is made up of thousand upon thousands of acres. Another large ranch is called the 7777 Ranch (the Four Sevens Ranch) because its owner supposedly won it in a poker game when he drew four sevens. Back in its early days when ranchers had no fences and ran large herds of cattle, every spring the cowboys would round up all the calves and brand them. Branding irons would be heated red-hot and the mark of the rancher would be burned onto the animals. That way the animal could be identified. Everybody knew who it belonged to because it bore its owner's brand. Many a rustler supposedly has been hanged because he was caught with cattle having another man's brand.

In our Scripture reading this morning we read of some instances when persons wore a distinguishing mark of some kind--when a person bore a brand. For example, we read about Cain and the Bible says Cain was branded. Cain killed his brother in a fit of jealousy and rage. Actually, Cain was doing only what came naturally. You see, his mother and father had rebelled against God and had fallen from their perfect relationship with God. Sin had contaminated the human race. Now the natural man was fallen and sin was the natural thing to do.

Has sin put its brand on you? I know sin has made its marks on my life. Sometimes we have the idea that sin won't hurt us. Sometimes we think that if our sins aren't found out--if we can keep them concealed and nobody finds us out, no harm is done. But the fact is, sin always has its consequences. It may be a character that continues to deteriorate. It may be a moral decay. It may be a growing insensitivity to what is good and right and true. But whatever the consequence, sin always leaves its brand. I remember reading once of a man who had two sons. As they entered their teen years, they began to do wild things. The father in desperation finally set a fence post in the back year. Whenever they did something wrong, he had them drive a nail in the post. When they did something good, he let them pull out a nail. It got to be a game with the boys and they began to work to get all of the nails out of the post. Finally they succeeded. They were very proud. "Look, father," they said, "we have done well and all of the nails are out." "Yes," replied the Father, "and I am proud of you. You are much better boys now. But I want you to take a good look at that post because now it is full of holes." Well, that is what sin does to us. It puts its brand on us. And even when we are forgiven; even when we work hard to overcome our sin, the scars of our branding always remain.

Look what happened to Cain. Because he sinned, the Bible tells us that God put a brand on Cain. Now, I don't know what the mark of Cain was and the Bible doesn't tell us, but it does tell us of the consequences. The Bible tells us first that Cain went to the land of Nod. Nod means "wandering". That's what happens when life is marked by sin. It is wandering--it isn't going anywhere worth going. It has no worthwhile direction. Jesus said the road to heaven is straight and narrow. The man who is wandering isn't on that road. The Bible goes on to say that Cain built a city and he called the city "Enoch." Enoch means "beginning again." Man who is building his life without God is a man who is always having to start over, to be always beginning again. Isn't that what we are talking about when we say we are going to turn over a new leaf? Isn't that why we make new year's resolutions? Why do we need to do that? Isn't it because we have been branded by sin?

I suspect a lot of us this morning are not really going anywhere worth going. We are always having to start over, to begin again. Life is made up with a lot of wandering because we are not on the Jesus Road, the straight and narrow road that leads to heaven. What road are you are this morning?

The second brand I want to talk about this morning are the marks of Jesus. Sin left its brand on Jesus. Sin left its marks on the Savior. And when we get to heaven and Jesus comes to greet us, he will still bear those marks. Do you remember the resurrection story? When Jesus first appeared to his disciples after his crucifixion, Thomas wasn't there. He didn't believe it when the others told him Jesus had been raised. He said, "unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe." Eight days later the disciples were together again and Jesus came and stood among them. He said to Thomas, "put your finger here, and see my hand; and put out your hand, and place it in my side." Yes, the risen Jesus still bore the brand of sin in his body.

Do you know what put those marks on the body of Jesus? It was your sin. It was my sin. Like Cain we have been jealous and envious. Like Cain, we do our brother evil. Like Cain, we rebell against God--against His will, against His law. And--like Cain--we bear the mark, the brand of sin. And Jesus died for those sins. He died for my sins and he died for your sins. Like the fence post we mentioned earlier, sin always leaves its brand. Sin always leaves its nail holes. And sin left its marks on the Savior. Sin put its brand on Jesus.

Whoever we are this morning, we helped drive the nails, we helped thrust the spear that branded Jesus. It was for our sins that he died.

The third brand I want to talk about is the brand of the Saint. When I say the word "saint", we think of someone who is perfect, someone who never does anything wrong. But that isn't how the Bible uses the word "saint". Much of the New Testament is composed of letters written by St. Paul to Christians in various places. And when he opens his letters he always begins, "To the saints who are at Philippi..", or, "To the saints at Colosae." Yet, when you read what he has to say to those people, you realize very quickly he is not talking to people who are saints as we think of it! No, the word "saint" in the New Testament means a person who has received Jesus as his personal savior.

Are you a saint? I'm not asking how good you are. I'm asking if you have accepted Jesus as your personal savior. If you have, in the New Testament sense you are a saint. But if you are a saint, there is one little problem. If you are a saint, you will be branded. You will have the mark of Jesus on your life. Isn't that what happened to St. Paul. He wrote, "Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of Jesus."

What did the brand on Paul look like? To the Philippians he described his brand this way: "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ..." To the Corinthians he described his brand this way: "Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure..."

That's astonishing, isn't it? Anyone who looks at the life of St. Paul knows he has been branded by Jesus. His body--his life--showed who he belonged to. Are you a saint whose life shows the brand of Jesus? Has our discipleship cost us very much? Back in the Old Testament the Bible tells us that David sinned against God and God punished David. David wanted to make an offering to God to atone for his sin. He was out in the country and he wanted to make a burnt offering to God, but he didn't have any wood for the fire. A farmer, when he realized that David was the king, offered to give him some wood. But even though the man wanted David to have the wood as a gift, David insisted on paying for it. He said, "Neither will I offer unto the Lord my God that which costs me nothing."

Is our offering costing us anything? For example, take your time. Time is one of the most precious things you have. There are 168 hours in a week. A tithe of that would be approximately 17 hours. Are you spending 17 hours a week for the Lord. Does your watch bare the brand of the saint? Or how about our material goods. Is a tenth of all of our money going to the Lord? Does your pocketbook have the brand of the saint on it?

When a man is committed to Jesus, his life will bear the brand of Jesus. His character will be stamped; his actions will be marked by his devotion to Jesus. Is that true in your life? Are you branded by Jesus, do you have the mark of the saint on your life?

There is one final brand I want to mention. There is one other passage that talks about a brand. We didn't read it during our scripture reading, but I want to read it to you now. In the Book of Revelation in the 20th chapter the writer begins to share with us what heaven is going to be like. He writes, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the Holy City, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God; prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men.' He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." Well, heaven will be like that! And then the writer goes on to describe life in heaven, and how we will all worship God. Then he writes, "They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads."

Well, will God's brand be on you? You see, we bear the brand of sin. But because Jesus bears the brand of the cross, God forgives us. If our lives bear the brand of the saint, when we get to heaven God will know we belong to him and he will put his brand on us. Then, as the Bible says, "...God will be their light and they shall reign for ever and ever."

How about you this morning? Will God know you belong to Him?