

Peace on Earth
Matthew 10:34-39

In the course of his ministry, Jesus says many things that seem very strange to us. Things that seem different, inconsistent and even contradictory. We come to one of them this afternoon.

v.34 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.”

In the parallel passage in,

Luke 12:51 Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.”

That seems to contradict what we read in other places, doesn't it?

Col. 1:19 “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

And,

Eph. 2:13 “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.”

And, of course, the familiar words from the description of Jesus' birth,

Luke 2:12 “And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

Peace on earth, right? Wrong. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.” So what is the point. What is it that Jesus is trying to teach us? The reality is that,

I. JESUS CAUSES DIVISIONS AMONG MEN.

That seems to be the plain meaning of these words. That seems to be the impact of that word “sword” in verse 34. Instead of the truce of peace which ends a war, instead of an armistice that would cause the opposing divisions of men to put down their weapons, Jesus comes to bring a sword. He comes to establish a division, to further the conflict. And it is a division close at hand, v.35-36

Now, before I go any farther with this emphasis, let me stress that the division is not caused by Jesus, per se. That is, he doesn't go about offending people so that he can make them into enemies against each other, creating enmity where there had previously been harmony. Rather, it is their reaction to him that causes the division, and that is as it always will be, until the end of the age.

The separation is caused by the response that people have to Jesus. And that separation is caused by the wickedness and godlessness of men who reject Jesus in their unrighteousness. And that is the separation which Jesus brings about. That is the separation which the gospel causes. For,

A. The gospel exposes the ungodliness of unbelievers.

So Jesus declares,
v.34

A sword is the judgment of God's wrath which our sins have earned.

Rom. 1:18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

So the division among men which Jesus brings with the gospel is a division which identifies those who suppress the truth and reject Jesus, preferring to live in their sin.

Rom. 2:6 "[God] will render to each one according to his deeds": 7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, 9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; 10 but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God."

That's the division, a division caused by the sin of men in their rebellion against God. The gospel exposes that sin and rebellion. Jesus came to bring a sword, for there will be deadly opposition to him and to his followers. And the end of that war shall be the judgment of God upon the wicked for their ungodliness and unrighteousness. That's what the gospel does! That's the division that Jesus causes. For in all of that,

B. The gospel threatens judgment upon unbelievers.
A sword.

Mat. 25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His

glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels...46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

John 5:28 "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

So that's the division, the sheep and the goats. Here is that judgment in the prophetic language of Revelation; here is the description of that war,

Rev. 17:12 "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. 13 These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. 14 These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."

The reality is this, the wicked will be judged. The enemies of Jesus will be condemned. And that judgment is integrally connected to the declaration of the gospel, a declaration that divides people between believers and unbelievers.

2 Cor. 2:14 "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. 15 For we are to God the fragrance of

Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.”

I mentioned already that this division is close at hand. It even divides family.

v.35-36

Surely, that is a grievous situation. I suspect all of you know of someone in your own family, perhaps even your immediately family, who remains separated from God in unbelief, enslaved to their sin and still under the threat of the eternal judgment of God. That is a grievous situation, but it is reality. But the point here, I believe, is not so much a focus upon that division within our earthly families as it is a realization of our true family.

C. The gospel identifies our true family identity.

And our family in Christ is actually to be of more substantial importance than our earthly families. In heaven, we will not even marry and be given in marriage, but we will live together as brothers and sisters in Christ. I emphasize that because for all the right and good emphasis upon healthy family relationships here on earth throughout this age, for all the good priority and commitment we give to those earthly families, we form a greater family in Christ. We are, indeed, brothers and sisters!

So a man might be set against his father, in terms of their relationship to Jesus. A person’s enemies, in terms of the gospel, might be those of his own household. This division does, indeed, cause such separations within earthly families. And so we have a great family identity. We are the family of God.

This is our family, as Paul defines it in,

Eph. 2:19 “[You are] fellow citizens with the saints and

members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

The household of God is the church. The family of God is the church. So here we are, joined together tonight as a family. A true family, a family whose identity is even greater than our earthly identity. The household of God. Please consider those words as you think about the church. The family of God, the church, that’s the family to which you belong if you belong to Jesus.

And so these words begin to make some sense.

II. JESUS CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO LOVE HIM.

Even more than they love the members of their earthly families.

v.37

In the parallel passage in Luke, the words are even stronger, more provocative. They are inspired by God the Holy Spirit and spoken by God the Son.

Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

The point of those words is so very clear.

A. We must love Jesus above all human relationships.

Because the gospel defines our true family, it is that family in Christ that must be promoted. So to be a disciple of Jesus, you

must hate your father and mother. You must hate your wife and your children, your brothers and sisters. You must love Jesus more, and so much more, that the provocative usage of the word “hate” is the comparison.

Beloved, that’s a high calling. Obviously, and let me emphasize that, obviously, that doesn’t mean you are free to be mean and ugly to those whom you love in your family. You are not free to do evil to your family. Nor does it cancel the biblical duty and responsibility to love those in your own household. The very definition of a Christian husband is to love his wife as Christ loved his church. So this isn’t a contradiction. This isn’t a call to practice evil in the form of hatred. But it is a call to practice love, for God, to such an extent that your love for God renders all your other family relationships to such a secondary importance as to be described by that word “hate.”

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” That’s the call of discipleship. A call to love, honor and obey. A call to serve. More than anything else. More than anyone else.

So consider this priority in your own life? Even your family can become an idol, can’t it, when it replaces God in the position of highest priority in your life. Even family can be an idol, another god whom we worship. Even family can be a hindrance to your love of God, if family comes before God. Even the love of a husband or a wife, the love of a child, or the love of a friend. We must love Jesus above all human relationships. Period. That’s discipleship.

Notice how he puts it.

v.37 “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not

worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

“Not worthy of me.” So what does that mean? Does it mean that you earn your standing before God by the exercise of our love? Does it mean that you merit something before God, that your love earns and achieves credit that makes us worthy by your own efforts and good works? Well, no. We never become “worthy” of the grace of God, for if we were worthy, it wouldn’t be grace! If we earned it, it wouldn’t be a gift.

So what does Jesus mean, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.” I believe the answer is this, that the expression to be “worthy of me” means to live in a way that corresponds to the love and mercy which we have received. In other words, to live a life worthy of Jesus, is to live a life which reflects the effect and influence which the gospel has upon your life. And to be “not worthy of me,” with reference to Jesus, is to say you love Jesus but then to live your life in direct contradiction of that declaration. To be “not worthy of me” is to live in a way that is entirely inconsistent with the gospel, that denies the reality of Jesus’ love for you.

So it is that,

B. We must love Jesus in response to his love for us.

I believe that what he means, “to be worthy of me.”

The same sort of expression is used in,

Eph. 4:1 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”

Paul isn’t talking about earning your salvation; but he is talking about living your life in a manner that is consistent with the high calling of the gospel. And so we love Jesus, because he has first

loved us! We love Jesus as a response to his love for us. And if you don't, if you claim to believe in Jesus and claim the promise of his love for you, but fail to respond by the way that you live, you fall under this strong rebuke. You are not worthy of Jesus, not worthy to be called his disciple.

v.37-38

There we have another specific call to discipleship. A call to die.

III. JESUS CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO DIE TO THEMSELVES.

The words are plain, aren't they?

v.38-39

A. To follow Jesus is to die to yourself.

Take up your cross. That doesn't simply mean to endure some sort of difficulty in life. Rather, it means to willingly, voluntarily give up your life. To die. The cross is an instrument of death. It is the means of bringing about death. And you are to choose that path for yourself, you who are a disciple of Jesus.

So what does it mean to die to yourself? Perhaps it would help to read the words of,

Rom. 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

A living sacrifice. That means, you are not your own! John Calvin expresses it this way, "We are not our own; therefore, neither is our own reason or will to rule our acts and counsels. We are not our own; therefore, let us not make it our end to seek what may be agreeable to our carnal nature. We are not our own; therefore, as far as possible, let us forget ourselves and the things that are ours. On the other hand, we are God's; let us,

therefore, live and die to him. We are God's; therefore, let his wisdom and will preside over all our actions. We are God's; to him, then, as the only legitimate end, let every part of our life be directed. O how great the proficiency of him who, taught that he is not his own, has withdrawn the dominion and government of himself from his own reason that he may give them to God! For as the surest source of destruction to men is to obey themselves, so the only haven of safety is to have no other will, no other wisdom, than to follow the Lord wherever he leads. Let this, then be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God. By service, I mean not only that which consists in verbal obedience, but that by which the mind, divested of its own carnal feelings, implicitly obeys the call of the Spirit of God."

You are not your own! That's the point. Your life is not your own. Your body is not your own. Your money is not your own. Your time is not your own. To follow Jesus is to die to yourself. It is to take up your cross and deny yourself. That means a lot of different things. Included would be this,

Titus 2:11 "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

Dying to yourself would also mean this,

Phil. 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Let this mind be in

you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.” It’s not about you. It’s never about you. It’s always about Jesus. It’s always about humility, and self-denial; becoming obedient, taking the form of a servant.

Christians, disciples of Jesus, this is your calling. To follow Jesus is to die to yourself. It is to put to death the sinful desires and passions of your flesh. It is to put aside self-interest and self-advancement, to do away with self-promotion and self-esteem. To follow Jesus is substitute Jesus for the god of self, and seek the advancement and glory of Jesus rather than the advancement and glory of self. It’s all about Jesus, and its not about you.

It’s not even about your own life.

Mat. 16:24. “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

B. To follow Jesus is to lose your own life.

v.39

Please take these words to heart. Consider your own goals in life? Are you trying to find life? Perhaps in the form of happiness or success, pleasure or satisfaction. Are you trying to preserve your life, to achieve or preserve your security in life? If so, you will lose it. “Whoever finds his life for my sake will lose it.”

But there is that positive encouragement as well. “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” So lose your life. People of God, give up your life. Take up your cross. Offer the whole of your life, your body itself, as a living sacrifice. And when you do, you will find life in the fullest sense. And when you lose your life in this way, you will know what it is to be a disciple of Jesus.