

**Luke 12:49-53** *"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup> But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! <sup>51</sup> Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. <sup>52</sup> From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup> They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."*

Would we be better off without the gospel?

1. Jesus would no bring peace to the earth
2. Jesus would undergo a baptism for us

This is Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain was British prime minister between 1937 and 1940. He's best known for the phrase "peace for our time." That was something he declared after the Munich Agreement in 1938 when he made a pact with Hitler to give Germany part of Czechoslovakia in return for the promise not to take any more lands. This appeasement policy frustrated many because they didn't believe that it would achieve a lasting peace. Those skeptics were right. Having bought himself time to build up the German army, Hitler invaded Poland less than a year later, touching off the five-year long conflict we now call World War II. Millions of deaths probably could have been avoided had Chamberlain stood up to Nazi Germany. Of course it would have meant sending British troops to fight the Germans already in 1938, but lasting peace always has a price. You know that's true if you've ever had to stand up to a bully. As long as you keep giving him your lunch money, he's going to keep making life miserable for you.

Well, Jesus, too, teaches that lasting peace has a price. It cost Christ his life, and could cost Christians friendships. So we might be asking ourselves if the gospel and faith is worth the hassle. We might wonder if we would be better off without the gospel.

Jesus asked, *Do you think I came to bring peace on earth?* Our first thought is probably: yes. Isaiah had called him the "Prince of Peace." When Jesus was born the angels sang, "Peace on earth." On the night before Jesus' death, he told his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." (John 14:27) On Easter evening Jesus greeted his disciples, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19) And Paul rejoiced, "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Roman 5:1)

Jesus did indeed make peace between God and us. Like the bank manager who stops his bank from foreclosing on your house, which would force you out on to the streets, Jesus stopped God the Father from eternally forcing us to live on the mean streets of hell. How did he do it? By paying the debt we owed for our sins with his blood. This is not the same as a bank manager having pity on you and giving you more time to pay down your mortgage. It's like a bank manager selling his house to pay off your debt. The result? You continue to live in comfort while the bank manager lives on the streets! Who would do a thing like that? God's Son did. He left the mansions of heaven to live on the streets of 1st Century Palestine. More than that. Jesus traded his loving Father's embrace for blows meant to punish our sins.

But while Jesus came to make peace for us with God by giving his life, he did not come to make our lives peaceful. The cross means peace between God and us but in this world the cross brings the fire of opposition. *"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!* The Apostle Paul once wrote, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18) To those who believe, the cross means everything. To those who do not believe, it's less than nothing; it's foolishness.

A Christian woman once told her pastor, "The day after I was baptized was one of the hardest days of my life." Her agnostic father chose this time to berate and belittle her for her openly confessed love of Jesus. She was not prepared to take that much heat for her Christian faith, especially from her own family.

But we shouldn't be surprised by the hatred of the world toward the cross. *Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. <sup>52</sup> From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup> They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."* We should expect that those outside the church will misunderstand our faith as pride and our humility as weakness. We should expect that the world will misunderstand the teaching of God's law as restrictive and the

gospel as license to sin. We should expect that the world will try to remake God the Father into a kindly grandfather rather than the Creator to whom we are accountable. We should expect that the world will want a nice Jesus, a condoning Jesus, a peaceful Jesus and they will hate us for proclaiming the true Jesus.

Yes, the cross of Christ and its message ignites fires wherever it goes. So if you can't stand the heat, should you get out of the kitchen? That's probably pretty good advice in most situations. But it isn't good advice when it comes to dealing with the fires that start because of the cross. Unfortunately it's exactly what some Christians do when the cross starts fires in their relationships and families. They don't like the heat so they get rid of the cross. No cross, no fire. No fuss, no muss. Everybody's happy. Who needs conflict anyway? Can't we just all get along? (Daron Lindemann)

Is that what we think sometimes? Does it seem the gospel just brings us trouble in this world? Would we be better off without the gospel? If a friend disagrees with what God says about sexuality and morality, do we clam up? If someone we love is staying away from church, do we say nothing because we don't want to upset them? Yet listen closely to what Jesus said about such an attitude. "Anyone who loves his father or mother [son or daughter] more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). If we think it's better to keep the peace in the family than to share and live the truth about sin and grace, Jesus says that we have put our family, and really ourselves, before him.

Jesus never asked us to take up our pillows and follow him. You will recall that he did ask us to take up our cross and to be ready to suffer all for him." (Meditations, Vol. 48, no. 3, p. 81) And we do so when we see how willing he was to suffer for us. <sup>50</sup> *But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!* "Christ would tolerate no half-way measures. He donned no asbestos robe to protect himself. He did not cave in to the taunts of his enemies who dared him to come down from the cross. Jesus came to be our burnt offering, to suffer the all-consuming flames of God's judgment against our guilt." (Meditations, Vol. 41, no. 4, p. 6)

We've all had appointments that made us feel anxious – appointments to the dentist for example. But that's nothing compared to the dread that Jesus experienced in waiting for this baptism of fire. When we go to the dentist we do so because it's for our good, and we can take a friend along to lend support and encouragement. When Jesus kept his appointment with the cross he did so because it was good for us, and he went alone, jeered by his enemies, abandoned by his disciples, and rejected by his heavenly Father.

While Jesus shuddered at the thought of going to the cross he did not shrink from the task. Instead, he kept his focus on the outcome. The writer to the Hebrews said in our lesson earlier, "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2)

And he told us, "And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

With eyes fixed on Jesus, let's carry the gospel forward and with it the cross of opposition. A follower of Christ is to be committed not only to Christ and not only to his Church, but also to the mission of the Church. The mission of the Church is to be the love of Christ in all situations in life. The mission of the Church is to spread the gospel so that other people can know Jesus as their Savior.

The great temptation of Christianity is always to have a sugarcoated Christianity with a sugarcoated gospel, with a sugarcoated cross, and to eliminate this great call to discipleship for the world. Our greatest temptation is that the cares, riches and pleasures of this life become more important than the call of Jesus Christ. And so the security of family, wife and friends and jobs and homes and vacations become more important to us than Christ and his mission.

The gospel will bring opposition. We still need to carry our cross and follow Jesus. Just as Jesus faced opposition, so will we. Would we be better off without the gospel? In this life we would have peace, but not in eternity. The fire of battle that comes with the cross isn't nearly as hot as the fire of hell that comes without the cross. No, we are not better off without the gospel.