

Matthew 10:34-39

³⁴“Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. ³⁷ “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. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

“Jesus’ Truth Causes Conflict in a Sinful World”

1. Because the world hates his truth
2. Because people want to compromise with his truth
3. Because people refuse to suffer in the cause of truth

Sermon for Pentecost 6, July 12, 2020 St. Paul’s, Green Garden

Text: Matthew 10:34-39

Theme: “Jesus’ Truth Causes Conflict in a Sinful World”

In the name of Jesus whose truth is our life, Dear Christian friends,

In some Christian circles you will hear a great deal about how a person who wants to become a Christian, a child of God, must make his or her ‘decision for Christ’. They say you must make a decision to follow him and belong to him. But almost nothing is said about the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing a person to faith. So the burden of conversion, the burden of coming to faith, is placed on the unbeliever who still only knows his sin. He has no power to work faith in his own heart. What a tremendous burden this places on a person who is told he must make a decision to believe and trust Jesus, yet he has no power of his own to come to faith. And even when he does come to believe that Jesus is his Savior he then thinks he is partly responsible for his own faith rather than giving all glory to God and his power.

We come to understand how true these things are when we read Jesus’ words today. The night Jesus was born, the angels proclaimed ‘peace on earth, good will to men.’ The angels were proclaiming that this is what God is doing for people by sending his son into the world—he declares peace. Today, however, we hear Jesus saying that he has not come to bring peace but a sword.

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Though this sounds like a contradiction of the angels' message, he is really telling us that the world's reaction to the message of peace and forgiveness causes conflict in a sinful world. It does so 1. Because the world hates his truth 2. Because people want to compromise with his truth 3. Because people refuse to suffer in the cause of truth.

People don't like dealing with these words of Jesus because they have a flawed idea of Jesus. How could Jesus say he had not come to bring peace? How could Jesus say that instead of peace he had come to bring the sword of strife and division? Isn't that a contradiction? Maybe Jesus didn't even speak these words. But Jesus did say them, he said them for a reason and by them he wants to instruct us, about ourselves and the world. The context of these words help us understand what Jesus meant by these words and what he wants us to learn.

Jesus was finishing his instructions to his disciples before he sent them on their way to bring the message of His kingdom to their fellow Israelites. They needed to know that while their message would bring God's peace to the hearts of people whose consciences were convicted because of their sins, the same message would become a cause of conflict for others. Why? People hate the message, that they need Jesus in order to be saved. People do not want Jesus to give them free forgiveness. The natural, sinful nature wants to offer God its own good deeds for our sins. The apostle Paul admitted that though he had become a believer, there had been a time in his life when he thought that he could do enough good things that God would accept him. He admitted to the Philippians that his false belief put him at odds with God and at odds with those who were believers: **“we ... put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴though I myself have reasons for such confidence. ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”** You heard Paul mention the sword. He said, **“as for zeal, persecuting the church.”** He hated Christ and his message. But he couldn't reach Jesus so he took out his hatred of His message on his followers. The sinful nature is so opposed to the message that we need Jesus as our Savior, that it lashes out, it fights violently against it. This is the sword that Jesus is talking about. The sword represents the hatred and the division that Jesus' message brings. He says that we have free forgiveness and free eternal life in heaven because his holy life and his innocent death stopped God's sword from coming down on us and sending us to hell where we deserved to go. When

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a famous person in the broadcast industry dies what do all his colleagues say? “He or she was a good person.” No he wasn’t, nor are we good people, that is why all of us will suffer death as a consequence of sin. But the world hates this message. And you see this even in religious circles.

Many churches today don’t preach Christ crucified, or if they do they preach Christ crucified so that you won’t have to suffer poverty; or Christ crucified so that you will have freedom from economic or racial oppression; or some preach Christ was crucified so that you will have success in life and be happy. But seldom will you hear Christ crucified for your sin and my sin and the world’s sin because this message shows God’s sword of justice against our sins and the world can’t bear to look at it. But when this message is clearly stated it shows the stark contrast between my sinful human pride and Jesus’ humility in dying for my sins and giving me free forgiveness. This message brings a sword that often divides families. Jesus said, “ **For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.** ³⁶ **A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.** I am sure you have heard as I have, too many sad stories of families divided because some members are believers and some are not. And that causes conflict when some members want to hear the word at worship while other members of the family want to stay far away from the church and the message that need to trust Jesus to take away their sins.

And friends, Jesus gave us these words so that we will know the world’s reaction to his message. He also wants us to know that when people oppose the message it is not we who are guilty. The world often shouts so loudly that it practices the principle, ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ But when we show them Jesus’ full message that we are all sinners who deserve his punishment, but, that Jesus has paid for our sins in full they call us unloving. And maybe it just so happens that your conscience is smarting from another sin for which you have recently repented and now someone accuses you of being unloving because of the message of Jesus. We may feel that we need to repent again. But Jesus makes it plain here that His word about the kingdom is a sword that causes division between those who believe and those who do not, even between family members, sometimes to the point of becoming enemies.

And while we fight against our own sinful nature that also opposes this message, we also need to watch our own hearts and words so that we do not compromise the truth of Jesus’ message, for Jesus tells us plainly that his truth

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causes conflict because people think they can ride the fence and compromise about his message.

In that way, some people believe they can avoid conflict. People who want to be Jesus' followers may ask, "But how can I oppose my father or mother? How can I go against my son or daughter? Surely God doesn't expect me to give up my family, does he?" But consider: Why does someone oppose the Christian faith? They do so because they oppose Jesus' free forgiveness. In their pride they hate Jesus' perfection and want to substitute their own deeds that God calls filthy rags.

Jesus makes it plain that if we compromise the truth of his message with those who oppose his truth, namely, that he had to die on the cross for our sins, then we are not worthy to receive it. And when I say 'compromise' Jesus doesn't mean we shouldn't love the person who opposes Christ, nor should we turn our back on them. But he does mean we dare not soft pedal the message and make it seem as if they can have Jesus on their own terms. "**Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.**"

It happens in our missions around the world, especially in places such as Hong Kong and Japan. Families are so steeped in heathen religion and its beliefs that when one member becomes a Christian he is actually disowned. He is shunned by family. Buddhism and Shintoism in Japan involves the worship of one's ancestors. If a member of the family, son or daughter becomes a Christian, that person's life changes. They worship Christ, not their ancestors. That can be a real threat to someone's older relatives, because when they die they hope their descendants will worship them and so they believe they will achieve the status of gods. So when a son or daughter becomes a Christian the older family members believe that they have betrayed the family and they are disowned—put out of the family. Is this a burden for them? Yes, because Christians in Japan and Hong Kong have found the comfort of Christ's message but many times their family members won't even give them a chance to explain. Yet, the child of God will not compromise, will not give in and pretend that Christianity and idol worship can stand side by side, for they cannot.

Are you ready to stay with Jesus even if family members or friends disown you for your faith? When you understand what Jesus suffered for you, not just the scourging, the thorns and the pain of crucifixion, but that he suffered the punishment of hell in your place for your sins; since he was willing to do all that for you, isn't it clear that your soul is priceless to him since he was willing to give his priceless life for you? So should not my own soul be that precious to

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me that I am not willing to lose it even for a friend or family member who doesn't love Jesus? And isn't your friend or relatives' soul that precious to you that you want him or her to know Jesus' love for them. When you hold onto Jesus without compromise, you send that message to others, loudly and clearly. "Jesus is my priceless treasure, I want him for eternity." And when you send this message understand then, that you and I will necessarily suffer for the sake of Christ's truth.

Yet this truth also causes conflict within those who face suffering. Those who oppose Jesus see the opposition to his message and they do not want to suffer. Jesus is very upfront with us: "**Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.**" The cross Jesus expects us to take is the cross of suffering that we bear because of our Christian faith. People Who oppose Jesus will ridicule us. When they are against Jesus they will mock us. When they call 'Christ crucified' a crutch for people who can't stand up on their own they are shooting Satan's arrows at us. Jesus persecution calls a cross. Just as the Romans made those who were condemned to die carry the instrument upon which they were to die so our Lord Jesus reminds us that when we suffer unjustly because we are his disciples it is just a small reminder of the suffering that he endured so that we will have unending life with him. Jesus does not tell us this to guilt us into not complaining. Rather he says rejoice and be glad because this is the way they treated the prophets who were before you. Nor can we return something to Jesus by our suffering. No, he is telling us, this is what a Christian's life will be like in a world that hates Jesus. But when it happens we know that we stand alongside believers of old who were also persecuted. God kept them faithful. He will also give us his strength so that we remain faithful.

We remember Judas who gave up Jesus for money primarily because of greed and perhaps even the fear that he might suffer poverty. We remember Peter who almost lost his salvation because he was afraid of suffering the pain of death at the hands of Jesus' enemies. You see, if we are not willing to bear Jesus' cross we will try to find our life in the things of this world. The world often encourages people to, "follow your heart." But often the translation of those words is, "follow your sinful nature" because that is all the world knows. And Jesus is clear about what happens when we think we can find our life by following the sinful nature: "**Whoever finds his life will lose it.**"

Do you see? The message of Jesus causes conflict because people do not want to suffer in the cause of truth. Our sinful nature convinces us that we

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should not have to suffer and it refuses to do so. Notice that this is just what Judas and Peter both did. And it is what we do, too when we don't speak up in defense of Christ or his truth when someone makes a joke about Jesus or mocks the Christian faith. And we may find ourselves refusing to suffer for our Savior's cause when we laugh along with those who mock him. But Jesus asks, how can there be any fellowship between darkness and light? And when I recognize that I have run away from my cross and Christ's cross by refusing to suffer all because I wanted the approval of people, I repent and ask for Jesus' mercy. And once again, his priceless death on the cross covers me completely and all I can do is praise and thank him for his perfect sacrifice. And then I want to redirect my life to serving him and taking my cross to follow him daily.

The writer of Hebrews said: "**The word of God is swift and powerful, sharper than any double-edged sword; it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.**" This is the sword that convicts us of sin. And when it convicts us and we believe the message of Christ crucified, then the same sword will also bring conflict in the world. The conflict is not Christ's fault. Yet he is the cause of it, but only because he loved us enough to shed his blood for a world at odds with him. May our Lord continually give us the strength to stand with our victor Savior in this conflict. Amen.