

Matthew 10:32-42 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. ³⁴ "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those 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 And whoever does not take 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. ⁴⁰ "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹ The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

Woah, did I read the right sermon text? Did I perhaps copy and paste the wrong text into the bulletin? That doesn't sound like a text you'd be able to preach a good, encouraging sermon on! Well, no it is the right text, though perhaps as you read through it here with me, maybe you had the same reaction as I did when I first selected it from this week's texts—which was I had to cringe. It's a rather shocking text. It's even really kind of painful to read, especially when you start thinking of all of Jesus' implications with regard to you! He's really not sugarcoating anything with these words.

Now, even though it feels like it could have happened 8 months ago, Christmas took place only 3 months ago. On Christmas Eve, we heard the children of our congregation standing up front here in the Christmas Eve service proclaiming the words of the angels! ***"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"*** (Luke 2:14) Well, a lot has changed in our world in these last three months, evidently even that message has changed! Then it was ***"On earth peace,"*** and now, just three months later during Lent we just read ***"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.*** Was it a change of mission? Did He have a change of mind? Is Jesus simply contradicting the angels? Were the angels wrong? I thought Jesus came to bring peace on earth!

Do not misunderstand Jesus here. He did come to bring peace, but it's not the type of peace most people try to achieve. Jesus is attacking here the prevailing mindset of a majority of people in the world and even a majority of Christians, the mindset of "Peace at all costs"—that the number one thing we must have is unity with one another. In order to achieve that, it is said that we must spend less time focusing on doctrines and differences, and more time on loving one another. This type of thinking can achieve some sort of imperfect peace on earth between people—but it does not achieve peace with God. Instead, this "peace at all costs" mindset jeopardizes peace with God entirely, and it is really peace between us and God that Jesus came to establish. To that end, as we consider these difficult words from Jesus, the theme for this morning is:

Peace Through Pain

- I. Jesus will divide.
- II. Jesus will offend.
- III. Jesus will save.

There is a rule of etiquette that I'm sure you've all heard, *"Never talk about religion or politics."* This general principal goes on to say, *"These subjects are highly contentious and usually result in heated argument instead of general agreement."* There's still plenty of stuff left to talk about: sports, music, movies, work, world news, your family; but politics and religion, it's best just not to talk about that stuff, or at least that's what they say. Notice the reason that they give for avoiding these topics—they say it's so that you can avoid arguments, so that you can have earthly peace, which, "Who doesn't want that?"

I'll tell you one person who does not follow that rule, one person who is not concerned with earthly peace and does not care one iota about that rule of etiquette: Jesus Christ. He says in our text, ***"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."*** Not that he's going to whip out a sword and start cutting off people's heads, but He's talking about the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. God's Word is described frequently as a sword throughout scripture, because just like a sharp sword cuts things in two, dividing them, so the Word of God also divides—and it always does so.

That rule of etiquette was completely right in one regard: Religion does cause contention, particularly religion based upon the true word of God. This is because mankind's natural stance is to revolt entirely against God's Word. So if you bring up religion, or particularly if you bring up what the true God says, if you speak openly about Jesus Christ as your Savior, you can expect division to occur in the workplace or at school or among friends—or even in your own homes. Jesus goes on to say ***"For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."***³⁶ ***And a person's enemies will be those of his own household."***

There will be people in your lives, and probably already are people in your lives who have no interest in the Word of God, or in Christ as their Savior, and it may even be people as close as your own family. And the temptation when this type of relationship comes up, is simply to avoid the issue, to *"Not bring up religion, because it will make things awkward, and I know they don't believe it and I wish they did, but let's just try to keep things peaceful around here, can't we?"* Now, it's not that every conversation you have with such a person has to be about religion, but the temptation is to avoid the topic again and again and again, and soon you've avoided it altogether because you are prioritizing earthly peace.

And that's very dangerous, for Jesus goes on to say in v. 37-39 ***"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 ***And whoever does not take 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."*** The Word of God does indeed divide us from the people of this world, even sometimes members of our own families. Because that's exactly what God did for each of us when He called us to faith through the Gospel. He divided us; He set us apart. He says that ***"you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession."*** (1 Peter 2:9) You have been divided from the rest of the world. Jesus says in John 15 that ***"As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world."*** And then He goes on to say ***"That is why the world hates you."*** (John 15:19)

As elect children of God, drawn out of this world of sin to be God's eternal possession, Jesus says that we can expect this division. We can expect the world to hate us. But we are often tempted to try to hold all these things together anyways—to still have our faith on one hand, and on the other hand have all of our family and friends and enjoyment and everything else in our life, and to keep those things entirely separate in order to avoid any mess. We want to be Christians and cling onto everything else as well. A "Have our cake and eat it too" sort of mindset. We want peace with God, but we also want peace with the World. But Jesus is saying in our text that His Word divides us from the world, and if we are focused on holding onto the things of this world instead of holding onto Christ, we will lose Christ.

Jesus divides. His Word divides families and friends. It also offends because when we read about this division taking place and what is expected of us, it is offensive to us. Offensive like if you wake up and catch a whiff of your own bad morning breath, and it's offensive. You are repulsed because you realize how disgusting your own mouth is. And that's how God's law works on us, it makes us realize how disgusting we are. What we see is offensive. All this talk about choosing God over family is offensive because it makes you realize that you have

made the opposite choice time and time again. It makes you realize just how impossibly high God's expectation is of you, and how terribly short you have come of following God's will.

I'm having instruction classes with a woman named Ann, who is just wonderful to be around and if you haven't met her yet I really recommend you introducing yourself to her. In our last lesson we were doing a deep dive into God's Ten Commandments, and she said she'd studied them before, but never really studied them in depth as we were now. She said that *"It was shocking to study them, because it's easy to go through life thinking you're doing pretty good, but when you really see the entirety of what God expects, you realize just how guilty you are."* And she was absolutely 100% correct, and we see that particularly with this command from God to love him more than our family. We all know the first commandment, **"You shall have no other gods."** On the surface level, that's easy. Just don't worship or pray to anything other than God. But here God shows the extent of what He means—you must love Him more than your own family! And now we see that we are truly idolaters.

Now when Jesus says these words about father and son and daughter and mother-in-law and so on, He's quoting from the prophet Micah. Micah had used these phrases to refer to the terrible spiritual condition of the Children of Israel at his time. You see, the general godlessness and rampant wickedness and selfishness of those people had led to a total breakdown of the family in Israel, where it didn't have to be politics or religion that would set people off, anything and everything disrupted their peace. The family structure in Israel had been completely lost, and sons hated their fathers and parents hated their children, and so on and so forth—they were godless!

Jesus is now stealing those pictures of hatred and using it here to tell the apostles what people would treat them like when they went out into the world with the Word of God, and it's the same for us. By its very nature, and because of the sinful nature of people, God is telling us that people will have this resentful reaction to God's Word—potentially even in our own families! And if we're being honest with ourselves, those are the conversations we dread the most, possibly even to the point of just not saying anything.

There are many times in my life, and I think you can each agree with regard to your own lives, many times when I prioritized earthly peace with someone over God's Word. Many times when I would have rather just maintained a temporary comfortable environment with someone over trying to bring them the eternal peace that only God can provide. That's very shameful, and this is very dangerous for us too, because Jesus warns us in our text ***whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. ... And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*** ³⁹ ***Whoever finds his life will lose it...***

These words are hard to take, because it sure seems like God is pointing His finger directly at me. These words leaves no excuse, no wiggle room, and that's good, for our sinful flesh is an excellent wiggler. Our flesh will use any excuse it can to avoid doing what God wants us to do. Our flesh will strive to find any margin of gray area where it can live, so that you can have peace with God and peace with people at the same time, just living in the middle. Our flesh will latch onto God's Forgiveness and use that as an excuse to continue right on with sin, *"It's ok, I can always ask God for forgiveness later."*

Our sinful flesh will often wear away at God's Word, smooth it out, wear it away until it's no longer difficult to try to follow. It will chip away at the cross that Christ asks us to bear until we can place it conveniently in our pocket. And if we do that, then Jesus' words are a word of convenience for us, where we can live whatever life we want, have the comfort of this life and still expect comfort in eternity.

Truly, Jesus' words here offer no such luxury. Jesus' call to each of us must be extreme, it must be the type of command that causes us to be offended by our wretchedness, because if is not—that is if we've sufficiently weathered it away to being something we can handle, a command that we can manage—then we are fooled into thinking that every problem, even the road to eternal life, that we can handle it all on our own! Instead,

Jesus gives us such strict and impossible commands here so that we can do nothing more than drop to our knees in repentance, realizing we have sinned; realizing that we are idolaters for prioritizing so many relationships over our relationship with God.

In this way then, it's very good that Jesus uses His Word to divide and to offend us; because it must do this because only when we are brought to our knees are we ready for His Word to save us. Jesus' Word must be offensive to us, because then when we realize how totally and completely lost and weak we are. And then we are ready to hear Christ's Words, for He says, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** He's saying, "Yes, you are weak, and wretched, and have fallen infinitely short of My expectations, and yet My grace is strong enough to overcome your weakness."

When we despair of our own strength in every way, then we can rest exclusively in Christ's strength. Then we can find that God's Call which demands everything from us also gives everything to us through Jesus. Jesus, who did not try to wear down the commands of his heavenly Father or chip away at His cross, but instead bore the heavy load of the entirety of His Father's expectations along with all of our sins, and He bore them even to His death. Jesus, who did not prioritize his earthly relationships, but even was forced to leave family that did not believe in Him, but He did it all because His eyes were focused on bringing peace between you and God.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us **"The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."** ¹³ **And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."** Yes, the Sword of God's Word even divides us, cutting to our hearts and revealing the depths of our sin—but He also wielded his Sword against His own Son because of it, crucifying Him together with all of our sin, so that none of your sin or guilt is left. And now taking our sin in hand, we can leave it before the Lord's cross, and trust His promise **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** (1 John 1:9)

Jesus closes our text with further blessings, saying, **Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.** ⁴¹ **The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.** ⁴² **And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."**

Four different times, with four different pictures, Jesus describes the same thing: receiving the Word of God. He says if you receive a prophet because he's a prophet, that is because he's bringing God's Word. if you receive a righteous person because he's righteous because of the Word of God he's bringing, that is to say if you receive the Word of God, you are receiving an eternal reward. Because Jesus says, receiving His Word, you are receiving Jesus Himself. You are receiving the perfect righteousness and holiness of Christ, as if it were your own. Because it is through His Word that God rewards each of you. In His Word, He declares you to be righteous; He declares you to be children of God and heirs of eternal life and salvation; He declares that though He has done all that was required, you will be the one rewarded.

And finally, we are left with peace. It is painful to get there. It does require division. It does require offense. It does require us to take a good long look at ourselves and to despair of all of our strength and all of our goodness; to realize we have nothing left to offer God. And then God offers you peace, that these sins have been taken care of. They were nailed to the cross of Calvary, and you stand forgiven. So yes, the angels were right, God did come to bring peace on earth. And to you here today, that's exactly what God has given you. Peace with God. Peace *through pain*, certainly, but God's peace indeed. Thanks be to God. Amen.