

## **“Division Brings Peace”**

### **Matthew 10:34-42**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace and prosperity—that’s the great promise of a life well-lived, right? The world proclaims that if you do all the right things by working hard enough, doing good, and looking out for your best interests, you will find yourself living in wealth, peace, and tranquility as you wait for the end of your days. Let’s assume for a moment that were true, and that, once you achieve such glory for yourself, you will live in peace and quietness all your days. You would find yourself content in worldly riches, and, as the Lord teaches in the parable of the rich fool, that is all well and good until your life is demanded of you. The promise of peace and quietness fades, and shows itself to be nothing but a lie and a deception of the evil one. When your life is demanded of you, your riches will then be divided, cut into pieces, and separated among whoever is left.

But, even more than that, your soul will be divided from your body, and the promise of reunion is one of eternal judgment instead of peace. The prophet Jeremiah alludes to that in our Old Testament lesson today. He says “As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, the it will be known that the Lord has truly sent that prophet.” The promise of peace is a rare thing, and one that even the Lord Jesus says is not the reason for which He has come into the world. And yet, for the believer, this division which the Lord’s sword brings, ultimately brings peace to those who have faith in Him. This division amongst families in our text points to a greater division to come—the division that awaits all people at the end of all things when Christ divides risen mankind into sheep and goats, into condemned and justified.

Our text this morning is one that often leaves people scratching their heads. Didn’t the angels proclaim “peace on earth and goodwill toward men” at the birth of Jesus? And here He is saying that He does not come to bring peace to the world, but a sword. The edge of a sword divides. It cuts through and parts one thing from another. So, is this the Lord’s way of saying that He has come to cut the enemies of God in two and lead an earthly rebellion against the armies of Rome? No, of course not. For the answer to this we must look to Scripture, and it makes this passage all too clear in the context of what Christ is saying. Hebrews 4:12, “For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts intentions of the heart.” He has come to bring the sword of His Word to divide the hearts of man, to divide believer from unbeliever, and His elect from the willfully reprobate.

The sword of Jesus first divides your own heart. Through the work of the Law, you find yourself to be unworthy of His love—a poor, miserable sinner who can do no good of your own will. By the sin of Adam which you have inherited in your sinful flesh, even when you seek to do good, you are utterly incapable of doing so, because your sinful flesh seeks only its own self-gratification and elevation. And that is true for all who dwell in this world—past, present, or future. It is that very sinfulness that leads to the strife and conflict among families, as Jesus says in Matthew. But it all begins at the heart, at the division of soul and spirit of every individual person. The Word of the Lord brings division and separates the flesh and the soul. Through the mirror of the Law it shows you your sin and the Holy Spirit, working faith in your heart, brings you to the realization of repentance which leads to forgiveness in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:20).

The Law of God though, is good and right. Its work of showing you your utter depravity is its true purpose, and by doing the work of the Lord to divide your soul from the flesh, it brings you to the point where you can hear the saving Gospel. In faith, you know that Jesus came into the world, died, and rose for your justification. And you might think that's the end of it, right? You've seen your worthlessness, been brought to faith by the work of the Spirit, so everything will just be "hunky-dory" from here on out. Oh, if only that were true. Jesus said He did not come to bring peace, but a sword. There is no peace in the face of this sinful world even for the believer who has been justified by His grace alone. In fact, that lack of peace is amplified for the believer into utter hatred and enmity. And that is true even among your own household, for fidelity to the Lord comes before even your family.

Christ says in verse 37 of our text, "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 is not meant to be an easy pill to swallow that the Lord has given His followers to take. In fact, He calls it a cross that you must bear, following Him to His own cross where He will redeem the world. Family strife that centers around the faith is something most of us have to battle in this life, and Satan uses that strife to his advantage at every turn. All too often, believers give in to his temptations to abandon the truth of God's sword—His Holy Word—in favor of making the faith more palatable to family members who have become hostile to it, or have given into their sins and shunned the Lord in favor of the things of the flesh. Stand strong in your faith in the face of such temptations. It is not meant to be an easy thing to face such enmity among the ones you love, but as Jesus says, to give up your life is to find the true life that you have in Christ Jesus.

He is your strength, your resolve, and the answer to every battle. To take your cross and follow Him is not something that you must do of your own will without any help. He has given you the help you need to accomplish this on your behalf. You have been given faith in Him, the One who has done all that is necessary to bring you out of the dregs of sin and death and has given you everlasting life. You have found your life in Him because it is He that has given it to you. So, when you face the battles of family and friends who rebuke Him in favor of the world, “Do not love the world,” as John says in his first epistle. Love the one who has given His own life for you, shed His blood for the forgiveness of your sins, and raised that you might have His eternal inheritance as a son of the Most High God. You are never alone in the face of strife, because Christ dwells in you as His baptized child. You look down the barrel of the devil’s gun as he believes he has trapped you like a fish in a barrel knowing that Christ has already defeated him and his wiles. You call him a liar, because Jesus has made you righteous in the sight of your heavenly Father, and he no longer has any power over you.

Jesus’ blood brings peace, but only after the sword has pierced Him for your sake. In this cup you find the peace of the Lord which comes from His sacrifice that has been declared to be the perfect atonement for all of the world. That truth is applied to you in faith, and as you receive His very body and blood which imparts forgiveness, life, and salvation, you are strengthened to go forth into this life knowing the glorious peace that He has brought to your soul. He is the peace that is promised by the sword of His Word, and through that sword, you no longer have to fear the problems of this world as one who looks forward in joy to the peace of heaven. It will continue to hurt when facing the struggles of life that impact those closest to you, but none are closer to you than your Lord and Savior, who has died that you might live and has promised you His eternal rest.

Using His holy sword, the Lord divides for Himself a remnant of the world that are His holy people. By virtue of your baptism into the death of Christ, you are among that remnant as one who has faith in the salvation that He has won for you in His death upon the cross. The sword does not come for you, but for all of those around you who have no faith, and have chosen death and eternal destruction as their lot. Because of His grace, your sin has been taken as Christ’s own, and you have been made righteous in the sight of the Father in heaven by His sacrifice for you. There is no need to fear the pain and suffering of this world, for the glory of heaven awaits you as a child of God. Division will come among you, whether that be from family, friends, or any of the other people in your life that the devil chooses to manipulate to his ends. But you have the hope of salvation—the hope of eternal life with Jesus—and that promise overtakes the despair of this life, even though at times that despair sure does feel like it is winning.

The cross of persecution and ridicule from those who are closest to you that have turned away from the faith is the hardest thing for any believer to pick up and bear in this life. The division that His Word of promise creates, though, brings peace to those whom He loves. Thanks be to God for His bounteous grace and mercy, because without such a treasured gift you would have no hope to console your aching heart. Jesus has lost His life that you might find yours. For His sake you have been given pardon and peace, and you are protected from the sword of His wrath by His precious blood. In the face of such hatred from the world, turn to one another for consolation, caring for the righteous in Christ, and thus receiving a righteous person's reward. That reward is everlasting life in God's glorious presence, and it belongs to you already as you await its full consummation. You have been cut away from the sin and death that faces the world, and the house of the Lord in the heavenly dwelling place is yours, where you will be with all those who have gone before you in the faith—where peace will abound for all eternity. Amen.