

True Peace

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[0:00] I think it's fair to say one of the most unsettling things Jesus ever said is the line that we just heard read from the middle of the middle of the aisle here.

This statement that Jesus makes that comes like a slap in the face in the middle of this gospel where he says, do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.

I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. When we first read that, many people react and think this can't possibly be right. This can't be what the original Greek said. This can't be what Jesus actually said.

Maybe it's a mistranslation or maybe somebody at a later point added it in and they were feeling particularly angry that day. You read this and you think this can't be right. Jesus, after all, is referred to in the Bible as the Prince of Peace.

How can he say, I don't come to bring peace? When he's born, the angels announce, now that this child is here, there's going to be peace on earth.

[1:02] How could he possibly say he didn't come to bring peace? The reason is because Jesus is pressing into a very hard truth, what we're going to grapple with this morning, that not all peace is true peace.

Not all peace is true peace. There's a difference between true peace and false peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, which means he's the one who offers true peace to the world.

But in order to bring true peace, Jesus first has to disrupt the false peace that stands in the way. So, this is what we're going to look at in this passage in Matthew chapter 10.

And we're going to break this into three parts. We're going to look at the lie of false peace, and then the sword of true peace. What does this reference to a sword mean? And then finally, the way into peace, the kind of peace that Jesus brings.

The lie of false peace, the sword of true peace, and then the way into peace. Let's pray. Our Lord in heaven, we thank you. We thank you for the fact that you're here with us. And we thank you that we don't need to do something to invoke your presence, like the pagan gods who needed to be awakened with clanging symbols.

[2:15] They need to be convinced to pay attention. Lord, you are here and attending to us on a level that we can't even possibly fathom. You know what we need already. You're ready and eager to give it.

And so, Lord, we pray that as every good father gives good gifts to their children, even more that you, as our heavenly father, would give the good gift of your word. And that through your written word, we would come face to face with the living word, Jesus Christ.

And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. So, friends, first we're going to look at the lie of false peace. When Jesus makes this shocking statement, and make no mistake, it would have been every bit as shocking to his first audience, hearers, as it is to us.

It's shocking when you first read it until you understand the context of what he's talking about. See, often when people think about peace, they like peace. We like the idea of peace. But often when people think about peace, what we think of is merely the absence of conflict.

It's merely the absence of conflict. But the kind of peace that Jesus brings goes far beyond that. At this place in the gospel, in Matthew 10, Jesus has already in this gospel been announcing the kingdom, announcing the coming of the kingdom of God.

[3:29] The good news that he is preaching is repent for the kingdom of God is drawn near. And so, in Matthew 10, this is a discourse that commentaries refer to as a missionary discourse.

And that's because Jesus is sending his disciples out to announce the coming of his kingdom, first to Israel, and then as you move through the chapter, to the whole world, to the Gentiles.

And the news that they're announcing is this. The true king has come. His kingdom is here. And he has come as the true king to set the world free.

That's the good news. And Jesus explicitly warns them that they're going to face tremendous opposition. They're going to be attacked. They're going to be maligned.

They're going to be slandered. They're going to be persecuted. They're going to be dragged in front of authorities, both Jewish and Gentile. And they'll demand that they give an answer for what they're doing, for the nonsense that they're preaching.

[4:29] And the reason that they're going to face such awful opposition wherever they go is because Jesus is sending his disciples into occupied territory.

He's sending them into occupied territory. Historians among you may remember and be familiar with the story of Denmark during World War II.

At the beginning of World War II, Denmark declared themselves neutral. But in 1940, Germany invaded and Denmark fell under Nazi occupation.

And at first, the approach in Denmark was to cooperate, to go along, to get along. And so for most people, even though Germany invaded, life didn't immediately change all that much.

Shops stayed open. And children continued to go to school. The Danish government actually continued to function for a little while. So people continued buying groceries, and they went to work, and they raised families.

[5:28] And people tried to carry on and pretend like everything was normal. So on the surface, everything seemed okay. Life seemed almost normal. But beneath the surface, Denmark was not free.

A hostile power had taken control. There were German soldiers in country. There were collaborators and informants, and you never really knew who you could trust.

There was censorship. There was propaganda. And so eventually the time came when every Dane had to make a decision. Will I continue to cooperate with the occupying force, or will I join the resistance?

And every Dane had to choose. And friends, this is the kind of world that Jesus describes. He says that we live in a world that is under occupation by spiritual evil.

But it's not obvious all the time. It's not like people walk around saying, I serve Satan. I mean, depending on where you live, you're probably not going to hear that every day. The world seems almost normal.

[6:37] And it's easy to believe that you can be in a spiritual neutral place. People are living their lives and going to work and watching the World Cup and arguing about politics and going on vacation.

Life seems almost normal. But beneath the surface, spiritual evil has woven itself into our systems, into our relationships, into our desires, into our fears.

And as this passage draws out, into our loyalties. So, when Jesus sends out His disciples, they are carrying a very specific message.

A resistance movement has begun. The true King has come. He's here. And His kingdom is breaking into the world. And every human being, sooner or later, is going to have to make a decision.

Will I continue to cooperate with the occupying force? Or will I join the resistance? And this is really the difference between true peace and false peace.

[7:49] See, false peace means doing whatever you have to do to avoid conflict. False peace is pretending like everything's okay. False peace is saying whatever you do, don't rock the boat.

Don't be controversial. True peace is only possible if you're willing to resist the occupying force. And that means conflict is inevitable.

True peace is often only found on the far side of conflict. Specifically, the conflict of resisting those who are in power over this world.

And so, this is the lie of false peace that begins to be exposed here. False peace, friends, is not peace at all. It's surrender with a smile.

And I would argue that we see examples of false peace everywhere in our daily lives. False peace is the unspoken rule that nobody mentions dad's drinking.

[8:57] False peace is the unspoken rule that nobody mentions dad's drinking. False peace is the unspoken rule that nobody mentions dad's drinking. False peace is that married couple that never

fight.

Because they're afraid to be honest about how they feel. False peace is parents who regularly give in to their child's tantrums. Because they just want the house to be quiet.

And they're exhausted. Right? False peace is saying it's not a big deal when it's actually crushing you on the inside. False peace is keeping all of your relationships shallow because you're afraid of being rejected.

False peace is saying I'm just being supportive when in reality you're enabling destructive behavior patterns. False peace is silence in the face of injustice.

Like we saw in so many, it's heartbreaking to say, in so many Christian churches during civil rights. Right? We just want to keep the peace. We just want to keep the peace. Silence is a soul that says I'm fine.

[10:13] I don't need God. While numbing ourselves with scrolling and shopping and sex. False peace, friends, this is the problem with false peace. False peace is the way of the kingdom of darkness.

That is how life is done in the kingdom of darkness. False peace is a covering that allows evil to fester underneath. It's a veneer of calm.

Concealing captivity. So, this is the lie of false peace. So, let me ask you before we move to the next point. It's worth doing a survey of your life and of your relationships and asking yourself, where in my life am I settling for false peace?

Where am I calling something peace just because no one is arguing at the moment? You know, and it could be in your family. It could be in your friend group or in your marriage or in your parenting.

Or it could be in your own soul and in your relationship with God. Areas where we would rather just not have conflict. And so, we're just going to look the other way.

[11:20] Or we're going to minimize. Or we're going to deny. Or we're going to pretend it's not there. Jesus loves us too much to leave us in the captivity of false peace because He came to set us free.

This is the lie of false peace. Now, as we move forward, we see the sword of true peace. Jesus says, I did not come to bring peace, false peace, but a sword. Hopefully, it's clear, but let's just make it very clear.

The sword is a metaphor. Jesus is making it clear, has made it clear a number of times in the Gospels that His kingdom does not come through violence. There's actually a place later on when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and He is about to be arrested.

And His disciples want to defend Him. And one disciple draws his sword and cuts off the ear of one of the soldiers. And Jesus rebukes him sharply. And then Jesus heals the man's ear.

And He says, my kingdom does not come this way. It doesn't come through violence. The sword is a metaphor. The sword represents the disruption of false peace.

[12:26] The sword represents the inevitable separation between those who join the resistance and follow Jesus and those who don't. And as we said, everybody's going to have to make that decision at some point.

So at some point sooner or later, this choice is going to divide people, even people who are very close. In the example, if you think back to the example of Denmark, when Denmark was occupied by the Nazis, eventually, as I said, every Dane had to decide, will I accommodate myself?

Will I continue to go along to get along? Or will I join the resistance? The good news is, eventually, a resistance movement did grow. And it grew up. And the citizens united. And they began to take greater and greater risks.

And they began to pass notes and messages and get organized. And they began to do things to undermine and oppose the occupying force. And then, eventually, when the Jews came under threat, when the Nazis came against the Jews in country, all of the citizens united.

And they were able to rescue the vast majority of Jews and get them to safety. It's actually a great story. And this is what Jesus is saying here. He's saying the resistance movement has begun. And everyone is going to have to decide, am I going to continue to keep the false peace?

[13:40] Or am I going to join the resistance? And so, even though Jesus does not intentionally want to tear families apart, that's not the point. He doesn't want to have to do that.

He knows that, in some cases, that will be inevitable. So, He says in verse 35, For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her

mother-in-law.

And then He says, a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. So, He's not saying that family doesn't matter. But what He is saying is that the entire social order is going to be reworked from the ground up.

That when the true King comes, every earthly loyalty is reordered around Him. So, in the kingdom of God, the deepest bond is no longer blood.

It's no longer your class. It's no longer your race. It's no longer your nationality. It's no longer your politics. The deepest bond is your allegiance to Jesus.

[14 : 48] A woman wrote a dissertation on Augustinian theology, and the title of the dissertation I've always loved, Water is Thicker Than Blood. Right? The waters of baptism form a deeper bond even than blood, even than DNA.

So, what that means is that someone from another race or someone from another country or class, someone from another political tribe, maybe someone who you barely speak a language that the other can understand, a person like that might become closer to you than your own relatives.

Always. And sometimes, painfully, the people closest to you by blood may be the people who most resist what Jesus is doing in you and through you.

And some of you have experienced this. Some of you, I know your story enough to know that some of us have grown up in very secular homes, sort of committed agnostic or atheist homes, and Christianity was sort of mocked and derided, and whenever it came up, people would always roll their eyes at those Christians, and then you became a Christian.

And after your conversion, coming to faith has cost you the approval and the respect of maybe your parents or your siblings. You feel like you have very little in the way of common ground.

[16 : 07] They no longer respect or support your lifestyle because you follow Jesus, and your decisions often don't make sense to them. We once baptized a woman in this church years ago who grew up overseas in a Muslim household, and so we baptized her, and then the next time she went home to visit her family, she was attacked and beaten in the street because word had gotten around that she had converted to Christianity.

And so she made it back to the States, and she's not been able to return home since to see her family. This is the kind of thing that Jesus is talking about. So the question is, do we want the peace that Jesus offers badly enough to allow Him to disrupt what needs to be disrupted in our lives?

Because Jesus brings peace by telling the truth, and truth often can be very disruptive when false peace holds sway.

Jesus brings peace by exposing the things that enslave us, and that can be painful. Jesus brings peace by calling us out of the old kingdom and into allegiance to Him and Him alone.

And often that brings tremendous conflict. Often it's a battle against our pride. In the Old Testament reading, we hear about how God is going to bring down every source and symbol of human pride and exalt Himself.

[17 : 35] Right? That's the kind of conflict that we need in our lives. And it's going to most likely create conflict in places like our family, because our deepest loyalty is no longer to our family.

It's to Christ. It's going to create conflict in your friendships, because you may not be able to live by the same values and priorities anymore. I remember coming to faith at my senior year in college, and I remember I had this really great friend group, and it wasn't by any choice of my own, but all of a sudden I had a different set of... I had things that I used to do with that friend group I really didn't care about doing.

Not even because I didn't want to, it was more that I just didn't, it didn't matter to me anymore. And there were all of these other things that started to matter to me. I wanted to go deeper in my faith. I wanted to be around people who I felt like could help me do that, and help me kind of make up for lost time.

I remember I wanted to get my hands on books that I could read to begin to understand what I had now come to believe more deeply. And I remember just feeling this alienation from all of those friends. And that's a hard thing to go through your senior year.

You kind of want to be making your best memories before you leave and go off. And instead, I just felt most of the time very lonely my senior year. I had a very lonely senior year because I just felt disconnected.

[18 : 50] There was no longer a common ground with those friends. And I still love them, and I still have tried to be friends with them, but something fundamentally changed. That's what Jesus is

talking about here.

But He's not disrupting our life merely for the sake of doing that or to destroy us. He's disrupting our life to set us free. True peace is found, as we said, often on the far side of conflict because it's found on the far side of surrender to the King.

So how do we find our way into this peace? Is it just a matter of deciding right here and right now, from now on, Jesus is going to matter most to me? Well, based on what Jesus says here, at first, this seems impossible.

And this is really the challenge of this text. There's this progression where it gets more and more and more, shall we say, threatening.

Verse 37, anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And that's like a, I mean, in the first century Jewish context, you can't even imagine how scandalous that would have been.

[20:01] But then He ups the ante. Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And you say, now you're talking about my kids? But then it gets even more intense.

He says, you have to love me more than your parents. You have to love me more than your children. But then He says, you have to love me and be devoted to me above your own life.

Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

A lot of times Christians make the mistake of thinking that when you take up your cross, it's like the burden of discipleship. Like I'm going to take on these extra set of things that I have to do, and it's like a burden that I have to carry. That's not what it means.

To take up your cross is to die. It's to take up the means of your own execution. So, this is not just about shouldering a heavy burden. Jesus is saying, whoever's not willing to die is not worthy of me. And then He drives it home. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. So, this isn't just about choosing your allegiance.

[21:04] This is about the death of self. It's about the death of ego. It's about the death of pride. It's about the death of an old identity. And you say, well, why is that necessary?

Why can't I just choose and just say, I'm no longer going to cooperate with evil in the world. Now I'm going to be on the side of good. And now I'm going to, the next time something bad happens, I'm going to speak up. The choice Jesus puts before us is whether or not we will continue to accommodate the occupying force.

But the truth is, apart from grace, we are not members, brave members of the resistance.

As much as we would like to say we are, apart from grace, the hard truth is that we are all collaborators. We've all made peace with the occupying power.

Because the evil that holds sway in the world is not just out there in the systems and in the brokenness. That same evil holds sway in here.

[22:16] It's worked its way into our hearts, into our minds, into our desires. The Apostle Paul writes that our thinking is, our hearts have been darkened.

And our thinking is futile. In other words, he's saying there's a problem in us. The sin goes so deep that we can't just think our way out of it. We can't just, it's not about just making a different set of choices. Our hearts are darkened.

Our thinking has become futile. We've accommodated ourselves to sin and fear and pride and lust and greed and bitterness and self-protection so much that we don't even recognize it anymore.

And so the gospel says the only way for us to be free from the kingdom of darkness and to become part of the kingdom of God, the only way to do that is to die. We have to be willing to die.

And this is why the gospel is such good news. Because if the hope of the world hinged on just enough of us being devoted enough to Jesus and doing things His way, I hate to tell you, there would be no hope.

[23:25] Without Christ, we are lost. But the good news is that Jesus succeeds where we fail. The good news actually is that Jesus is the faithful one.

The good news is that Jesus is the one who initiates the resistance and can do what we can't do. So Jesus is the one who enters into occupied territory.

Jesus is the one who never compromises in His mission. He never collaborates with the enemy.

Jesus is the one who opposes and then ultimately destroys Satan.

Jesus is the one who speaks truth no matter what it costs Him. And Jesus is the one who's willing to take up His cross. And in the most astonishing act of love, He gives His life not for noble resistance

fighters, but for collaborators.

Romans 5 says, while we were still powerless. I mean, that's like saying, while we were still completely enthralled to the enemy, Christ died for the ungodly.

[24 : 34] While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. In this place in Romans, Paul marvels. He says, you rarely see a person who's willing to die for a righteous person. How much more must God love us to see Jesus give His life for the ungodly?

And then in Romans 6, the passage that we heard Jeremy read a moment ago, we get the answer to our question, how can we enter into the peace of Christ? And you say, well, didn't you say we have to die?

What does that mean? Do we really have to die? Yes. And we die through faith and baptism. He says in verse 3, don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

Through baptism, that's how we become united to Christ. Through baptism, we become united to His death and resurrection. Through baptism, our old self is put to death.

And through baptism, we receive a new life. We receive a new identity. We receive the power of God which goes to work in us. So, what is the point of this passage if we try to kind of draw out what this means for us?

[25 : 46] I would say it's simply this. Jesus Christ is calling us to join the resistance. How? Well, first we have to die. You have to put your faith in Him.

You have to go into the waters of baptism. You have to die the death that He died, and then you have to be raised to life the way He was. And when you come out of that water, you're a new person with a new identity, and you're joined to Him.

And then, as Paul says in Romans 6, from that point forward, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. What does he say? From that moment forward, stop negotiating with the occupying force.

From that point forward, count yourself dead to the occupying power. And that means simply stop treating sin like it's still our master.

Stop saying, well, this is just who I am. This is just how I was made. Stop saying, I can't help it. I've tried, but nothing works. If you belong to Jesus, sin may still tempt you, and you may still lose a lot of those battles.

[26 : 57] And there may be times when it feels like there's nothing more you can do, but the truth is sin no longer owns you, and it is no longer your master. You know, I talked to somebody who we baptized not too long ago, and she said, you know, that old self, that old self has been really resisting.

It's been really resisting my new identity. I've been feeling the old self a lot lately. And I thought, that's actually a theologically brilliant way of talking about it, right? It's the kind of death rattle of the old self.

Don't forget about me. Right? I love the way of thinking about it. So, joining the resistance means sin no longer owns us. And then in verse 13 of Romans 6, as Paul says, it means every day you present yourself to God.

Every day when you wake up, every day when you enter into that day and start to live your life, you present your mind to God. So, your thoughts are no longer ruled by lies or resentment or lust or anxiety or despair.

You present your mouth to God. You say, God, I want my words to no longer be instruments of gossip or manipulation or deceit. I want my words to be instruments of truth and blessing.

[28 : 10] They're yours. My mouth is yours. You present your body to God so that your desires are no longer surrendered to whatever gives the most immediate comfort or pleasure. You say, Christ, my body is yours.

Do with it as you will. Bring glory to yourself through how I use my body. And in the same way, you present your time to God and your money to God and your relationships to God. And you say, I want these to be used in ways that reflect your heart to the world.

That's how we enter into the peace of Christ. Don't settle for false peace. Don't surrender and call it peace. Come to Jesus. Allow Jesus to disrupt what is false, both in your life and in your heart.

Let Jesus put to death what is enslaving you. Be willing to lose your life for His sake. And I promise you, you will find it. Let's pray.

Our Lord in heaven, may this be so. May this be so. Lord, as we come around your, in this time of prayer, as we confess our faith, as we come around you in this time of prayer, as we confess our sin and hear the grace of the gospel spoken into our lives, and as we come around your table, would you strengthen us, would you strengthen us to enter into the death and resurrection every day, to give ourselves to you, that we might receive our true self and true freedom in return.
[29 : 38] We pray this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.