

# Not Peace, but a Sword

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. If I've not met you, my name is Dave, and it's a privilege to bring God's word to you today.

! If you'll turn with me to Matthew chapter 10, we are going to continue our series. As we follow Jesus and look over his shoulder as he commissions his disciples to become missionaries and learn ourselves how to become missionaries, we'll begin in verse 34 of Matthew 10. If you don't have a Bible, they're on the back table. They're already bookmarked to today's passage. I checked it myself. And it is a joy to open up this very strange passage, this very strange word for us today.

Hear now the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, beginning in Matthew chapter 10, verse 34. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.

I have not come to bring peace but a sword. 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.

[ 1 : 21 ] And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. 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.

And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

This is God's word. God's word. It's Christmas time, right? And at Christmas time we sing carols about a little baby, meek and mild, born on a silent night, come to bring peace and goodwill to all the earth.

And then the baby grows up and says, I have not come to bring peace but a sword. Well, Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

Right? When we come to a passage like this, we sort of scratch our heads, right? And then we shrug our shoulders.

[ 2 : 34 ] And then we read the next passage. That one's on rewards. And we let passages like this one, the head scratchers, the ones that are so unexpected, fade away.

We don't know what to do with them. And we're a little afraid that if we took the time to figure out just what to do with them, we wouldn't like the answer very much. And so we move on to the next passage.

But if we move on from these hard and unexpected words, we're going to rob ourselves, I think, of a greater joy than if we had simply wandered off.

And we'll lose a greater joy and a greater peace that Christ wants for us. So let's not look away.

Let's look with a steady gaze at Jesus Christ, the Jesus who surprises us, the Jesus who confronts us, this unexpected Jesus.

Let's pray. Lord, as we come to this unexpected word, this word that does not seem to fit the season's greetings that we ourselves give to others, but also, Lord, the season's greetings that we expect to hear from you.

[ 3 : 57 ] Lord, will you help us to see our risen Savior, Jesus, here? Will we come to know and adore him more, all by the power of your Spirit at work in us?

We pray this in his name. Amen. The more we read the Gospels, the accounts of Jesus' life in the Scriptures, the more we find that our King does not do and does not say the things we expect. He's always pushing us. He is always stretching us. He's not content with where we are or what we desire or how we think. He's like a good coach, never letting you get comfortable, always keeping you a bit off balance, always pushing you just a little farther.

And in this passage, Jesus gives us quite a push off balance, I think, at least to me. When he says, do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword, that's one of those passages that makes me say, what?

Didn't Isaiah call Jesus the Prince of Peace? Isaiah 9.6. Didn't the angel choirs at Christ's birth say glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased?

[ 5 : 32 ] Luke 2.14. Didn't Jesus himself say in John 14, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

Doesn't the apostle Paul tell us in Ephesians chapter 2, for he himself, that is Jesus, for he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

So making peace. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. And by the end of the very next chapter here in Matthew, Matthew 11.28, Jesus is going to say, come to me, all who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest.

Is that not peace? What's going on here? Did Matthew write this down wrong? Did he get it wrong? The verses we just read about Jesus being the prince of peace and preaching peace and giving us peace and being our peace himself, those are all true.

The overwhelming weight of scripture leans in that direction. Jesus came to make peace between God and his enemies.

[ 7 : 00 ] That's us. Colossians chapter one. It's going to come up here in a second. Tells us that for in him, that is Jesus, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

And what a peace it is. It's not as if we were simply, you know, not really on the same page as God once upon a time and Jesus kind of came and corrected that error. Romans chapter five, Paul tells us that we were God's enemies before Christ reconciled us to himself.

It is no small thing to be an enemy of the living God. So, God the Son did take on a human nature to make peace.

It's the greatest work of reconciliation, peacemaking in history. So, what do we make of this statement that he didn't come to bring peace?

Before we answer that question, I want to extend an offer to anyone who has not received the peace I'm talking about. that peace where Christ bore the punishment of that enmity on his cross.

[ 8 : 25 ] If you have never been reconciled to the one true living God by the blood of Jesus Christ, by repenting and believing that he stood in your place and took the weight of your judgment so that you might be reconciled to God, will you take hold of that today?

and by faith receive the peace of his cross. But then, what do we say about this passage?

If Jesus did come to make peace, what do we make of this statement that he didn't come to bring peace? The gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ is first an accusation.

It says you are a sinner. It says you stand under a righteous judge. It says you are subject to a righteous judgment.

It says you are powerless to save yourself. It says that if you are not saved from that judgment, you will suffer an everlasting punishment in hell. That is unwelcome news.

[ 9 : 44 ] And it's controversial. It's divisive. Nobody wants to hear that. There's only one moral absolute in the United States these days, I think.

And that moral absolute is you do you. And so the one true sin in our culture is to say deny yourself, repent, take up your cross and follow Jesus.

And that's not new. Nobody wants to hear it today. Nobody wanted to hear it when Jesus said it.

And so when Jesus says I came to divide, he's pointing at the effect of his ministry.

and his message. The peace he brings is controversial. So people will divide over it. One writer put it this way, a sword divides, so does the truth which Jesus came to bring.

And so Jesus did come to bring peace, but the very preaching of that peace is controversial. Which means that the result of his peace mission is conflict.

[ 10 : 58 ] And so when Jesus says I came to bring a sword, he's talking about how people will divide over the peace he brings. But that feels to me a little bit like he's letting us off the hook here.

this is a really hard saying. And that answer is a little too neat and tidy, I think. Since when does Jesus let us off with neat and tidy?

We don't simply get to say, you know, the conflict he's talking about is, you know, just an effect of the peace he brings and call that a day. These are active words. I came to bring a sword. I came to divide. He came here to break things, friends. He did. This is a missionary text. He intended to force the issue. He's not just saying, you might see some pushback when you trust in me. He's saying, I'm here to make a big deal out of this.

[12:09] I'm going to force the issue. Because if Jesus didn't force the issue, we would still be dead in our sins. It's love that drove him to force the issue.

And it must be love that drives us to force the issue too. And that makes sense in this context, right? From Matthew chapter 9 35 on, until now, Jesus has been teaching his followers to be missionaries. And that task is the task he's also given us. And it is by its very nature something that forces the issue. Christians have to stir the pot. There is no way to be a missionary and be uncontroversial. There's a reason they say don't talk politics or religion in polite company, perhaps at a holiday dinner. It's controversial. And that's exactly what Jesus commands we do.

forcing the issue, however, does not mean be a jerk. It doesn't mean cram it down people's throats.

[13:18] That is not how Jesus operated. Not how he operated at all. His typical way of evangelism forced the issue gently, but with great conviction.

For example, in John chapter 4, he forced the issue with a Samaritan woman, but he didn't do it like a jerk. He did it by offering her something. John 4, 10, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

That's not antagonistic, but it certainly is forcing the issue. She has to ask questions of this. What do you mean, what gift of God? She has to ask, who is saying this to me, if you're saying, and who it is that is saying it to you.

She has to ask, what kind of living water are you even talking about? So he has forced the issue, but he hasn't been aggressive about it.

He hasn't been a jerk. He has done it graciously by making an offer. And that's what the gospel is. It's an offer of something beautiful. And so we too can force the issue just like Jesus, and we can do it graciously with an offer, just like he does.

[14:37] The holiday season is often hopeless for lots of people for lots of reasons. And you can say, can I offer you some hope? Can I share some good news?

Can I tell you something that's special to me or important to me? Can I share with you how, as a Christian, I would deal with that thing you're going through?

These are offers. They all force the issue, and they are all gracious. You can't separate them from questions of faith in Jesus, but they are also kind.

And that mirrors the kindness of his love for us and the kindness of his gift, the peace making blood of his cross. Now, before we continue, I want to take a moment and talk about the pain that's here in this verse.

A person's enemies will be those of his own household. Friends, that pain is real, and it is significant, and for many, it is long-term. Some of you know what it is like to become the black sheep in the family when you profess faith in Jesus, to have backs turned, to have motives questioned, to have names called, to have close relationships strained, or cut off entirely.

[16:04] Some of you know what it's like to have a child scream at you for teaching them about Jesus. See, his message that you're a sinner, and you must repent, and you must obey, is not what a child wants to hear either.

And so they kill the messenger by shouting at you. Some Christians from backgrounds where they are fully disowned by their families for coming to faith in Jesus.

Some cultures hold funerals for those who convert to Christ, or worse. All of this is real. These situations are real, and for many it lasts a long time, a lifetime even.

And I want to give you two encouragements, if that's where you are today, from this text. First, this is not a surprise to our God. Jesus knew that people would hate him and kill him, but still he came, and he knows that his people won't always have smooth sailing.

That's why he's preparing us with these words already. John Chrysostom, one of the great preachers of the early church, put it this way, do not think that you are to blame for these things, that is, these separations, the enmity within a household.

[ 17 : 28 ] Do not think that you are to blame for these things. It is I who order them so, because men are so disposed. What he's saying is that do not think that you're doing it wrong.

Do not think that you have made a mistake, or that God is in some way displeased with you because you have met resistance for the gospel. He knows it and he sees it.

It is not your fault. And second, the pain is worth it. Even when the people who should love you don't, the pain is worth it.

Even when you are ignored or scorned or slandered or worse, the pain is worth it. In his divine wisdom, Jesus knows it's worth it.

On the last day, we will see that it is worth it. Offering Christ to people is always worth it. And even the scorn you receive for Christ's sake will be one day a crown on your head.

[ 18 : 34 ] I know that because of verses 37, 38, and 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. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it.

And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The first thing we see here is the extreme level of devotion that Jesus demands.

there is only one loyalty we ought to have higher than our family. Only one devotion stronger and that is to God himself.

One commentator said, who but God himself has the right to claim such devotion? And so when Jesus speaks here in verse 37 and claims that position in our lives, our all in all, he's claiming to be God.

[ 19 : 44 ] Because only God can demand such devotion. And that is why the pain is worth it.

Because God himself is standing here and giving us an offer.

Can you see the offer? It's kind of hidden in this. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Buried in that sentence is an implied promise. The implication is that he is offering himself to the person who desires to have him. Take his cross and follow me.

We get to go with him. Loses his life for my sake. We can trade our lives for the living savior. See, God's greatest gift to you is not an escape from hell.

God's greatest gift to you is God.

[ 20 : 51 ] Heaven is simply where we will have him. Everlasting life is simply how long we will have him. the crown of glory is simply what we will be wearing with him.

But the main attraction, the thing that really counts is this, Jesus offers himself to you. Amen. Amen. the one who has all life, glory, goodness, blessedness in and of himself, and is all sufficient, not standing in need of anything, who is the foundation of all being, the one from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, the one who has sovereign dominion over all things, whose knowledge is infinite and perfect, who is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands, to him who is due from angels and men and every other creature all worship, service, and obedience, he took on a human nature to bleed and die in your place so he could reconcile you to himself and offer you to be his friend and his family forever.

So is it worth it? Yes. Is mocking or slander or scorn worth it? Yes.

Is the pain of division worth it? Yes. Because the blessing of earthly peace is but a shadow of the incalculable joy we have in Christ, with Christ.

[ 22 : 51 ] Let's look at that list one more time. Verse 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.

I think this list is meant to be expansive. Jesus is telling us that it's not okay to love parents or children more than him. That doesn't mean that it's cool to love siblings more than him.

I think this is a stand in for all people. He's using these relationships, the ones people typically value highest, as examples pointing us to this truth.

if Jesus is not your highest priority, there is something wrong, gravely wrong. Now, this does not mean that we should start loving our parents and our children less.

Jesus isn't saying, hey, scale that back. Scale back your love for others. Our love for our families is probably still too small. So he's not asking us to dial back on the love for family.

[ 23 : 59 ] We need to love Christ even more, which incidentally will probably help us love our families better. If we try to put a person where God belongs, we will not be happy with the result.

That's true of a spouse. It's true of a friendship. It is true of a child. It is true of every human relationship, the ones we have and the ones we desire.

Sometimes the ones we desire, the spouse that we want but do not have, the child we want but do not have, the friendship we want but do not have, sometimes those grow even larger in our eyes because the desire is still unmet.

What I want to tell you is that whether it's a relationship you have already or one you desire for the future, putting a person first in your life, if that person is not Jesus Christ, will hurt that person and leave you dissatisfied.

If I treat someone, say my wife, as my greatest good, I put a tremendous burden on her. If she is my highest good, I'm saying, you are where I finally find satisfaction.

[ 25 : 30 ] That sounds nice, and to be sure, I do find satisfaction in her, but if the buck stops here, so to speak, if she is my highest good, if she is my primary source of satisfaction, I will crush her under an unbearable burden of expectation.

I was made in the image and likeness of God, which means I was made for fellowship and communion with the great I am.

If I'm looking to fill that limitless, transcendent need with a finite person, if I'm looking to fill an ocean with a kitchen faucet, no matter how beautiful the kitchen faucet, I will never be fully satisfied, and I'll also mistreat that faucet, trying to draw more water from it than it was ever made to put forth, and I will grow to resent that faucet for not giving me what I want from it.

That's also true of things, possessions. It's true for the things that we have, the accomplishments that we have, or the things we want, that we would desire to have someday.

It's also true of the accomplishments that we would like to have. It's kind of a famous thing in New England. You've probably seen, after Tom Brady won, I don't know, it was like his third or fourth Super Bowl ring, they said, what's next?

[ 27 : 07 ] And he said, there's got to be more than this, right? There is no amount of achievement that can satisfy. I think we also need to take this and apply it somewhere else in our lives.

Right? So, Jesus' audience, who are they? They are first century Jews in Israel. Here's how one commentator and historian expressed how that affects this message.

To bring division between father and son was to offend against the most deep-seated convictions in the minds of Jesus' hearers.

What does that mean? It means that for a first century Jew, this relationship was the family relationship that Jesus right here is saying, don't make that ultimate.

That was the ultimate currency. It was the highest good in a person's life. It was, as Leon Morris said, the most deep-seated conviction in the minds of Jesus' hearers.

[ 28 : 19 ] And Jesus calls us to put down our most deep-seated convictions as well. But in our context, I don't think that family any longer is the most deep-seated conviction.

I think that the modern corollary to this idea is actually individualistic. In contemporary Western culture, our primary duty is to be true to ourselves, isn't it?

You do you. No matter what it costs your family, right? And that's why the Bill of Rights, the most prized aspect of our Constitution, is only about individual rights and liberties.

That's why phrases like self-actualization and authenticity and self-esteem are everywhere in our culture. The biggest priority that you and I have probably isn't our loved ones, it's probably ourselves.

That is the air we breathe in this culture. Here's how that works for me. Marriage, and especially parenting, have taught me how selfish I truly am.

[ 29 : 37 ] My problem is not, as Jesus has put here, loving my family members more than Jesus. My problem, Dave Moser's problem, is loving myself more than Jesus.

And I think that is a very common thing in our day and age because our culture looks different than his. And that is exactly why Jesus calls me in verses 38 and 39 to lay down my own life.

Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Leon Morris again. For us, this is a remote metaphor. We don't understand very much what it is to take up a cross. But Jesus hearers were people who had seen men take up their cross.

Anyone condemned to be crucified was required to carry the cross beam to the place of execution. This would be like carrying the vials of the lethal injection to the execution chamber in our day.

[ 31 : 00 ] They knew that when this happened and the man went off with a little knot of Roman soldiers, he was on a one-way journey. He would not be back.

Thus, for them, taking up the cross stood for the utmost in renunciation of the claims of self. The person who took up a cross had died to a whole way of life.

Jesus demands from everyone who follows him nothing less than a death to self. Your cross to bear is not your mother-in-law.

That's how we use it, but it's not what he's talking about at all. In his classic, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, and explaining this, said, when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

He calls me to come and die to that very idea that my good is best served in my self actualization.

[ 32 : 13 ] right, in that you-do-you idea. He calls me to lay down the idea that I will find satisfaction finally in a relationship.

But this is not negative, right? This is an offer and an invitation. You can hold on to your life, or you can lay it down and trade it for Christ.

That's the promise buried in here. Is Jesus worth it to you? Right, that's the final question here.

Does he have the highest place in your heart? Or does something else or does someone else or do you yourself have that spot? Now, how do we change?

How do we get there where we need to be with Christ on the throne? How can we change the amount we love Jesus?

[ 33 : 36 ] Is there a dial that we can go fiddle with? Do we just put it on the calendar? How do we get there? Is it something that we can even do?

I hate olives. I will not eat anything that you have given me with olives. There's no amount of any doing that I can do to change that.

The genes that produced my taste buds hate olives. There's literally no way without changing me at a DNA level at the very core of my being.

There's no way that I can affect my taste for that. I hate them and I always will. I also want to hate them, by the way. I think they're horrifying. But I cannot increase my love for them.

I just can't because it's embedded in my very nature. We have this term in America, right? We fall in love as if it is something we are helpless.

[ 34 : 54 ] It is an accident. Oh my goodness, I fell in love, right? Our affections are not something that we can just study up on and say, okay, yes, it's not a spreadsheet-able thing.

I'm sorry to say to all the engineers in the room. There is nothing that I can do of my own will and strength to change my own desires for olives or for falling in love or for my devotion to Christ.

Certainly I can change my habits and my behaviors. I can change what I do with my calendar, but have I actually at that root? Have I changed myself, my heart, my actual devotion and predisposition towards God or have I put on a show?

Like our salvation, which is a miracle of God, so too is the changing of our hearts.

It is something we cry out to the Savior for, and it is something that we listen to him in. And we are going to pivot now towards a time of communion because actually this is the last point of the sermon essentially, our time of the Lord's Supper.

[ 36 : 34 ] Because he has promised to work in our hearts by what the church has often called throughout its history the ordinary means of grace.

The changing of our hearts is a miracle of God as he grows us and sanctifies us. And he chooses to do it through the things that he has given us in his word, specifically the preaching of the word, the ordinances or sacraments of the church, and prayer.

These are the means through which God the Holy Spirit works in us to develop these very things. And so when we come to the Lord's table, we are not just going through the motions.

We are not just making a remembrance. We are in a relationship with God that is obeying him.

Your obedience, you realize that is a relationship with your heavenly father? We are obeying him and we are going to his table where we have communion with the living God as he reminds us of his great love for us.

[ 38 : 00 ] And God the Holy Spirit applies it to our hearts and our lives. Friends, the preaching of the word, the communion table, and our prayer to our God are the very means by which he intends to light a fire in our hearts so that we can treasure him as our great prize.

That's what this passage is all about. He offers himself to us. Will you take him as your greatest good? And will you graciously force the issue?

So let us do that now. Friends, I'm going to pray. We're going to then take the communion elements and return to our seats where we will celebrate with our Father in heaven together.

Let's pray. Lord, you call us to take up our cross.

And Lord, the table that we're about to share together as a church family and as your family is your testimony to us that this Jesus took his cross.

[ 39 : 34 ] So as we go to the table, will you help us to see him going ahead of us, blazing the trail, taking his cross so that we might follow him?

And Lord, will you excite in our hearts a love for him that we might find him to be our great treasure, that when you have called us to lay down our lives, Lord, that we would do it gladly because Christ is so much better than what we have going on here.

Lord, will you apply this to our hearts? Lord, may we not just come away from this knowing about what the passage says.

But Lord, help us to know Christ, the one who is speaking in and through it. We pray that in his name.

Amen.