

A Sword, not Peace

As we prepared for the coming of Jesus a couple months ago, we heard Scripture making the point that the birth of Jesus Christ brings peace. We remember the words of Isaiah, *“For a Child will be born for us. A Son will be given to us. The government will be on His shoulder, and His name will be called: “Wonderful Counsellor,” “Mighty God,” “Everlasting Father,” “Prince of Peace.” (9:6). He then goes on to add, “There will be no end to the growth of His dominion and peace. He will be on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to make it firm and to support it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever” (9:7).*

We also remembered the words of the angel to the shepherds: *“I am bringing you Good News of great joy, which will be for all the people, because a Saviour, who is Christ, the Lord, has been born for you today, in the city of David” (Luke 2:10-11).* We are left in no doubt that this Saviour brings peace as a multitude of the heavenly host praise God saying, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” (Luke 2:14).*

The theme that Christ has brought peace resounds throughout the New Testament. Jesus promised, *“Peace I am leaving with you. A peace that is My own I am giving to you. I am not giving it to you as the world gives it. Let not your hearts be troubled or afraid” (John 14:27).* Peter told Cornelius and those gathered with him that the word that God had sent to Israel was one of telling the *“Good News of peace through Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36).* Paul wrote to the Romans, *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).*

The apostle Paul says this peace does not only exist with God because of Christ. Jesus is also the source of peace between people. In particular, He is the source of peace between Jew and Gentile as they are united in Christ. He told the Ephesians, *“For He Himself is our Peace. In His human nature He has made them both, Jew and Gentile, one, by breaking down the wall of hostility that kept them apart. He has abolished the Law with its Commandments and Regulations, to create the two into one new person in Himself, so making peace, and that He may reconcile them both to God in one body through His cross, on which He has killed the hostility. He came, telling the Good News of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near” (Ephesians 2:14-17).*

Because of this background, it seems quite shocking to hear Jesus say, *“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 turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A person’s enemies will be those in his own home. Anyone who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and anyone who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. The person who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. The one who has found his life will lose it, but the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 10:34-39).*

Jesus Christ is God’s gift of peace and reconciliation for sinners through this death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. He means peace and forgiveness between those who have received the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit in Baptism (Titus 3:5). Jesus is the peace of knowing that death cannot separate us from God. To die is to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23), and our Lord will raise our bodies on the Last Day (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). All of this is true for those who are in Christ - those who confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God has raised Jesus from the dead (Roman 10:9). But for those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, He is a source of division and conflict.

Those who do not want to listen to God’s Law, will not confess their sin. Instead, they want to hang on to it. They want to do things their own way, and react in anger against anyone who speaks the truth about God’s will. They do not want Jesus Christ to be their Lord. Instead, they embrace the multitude of false gods offered by our world. Jesus’ statement, *“I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,” (John 14:6)* evokes indignation because of the exclusive claim made by Christ.

Our Lord identifies family as the most basic setting where this occurs. Jesus brings peace to those who receive Him in faith. But where family members do not, Jesus Christ becomes the source of strife. He does because the way of Christ and the way of the world are very different. Where the world accepts fornication, living together outside of marriage, and homosexuality, Christ says these are sin. Where the world accepts unbelief or “agnosticism” as normal, Christ says that they are the rejection of

Him. They bring damnation. There is no middle ground when it comes to Jesus Christ. Either He is your Lord, or the devil is your Lord. We think of family as being the most important connection and relationship in life, but Jesus says, *“Anyone who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and anyone who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37).* This means that as we deal with family members who reject Christ and embrace sin, we must put the Lord and His will first. We must speak the truth and be willing to back it up with action that confesses this truth (so for example, no, we won’t stay at a household where an unmarried son or daughter is living with a girlfriend or boyfriend). The witness to Jesus Christ and His will is one of love, and so we seek to speak and act in a loving and caring fashion, even when the content is not received as such.

This is a cross that none of us wants to face. Yet our Lord says, *“The person who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. The one who has found his life will lose it, but the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 10:38-39).* Jesus calls us to take up the cross of hardship and suffering. In fact, if God wills, He says we must do so even if it costs us our life.

The call to take up the cross and follow Jesus comes from the Lord who has already died on the cross for us and risen from the dead. He is the One who has given us peace – peace that has defeated death and gives us eternal life with God. He is our Lord who has risen from the dead. Jesus prepares us for what we will face in the world, and by His Spirit leads us to confess Him as Lord in what we say and do.