

## Matthew 10:34-42

<sup>34</sup>“Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup>For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup>A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.

<sup>37</sup>“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. <sup>38</sup>Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup>Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

<sup>40</sup>“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. <sup>41</sup>Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward. Whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. <sup>42</sup>Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink because he is my disciple—Amen I tell you—he will never lose his reward.”

## A Sword of Peace?

### I.

“Peace through strength” was a motto Ronald Reagan borrowed from emperor Hadrian, a Roman emperor who lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D. The concept is that, to ensure peace, a nation must project strength. Hopefully, if we appear strong, there will be no need to prove it.

There is a holiday coming up that seems to epitomize the “Peace Through Strength” slogan. We celebrate it with the sounds of war. Fireworks spark difficult memories in the minds of veterans with PTSD. We shoot the fireworks to remind us that liberty was a hard-fought victory. Independence brought with it a certain kind of peace.

Is that what we were talking about in those all-but-forgotten dark days some months ago? Peace Through Strength?

Try really hard; perhaps you will remember the time. It was cold; sometimes it was snowy. The nights were long and dark. Twinkling lights festively decorated many homes, both outside and inside. Perhaps they were there, at least partially, to drive out some of the darkness of the long, cold nights and remind us that the long days of summer were coming.

In the seasons of Advent and Christmas we sang about peace. The angels announced it to the shepherds, keeping watch over their sheep in their fields on those long, cold nights. “Peace,” we chanted. “Peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”

Were we even right to talk about peace, even in Advent and Christmas? After all, it is the One who we sometimes call the Prince of Peace who said in today’s Gospel: “Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace” (Matthew 10:34, EHV). Why did we sing “peace on earth” if Jesus didn’t come to bring peace?

### II.

The world doesn’t want to hear certain parts of the Bible. It becomes downright hostile at times when God’s Word in all its truth and purity is proclaimed.

“For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup>A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (Matthew 10:35-36, EHV).

That’s not what people want. Who wants strife in the family? Ask any child who has lived in a house filled with conflict between the parents. There is constant arguing and bickering. Children are on edge, wondering if what they do or say next might create a blowup. Each spouse might also be on edge, wondering the same thing. Or maybe they pick and prod, trying

to get the war underway again.

A household filled with strife is anything but peaceful. It's exhausting. Sometimes family members do whatever they can to try to bring about peace. They ignore things that perhaps shouldn't be ignored. Things that need to be said go unsaid, just to keep the peace. Things that need to be done are left in disarray, just to keep the peace.

People like peace. Even when it's a false peace. Peace is safety. Even if the family is broken and unhealthy, if everyone can just keep things toned down a little bit things are familiar. It's safe. No one wants change, because change might disrupt the peace.

That's not real peace, is it? Everyone in the situation is pretending. Each one lives in fear, knowing that, eventually, things are going to bubble to the surface. It looks like peace, but it really isn't, because the peace is all based on a lie—or a series of lies.

False peace comes at a cost. Sometimes you just live and let live without confronting the realities—all in the name of peace.

False peace even brings death. As long as you think life is all about pursuing the appearance of peace, you are living a lie. If your friendships are all about tiptoeing around the difficult issues and never discussing issues, they are just superficial.

What about your relationship with God? “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” (Matthew 10:37, EHV). Jesus does *not* say loving your father or mother or your children is wrong. He does *not* say that your love cannot be fierce and protective and intense. What he *does* say is that your love for other people in your life must not—dare not—supercede your love for Jesus.

### III.

“Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34, EHV).

The angels sang at Jesus' birth: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind” (Luke 2:14, EHV).

Isaiah pointed ahead to the time the angels would sing. He said of Jesus: “For to us a child is born. To us a son is given. The authority to rule will rest on his shoulders. He will be named: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, EHV).

There's that name: the Prince of Peace. Isaiah was getting at something deeper than just the absence of fighting. The Hebrew word *Shalom* indicates having restored relationships. *Shalom* means completeness, safety, satisfaction, soundness. It indicates a wholeness in relationships.

Think again of what Jesus said: “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” (Matthew 10:37, EHV). The most important relationship you have is with God. But that relationship was broken by sin. There was no chance for peace in that relationship.

The only thing that can restore our relationship with God—the only *One* who can restore our relationship with God—is Jesus. That's why Jesus, the Prince of Peace Isaiah identified, says: “Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34, EHV).

Jesus came to cut through the false peace and the lies to give *shalom*. Last week Paul reminded us that it isn't always convenient to proclaim certain Bible truths. Jesus says that taking a stand brings a sword. Speaking the truth brings you into conflict with the lies the world embraces.

The world is comfortable with its lies about life and about human sexuality. Declare that there is an absolute right and wrong—or that some actions bring life and joy while others bring

death and destruction—and you will find out how hostile the world is to the absolute truth of God’s Word.

“Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38, EHV). There is some cross-taking to be done by the Christian. Conflict with the world—the sword Jesus mentioned—brings true peace.

“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39, EHV).

Just like I have, you have done things you shouldn’t have. You have said things you shouldn’t have. There are times you *should* have spoken up, but you kept silent. There are times you *should* have taken action, but you were too afraid.

Those who find life in the sins of the world—those who embrace the world and all its lies and empty promises—lose the life of real peace with Jesus. That brings you face-to-face with the greatest lie of all: you begin to think that you done too much or said too little for God to love you any more. Somehow you think you have pushed it one too many times and this time there can’t be any peace.

In a sense, that’s true. You and I *can’t* make peace with God. There isn’t enough goodness in us. Confront the things that are wrong in your life. Lose your earthly desires of this present life.

It is God who has made real peace with us. Jesus came to establish the real peace we need—peace between us and God. He fell on the sword. He took all the reasons we were not at peace with God on himself. He took the nails, the spear, and the death of the cross and paid for our lack of peace.

#### IV.

Some congregations like to “pass the peace” at some point during the service. Pass the peace. Not just to people sitting in a pew next to you—most of them already have the peace of Jesus. Remember what Jesus said: “A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (Matthew 10:36, EHV). Members of your own household who have turned away from Jesus have a need for peace.

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me” (Matthew 10:40, EHV). Pass the peace to your son, your daughter, your parents, your friends. You and I are extensions of the peace of Jesus. The message of salvation goes out from you. It’s part of who you are as someone who has been blessed with the peace of God which passes all human understanding.

“Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward. Whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. <sup>42</sup>Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink because he is my disciple—Amen I tell you—he will never lose his reward” (Matthew 10:41-42, EHV). You and I are not responsible for making the peace. Paul calls it planting a seed or watering a seed, but reminds us that God causes the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). Isaiah reminds that it is God’s Word that will work the way God wants it to (Isaiah 55:10-11). We are merely proclaimers of what God says in his Word.

Even so, though it is God who causes the growth and accomplishes what he wants when his Word is proclaimed, he has kept a reward for you and me when we act as his messengers. Your righteous reward awaits you in heaven.

Though at times you may have to deal with swords in this life because of Jesus, the peace of heaven belongs to you. Jesus’ sword brings you peace. Amen.