

## The Prince of Peace's War

A Sermon on Luke 12:49-53 and 2 Kings 11:1-3, 12-18 by Pastor Jason Liebenow

Dear friends in Christ, though you face earthly struggles and divisions, you have heavenly peace.

I have a friend who started chewing tobacco. I have heard a lot of the health problems associated with smoking tobacco, and I have heard that chewing can lead to even worse problems.

Now, obviously, I care about my friend's health, so I want to say something about his habit, but I've already talked to him in the past and it really doesn't seem like it will do much. He just gets mad and it seems that it's best if I just don't say anything.

I imagine that many of you have dealt with similar situations. You have seen people that you love and care about doing things that you know will harm them. If you talk to them, you might be able to help them out of a dangerous habit... But you might just end up with them mad at you, or worse, that relationship could be permanently damaged. If you say nothing, they'll probably continue hurting themselves, but at least your relationship will be ok.

There is certainly no one-size-fits-all solution to these situations, but one thing we always need to consider is this: by our decision, are we putting them first or ourselves first? Are we more concerned with avoiding conflicts for right now, or are we more concerned with what will help the person in the future?

Today, we listen to the words of the Prince of Peace, as he comes to tell us that he has come, not to bring peace on earth, but division. Brothers and sisters in Christ, that earthly division is a small price to pay for the heavenly peace that Christ has won for us.

We live in a culture that promotes tolerance. And that's a good thing. In fact, the wide-scale tolerance for others that we enjoy today largely grew out of Christianity. Our God calls us to love everyone, even our enemies. Our God calls us to pray for those who hurt or persecute us. Our God calls us to put the needs of others before our own needs because we know that God will take care of us. Our God forbids us to take revenge and instead calls us to wait for him to avenge. That is tolerance!

But tolerance goes too far when we selfishly refuse to help others because *we* don't want to deal with rejection. Tolerance goes too far when our comfort right now becomes more important than our neighbor's future wellbeing. Tolerance goes too far when the truth becomes a non-issue compared to everyone just getting along.

What if God treated us like that? It's not pleasant when God accuses us of our sins, but what if God just didn't tell us about sins? What if he just let us be? The Bible tells us that by ourselves we are God's enemies; that we naturally hate God. The Bible tells us that by ourselves, we cannot do anything that pleases God, only sin.

If God just left us to our sins, that way of life would take over our lives! We would fall deeper and deeper into sinful habits. Instead of recognizing the damage that our sins were doing to us, we would justify our sins to ourselves. We would rationalize why it was good for us to commit these sins. We would not listen to God's truth but instead would follow our own personal beliefs about everything.

We would push God further and further away from us until the only option would be for God to separate from us eternally. God would finally give us what we in our sin would want. God would leave us to live divided from him, separated from him. That kind of division, that kind of separation from God, is called hell.

But thank God he does not treat us like that! In grace, our God is more committed to the truth, than to avoiding conflict! He cares more about our eternal salvation than our immediate comfort! Our God has given us the law, for our good.

Is the law comfortable? Do we always like to hear God's law? No. It is hard for us to hear that the way we are living right now is wrong, that it needs to change. It is hard for us to hear that our habits, the things we love, even the way we think about things, can be sinful, can be offensive to God. It is painful to realize that these things can damn us.

But how great it is that God does point out our sins to us! How great it is that God calls us to repent! How great it is that God gives us the power to repent through the gospel message!

That message about how God did not leave us to our sins, but sent his Son Jesus to undertake that baptism which he talked about in our gospel lesson for today. Jesus suffered for our sins. He went to the cross, was nailed to that accursed tree, and suffered that separation from God, that division from God's hand of blessing which our sins deserve! And because Jesus undertook that heavenly division, you and I have heavenly peace.

It is through this gospel message that God brings us to spiritual life. It is through this gospel message that God gives us heavenly peace. It is through this gospel message that God gives us power to repent of our sins, to turn away from them and to live our lives free from the sins of our past.

And now, as God's people who have heavenly peace, our God teaches us that this will bring earthly division. We need not fear it. But we need to expect it. Jesus was the most loving person this world has ever seen and he was hated so much that people put him to death. Let us love like Jesus loved us.

When we see our neighbor in error, let us use the spiritual life we have through our heavenly peace with God, to consider our neighbor's needs. Let us look past the earthly division that will eventually come from our holding to the truth. Let us consider how we can be a blessing to our neighbors.

Sometimes that will mean telling them what they don't want to hear, but what they need to hear. Sometimes that will mean waiting until the proper time. But whatever we do, we can act in love for our God and for our neighbor.

Dear family of faith, the Prince of Peace has brought us peace and unity with God, but he has brought us division, separation, and war against this world, against Satan, and against sin. Let us not fear it. Let us be ready for it. Amen.