
God's Peace Brings a Sword (Matthew 10:34-42)
7/16/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



Jesus said, "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." Wait... isn't Jesus the Prince of Peace? Didn't the angels sing "Peace on earth," when Jesus was born? What's the deal here? Whenever we read God's Word, we need to take the context into consideration. Honestly, we can't understand anything without the context. You understand my words spoken here from the pulpit different than you understand the words in a child's nursery rhyme. The context helps us understand. So our questions are, "In what context is Jesus the Prince of Peace?" and "In what context does Jesus not bring us peace?"

On the first question: God's Word is clear on the real peace Christ has brought us. Romans 8 tells us the sinful mind is hostile to God. We, as sinful people, naturally hate God. We are naturally at war with God. Maybe that doesn't sound right to you, but any time you have been angry at God, that's a hint of that spiritual conflict between us and God. Any time you have ever known what you ought to do but you really didn't want to do it, the fact that we see God's law (right and wrong) as a burden on us, that shows that we are not naturally on God's side.

But the real conflict is not simple disagreements we have with God. The real conflict is our sin. Every time you've felt guilty in your life is proof that you are not living up to God's standard. We want to be good people, right? Do we want to be good people just sometimes or just most of the time? That's what God wants. God wants us to be totally good, all the time. You and I haven't done that.

Let's look at the first commandment for a second: God commands us, "You shall have no other gods besides me." Martin Luther explained that commandment with these words: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Now, is it possible to be a good person without loving what is good, without loving goodness? God is good. God is goodness. Loving God is loving goodness. It's not possible to be a good person without loving goodness. So it's not possible to be a good person without loving God, and loving him above all else.

But now let's ask the hard question: How many times have you broken that commandment? How many times have you loved a family member or a hobby or just your own comfort more than you loved God? My wife and I are trying make God a bigger part of our family life. We have a goal to read the Bible together after a meal at least 5 times a week. Start small, right? Over time, we've gotten to the point that we do read more often than not, but there are still days where we just completely forget, because we gotta get those dishes done, and somehow I put those chores above

hearing my God speak. Sometimes, we forget because we want to go and do something after dinner, and suddenly I show that I love my hobby more than God. Sometimes, we remember to read, but the whole time my mind is wandering to other things, and suddenly I've made whatever thought in my head more important than what God has to say to me.

That's only the first commandment and I can't even count the number of times I've broken it. Every time love for God did not even factor into my thinking, I've made another idol. Every time God's ways took a back seat to my ways, I've made another god. Every time I just forgot about God because something else was more important, I've continued this war against God. Do you see how breaking the first commandment is really an attempt to put something above God? Every trespass here is another effort on our part to shove God off the throne of our hearts and place something else there instead. It's trying to say God has to bow to me rather than me to God. That is our war against God.

How smart is that war? How wise is it to war against God? God is almighty. Not only can he destroy our bodies, but he can destroy our souls eternally in hell. We can't hope to win this war, but we persist in it.

More than that, this war makes no sense! Why would we go to war against God? He made each of us. He has provided everything we have ever needed every day of our lives. Every happy memory you have, every good thing you've ever enjoyed, every penny you've received, every bite of food, every laugh with a loved one, all of those were gifts from God. Furthermore, we love what God stands for. God wants us to be good people and we want ourselves to be good people! God graciously provides and cares for us and he stands for everything we value, but still we persist in our war against him.

What reason would there possibly be for you and me to love anything more than God? But we do it. We continue this war against God, even though we could never defeat him, even though he has never done anything but be merciful and gracious to us, even though he stands for every good thing that we value. But we continue setting up idol after idol. We keep telling ourselves what good people we are even though we do not love goodness, we do not love God. God should simply end this war by sending us to hell for eternity. That's what we deserve. But God didn't do that.

God ended the war in a different way. God sent Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, to bring this war between us and God to an end. God sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross for every moment when we loved anything more than God. Jesus gave up everything for you and me. He left behind his glory and power as God to

become a human being like you and me. He even gave up his life so that he could save us. Jesus was totally committed to you and me. And through his work, he forgave us for every effort we have made to shove God off his throne. Jesus freed us from our delusion that we could be good without loving the good God. Jesus transformed us from God's enemies into God's very children. Instead of the hell we deserve, Jesus has won heaven for us, an eternal honeymoon with our God who loves us even when we fail to love him.

That is true peace. That is the peace that Jesus has won for us; peace that takes away our guilt, peace that frees us from sins delusions, peace that can stay with us no matter how exhilarating or how miserable our lives may be. That is why Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

But now, Jesus warns us that he will not bring us peace. Absolutely, we have peace with God, but our peace with God will not bring us peace on earth. Jesus' total commitment to our salvation leads us to a total commitment to him. After everything God has done for us, how could we love anything more than God? That's what Jesus is talking about here. If we believe in what Christ has done for us, how can we look to anything else for a fuller life? How can we look to parents, or children, or a spouse, or anything else for what we need?

Now, hold on, Jesus. Aren't we supposed to love our parents? Aren't we supposed to love our children more than anything? What could be more important than loving your family? Have you ever seen the child at Christmas who opens up one of his presents and gets exactly what he was hoping for and then he runs off to play with it and never gives a thought to thanking the person who got him the gift? That's pretty normal for kids. Have you ever seen an adult do that? That's unacceptable. When an adult is not mature enough to recognize the relationship with the gift-giver is so much more important than the relationship with the gift? That's unacceptable. That's childish. That person needs to grow up.

That's exactly what happens when you and I love our family or friends more than God. Yes, God wants us to love those people, to love them as we love ourselves, but God is the one who put those people into our lives to begin with. Each of our loved ones are gifts from God. If we are so enamored with the gift that we completely forget about God, we are being that child at Christmas who forgets to say thank you. We are being that child who loves the gift more than the giver. That's immature. That's childish. That's only trying to continue the war with God that Jesus already ended when he took away our sin. But God gives us more grace. He continues showering us with those gifts, even when we run off without saying thank you. Our God remains totally committed to our salvation, even with our

immaturity.

Total commitment to Christ is not easy. Jesus tells us that following him means denying ourselves. Following Jesus means taking up our cross. It means giving up our ways, our wants, our goals, our attitudes and beliefs when they get in the way of our following Christ. But only that way of life, a life of taking up our cross, is consistent with the faith God has put in our hearts; a faith in our God who is totally committed to our salvation. If we believe that Jesus has truly ended our war with God, why would we seek to earn God's favor by our own efforts and works? If we believe that God has opened eternal life in heaven for us, why would we try to get a fuller life through relationships or careers? If we believe that God has given us every good thing we have, why would we seek our happiness in our passions and dreams? Not that we have to give up all those things, but we may have to if those things get between us and following Christ. We do not love them more than Christ. We don't look to them for fulfillment.

That's how every sin portrays itself to us, isn't it? Sin deludes us into thinking that selfishness is healthy; that being true to ourselves will give us a full life; that it's normal and good for us to put other things before Christ, after all, no one wants to be a fanatic, right? Jesus warns us that such thinking is not consistent with our faith. That thinking comes from the sinful mind. It will provide nothing that it promises and will only lead us to hell.

Only Christ can provide the fuller life we desire. These words come from the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew heard and spoke with Jesus. Matthew received the Holy Spirit's power to accurately record Jesus' words for us. When we treat Matthew's words as they truly are, as the very words of God, we receive the same blessings, the same rewards that Matthew received because we hear God speak to us just as God spoke to Matthew. We receive the same rewards of God's grace. We receive the same peace in our war against God. We receive the same fulfilled life, not health, wealth, and happiness here, but the hope of eternal health, wealth, and happiness in heaven with our God.

Dear friends, Jesus has brought us peace with God, but that peace will bring a sword into all our lives. As you struggle in your calling to total commitment to Christ, let God's peace win that war. Let God's peace prepare you for the rewards Jesus earned for you. Amen.