

Matthew 10:34-42 34 " Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; 36 "and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. 40 " He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

There is a rule of etiquette which is stated thus, "in business, at the dinner table, at the barbershop and elsewhere—"never talk about religion or politics." These subjects are highly contentious and usually result in heated arguments instead of general agreement."

So, what's left? If one were to ask, "So, what can I talk about in polite company?" The answer, I suppose, would be, all the small things. Things that are inconsequential. Things that no one will get upset about. Things like sports, movies, music, books, the weather. Notice what the stated reason behind this rule is. "These subjects are highly contentious and usually result in heated argument instead of general agreement."

Well guess who's coming to dinner?

Jesus was not after general agreement. He was not concerned with earthly peace. He isn't worried about offending people with His teaching. He says in our text "**Do not think I have come to bring peace upon the earth, I have not come to bring peace but rather a sword.**" And no that doesn't mean Jesus is about to whip out a sword like Lancelot at a wedding and start killing people. He's talking about His Word. Politics aside, Jesus knew the truth of that statement. Religion is highly contentious. Particularly true religion. Particularly the Word of Christ. It is a sword which divides.

He explains verses 35-37. Jesus here quotes from the prophet Micah who uses these expressions to describe the terrible condition of the people of Israel at his time. The lack of true faith in God had led to a breakdown of the family. There was discord and contention and it didn't take discussions of religion or politics to bring that about.

Jesus is predicting the same thing will happen as the Apostles go out to preach the word, but for a slightly different reason. When Christ's call is believed, it sets people apart. It puts you who believe into the Holy Christian Church. But not everyone believes. And this creates tension and contention. If your father or mother, wife or husband, son or daughter, friend or neighbor does not believe there is an immense and immediate division between you. You belong to Christ, they do not. You are a member of His Church and He is your Lord, they belong to this world and to the devil the prince of this world. And there are only two ways to fix this rift. Either you go over to them or they are brought over to you.

The temptation is strong to try to go to them. And this is what Jesus warns of in verse 37 and then also in verses 38-39. You will be tempted to conform Christ to your life instead of conforming your life to Christ. You will want to have your Christ and sacrifice nothing. But that is not possible. For, as Jesus says, whoever finds his life will lose it.

See, the Word of the cross is offensive. It will not be believed by most people. It will not be believed even by all the people you love. And you can't make them believe it. So what do you do? If they insult Christ, what do you do? If they call you bigoted or hateful, what do you do? If you have a husband or wife, friend or child who wants you to stay home with them or do this or that on Sunday instead of going to church, what do you do? Find your life or lose it? Family or Christ? If you have a friend or family member who is gay, what do you do? One trap I've seen many people fall into is to think, "Hey this person I know is gay but I really love them and they are really nice so it can't be wrong." It's just not true. That's really foolish logic. Christ isn't telling you not to love that person. He's not telling you to kick them out of your life. But don't try to conform the cross, to carve it down so that it won't be too offensive. Don't let the fear of division and strife from others make you keep your mouth shut about Christ and His Word, don't let it influence you to be like the world.

For the Word must be offensive. The Word demands everything. It leaves no excuse, no wiggle room. It must be so. For the sinful flesh is an excellent wriggler. We saw last week what our flesh tries to do with the concept of Christian freedom. It's the same here. You know how toddlers just try to wear you down with their persistence so you'll give in? You know how the waves wear away the rocks, turning them little by little into beaches of beautiful sand? That's what our flesh seeks to do to God's Word. Wear it away, break it down, smooth it out so that it's not so hard, so rough. **It wants to conform Christ's call to fit into my life.** Very often this can seem harmless. Because it can all be done with the excuse of "Christian freedom."

One example is church attendance. Well the bible doesn't say we have to go to Church every week right? That's true. Instead it highly praises, exhorts, and commands the gathering of believers, the hearing of the word, and the reception of the sacrament on a regular basis. But if you start using this freedom of yours as an excuse for the flesh not to make faithful use of the means of grace then you are conforming the cross to your life instead of your life to the cross.

As long as we deceive ourselves into thinking we can have it all, we will either not have, or be in great danger of very quickly not having Christ. For He demands everything. His Word divides. It offends. And it must. Only then can it save.

As long as we conform it to ourselves and think we have it, then we will think we can do it. As long as we think we can decide what to believe, then we won't really believe in Christ at all but our own made-up version of him. As long as we think we can choose what to obey, then we won't really be obeying Christ but ourselves. As long as we think that it is up to us to answer the call, to be good enough etc then we never will be.

Take the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and said "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life." Jesus said "keep the commandments." The man said "I have." And so Jesus said "go sell all that you have and give it to the poor then come follow me and you will have treasures in heaven." The man went away sad because he had great wealth. Jesus doesn't command all of us to

do that, but he commanded this man to. Why? Because it was necessary for him. It was necessary for him to see how incapable he was of being good enough. It was necessary for Christ's call to be so extreme that there was no way the man could fool himself into thinking he could do it himself.

Christ's call must be extreme, it must be offensive so that we understand "When I am weak then I am strong." Meaning, that is when Christ takes hold of us. So that we despair of our own strength in every way and rest only in His. That is why His call, which demands everything, also gives everything, bridges the gap and makes us disciples, brings us to believe, brings us to obey, brings us to stand not on a beach which we have made through our sinful weathering, but on the rock which God has made.

The only rock which saves. The rock of the cross of Christ. Where He became entirely obedient. Where Jesus did not conform His cross even the tiniest bit to any earthly need or desire but rather entirely conformed his will to God's and in so doing saved and redeemed you.

This is what Jesus means when he says "whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." We may lose our desires, our will, our dreams, our peace, our money, all we have, our very lives, but the life we find in Christ is far better. In Christ we find life that is eternal. In Him we find the life that is abundant, where goodness and mercy chase us all the days of our lives and finally catch up to us in the halls of heaven, where our cup flows overflow, where we have all we ever need and more in Christ. God called Abraham to offer him his son, and then he gave his son back to him and with him the promise of the resurrection and life eternal through the one who would come through Isaac. From the rich young ruler, Jesus demanded everything, but he also promised "You will have riches in heaven." Here Christ promises "whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward and so on." And he is there promising us two things. First, a new family. God's word divides but it also unites. It unites us with His church. As the psalmist said, God places the solitary into families. And also he promises us a reward. The reward of a prophet, the reward of a righteous person. What is that? Heaven. The reward which none of us have earned and yet which God in Christ has freely given and promised.

Aesop tells a story of a dog who was carrying a nice piece of meat in his mouth. As he was crossing a bridge, he happened to look down into the water and saw his reflection. "There, he thought is another dog and he has a fine looking steak! I must have it!" So he opened his mouth to grab it and of course lost the meat he had. That is what we are like when we hold on to the things of this life, when we try to conform Christ's call to fit this world. Then we are striving to keep our life and so we lose it eternally. Instead hold all the things of this life with a loose grip ready to let go at any time. That is not to say that you do not treasure family and friends and the good gifts God gives. For Christ is not saying that these things are bad, just that the life He gives is so great that it is much better. The Lord teaches us to hold loosely the things of this world and cling tightly to Christ. Luther said it this way "I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.." All that we have in this world we will lose anyway. So let these all be gone if need be. You have Christ. You can't have everything but you can have Him and that is far better.