

May 28, 2017  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Peace in Chaos  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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**PEACE BY SWORD?  
Matthew 10:34-42**

Ronald Reagan, one of America's favorite presidents, preached "peace through strength." He believed that the only way to guarantee peace for America, and the only way to maintain some semblance of peace in the world, was to present a strong military defense. In keeping with that view, President Reagan led the development of the "Patriot Missile Defense System" (which is now outdated), and he stared down the Soviet Union which caused it to disband.

Okay, it is hard to argue with success. But do we not wonder if maintaining peace by wielding a sword is truly peace? Is it the best kind of peace, or just the best the world has to offer? We can now see what happens when leadership changes and the sword is put back in the scabbard. When that happens, renegades and anarchists of the world rise up and peace disappears.

History indicates that for a period of time the visible, organized church also shared the "peace through strength" idea. The infamous Crusades that lasted for about three centuries was an effort by the visible church to subjugate warring nations, especially the Islamic people who had taken over the Middle East. How could the church sit by and do nothing when the religious enemy was stealing all the glorious sites of Christendom in ancient Palestine and Jerusalem? It worked for the most part. Islam was silenced and the church was able to build marvelous iconic buildings on every site they considered holy. And peace was achieved – kind of.

While it is easy for modern Bible-believing Christians to criticize the Crusader mentality of the middle ages, we are often not all that much different in our own beliefs and actions. Is it not true that God and Country rallies are often attempts to stir up zeal in order

to gain power in the seats of government? It seems like the "Christian" plan for America is to establish a little bit of heaven on earth by prosecuting and imprisoning everyone who does not live according to our interpretation of the Bible. Does our Lord intend for us to establish peace by silencing the critics?

Apparently, the disciples thought a lot like modern American Christians. As the Last Supper was coming to an end, Jesus foretold how the disciples were now going to need to provide for themselves with a money belt, a bag, sandals, and a sword. Not realizing that Jesus was speaking figuratively, the disciples respond, "Well look! Here we have two swords." Jesus rebuked them by essentially saying, "Stop thinking like that!" In fact, a couple hours later, Peter would try to maintain peace through strength when he drew his sword and cut a man's ear off. Jesus told Peter to stop such action and healed the man's ear.

That brings us to this confusing text. What did Jesus, the Prince of Peace, mean when He said He didn't come to bring peace but a sword? He encourages us to live in peace. We want to have peace. So we try to establish peace with a sword. But peace is missing. Why? Peace is found in a right relationship with our God and with those who also maintain right relationships with our God. The sword points out the difference between righteousness and unrighteousness. The Prince of Peace advances peace through righteousness.

**The Prince of Peace Made a Conflicting Proposal (vv.34-36).**

Jesus made a shocking statement when He told His disciples, "*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword*" (v.34). That could not have made any sense at all to the men who first heard it. The idea that Jesus came to bring a sword, not peace, to earth cut across the grain of everything the disciples believed about Him.

Jesus' followers were convinced He was the promised Christ. The closest followers in those few years of ministry were convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. The confidence was evidenced at the outset as soon as the men who would become apostles met Jesus. For example, the moment Andrew met Jesus, *He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found*

*the Messiah*” (which means Christ) (John 1:41). A couple of years later when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13-16). That was the same conclusion all the disciples had drawn.

They fully expected Jesus to fulfill the promises of the old prophets which included reestablishing the nation of Israel. They knew that Isaiah for example had promised, *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. . . . Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this* (Isaiah 9:6-7).

We know that when the angel Gabriel brought the message of Jesus’ birth to Mary he had promised, *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end* (Luke 1:31-33). The disciples must have heard that story and agreed that this Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the promised King who would sit on David’s throne. And the angels who announced His birth to the shepherds promised, “On earth peace, goodwill toward men” didn’t they? Well actually they didn’t, which leads to a misunderstanding of Christ’s promised work. The angels announced “On earth peace among those with whom God is pleased.” This is a very important promise as it intersects with Jesus’ statement here.

Nevertheless, the complete fulfillment of Jesus’ character and work included the fact Jesus would be the Prince of Peace. When Isaiah promised the Son who would be born to rule the people of Israel, he also promised, *and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* (v.6b). *Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end* (v.7). The disciples were convinced that is who Jesus was.

Therefore, all the while they hung out with Jesus, they were waiting for Jesus who is the Christ to gather His army together, defeat Rome, establish His throne, and put the disciples in the chief places of leadership in the kingdom. The true hearts of the disciples were uncovered when *the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom”* (Matthew 20:20-21).

With that understanding of Messiah firmly fixed in their minds, the disciples must have been shocked to hear these words about sword and conflict and division come from the mouth of the promised Prince of Peace. But what about us? Do we not also believe that Jesus is the promised Prince of Peace? Most of us are convinced that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s promise about the Prince of Peace. We believe that through His sacrifice we are made righteous with God and have peace with Him. We truly believe that Jesus Christ desires for us to have peace, trusting in His promise: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid”* (John 14:27).

Then how could the Messiah say He did not come to bring peace? Let His words sink in: *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword”* (v.34). It is easy for us to misunderstand what Jesus said. But lest we think Jesus really did not mean that He was the cause of conflict, listen to how Luke expanded on Jesus’ statement to make it sound even more difficult to understand. According to Luke, Jesus also said, *“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division”* (Luke 12:49-51).

Obviously there is a truth here that does not sit on the surface. We can imagine that the twelve closest disciples were shocked like we are. Or maybe not. Hearing this statement in the larger context of Jesus’ teaching helps us understand what He taught. Jesus had gathered the twelve disciples to prepare to send them out to represent Him and preach the message of the Kingdom (10:1-15). In that

context, Jesus warned that there would be people who would refuse to listen to them (10:14-15). Jesus also warned that the disciples would have to be as shrewd as serpents and yet as harmless as doves because religious leaders were going to arrest them and persecute them (10:16-23). Jesus warned that brother would betray brother and that His followers would be hated by all (10:21-23). And Jesus explained that His followers should expect such treatment because the follower is not above the Master who is also treated with disdain (10:24-33).

The truth is this: If everyone in the world was righteous and loved Jesus, we would all live in wonderful, blissful harmony. That is pie-in-the-sky imagination. The reality is that the world, sunk in sin, fully infected with sin, is unrighteous and hates the righteous Prince of Peace. Our Prince of Peace also makes His followers righteous. The result is that righteous Jesus who came to provide righteousness is naturally going to be divisive in an unrighteous world.

The question we might want to have answered is, “To what extent does He cause division?” Read on in this text and discover that Jesus’ explanation of the shocking statement is also shocking. He promised that because of Him instead of peace in families there is conflict. *For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household (vv.35-36).*

Jesus’ righteous character causes division in the closest immediate family ties. Because of the universal fall of creation into sin, every one of our family members (and us) are born with the sin nature. We are naturally sinners and we naturally sin. But then something happens in a family. God reaches down and interrupts the life of one of those people, a family member like a mother or a father or a daughter or son. God graciously opens that person’s spiritual understanding, imparts eternal life, and declares the person to be righteous. Now because sin is always in conflict with righteousness, the newly made righteous person disagrees with sinners about how they should talk, how they should dress, how they should be entertained, what they should watch and read on the internet, and on and on the differences go. Sometimes the people in the family who

remain sinners are tolerant with the new child of God. Sometimes they are not.

The result is that people of our own immediate families can be our enemies. When family members who are not born again by God’s grace are not tolerant, peace will definitely be missing from the family relationships. Try to imagine the plight of a wife who lives in a family that holds to a false religion that denies the deity and atoning work of Christ. Then, by God’s grace, she is born again and loves Jesus and wants to talk about Him. She has just abandoned the family religion and, in their eyes, she is trying to divide the family by teaching false doctrine. In some Muslim and Hindu families that conflict results in rejection from the family and sometimes even death. Often the division is just as obvious between Protestant religionists who do not believe the Bible and the born-again person. Jesus was exactly right to teach that because He is righteous, He brings a sword that divides families.

But the conflict is bigger than just families. We know that it is also true that because of Jesus’ righteous character, instead of peace there is conflict with almost the entire world population. False religionists like Muslims, Hindus, and the thousands of other religions hate followers of Christ if they are bold enough to speak about salvation through Christ.

Also the multiplied “isms” like Communism, Socialism, Secularism, Humanism all hate followers of Christ when they speak up about the righteousness of Christ. If we remain silent and appear to submit to their sinful expectations, they will tolerate us. But let us display the righteousness of Christ and the leaders of the “isms” will seek to silence us. The visible and organized but unbiblical church has for centuries also hated and persecuted, often to death, followers of Christ. Even politically/fiscally conservative politicians in America cannot endure the quoting of the Bible that reveals the righteousness of Christ.

The sword of righteousness divides like a sharp knife. So then, is it really possible to experience peace in this life?

## **True Peace is Gained in Unexpected Circumstances (vv.37-42).**

Contrary to natural expectation, true peace is not found in human relationships. Jesus taught that whoever puts human relationships before Christ will not enjoy true peace. He said that whoever loves father or mother more than Christ forfeits peace. Specifically, Jesus said that *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me (v.37a)*.

That statement also sounds like a contradiction to what we have read in Scripture. On one hand, God commends honor for parents. It is a foundation stone in the law of God that reveals His character. Command number five of the Big Ten says, *“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12)*. In case we missed how important, how foundational that principle is, Jesus taught the same truth. He reminded the Pharisees who were dishonoring their parents, *“For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die’” (Matthew 15:4)*. And lest we think the command no longer applies, God saw to it that the instruction to the Church requires the same kind of honor. Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, *Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), (Ephesians 6:2)*.

Jesus did not set this commandment aside. We must understand that to honor means, according to the word used in the Old Testament (*kaw'-bade*), to lend weight or value to something. It means to esteem highly. Not surprisingly when we come to the New Testament, we discover that the Greek word for the English word honor (*timao*) means to value, venerate, view with reverence. However, to honor your parents does not mean that you set aside your love for Christ because your parents don't like it. Rather, Jesus made a comparison showing that our love for Him must exceed our love for parents. Parents are nice people who deserve honor, but they did not nor could not win salvation from sin for us like Christ did. We cannot love parents more than we love Christ—and sometimes that causes a division.

Also, whoever loves son or daughter more than Christ will not enjoy true peace. Jesus continued, *“And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (v.37b)*. This is a

difficult statement for us to grasp in light of our natural love for our children. Most of us would give anything and do anything possible to make life easier for our kids. But would we maintain our love for Christ if our adult children mocked us for it? Would we continue to love Christ if our child threatened to leave home because of it? Or is it possible that our desire to make life easy for our children, to make them popular, to help them enjoy all the experiences their world says they need, we cause them to neglect Christ?

The parent who neglects time with Christ because they are too busy loving their children do not really love their children as they should and obviously do not love Christ like they should. If we really love our children, our driving ambition is to help them on to loving Christ also. The family that does not put Christ first and foremost will not know peace, even though they might claim to be “Christian.”

Another way in which Christ brings a sword that divides is found in His requirement that *“whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (v.38)*. This means that whoever does not take up his cross will not enjoy peace. Again this thought flies in the face of common human response. The cross signified suffering, pain, embarrassment and shame. Often Christians have interpreted this “cross” as a special burden they are called on to bear. In some cases that might be true.

But here Jesus used the term “cross” as tantamount to identification with Him. Being identified with Christ requires that we are also identified with His cross. The cross of shame and suffering IS the ministry of Jesus Christ. We naturally conclude that any suffering, any shame, any embarrassment precludes peace. In fact, peace comes when we die to self in order to live for Christ.

That being true, it is likely that the Christian sister in Saudi Arabia who is persecuted for her faith, who loses her job, who is shunned by her parents and siblings has greater peace in her soul than the Christian American mother who claims to have it all together but is running herself ragged making sure that her kids are popular, accepted, and experiencing all that the American dream has to offer. Running ragged homes are not the most pleasant places in which to grow up.

Another principle that appears to be divisive is that whoever finds his life loses it. Jesus said, *“Whoever finds his life will lose it”*

(v.39). Almost no one volunteers to lose their life. The most natural thing is to “take care of number one.” We are taught to do that in every way imaginable. But Jesus warned that putting all our eggs in that basket is going to make for rotten eggs in the end. We will never experience true peace by watching out for our own interests and maintaining our defenses to protect from someone making us feel poorly about ourselves.

It appears that Jesus’ requirements that cause division cover a lot of human relationships. Indeed, most human relationships are tempered by conflict with unrighteousness. Family members fall into conflict because someone speaks or acts unrighteously. Co-workers are set at odds because of unrighteousness. In reality, it is unrighteousness that causes marriages to fray around the edges and eventually break up. Righteousness is the key to real peace. Jesus the righteous one came to make us righteous, which is never well accepted by a sinful world.

Therefore, we must conclude that peace is found in a right relationship with the Prince of Peace. To live in fellowship with Him is to find peace. But that fellowship requires death to self. Jesus also promised that “*whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*” (v.39b). Death to self is losing life. Instead of working, grasping, manipulating others in order to have peace, we do better to rest in Jesus Christ. When we are consumed with the desire to know Christ and live for Christ, peace just happens. By dying to self and living for Christ, we almost inadvertently find the “life” nearly everyone is searching for.

Living for Christ also results in fellowship with others who have peace with Christ. Jesus taught the disciples He was sending out to do ministry, “*Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward* (vv.40-41).

Oh, how good to know that the entire world is not opposed to the righteousness of Christ. When Christ makes us righteous, we learn to find and fellowship with those who share the same righteous character. Practical wisdom teaches that where there is fellowship based on wisdom, there will be peace. This is why we should be

suspicious of the person who claims to have been born again, declared righteous, but does not enjoy the company of righteous people.

That same peace that is built on righteous relationships is revealed in relationships with the “little ones.” Jesus said, “*And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward*” (v.42). The “little ones” referenced here are the disciples of Christ. The original reference would have been to the twelve apostles. The term also applies to us. It is a term of endearment. It reminds me that I am really not Christ’s co-worker but His little child for whom He cares and desires to protect. Great peace is found in a chaotic world when we know the presence of loving Christ to protect us.

While loving the righteous Christ causes division, fellowship with the Prince of Peace tempers the conflict we face in the world. It is strange but true that the very peace we enjoy because we are in fellowship with Christ raises the suspicion and ire of the sinful world. In fact, it is God’s plan to use the conflict of the world to keep us running to Him and trusting Him for peace.

“This is the ultimate reason, from our standpoint, why God fills our lives with troubles and perplexities of one sort and another – it is to ensure that we shall learn to hold him fast. The reason why the Bible spends so much of its time reiterating that God is a strong rock, a firm defense, and a sure refuge and help for the weak is that God spends so much of his time showing us that we are weak, both mentally and morally, and dare not trust ourselves to find or follow the right road. When we walk along a clear road feeling fine, and someone takes our arm to help us, likely we would impatiently shake him off; but when we are caught in rough country in the dark, with a storm brewing and our strength spent, and someone takes our arm to help us, we would thankfully lean on him. And God wants us to feel that our way through life is rough and perplexing, so that we may learn to lean on him thankfully.” (J.I. Packer, *Your Father Loves You*, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986.)

Our perfectly wise and sovereign Father knows how much of the conflict is good for us and truly puts limitations on it—though there are times we wonder. Max Lucado tells the story about

“Chirpee” the parakeet. It seems that Chirpee’s owner decided to clean the bottom of his cage. However, her choice to use the vacuum cleaner might not have been the wisest choice. She removed the attachment from the hose, and just about the time she stuck it in the cage, the phone rang. While reaching to get the phone, the lady accidentally sucked old Chirpee up the vacuum. Horrified, she put down the phone, shut off the vacuum cleaner and hurriedly pull out her parakeet. He was still alive after the thrill ride up the vacuum hose but was completely covered in dust. Fearing her bird might suffocate, the woman ran to the bathroom and turned on the bathtub spigot full blast. She put poor little Chirpee into the water, and in a few seconds realized he was shaking having nearly drowned. Her next reaction was what any mother would do. The lady grabbed the hair dryer and blasted little Chirpee full blast until he was dried. A couple days later, her friend called to see how Chirpee was making out after his ordeal. The woman said. “Well, he doesn’t sing anymore. He just kind of sits there staring.”

You might feel like Chirpee at times. The reality that you live in a world of sin impacts you at a level higher than you think you can handle. Maybe you wonder if your Owner, Christ, cares or knows what you are facing or has not been altogether kind to let you go through the tough times. It is true that because you love Him who is perfectly righteous, and because He has made you righteous, your unrighteous world is not very pleasant. But it is in the times of testing that we go to Christ, lean on Him completely, and there find the peace that only He can give.