

July 2, 2023

Matthew 10:34-42

“Today is Still the Day of Salvation!”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In part, Jesus says in our gospel lesson for today: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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.” There are some true stories I could share with you regarding this passage that would be considered by most to be dramatic. The truth is that you don't need a lot of drama to feel the pain of this passage. Most people feel the pain when someone you love simply rejects the peace that you offer to them in the gospel and it changes your relationship on some level.

I suppose that the drama depends upon the level in which you are rejected. As of late, it seems to me that we most often experience this when a spouse, or a child or grandchild - anyone you love - drifts away because you hold fast to Christ. They shut down and build a wall to keep you at arms length or out of the picture all together. About three years ago, there was an article from *Focus on the Family* that tells the following story:

After college, Gerry and Jen's daughter, Melissa, moved hundreds of miles away. She not only left physically, but she also “left home” spiritually. She had been raised Christian and had always attended church. Because of a series of hurts, poor choices and spiritual battles, she no longer considered herself a believer. Like many other parents whose children have rejected God, Gerry and Jen were heartbroken and discouraged.

“Heartbroken and discouraged” are appropriate words to describe that moment when you realize that the one you love doesn't want to be in your life because of your faith in Jesus. Conversely, they feel that you don't want to be in their lives because of your refusal to follow along with them in their unbelief. They want you to embrace their new, crooked path as good, when you know that to do so is a denial of Christ and the truly good peace that he brings in the forgiveness of sins. This raises the question: Should not the peace that comes from the cross and the hope of heaven be welcome by all those who are steeped in sin and death? We would like to think so. But it's not.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. But he does not give peace as the unbelieving world gives peace. The unbelieving world wants a peace that leaves you alone to love and practice falsehood. Jesus suffered and died upon the cross to remove the love of sin and every wicked work. He came to overcome and forgive sin to establish a rule of peace with God where hostility between us and him comes to an end. As long as we love ourselves to serve ourselves, we cannot properly be with God and others. An appropriate love of the self is when we care for ourselves that we may give ourselves in love to God and our neighbor.

Thus, sin is to love and practice that which is false. It is to be doing all that serves the self regardless of God's loving rule and the call for loving sacrifice for the needs of others. Our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The problem, is that there are those who embrace their labor in sin and do not find it a heavy burden even though it is the heaviest burden that one can imagine. They find their rest in loving and practicing that which is false.

Such do not require a rest in Jesus, for they have found their rest in the labor of satisfying their sinful desires. On the opposite, we who have found rest in Jesus and the forgiveness of sins expose all false peace, untruth, error, and sin while seeking to overcome all spiritual darkness with the light of forgiveness and the hope of rest in heaven where loving and practicing sin is gone. We want them to know freedom *from* sin. But many seek freedom *in* sin. So, these words that Jesus said of himself are applied to us. They hated him because he testified that their deeds are evil (Jn. 7:7). We are hated for the same reason that Jesus was hated. And our Lord says, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you (Jn. 15:18-20)."

The most intimate ties on earth will be severed for Jesus' sake. The peace of the home will give way to internal strife and persecution. The house will be divided against itself. But this has always been the history of the unbelieving world and church from the time of Cain and Abel. Did not Cain slay Abel because of Abel's faith in the Savior? The battle between the two will never cease until the end of time. Religious differences will continue to produce bitter division. It will estrange the closest of friends. It will disrupt families and even cause lasting enmity between members of the same family.

"Yes," you may say, "but it really hurts." And I understand. More importantly, Jesus understands. He experienced this with his own family. And I believe that this is designed to help us cope. There had to be a lot of pain in Jesus when he said in Mark 6:4, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." And, then, there are these words from the Psalms, quoted by Paul in Romans 3 (10-12) regarding all of us: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Now if these last words were at one time spoken about us, and we have still miraculously come to faith by the work of the Holy Spirit in the means of grace, then we should not lose all hope when it comes to others and those we love in this life. **Today is Still the Day of Salvation!** And we need to understand what Jesus means when he says the following in our gospel lesson: "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." There is much to say about these words, but one thing stands out this morning. We cannot compromise or acquiesce in this battle for the true peace of forgiveness.

True peace can never be gained by compromising truth for the lie. Even we Christians are tempted to do this when we meet opposition because of our confession. We are often tempted to keep quiet for a semblance of peace in our relationships. "Why invite trouble and ill feelings? Why rock the boat?" we say to ourselves. And yet, it is our confession, by the working of the Holy Spirit, that can change the lives of the ones we love. If it really is the case that it is matter of heaven or hell, then we dare not shrink, but become wise as serpents and innocent as doves to prayerfully win souls. We patiently, gently, lovingly look for the opportunities when they arise and we accept whatever our confession may bring. We pick up our cross with Jesus and follow him. We lose our life down here for the sake of Jesus to find it. To do otherwise is to keep the gospel from others who need it and to disturb our own peace of conscience and fall.

Today is Still the Day of Salvation! Therefore, we do not give up. If strife and dissension over the confession of Christ is to lead to true peace in Christ, then we must take a firm stand and even willingly sacrifice everything for the truth with the hope of saving others. With that in mind, all persecution, regardless of its degree, is to compel us to a more diligent study of the Word of God, which increases our peace. And we must find our comfort in knowing that in the Word of Christ there is the power to convict and convince and convert unbelievers. The Holy Spirit is always attached to Scripture. Therefore, our confession to those we love is not in vain. And while some may refuse to believe as it is in their power, the gospel remains the only means to real and abiding peace with God in Christ.

Remember the account of Gerry and Jen? They were heartbroken and discouraged about their daughter, Melissa. The article from *Focus on the Family* goes on:

Still, they knew that parenting was a lifelong mission, and they needed to continue to reach out to their daughter with God's love. They sent Melissa a letter. It was simple. They wanted her to know, in writing, how much they loved God and how much they loved her. There was no response, not even a polite acknowledgment that the letter had arrived. However, two years later, Melissa found her way back and embraced a relationship with God. When Melissa eventually shared her journey with her parents, she told them that God had used that letter to start the process of turning her heart back to Jesus.

You never know what your witness will do. But if we do not take the time to witness, how then can they hear? And God's timing is everything. Consider the thief on the cross and how he was rescued. For him it was the last hour of his life. The Lord has these things in hand, and hears our prayers, and promises to see us through every outcome that may be. Only let us never give up our confession, for we are the instruments that God uses to save. Think of what is lost if, instead of faithfully proclaiming Jesus, we choose to make peace with this unbelieving world and obtain a worldly peace. Instead, we press on, as optimistically as we can, praying that our loved ones will one day receive Jesus by grace.

Finally, our Gospel says, "Whoever receives you receives me ..." Thus, Jesus goes with us in this endeavor. It is tough work. But Jesus goes with us. And as Jesus says in John 9:4, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work." But for now, **Today is Still the Day of Salvation!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott