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St. Matthew 10:34-39:

We've Got Things to Think About

- I. The Peace He Brings
- II. Conflict
- III. The Cross

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St. Matthew 10:34-39

Dear Friends in Christ,

Have you ever heard of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD): Moralistic [a person who imposes their moral values on others] - Therapeutic [a way to comfort or heal] - Deism [belief in a supreme creator based on what a person thinks or feels]? The term was created in 2005 by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton "to describe a widely held, reduced form spiritual belief system among American youth. It focuses on being nice and feeling happy, rather than orthodox religious doctrines or deep theological commitments." I would add that it is also a belief system popular among young adults. I like to call it the theology of the Fuzzy Wuzzy's.

In an article entitled "Illuminations" Anthony Esolen, Distinguished Professor of Humanities at Thales College, Wake Forest, NC, wrote:

The religion of our time, many have said, is the easy going Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, which I use to portray for my students by drawing a big smiley face on the blackboard. "Our God is a consuming fire," I said. "Smiley has no fire. Our God has arms to save. Smiley's got no arms. You fall into the depths of sin? Smiley just goes on smiling... But Scripture says, "...the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives... If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are (illegitimate children) and not sons (Heb. 12:6-8)." (Anthony Esolen, Illuminations, Touchstone Journal, March/April 2026, p,52).

I'm sorry, but I couldn't keep myself from thinking of the words of the wicked witch of the West from The Wizard of Oz as she was melting away, "What a world, what a world!" You know,

WE'VE GOT THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

I. The Peace He Brings.

Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword (Mt. 10:34)." Well, He didn't. He didn't come to bring peace to this earth. He is peace on earth. As the angels proclaimed at Christ's birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased! (Lk 2:14)." Jesus is peace between God and sinful mankind, the One who earned our forgiveness of sin and eternal life. But what about the sword? Please listen to this from The Book of Hebrews:

For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight [the Word], but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb.4:12-13). [Do not lightly brush those words away!]

With that in mind, the Lord had the apostle John write, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:1, 14)." That's Jesus, the living Word! Then this from Christ's High Priestly Prayer: "For I have given them (the first disciples) the Words that you gave me (Jn. 17:8)." The Word in the flesh spoke the Word. The Lord then prayed to His Father, "I do not ask for these only (the first disciples), but also for those (us) who will believe in me through their words [the ones He gave them] (Jn. 17:20)." This is what we have in the Bible; the living, active, and piercing Word of God; the Sword!

With all this in mind, please understand that there will never be such a thing as a man-made "one world order." Humans have never found agreement on the Law and Love of God. As David said, "God

is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day (Ps.7:11)." Do we understand what indignation is? It is rage, anger against all who justify violating God's Commandments in thought, word, deed! And so, the judgment: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm.3:23)." Well, here comes the hard part...

II. 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. 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 (vv.34-37).

Do we understand this? The Word speaks His Word, and it pierces body and soul - "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." A lot of people who claim Christianity and a lot of churches that claim to be Christian will dance around that statement. Many don't want to hear it. Many want to reinterpret it. It means what it says!

Christ's statement is very clear: "Whoever loves father or mother... Son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." The Greek word that is used for love in this text is philia which means "deep friendship, brotherly love and affection". The following observation has been made of this verse: "If one does not have enough of (this) form of love for Jesus to outweigh his attachment to his family, he is not worthy to be counted as a disciple." In other words, our philia for family and friends is normal, but can never be allowed to pull us away from our walk with Jesus. Jesus is our greatest friend.

But there is another Greek word for love that I am compelled to consider with you: agape. It's the word used in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son..." - a love that will sacrifice for someone who or something that is not worthy. As hard as it might be, listen to this Word of God: "All have turned aside; together they have become worthless (no value); no one does good, not even one (Rm.3:12)." This is us before Christ entered our lives. The Word of God is clear:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life (Rm.5:6-10).

This is miraculous! Christ didn't die for us because He "liked" us; we were not his friends (philia). He died for us because He loved us (agape), was willing to take the punishment for our sin. Through faith we are His friends. We must remember Jesus' words, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly (Jn.10:10-11)." Christ bought us with His blood that we would be His forever! Without Him we are eternal nothings! I like the way Martin Luther said it, "God does not give grace freely in the sense that he will demand no satisfaction, but he gave grace to be the satisfaction for us."

III. The Cross

And so, Christ was on the cross to cleanse us from our unrighteousness, to heal us and make us whole. He is now our Savior and Friend, and He is something else, our Lord and Master! As Lord and Master He says, "And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life (makes this world their heaven) will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (vv.38-39)."

The cross He asks us to bear is the cross that results from our connection with Him. We remember Jesus' words, "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul how much more will they malign those of his household (Mt. 19:25). If our main goal is to make a happy, comfortable life here, no matter the cost - if that's our goal - we're going to lose it. After the last breath it is gone and forgotten forever!

Matthew Henry said: "They are best prepared for the life to come (who) sit most loose (not tied to) this present life." So, how do we sit: tied to this world's death march, fearful that someone might see our love for Jesus, or holding on to the cross while making our way to eternal life and joy? I don't accept aspects of his theology, but his following words are well worth our thought; this from Thomas a Kempis:

Jesus (has) many lovers of his heavenly Kingdom, but few bearers of his cross. He (has) many seekers of comfort, but few of tribulation. He (finds) many companions on His table, but few of His fasting. All desire to rejoice with Him, few are willing to undergo anything for His sake. Many follow Jesus that they may eat of His loaves, but few that they may drink of the cup of His passions. Many astonished at His miracles, few follow after the shame of the cross.

Are you familiar with the Noah Principle? "Predicting rain doesn't count; building arks does." Or, as somebody said: "Sitting still and wishing makes no person great. The Lord sends the fish, but you have to dig the bait." In other words, we have to get our hands dirty! So, we take up our cross and follow Jesus right into the eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible love and bliss He won for us. God help us to witness, which is our assignment, and take others with us. You know, we've got things to think about.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott