

Pentecost 6
July 16, 2017

Christian, Bear the Strain

MATTHEW 10: 34-42

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn

*"a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'*

³⁷ *"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

³⁸ *Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*

⁴⁰ *"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."*

I once lived across the street from a church that called itself the Church Triumphant. I thought that interesting since that's how the Christian church has come to describe heaven. I always wanted to go across the street and ask them if they had already arrived. Because Jesus tells us that following him will not be a life of one joy, one happy moment after another. This world will not permit it.

But that hasn't been my experience pastor. I am a Christian and things are going just fine, in fact great. Well then let me ask you dear Christian. How close are you following your Savior? Are you following him at a safe distance that arouses no attention from the world, your friends or family. Are you following him at a distance, a dangerous distance that makes you easy prey for Satan? How close are you following? If someone were to watch you over the course of your day could they accuse you of being a Christian? Maybe that's why you haven't experienced what Jesus tells his disciples here.

But I suspect you have. You know what comes with following Jesus in an unbelieving culture-in your workplace, even in our own families. It can be a struggle not just in places where you take your life in your hands by saying: *I believe in Jesus.* It's a struggle to persevere. It's a struggle that too many abandon along the way.

Here Jesus helps us to look beyond the struggle. To see that the cost is worth it by far. So we say:

Christian, Bear the Strain

I. Yes, it will cost you to follow Jesus.

II. Yes, but follow on to rich reward.

Jesus was sending the twelve disciples. He tells them: ⁷As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Wow, the kingdom is near. Sounds like good times are just around the bend. So the disciples thought. Like many, they thought the coming of the Christ meant power, glory and peace. The Romans would be gone. A great new king would take charge. Great expectations, kind of like those Christians who believe that Jesus will return and reign on the earth for a thousand years – a millennium of peace. Great expectations but wrong expectations.

³⁴"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. Wait a second Lord. What about those Christmas angels that sang at your birth? Didn't they sing about peace-peace on earth? Yes they did. Didn't Jesus say, Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. Yes he did. And he does. He offers a very special kind of peace that only He can give. Let's talk about that peace before the sword.

Too many times it happens. A bomb goes off in a public place. A peaceful day is horribly changed into a day of death and destruction. That's what sin does to our relationship with God. It's like a bomb that brought death and destruction to something so good—and we were the bomb makers. And bombs leave debris everywhere. That's what sin does. It makes debris out of the love we owe each other, out of unborn children, out of marriages meant to last. And worst of all sin made debris out of our relationship with God.

But for some strange reason beyond my understanding, God so loved the world, you and me bomb makers, that he gave his one and only Son...He gave us Jesus who then lived each day of his life for you. Then he took your guilt and mine to a cross where he paid the deadly price for us all. Every sin. Every sinner. It is finished And how can we be sure? Jesus rose from his grave. And now God's word declares. Through faith in Jesus, we have peace with God. In Christ, God is your dear Father and you are his dear child. And he promises you, Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. In other words, his love will never fail you, even when you take your last breath on this earth. That's the peace our Savior gives in the gospel.

But what happens wherever that gospel is preached. Some believe it by the grace of God. Others reject it. That's the sword Jesus speaks of here. Think of a sword. It cuts. It divides. When God's Word draws people to Jesus, there comes a great divide. God spoke of it in the Garden of Eden when he said. I will put enmity between your offspring and hers. Jesus speaks of it when he said to his disciples: If they hated me, they will also hate you.

With Jesus comes a great divide. Sometimes that divide results in terrible things done to Christians. I often sense it in the way people act when they find out I am a Christian pastor. There's a divide. And sadly that divide can run right through a family. Jesus speaks of it here: "`a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— ³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own

household.'

Well who wants that? These are people near and dear to us. If my faith in Christ turns my loved ones against, that's a serious price to pay. No one wants to be at odds with family. We want peace and good relations. But sometimes that is what it will cost you to follow Jesus. What did Jesus say? ³⁷"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;

And then Jesus adds: anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. When Jesus disciples heard the word cross it must have shook them to the core. The crosses they knew were not pretty jewelry hanging on a golden chain. They were ugly instruments of torture.

But Jesus wasn't telling people to go around carrying a heavy wooden cross. He's talking about the things that make it hard to follow Jesus. From the teasing of friends to a job or business lost because you refuse to go against God's Word, all the way to the Christian mother condemned to death in Pakistan because of her faith.

Yes it will cost you to follow Jesus. And for some that cost is too much to bear. They'd rather live their life and not deal with those things. But how sad. Such a person has truck a terrible deal in walking away. Jesus says it this way. Whoever finds his life will lose it. Or as Jesus says elsewhere: What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul.

So you, Christian, **bear the strain** no matter how hard. For **yes it will cost you to follow Jesus.** If you are faithful it will cost you. But follow on friends. **Follow on to rich reward.**

Does the name Pastor Richard Wurmbrand ring any kind of bell? He wrote the book *Tortured for Christ*. He was a Lutheran pastor in Communist Rumania who suffered much for the gospel. When he was in prison, he met a man he had led to Christ but now was also in prison for his faith while his wife and children were starving. Pastor Wurmbrand said to him: *Do you hold it against me that I told you about Jesus and now you are in prison?* To which the man replied: *If you had not told me I would not have known about our wonderful Savior.* Here was the kind of man Jesus was talking about when he said: Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

You see, to follow Jesus is to lose our life in Him. Before he came to us in baptism, we belonged to this sinful dying world with all its ugliness. We were without God and without hope. Our lives were on a different course with a whole different set of values. But we have lost that life in Jesus. In fact, sometimes that life is taken from us by those who hate Jesus.

But we have lost this life only to find another. He who believes in the Son has eternal life. And when we believe, we find life. Real life. Life with God. Life that even death cannot destroy. Life that offers rich reward. And not just to those men in prison. All of us who follow Jesus regardless of the cost. **We follow on to rich reward.**

And how do we do that? We listen to those he has sent. We listen and take to heart the truths Jesus has given them in this Word. It started with just these twelve men. But it goes on to this day through those he has called to his service. For what does Jesus remind them here? They do not speak for themselves. They point you to Jesus and urge you to trust him and follow him. So listen closely to what Jesus says to his called servants: ⁴⁰ "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.

Now I'd like to skip down to the last verse of our text: ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." Whenever I read this verse I think of two very special people years ago. I was going through their neighborhood knocking on doors, introducing myself as pastor Smith of a new church in the area. It was a hot desert evening. I came to their neighbor's door. I knocked. He opened up for a moment, listened for a few moments then yelled at me and slammed the door shut. But before I could leave he opened the door again and asked me if I had any kids. I told him two—and one on the way. He muttered that's too bad and slammed the door even harder.

I trudged over to the next house not sure I wanted to knock. Ed and his wife answered. They soon realized I was a Christian pastor, invited me in, listened to my story, encouraged me in my ministry and then brought me a very welcome glass of cold water. They probably thought it was nothing but it meant a lot coming from these two people who followed Jesus and honored his gospel. They helped me to **bear the strain** as we should help one another.

But here's the thought. If I have my way when I get up to heaven, Ed and his wife will be in for a surprise. Here is one person who will greet them with a big hug. I suppose there will be a lot of that going on. So Christian **bear the strain** of following Jesus. Yes it can be hard at times. But follow on. Follow on to rich reward –and more. Yes more. Amen.