



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 4

June 28, 2020

Paradox

Matthew 10:34–42

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰ “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² 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.”

Frederick Bruce, an English professor and writer, wrote a book in 1983 called the “The Hard Sayings in the Bible.” In it he tackled verses that were hard to understand or appeared to be contradictory. To him, and to many people, these sayings seem paradoxical.

There are many such paradoxes in Scripture. In fact, it’s in the nature of our world that there are paradoxes. A paradox, as you might know, is an apparent contradiction that persists despite our efforts to resolve it. One paradox that serves as an excellent example of this is ourselves.

Look at us! We who call ourselves Christians – we’re sinners – children of Adam, born in sin, not able to do the things we should, would, could, and ought to do! We cannot help ourselves; even our own wisdom and strength fail us when it comes to our sin.

And yet, we’re also Christ’s redeemed. We’re saved; our sins are forgiven – even the deepest and most firmly rooted of them. The greatest and most horrible expression of our depravity is taken away by Jesus.

We are what Martin Luther called “*simul justus et peccator*,” “both Sinners and Saints.” We’re paradoxical; we’re a living contradiction. That’s how life is. We would love to live in a world where there are no paradoxes, but that world doesn’t exist, and so it is when God speaks to us in His Word. There are paradoxes.

It is just such a paradox that we find in our text. Jesus says, “Do not think that I



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have come to bring peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Now, wait a minute. Isn’t this the “Prince of Peace?” Didn’t He say: “My peace I leave with you?”

So, what’s He saying here? What is this “sword” that He brings? First of all, we have to recognize that a sword represents death, because it’s an instrument of war. Now, Jesus didn’t start the war, but it would be foolish to enter an arena of battle without a weapon.

The fact is, friends, we are at war. Years ago a dear friend of mine had a dream. In this dream, the spiritual war in which we are all engaged broke out into a great military battle between the forces of good and evil. He found himself standing on a great battlefield, surrounded by the elements of war. Explosions shook the earth, bullets whizzed past his ears. He looked around and saw the familiar faces of those he had known throughout his life and ministry, who had fought bravely for the kingdom of God. Many were injured, some very badly. There was no visible indication of which side was winning, but he had the deep impression that this was a last, desperate, all-out offensive on the part of the forces of darkness. It was a grim scene, but he sensed that our victory was imminent. When he awoke from that dream, the meaning was clearer than any dream he had ever had. What was visible in his dream is in reality *invisible* to the human eye. But the battle is every bit as real; many of God’s faithful servants are being injured in ways beyond our ability to see, yet the wounds are deep and lasting. Only the healing balm of the Gospel can mend these wounds. Some will never be fully healed until we meet the Great Physician face-to-face. The end of this war is coming, beloved, and it’s coming soon. But before we have victory, the devil and his troops will be fighting frantically to gain as much ground as they can, while they can. To be sure, the forces of evil are even now engaged in a final, desperate, all-out offensive against the followers of Christ.

This is the great cosmic conflict that began in Eden’s garden and is now, in our lifetime, coming to a head. Skirmishes are breaking out all over. From the physical persecution of Christians in various parts of the world, to philosophical persecution here in our own land, our opponents range from the enemies of the cross to members of our own households . . . and own church. Though the war was won by Christ through His suffering, death, and resurrection, the battle continues, as Satan struggles to pull as many of us down with him as he can. So he fires his flaming arrows and swings his demonic sword in order to cut us down. Sin brought the sword. And it can only be defeated by the sword. The trouble is, the sword is too heavy for us to lift. Jesus must wield the sword; He must battle sin for us.

And He must wage this war against sin not only because He alone has the strength to engage the enemy and defeat him, but also because we’re not innocent bystanders. We’re often used by the enemy to inflict damage on the very ones we love. For the war goes on, first of all, within each and every one of us. The battle of good against evil goes on daily in our hearts, our spirits desiring to do the good that pleases God, our flesh



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desiring to do the evil that pleases only itself and the devil who tempts it. We will never be able to wage war against the forces of darkness ourselves, for we far too often switch sides and fight for the enemy.

But war must be engaged; the enemy of God and His creation, he who is bent on our destruction and that of our world, must be defeated, for without this war there can never be peace. You know, it's another strange paradox that war is often the means necessary to establish or restore peace. It's sin that brought the war between good and evil to our world. Sin and its master, Satan, have started this assault against God's creation. The only way for peace to be restored is to defeat sin, death, and the devil.

Yes, sin is the enemy. Jesus is not suggesting in this text that we wage war against the heathen; He's not telling us to take up arms against the person or persons we think are responsible for our conflict. Jesus is not the great warrior king of the earth. Peace may ultimately be re-established in our nation. God grant it soon to His glory and our great joy! But a peace among nations is a peace obtainable in our world *by our world*. Jesus offers a peace that the world cannot give.

His peace, after all, is the Gospel. Christ's peace is a peace between you and God, a peace that comes by defeating the power of sin.

How do we get that peace? How does the peace Jesus obtained by His death and resurrection, His defeat of sin and the devil, become ours? First, by repentance and faith. We acknowledge that we're sinners, and then God, through Jesus Christ His Son, cleanses us from our sin. In Holy Baptism, in the Lord's Supper, we're saved from our sin. Peace, on account of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, now exists between you and God!! Having come to faith in the Savior, your life of peace begins and continues in Jesus.

And then we acknowledge that this peace is a gift – a gift of pure grace. It can't be earned, it can't be bought; the price has already been paid, and it's offered free of charge to all who accept Christ in faith.

But, once you have this peace, this Gospel, the world will hate you and then, my friends – the war comes to you! But this is nothing to fear, for it is a great and glorious war, a war against sin and death, and a war in which our victory is assured, for Christ already won the war at Calvary.

The battle, however, continues . . . as it should. Christians are not meant to live on top of a mountain and chant prayers all day. Christians are not meant to lock themselves away in a monastery, and contemplate the mysteries. Christians are not meant to turn inward upon ourselves and believe we're the center of the universe.

You see, Christians are "in-the-world-yet-not-of-the-world" people. We're the light of the world, the salt of the earth; we're God's spice to season people's lives. We're God's storm troopers, His sheep flocked together to take the Gospel to others, to win the world for Christ.

And yet it's another great paradox that in the midst of the battle we may still have peace. On the battlefield of my friend's dream, amid the mud and blood, noise and



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commotion of war, my friend felt peace, just like in the turbulence and struggles on the battlefield of life, you too may have peace.

The Son of God makes peace between you and the Father. But this peace does not come as a “bed of Roses”; it comes with the sword, with battle, war, conflict, and strife. This is a reality we need to deal with. And it’s why fellowship – gathering here in church, Godly Love and brotherhood – is so important; it helps us to have peace in the battle. God bless you in your daily walk, beloved, as Christ enables you to fight the good fight of faith. But, more importantly, may you ever cling to Him who fights on your behalf – your Champion, your Savior, Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen