

INTRODUCTION

It's been a memorable weather week, for the first time since they started keeping records, 49 of the 50 states had snow on the ground at the same time. Northwest Florida even had snow – the only state without snow was Hawaii. There is usually always snow on the top of Mauna Kea, which rises 14,000 feet above sea level on the Big Island. But observers there report there was no snow this week. And meanwhile, they're hauling in snow in Canada for the Winter Olympics—go figure!

That's unusual weather, and I have an unusual message topic today: "The Prince of Peace Carries a Sword." There are many titles given to Jesus in the Bible, and one of my favorites is "Prince of Peace." In Isaiah 9:6, the Jesus' birth was predicted 750 years before it happened. This prophecy says, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." And yet in the passage we're about to read Jesus says, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword." When I first read that many years ago I scratched my head and thought, "Wait a minute! I thought Jesus was the Prince of Peace, but here He says He didn't come to bring peace but a sword." Which one is it? Is He the Prince of Peace, or does He carry a sword? The answer is "yes" to both.

We've all seen paintings of Jesus holding a little lamb in His arms; that's the warm, fuzzy, precious moments Jesus. But idea of Jesus holding a sword, like Mel Gibson in the movie "Braveheart," upsets our sensibilities! So what did Jesus mean when He made that radical statement? First, don't forget the context. Jesus is sending His disciples out to preach the gospel of the Kingdom. He is warning them that there will be many people who will reject their message. He also warns them some of them would be arrested and killed for their testimony about Jesus. When you understand this context of opposition, these words make more sense.

Matthew 10:32-39. "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'* 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 anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

* Micah 7:6

So much of what Jesus has said has been misquoted or taken out of context. In this message I want to spend the first half of this message telling you what Jesus *didn't* mean by this statement and then talk about what Jesus really was saying. But primarily I want you to leave here with an understanding of what this truth means to you in your daily life. So let's start with two common misunderstandings about this statement.

MISUNDERSTANDING ONE: JESUS ISN'T OPPOSED TO PEACE

In fact, He said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." (John 14:27) Jesus knew there are different kinds of peace. He came to give us peace, but not the kind of peace the world understands. In our time, people keep talking about the need for world peace. In fact, for years, whenever a beauty pageant contestant has been asked the question, "And what is the one most important thing our society needs?" The right answer is always, "world peace."

I think every beauty pageant contestant should just say "world peace" to whatever the question may be. You may remember a couple of years ago in the Miss Teen USA pageant Miss South Carolina was asked, "Why do you think a fifth of Americans can't find the USA on a world map?" Here is her answer: "I personally believe that U.S. Americans are unable to do so because, uhmmm, some people out there in our nation don't have maps and uh, I believe that our, I, education like such as, uh, South Africa, and uh, the Iraq, everywhere like such as, and I believe that they should, uh, our education over here in the U.S. should help the U.S., uh, should help South Africa, it should help the Iraq and the Asian countries so we will be able to build up our future, for..." She would have been better off if she had just smiled and said, "World Peace."

But is world peace actually possible? In Matthew 24 Jesus said there would always be wars and rumors of wars. He was right on target. Several years ago, historians at West Point Military Academy tried to determine how many years of war and peace the world had experienced over the last 5,600 years. They concluded that over the past 56 centuries, there have been 14,351 wars and over 3.6 billion people had been killed. They also concluded that of the 5,600 years there were only 293 years of peace where no major war was fought.

So when Jesus said He didn't come to bring peace to the earth, He was saying it wasn't His job to end all wars. He didn't come to bring THAT kind of peace, but He came to bring another, more important kind of peace. He said, "MY peace I give to you—not the kind of peace the world understands."

Jesus is all about peace. He came to give peace that comes from having a relationship with Him as the Prince of Peace. Jesus offers you something much more valuable than world peace; He offers you peace WITH God and the peace OF God. Romans 5:1 says, "Since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 2:14 says Jesus, Himself is our peace having broken down the wall that separated us from God. Colossians 1:20 says He came to make that peace through the blood of His cross. And Philippians 4:7 tells us Jesus can give us an inner peace that passes all human understanding.

On Palm Sunday, as Jesus traveled down the Mount of Olives, he stopped and looked at the city and wept. I've stood in that exact spot many times. There is a beautiful church there called Dominus Flevit, which is Latin for "Our Lord's tears." Why did He cry? He said, "Oh Jerusalem, if you had only known what would bring you PEACE—but you didn't accept me as God, and I foresee that this city will fall to the swords of the Romans." He was so passionate about giving

them peace, that it broke His heart when they rejected Him. As Jesus looks at your life today, does it break His heart because you have not accepted Him as your Prince of Peace? He offers it to you today.

MISUNDERSTANDING TWO: JESUS DOESN'T ADVOCATE VIOLENCE

We know Jesus wasn't speaking literally about a sword, because when He was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter drew his sword to defend Jesus and Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back in its place. For all who draw the sword will die by the sword." (Matthew 26:52)

This passage of scripture has been abused and misused throughout history as a rationale for violence in the name of Jesus. The Crusades are a perfect example of how leaders with a lack of Biblical understanding used this passage to motivate thousands of people to pick up the sword and declare war against the Muslims who were occupying the holy land of Israel. Hundreds of thousands died. They didn't understand that the Christian faith isn't a religion that focuses on a place worth killing for. Christianity is about a relationship with a PERSON worth dying for.

The Spanish Inquisition justified the torture and murder of Jews, Muslims, and even non-Catholic Christians by misusing scriptures like this about Jesus and the sword.

And see if you can guess who spoke these words: "My feelings as a Christian point me to my Lord and Savior as a fighter. It points me to the man who once in loneliness, surrounded only by a few followers, recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to fight against them and who, God's truth was greatest not as a sufferer but as a fighter. How terrific was His fight for the world against the Jewish poison. To-day, after two thousand years, with deepest emotion I recognize more profoundly than ever before in the fact that it was for this that He had to shed His blood upon the Cross." It was Adolph Hitler in a speech he gave in Munich on April 12, 1922.

But Hitler was wrong. Jesus wasn't a fighter, He was a lover. He was using a sword as a metaphor. There is no record that Jesus ever even picked up a sword in His hand. The most agitated we ever see Him is when He drove the moneychangers out of the Temple for their extortion. But when you read all four accounts, you learn He didn't attack the people. He turned over their tables and drove the cattle out, but there is no indication He committed any act of violence against the men running those scams. He didn't hate them, He hated their sin.

Jesus taught that if someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other cheek. He didn't teach retaliation, He taught forgiveness. Jesus never intended His followers to be soldiers who used literal swords. That doesn't mean Jesus taught us to all be pacifists. He forbids personal violence, but many committed Christians continue to serve in our military fighting for our freedom. But they carry the sword of the governing authority, not for personal vendettas.

I cannot leave this point without making a very important contrast between Jesus and Mohammed. In our age of PC, I know I'm not being tolerant. And there are people who have left our church because they don't like that I speak about this, but I cannot be silent. I challenge you

to study Islamic history. Mohammed was literally a man of the sword. He was known as a warrior, and he personally killed those who opposed his faith. History is clear that he led military battles and personally killed enemies. You may think the main symbol of Islam is the star and the crescent, but it isn't. That's an old symbol from the Ottoman Empire and it many Muslims reject it. The official symbol of Shiite Muslims is the sword. Look at the official flag of Saudi Arabia, and there is a sword below the Arabic inscription, "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." Islam has spread through the sword, and Christianity spread through the preaching of the gospel.

I simply point this out to you to remind you that Jesus never committed violence against anyone. Jesus never took a life; instead, He restored physical life to many, and offers eternal life to all. Don't ever be afraid to compare Jesus to Mohammed or any other religious leader, because Jesus wins every time!

So what was Jesus talking about when He made the statement, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword?" The key is found in verse 32, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."

Through the years I've heard people say, "I believe your faith is a private matter and you shouldn't talk about it openly." Well, you're entitled to your opinion, but if you believe that, then your faith isn't faith in Jesus. Jesus told us to confess our faith before others. Now I believe our faith is personal. That means I can't believe for you and you can't believe for me. But we have a responsibility to publicly tell others about our faith. When we acknowledge Jesus before others, He acknowledges us before His Father. Every time you let someone know you are a different person because of Jesus, Jesus turns to His Father and says, "Dad, that's one of mine right there. I claim him or her as one of my followers." But when you openly confess Jesus, there are some consequences you have to face—and not all of them are pleasant.

(1) WHEN YOU OPENLY CONFESS JESUS SOME PEOPLE WILL CUT YOU OUT OF THEIR LIVES

The metaphor of the sword carries the idea of division.

Someone said, "There are two kinds of people in the world. Those who group all people into two categories and those that don't." But according to Jesus, all of mankind IS divided between those who are followers of Jesus and those who are not yet followers of Jesus. He said, "He who is not with me is against me." (Matthew 12:30) In Matthew 25 Jesus predicts a time when He will separate the sheep and the goats, but he was talking about people. Jesus is the great divide.

Since the beginning of our faith, there has been persecution and even execution of Christians. In Hebrews 11 we have what is often called the Roll Call of Faith. But it could also be called the Poster Children for the Persecuted, because all of them suffered and many of them lost their lives. The chapter concludes with this observation, "Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword." (Hebrews 11:36-37)

Not many of us here in the U.S. are being arrested for our faith. Yet. But when you stand up for Jesus Christ there are going to be some of your former friends who may cut you out of their lives. They may no longer invite you to their parties, or include you in their activities. And being ostracized and rejected can hurt like being cut with a knife.

But lest you think the death and martyrdom of Christians is something from history think again. Let me read a statement that got my attention recently: "More people were martyred for the sake of the gospel in the 20th century than in all the previous centuries combined. As many as 160,000 believers reportedly make 'the ultimate sacrifice' each year. At current rates, one in every 200 Christians around the world can expect to be martyred." (Voice of the Martyrs)

That amazing statistic is because there are more Christians than ever before, and there is an increasing rise in attacks against Christians in Muslim nations. Jesus was predicting His followers would face a sword.

(2) WHEN YOU OPENLY CONFESS JESUS YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS MAY HURT YOU

Jesus quoted the prophet Micah saying He came to set family members against each other. (Since some people have trouble with their in-laws, He may not have to push too hard to set daughters-in-laws against mothers-in-law!) But seriously, Jesus claimed one of the consequences of openly confessing Him would be that some family members would refuse to follow Him and would hurt those who do. He didn't say you shouldn't love your family members, He simply said love for Him must supersede love for your family.

Did you know this was true even of Jesus' earthly family? Early in His ministry when He started going around claiming to be the Messiah, His own family refused to believe Him. The Bible says, "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered...when his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" (Mark 3:21)

In some cultures, if a family member becomes a Christian, they are considered to be dead. A few months ago I told you about 17-year-old Rifqa Bary. She became a Christian and ran away from her home in Ohio, because she feared her father would harm her or kill her. She is still in Florida under protective foster care because the court deemed there was indeed a danger to her life. Her family is suing the state of Florida to regain custody of her, but some former Muslims who are now Christians say if she is returned to her dad, she'll be put on the first plane back to Sri Lanka and will never be heard from again. Her next court date is set for March 2, so we need to pray for Rifqa. She understands these words of Jesus more than any of the rest of us here today.

But many of you have told me you have family members who aren't Christians. At family gatherings and you have to watch what you say, because if you bring up your faith, the battle breaks out. Verbal swords are drawn and the fight begins. Of course we love our family members, but Jesus said our love for Him must be supreme.

(3) WHEN YOU OPENLY CONFESS JESUS YOU MUST DAILY DIE TO SELF

Jesus said the best way to deal with being cut off, or rejected is to "take up your cross and follow me." Taking up the cross doesn't mean wearing a cross, or hanging a cross on your wall. In Jesus' day when you saw someone carrying a cross it meant one thing: They were going to die.

I really believe most Christians truly want to share their faith and confess Jesus openly, but they don't for one simple reason—they are afraid. They aren't afraid someone will pull out a sword and kill them. They're afraid someone will ridicule them or make fun of them or they'll miss their chance for a promotion. They're afraid they won't "fit in."

When I was senior in high school I was already preaching. I shared my faith with everyone I could. Most people respected me for that, but there were plenty who went out of their way to make fun of me and call me preacher. My basketball coach was a rough guy. He would sometimes get angry at practice and would do what we used to say "cuss up a blue streak." But after he let those expletives fill the air he often turned to me and sarcastically said, "Excuse my language, Dykes." I don't know if that was a good thing or not, but it always made me feel a little embarrassed. The other players glanced at me as if to say, "What's so SPECIAL about you?"

The only way to get over your fear of embarrassment is to die daily. That means to die to flesh. You see, your "flesh" or "self" wants to avoid embarrassment or ridicule. When you die to self it no longer stings when someone makes fun of you or criticizes you. You can go to a funeral home and view a body and say, "That's an ugly tie" or "That's a bad hair cut" and it won't bother that guy a bit—he's dead. When you're dead to self you become less sensitive to insults as well. There is a verse I have claimed probably more than any verse in the Bible. Try quoting this every day and see if it doesn't give you boldness to openly confess Jesus: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

(4) WHEN YOU OPENLY CONFESS JESUS YOU GAIN MORE THAN YOU LOSE

Then Jesus said in verse 39 "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." That just means if you live your life only for your SELF you lose. But if you LOSE your life for Jesus, you WIN. There really is no middle ground there. You can choose to spare your life or sacrifice your life. But when you lose your life for the cause of Christ you discover what real life is. Jesus said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10b)

Some people say you have to give up a lot to become a Christian, and they're right. When you come to Jesus you give up everything. But what you gain is so much better. You give up guilt and gain a forgiveness. You give up worry and gain confidence in Christ. You give up frustration and gain a purpose for living. You give up hell and gain heaven. Jim Elliott was right when he said, "He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose."

CONCLUSION

The takeaway truth in this passage is that when you are radically in love with Jesus Christ and truly follow Him, you risk being hurt, like being cut by a sharp sword. But the risk is worth the reward! I remember Dr. R.G. Lee telling a story about a girl who attended Memphis State University. Some of her friends brought her to Bellevue Baptist Church where she became a Christian. She fell in love with Jesus and started using her ability to sing and play the piano for Christ. The only problem is she came from a very wealthy family who were religious but not really Christian. Her family only attended church on Easter or Christmas, but she had never heard her family pray or read the Bible in their home. A few weeks after her conversion, she drove home to tell her parents. She was glowing in her faith and was told her mother and father what a difference Jesus had made in her life and how she was going to serve Him for the rest of her life.

Rather than receiving the news with joy, her parents looked at her as if she had lost her mind. Dr. Lee said they considered Baptists to be some strange cult, and they thought their daughter had been brainwashed. They refused to believe what happened to her was real and spent all weekend trying to talk some sense into her.

She wanted them to go to church with her on Sunday, but they refused and told her she couldn't go either. Later that afternoon as she prepared to return to Memphis State her father told her they were disappointed in her. They had other plans for her than for her to become a religious kook. He laid down an ultimatum. He said, "Your mother and I have decided that you need to drop out of school. We want you to give up this notion of being 'born again' and stay here and let us get you some help. If you insist on going back to school, you're on your own. We will no longer pay for your tuition or expenses."

The girl's heart was broken, and she ran up to her room crying. A little while later she slipped back downstairs with her packed suitcase to leave her home. Before she walked out, she stopped at the grand piano where she had learned to play classical music. She sat down and began to play a Christian song she had recently learned. With a choked voice she sang, "I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold; I'd rather be His than have riches untold; I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land; I'd rather be led by His nailed-pierced hand" Then with a broken voice she continued, "Than to be the king of a vast domain, or be held in sin's dread sway; I'd rather have Jesus than anything, this world affords today."

Dr. Lee said as she picked up her suitcase and started for the front door her father stepped into the room. He had heard her song and it had melted his heart. He said, "Darling, if Jesus means so much to you that you would be willing to give all this up, He has to be real. We want to know more about what you have." And Dr. Lee said both of her parents later came to faith in Jesus.

Yes, the Prince of Peace brought a sword. But He doesn't use it to hurt anyone He uses it to teach us that following Him often brings us to the point of the sword. And remember, kings also used swords to honor their faithful servants. Revelation 19 predicts a time when the King of Kings will return with a sword—a two-edged sword that comes out of His mouth. Our goal should be to serve Him faithfully and confess Him openly. Maybe one day you'll kneel before your King and He'll touch that sword to your shoulders and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

OUTLINE

MISUNDERSTANDINGS:

1. Jesus isn't opposed to peace

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." *John 14:27*

2. Jesus doesn't advocate violence

"Put your sword back in its place. For all who draw the sword will die by the sword." *Matthew 26:52*

WHEN YOU OPENLY CONFESS JESUS:

1. Some people will cut you out of their lives

"Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword." *Hebrews 11:36-37*

2. Your family members may hurt you

"Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered...when his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" *Mark 3:21*

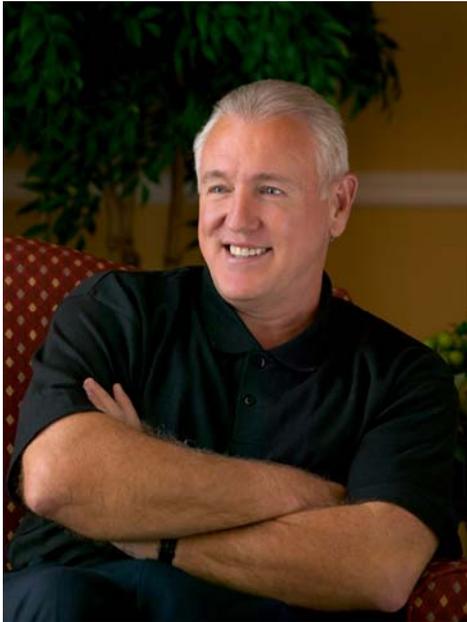
3. You must die daily to self

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." *Galatians 2:20*

4. You gain more than you lose

"I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full." *John 10:10b*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes