

“Losing Your Life *or* An Introduction to Kingdom Math”
Seventh Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 8
June 29, 2008

Texts: Isaiah 2:10-17 / Psalm 89:1-18 / Romans 6:3-11 / Matthew 10:34-42

The Second Lesson

Romans 6:3-11

Bible, p. 1199

6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The Gospel

Matthew 10:34-42

Bible, p. 1036

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.”

This Gospel passage introduces the reader to Kingdom Math. Now, before your eyes glaze over, let's look at this passage, opening your pew Bibles to p. 1036. We can divide this passage into three sections: 1) verses 34-36 are about Division; 2) verses 37-39 are about Subtraction; and finally verses 40-42 are about Addition. Division, Subtraction, and Addition – Kingdom Math. Let me explain.

First, verses 34-36,

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.

So, first there is division. Many of you may be saying, yes, but didn't Jesus breathe peace on His disciples in the upper room? And doesn't St. Paul constantly talk about the peace we have with God if we believe in Jesus and the peace we are to exhibit as the people of God? Yes, that is true, but, again, notice what the first verse says, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace **on earth**..." It is not worldly peace that Jesus offers, but a peace within; peace with God through the forgiveness of sins (Romans 5:1), and peace between true believers in Christ. Nineteenth century Anglican Bishop J.C. Ryle has said,

So long as one man believes and another man remains unbelieving, so long as one is resolved to keep his sins and another is desirous to give them up, the result of the preaching of the gospel will mean division. [Jesus] brings peace, but that peace divides the world between those who have embraced that peace and those who have rejected it and opposed it...The object of Jesus' first coming was not to set up a millennial kingdom in which all would be of one mind, but to bring in the gospel which would lead to strife and divisions. We have no right to be surprised if we see this continually fulfilled. We are not to think it strange if the gospel rends asunder families and even estrangement between the nearest relations. Jesus is warning us here to expect, both individually and corporately, the gospel to bring about opposition when it is embraced truly.

Do not be fooled. Jesus is also crystal clear here that, for the committed Christian, family is not the number one priority. God should always be first. He is explicit here. God is not saying, and obviously neither am I, that families are not important. God cares deeply about families and that we should cherish our families. But, if they take preference over our love of God, then this is called idolatry, and this will lead to dysfunction and disorder in our lives and in our families.

Think about all of the time you spend with your families, nurturing them, encouraging them, caring for them, going to activities with them. Think of all the mental effort you expend thinking about their well-being, trying to do the right thing, encouraging them. Have you spent as much or more time with the Lord and doing the Lord's work? He wants to be first. He needs to be first, for the health of your family.

The Gospel is clear that our relationship with Jesus will divide families. I know many of you sitting out there in the congregation have already, and some are continuing, to experience that. Some of you have daughters or sons, or mothers or fathers, or husbands or wives who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They may know *of* Him, they may even believe *in* Him in some way, but they do not really have a personal relationship with Him. They do not see Jesus Christ as the Savior and Lord – they do not seek Him daily in prayer, they do not read His Word daily seeking God's counsel in all things, and they do not come together every week with His Body to worship Him.

Let me say one final thing about this passage...and it may be a hard thing for some to hear. This is directed mainly to the young people of this congregation. Please, Holy Spirit, open ears to hear. If you are dating, or will begin dating in the future, be forewarned. The Gospel of Jesus Christ divides. If you, as a Christian, do not make Jesus Christ the center of your relationship with the person you are dating or engaged to, or thinking about being engaged to, then you will be at war with them, with yourself, and with God, from the very start. There will be no peace. Although we may all know of cases where a Christian married a non-Christian, and at some point the non-Christian came to faith, there are many more examples of Christians losing their faith because of an unfaithful spouse, terrible discord in families, with children not raised in the church, and even divorce. It is best to seek first someone with whom you can, as the Scripture says, be equally yoked. In other words, make a personal relationship with Jesus Christ the first criteria for choosing a mate. Then, your relationship will at least begin in peace.

Secondly, in verses 37-39, we see that the Kingdom of God includes Subtraction.

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.

There are those who will refuse the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they will seek their own way and not that of the Father, and these folks, unfortunately, will not be considered part of the Kingdom of God. They will not have abundant life with Christ right now or be with us for eternity to enjoy the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Finally, the Good News. There is most assuredly Addition in the Kingdom of God.

Amen!

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.”

From the beginning, that has been God the Father and Jesus His Son’s wish for all humanity. Recall what the St. Paul says in his First Letter to Timothy,

*This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires **all people** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom **for all**, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:4-6)*

And, the Apostle John says in his first epistle,

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation [a big word that means that Jesus is our substitute, He takes the penalty that is rightly ours] for our sins, and not for ours only but also **for the sins of the whole world**. (1 John 2:1-2)*

Each and every person who receives Jesus and does the deeds that He calls them to do...to care for the poor, to open their hearts to all...these will be added to the Kingdom of God.

Alleluia!

Our reading from Matthew’s Gospel is one of the many hard sayings of Jesus. And it is a passage that you often hear minimized. Often while the congregation is still settling into their pew after the reading of this Gospel, the preacher begins to qualify Jesus’s statements here. “Well, Jesus didn’t really mean that members of the same household will be enemies...” “Of course, we know that Jesus did want peace...he was not a warrior” And

on and on the apologies go. But, if we look outside of even Matthew's Gospel, especially in John's Gospel, we see Jesus using similar, sometimes even more stark, expressions.

In John's Gospel (15:18-19; 17:14), Jesus says,

*18 "If the world **hates** you, know that it has **hated** me before it **hated** you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world **hates** you...14 I have given them your word, and the world has **hated** them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

The word "hate" is used five times in three verses here. And less you think that this word is mistranslated somehow, the original Greek word actually means, "to detest, to abhor; to hate without ceasing."

But, most significantly, what Christ is saying here is that, unless He is the first priority, everything else will be out of whack in your life. Unless you love Jesus Christ with such an intensity that would see your love of family, and country, and property, pale by comparison, then you will not be the effective witness that you are called to be.

And why is this so? Because if you love your family first, even in the face of their disbelief, then you will have lost the most important battle; the battle for their souls. If you have peace within in your family, but yet your family does not know the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and if they die in their sins, then their souls will be lost for all eternity. This is a Subtraction that I hope none of us finds acceptable. And that is not true love on your part. "Loving anyone more that God is idolatry. Letting a person pull us away from God will result in our eternal separation from Him in hell."

The greatest love you can show your family is to pray fervently for their salvation and give them the example of a passionate follower of Jesus Christ, speaking of Jesus constantly, inviting them to church repeatedly, and still loving them unconditionally. For God Himself says in the Book of Deuteronomy (6:6-9),

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise... You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

We need to eat, breathe, and live Jesus Christ. When family or friends come to visit or spend the night over a weekend, you need to invite them to worship with you. It may be the

only chance they will have to hear the Gospel. There may be a message for them at that service...do not miss the opportunity. Their very life may depend on it.

And, thus, we must, as Jesus says, “lose your life,” in other words lose our own vision of our lives, what we think it should be or could be, in order to discover God’s infinitely better plan for us.

Now, I’m going to offer you something a little bit different today. We are going to have an altar call. At the conclusion of this service, Joe and I will remain at the altar rail. We will be there with the prayer teams. If there is someone in your life – brother, sister, son, daughter, father, mother, husband, wife – that you do not have the assurance of their salvation in Jesus Christ, then I would ask you to come forward for prayer. By the same token, if you do not have the assurance that **you** have salvation and new life in Jesus Christ, then I would ask you to come forward also at this time.

Now is the appointed time. Your family...THIS family... has been divided for far too long. Please come and bring your heavy hearts to the altar rail and lift your loved ones anew to Christ in prayer.

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