

# **Sermon: Jesus brings separation**

## **Luke 12:49-56**

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God is love, true. And Jesus loves us, true. But the popular image of Jesus as 'sweet Jesus' is one-sided.

In Toronto, Canada, there is a chain of ice-cream shops with a particularly anti-Christian logo and I am sure that reflects their attitude; the shops are called Sweet Jesus. Well let them; they resist a Jesus who does not exist. Because the sweet Jesus exists only in the imagination of people.

If we think of Jesus as sweet and nothing else, we have not read the Gospels. Jesus beat the salesmen out of the temple; Jesus speaks more than anyone in the bible of hell; Jesus condemned religious leaders for being whitewashed graves.

### **1 War and Peace**

And now Jesus says he has not come to bring peace on earth, but division. This does not sound nice! Because we need peace. We want peace.

In the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, you can read that the angels sing of peace on earth when Jesus is born. Now Luke quotes Jesus as saying that he has not come to bring peace? How can this be? Are Luke and Jesus contradicting themselves?

That would be a rather illogical idea, in my opinion. Luke was a careful writer, and he wrote what he did with reason. And Jesus often enough says that peacemakers are his friends. Blessed are the peacemakers.

Jesus often used enigmatic language to make his listeners think, and he also often used the Hebrew linguistic hyperbole. "If you do not hate your father and mother you cannot be my follower", is one such statement. What he meant with this, was that we must have the right priorities - In our life, God must come first.

Jesus did indeed come to bring peace on earth; when angels speak, they are never wrong. First, he brought peace by restoring the bond of peace between God and man. Then he brought peace, by telling his followers to be peacemakers.

But by restoring our relationship with God and by making his followers into peacemakers, he also created problems.

Imagine this. This world is in many respects upside down. Money is respected too much. Power is worshipped. Sin is justified. War is deemed acceptable. A lot in our world is the opposite of what God intended it to be.

If through the grace of God, he puts us downside up again, we become strange phenomena in this world. As long as people go with the flow, they are seen as okay. As soon as they are different, they are seen as troublemakers. And we are different as we are reconciled with God. But therefore also with many very different views of life as our environment.

Jesus, in our Gospel text, focuses on problems in family relationships. Where you would expect love and harmony, he describes trouble between:

father against son  
and son against father,  
mother against daughter  
and daughter against mother,  
mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law  
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

It is awful to have such divisions within our families. Painful. And if in our families we see divisions, even more can we expect such troubles in our work, in our nations, between nations.

We must not generalize what Jesus said as if he spoke of general conflicts in this world - he spoke specifically of problems that are the result of Him. Because of his presence. Because people believe in him.

In Luke 21:16-17, Jesus says that there will be days when:

You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake.

His name, his presence creates trouble for us. It is easy to go with the flow, but if we swim against the current as followers of Jesus, we get hit in the face but all the driftwood in the river.

## **2 Division must be**

The presence of Jesus Christ in our life, this creates light. In our own life. Have you noticed how painful the process can be, of accepting our Lord to speak into those areas of your life where darkness is thick?

It is not a pleasant experience to allow the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to shine in the areas of our life that we prefer to hide. But as we allow God to change us, the hurt is being changed into blessing; the pain of the process of change is softened by his presence.

And also around us, things change because we impact on our environment. This is normal, all people influence each other. We are no islands but social beings.

But to the extent that the light of Christ permeates our life, we may expect more opposition in a world that simply enjoys moral and behavioral darkness. The pain of God working in our life is in a sense the pain of the people around us who are influenced by us. And many reject the presence of Christ wholeheartedly.

Light reveals what happens in the darkness; goodness exposes what is evil. Not that we are so good, and so light. God is at work in us, and he has much to do. But even the fact that the name of Christ is written on our life, is already reason enough for some people, to resist us.

When I managed some companies here in Cairo, years ago, I had this dream that the relationships with all personnel would always be fine. And I made that a major goal of my management. It took me a few years and then I realized how wrong I had been. Because if you want to manage well, you must be prepared to let go of people. A manager who has only friends in his work, is doing something very wrong.

The same is true in church. It is impossible to please all people. If the pastor pleases all people, he must be doing something wrong.

And you have to wonder, if you only have friends, only people who like you, no people who resist you, then you maybe doing something wrong as a Christian. Because to not create friction in this upside down world, is impossible, if your life has been put straight.

A Christian can be very irritating for his family and friends. To avoid this, could mean that you must always keep your mouth shut, always go along with all things they like to do. But you cannot do this as a Christian.

Of course it is painful to be seen as an odd-ball, as strange, as irritating. But think of this, if the irritating sand did not enter into the oyster, the oyster would never create the pearl.

Jesus himself has started this process of peace and division. By his coming to this world, he brought peace, the presence of God, and this irritated the world. Many people around him were upset about him - and in the end they murdered him.

He asks the crowds - you who are so good as looking at the clouds, and recognizing that it may rain today, do you not recognize what is happening spiritually? Jesus has come to put the world on its feet again - and that creates friction. Division.

### **3 No excuse for creating problems**

But be careful. Jesus brought peace to the world, and that created the problems for him.

If you are looked down upon because of your goodness, that's fine. If you get into trouble for presenting Christ to people in a loving way, God is with you.

But I have encountered too many Christians who are by their nature irritating. Or pushy. Or unlikable. Surely God is at work in their life but the job seems hopeless :)

And I have met Christians who had problems in their work, or in their school, and they were convinced that this was persecution because they are Christians.

We can easily with our wrongly chosen words, or by our own wrong attitude, create problems. Then we are not walking in the footsteps of Jesus. Then the divisions we create has nothing to do with what Jesus talks about.

So we must be very careful to not easily think that the problems we have, are because of the others. We can often be the real cause for trouble, if we are not the peacemakers we should be.

When we face troubles, - and we all do sometimes - we must ask ourselves honestly whether we were the cause of these problems because of our lack of wisdom. Or did we behave wisely and Christlike and was that the cause of the problems that people sometimes give us?

I am sure we have all experienced both situations. Sometimes we get ourselves into trouble. But at other times, people resist us because they do not want the name of Christ in their environment.

Let us be peacemakers. As Christ called to be. Let us be bridges between people. But we may, or rather, we will experience problems if we try to be bridges. Because people walk over the bridge, and the bridge carries the weight.

It hurts to be a peacemaker. Jesus was killed for it. And if we want to follow him faithfully, we will also experience our share of pain from people around us.

### **Conclusion**

Be a peacemaker; then we truly walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

But do not get scared when you face adversity. Jesus predicted that this would happen to all who follow him - to all who by him and by the gospel have been put on their feet, who stand straight up in this world.

If you make peace and you get in trouble, be encouraged. Blessed are the peacemakers; theirs is the kingdom of God. You may lose a few friendships in the process, but peacemakers are friends with Jesus; He is nearby and He is on your side.

**Amen**