

Keep your lamp burning: the dividing line of truth
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Our passage today is one of those verses that challenges some of the modern conceptions of Jesus. Jesus offers some blunt statements in our passage today that if you did a man-on-the-street interview where you ask people, "Guess who said this," not many would think that it's Jesus. But his controversial words, again, are meant to help us. Even though they are startling and even tough, they are meant to give you hope and direction in a hostile and stressful world. I find that when times are uncertain, when it's difficult to know what to do, when confusion is circling like a thick fog, I need plain, clear truth. Even though such words might be hard to understand or accept, it's what we need. So, let's look at what Jesus says here in this passage and we'll apply it to our lives (READ Luke 12:49-53)

This certainly is not a meek and mild moment for Jesus. From beginning to end, he is passionate and bold. He's talking about some of the most important matters of life and faith. His own personal suffering is weighing heavily on his mind. The baptism he sees coming is his own coming suffering and death that is so central to his work and our faith. His suffering was a necessity; that's how the wrath of God would be satisfied. In great love Jesus voluntarily offered himself as a sacrifice for sin and he was burdened by what was coming.

But In addition to his own suffering, Jesus cares deeply for his followers; that's why he's even talking about this stuff - for the sake of people who trust in him. This entire passage is filled with blood-earnest care. So, here's what I want you to do: I want your listening to match his concern. I want to call you to listen with the same kind of care. You know, if a friend reached out to you and shared with you suicidal tendencies or that she was ready to leave her husband I hope you wouldn't have this casual, half-way interested posture. Don't be sipping a slurpee and eating a cheeseburger during that meeting. Don't be checking your text messages every 5 minutes. No, you would listen attentively, wouldn't you? You'd be leaning forward; your eyes would be locked on your friend. You'd put your phone on silence so you're not distracted. Something serious is happening right in front of you. I don't know how Jesus' words strike you, but they sound serious to me; they sound like I need to give my undivided attention; I hope you can give that this morning for the sake of your own soul.

Something really important for us to ponder is Jesus' intent. He doesn't quite say it that way, but that's exactly what he's getting at. He *intends* to bring a sword to the earth instead of peace as it's quoted in the Matthew account of this story. He is purposefully casting down fire onto the earth. "I've come to bring division," Jesus says. Why would Jesus want to do that? Isn't that kind of division exactly what we dislike in our current culture? People bringing division and disunity? Why in the world would Jesus try to do this?

I think the first place to start is seeing that Jesus is not trying to divide for divisions sake. He's not a pot stirrer hoping everyone goes to war with each other for selfish reasons. That

picture is contrary to everything we know of Jesus. I think the best way of understanding Jesus' words here is like this: Jesus has come to bring the truth and the truth doesn't just unite, but it divides, too. Have you ever thought of the truth that way? That the truth divides people as much as it unites people? Truth will bring people together, but it will also divide people into groups of two or three as well. How does that work?

I'm reminded of something Jesus said in the Gospel of John. Before Jesus was crucified by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, Pilate interrogated Jesus in his quarters. And in that exchange Jesus said a remarkable thing: as it's recorded in John 18:37 he said to Pilate, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world - to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

Do you hear Jesus, my brothers and sisters? My mission was to bring the truth to the earth. My purpose was to break the power of deceit and lies so that people can live freely before me. I've come to bear witness, to testify to, to herald and proclaim the truth (Think of it friends - there is Truth). And then he says, "If you are of the truth," meaning, "if you are on the side of truth, if the truth has captured you and has set you free, *you listen to my voice.*" Not Muhammad's voice. Not Buddha's voice. Not your own voice or your own feelings or your own dreams. I establish and proclaim the truth. Who's side are you on? Who's voice will you listen to? My voice? Or someone else's? Because if you don't listen to my voice you're not on the side of truth; you're believing lies.

Friends, the truth that Jesus is himself and that he gave to the world is a gift of mercy; it's a gift of love. That's what's so important to remember about the truth. The truth sets us free. We need the truth. Let me see if I can illustrate this for you - that we desperately need the truth to be set free.

Set the politics of abortion aside for a moment as I tell you this story. Samantha is a young woman who has a bright future, but an ugly relationship with her father. She could never live up to his expectations. She worked so hard and succeeded so often, but it never seem to meet her dad's standards. And when she didn't, her father would get downright abusive with her. Going to college was a dream; she was looking forward to getting away from him and his expectations more than anything. Samantha met a boy in college. She was so happy. But fear seized Samantha when she found she was pregnant. There were plenty of things to be scared about, but the thing that scared her the most was facing the wrath and disappointment of her father. So, to avoid all of that, she got an abortion.

At first, she was relieved. But it didn't take long for another emotion to begin to develop - guilt. She felt guilty more and more. She always believed abortion was wrong; she always hoped to be a mom someday. As the months stretched out to years, she could never shake the feeling of guilt and shame.

Wouldn't Samantha be helped to learn the truth that Jesus Christ has come to cleanse her of her sin? Wouldn't the shame of her sin be lifted if only knew and was told the truth that Jesus has come to be her shame-bearer and she could be forgiven of her sin and healed of her wounds? Friends, this is the blessing of the truth.

Or wouldn't the truth help Joe. Joe grew being told by his atheist mom and dad that there was no God to believe in. Instead of worshiping an old, bearded man in the sky (they sarcastically would say), his parents taught him to respect Mother Earth as the Giver of Life. So, his entire life, Joe has worked to care for and has even worshiped the earth. In Joe's ecological passion, he hates humanity because he believes humans are hurting, even killing, Mother Earth. Because of the lies Joe believes about God, the Earth and humans he feels justified destroying people's property and takes joy when "polluters" are hurt or even die. Wouldn't Joe be helped knowing the truth that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator of all there is and he's the one worthy of praise? And that the earth, like him, is a part of His creation? Wouldn't Joe be helped to know the truth that human beings are created in the image of God, the only part of his creation to have God's thumbprint stamped on their soul? And instead of worshiping the Earth, we are to worship God by caring for the earth and stewarding it well? Think how Joe's passion for creation care could be rightly aligned and prioritized if he only knew the truth.

When Jesus came to the earth, he came with the truth. But the truth doesn't just unite; it divides. He's the one said, "everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." That's where the division comes from, friends. Not everyone listens to the voice of Jesus, do they? So the division that Jesus has come to create is simply this: people who listen to Jesus and his voice and those who don't. The first question for you is this: who's voice will you listen to? Will you listen to the voice of Jesus? Will you count everything that he says as the truth? And are you ready for the consequences when you do; that you will find yourself on the opposite side of the large mass of people who reject the voice and words and teachings of Jesus? And that's not too hard for you to imagine, I'm guessing? Jesus' words about sexual ethics, Jesus' words about the the role and even our obedience to the government, Jesus' words about the family, Jesus' words about self-denial and wisdom are going to put us on opposite sides of those who do not obey the voice of Jesus. Jesus' words are like this line in the sand with the words *truth* on one side and *lies* on the other. What side will you be on?

That's the first important and controversial thing Jesus said. But there's more. Did you notice where Jesus draws this line of division? He draws it over the family. Look at vs. 52-53 again (READ). I'm curious what you think of that, FBC? I bet many of you are heartbroken over such an idea. Your love for family is so great. You love cherish time together; you consider your sister or brother your best friend and you couldn't imagine that not being the case. What's this about? Would Jesus actually want my family divided?

I think Jesus brings up family because he wants to get straight to our loyalties. Will we be faithful servants or not (remember, that's been the focus)? Suffering tests our faithfulness. Time tests our faithfulness; will we stay faithful even when we think we have time to spare? But other

allegiances or loyalties will test our faithfulness, too? Will we stay faithful to Jesus when the people we care for the most, the people we love the most, are on the other side of the dividing line of truth?

How might family test your faithfulness? Well, first of all, I think family might test our faithfulness when it comes to doctrine or what we believe. What do you say or do when Johnny comes home from college and tells you, "Mom, I just don't believe this God stuff anymore? I don't believe Jesus was born of a virgin, mom... come on! That's impossible!" Or, "Dad, the Bible isn't God's word. It's just a collection of old stories the church used to control people." So, what might you do in that situation? Will you stay faithful to the truth of scripture? Will you stand for the unpopular, but life giving doctrines that God has given us to believe even when your children or grandchildren think they are so old fashion and out of touch?

Maybe you're wondering, "Brian, do you think I'm going to jeopardize my family harmony over doctrine? Dry, stale, doctrine, Brian? Really?" True doctrine isn't dry or stale; it's life giving. I'm reminded of two different passages. James 1:21 says, "Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." Did you hear that? Receive the word, the truth of God - Jesus' voice. Why? It will save your soul. This truthful doctrine about Jesus, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, scripture, Creation, sin, redemption, the church will save your soul. The other passage I thought of was Jesus' words from John 17. John 17 is a prayer of Jesus to God for us; Jesus prayed for you 2000 years ago and said (John 17:17), "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." Jesus was asking God the Father to mature you, to grow you, to cleanse you and perfect you. And we learn in Jesus' prayer the truth does that. The truth will mature, grow, cleanse, and perfect you. Sound doctrine. It's not stale or dry and we can't compromise on it. And it's quite possible that you have family or will have family that will not side with true doctrine. Will you remain faithful?

Another way we might compromise or be unfaithful to the truth related to family loyalties relates to righteousness. Now, what do I mean by that? Righteousness means right living - living according to the truth of God. Question: have you ever had a family member choose a lifestyle contrary to God's word? Have you ever lived a lifestyle contrary to God's word? Happens all the time, right? And you found forgiveness from God from your win when you repented and turned to Jesus. But what if your beloved son, grandson, daughter, granddaughter won't repent? Will you compromise what God says is right living?

Right now in our culture, nothing challenges our views of righteousness like sexual ethics and norms. People have been committing sexual sins from the beginning of time; many of us have been saved from sexual sins and still struggle with sexual sins. But in recent years there is tremendous cultural pressure to throw God's prescriptions for sexuality and gender out the window completely. Because sexuality is so important, so precious to God, he guards our sexual lives by giving us very specific commands about this area. God designed us to be sexual being so that when we entered into the covenant of marriage we can express our love together and renew our covenantal love through the act of sexual fulfillment. Sexual relations outside of this

relationship God says is out of bounds because it's dangerous to us and dishonoring to him. But our rebellion to God runs so deep inside of us where we want to say to God, "Don't tell me what I can do and who I do it with and when I do it." And that rebellious independence is being fully lived out in our sexual world. Premarital relations. Adulterous relations. Same-sex relations. Polyamorous relations and every other sexual behavior is permitted and celebrated while God's prescription of monogamous, marital relations between a man and a woman is at best considered lame and stale and at worst is thought of as oppressive and needs to be eradicated.

In the book of Isaiah, when God is chronicling just how far the people of God have strayed away from him, God says this of them (Is. 5:20), "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." We are all tempted to go astray; all of us. But, by the grace of God, we can be saved from taking the wrong path. But we're also going to be tempted to compromise on what the wrong path even is, especially when our loved one's start walking that way. Maybe it's because we don't want to believe it's happening. Maybe it's because we're afraid of what that will mean for them. And maybe it's because our loyalties to family are greater than the loyalties we have to God. But one of the ways you can find yourself on the wrong side of the dividing line of truth is by compromising on and accepting unrighteousness.

Now, there are a lot of related issues that are really important for us to consider with this dilemma. Questions like:

- How do we know what core doctrines to stand on and what are secondary doctrines?
- How do we remain kind, accepting, and loving to those who disagree with Jesus' voice?
- How do we stand for truth without becoming self-righteous?

There's a temptation to be a jerk about the dividing line of truth and pretty much write off anybody who we think is opposed to Jesus' words. That's not what Jesus would have for us. But the big idea, my brothers and sisters, is knowing that standing with Jesus will mean others will think we are standing on the wrong side and that will cause division. Remain faithful, FBC. Be gracious, but stand firm in the faith.