

The title for today's message is: **Battle on, dear Christians, battle on**

Jesus said: **"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the year 1939, some say we could have had peace instead of war. That is if only Great Britain and France would have just let Hitler have Poland.

Just like the year before when they let Hitler have part of Czechoslovakia. It was then British Prime Minister Chamberlain who returned from Munich declaring that he secured peace, that's right peace with Hitler."

In the year 1941, some say there could have been peace instead of war, if only the United States had just let Japan get away with Pearl Harbor.

Yes, there could have been peace. But not the kind of peace we would want to live under.

Jesus said: ***"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."***

Here, Jesus wages war against the prince of this world, Satan, an enemy far worse than Hitler, or Japan.

And we, my friends, are on the front lines of a Spiritual war. Yes, we could find a kind of peace by appeasing Satan, another words surrendering to him.

Or, we could keep on following Jesus, even though it is a daily battle of conflict.

But battle on, dear Christians, battle on. Battle your heart to keep Jesus first. That's our theme for today, our military cadence if you will.

But why does placing Jesus before family cause such conflict? Well, here Jesus lays it all out for us, as He does throughout scripture.

For example, He's not like a recruiter who paints a rosy picture of honor, glory, and exciting world travel, just to get us to sign up.

Rather, as Jesus told His disciples, they will face persecution, that's right persecution for placing Him first in our heart.

Look, the world can tolerate many religions, but it just cannot tolerate Jesus, nor His followers. It seems, we who put Jesus first are enemies. Why?

Because Jesus condemns the world's power. And He claims He Himself is the only Savior of the world.

Sadly many churches today, have looked for the easy way out, by giving some credit, just a little, to the powers of mankind.

Yet the Christian faith confesses: "I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, or even come to Him".

Its as if the world wants the different religions working together, recognizing that each one has contributions to make, not true.

Take the Christian faith for example, they, we! confesses that Jesus Christ alone, is the one and only Savior. That we're powerless to save ourselves.

The problem? The world simple won't put up with this kind of exclusiveness. Therefore the world dislikes Jesus, and His followers.

For some, even our close family bonds are cut apart by the world's sword of hatred against Christians.

The world literally turns son against father, and daughter against mother. So wouldn't it be better to compromise a little in our faith to keep peace in the family?

Hasn't God given us our family, and told us to love each other?" Doesn't God hold family in high regard, yes, He does.

But compromising faith in Jesus for the sake of family puts our family before Jesus, making family first instead of Jesus.

Jesus said: ***"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"***.

Look, to place family before Jesus, is to make family our God. But God said: ***"You shall have no other gods before me."***

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things, and yes, all things include family.

So what a blessing when a family shares the true faith, and supports each other in it, when we don't need to choose between family and God!

And remember, when it comes to either keeping family peace, or following Jesus, there is only one right answer.

Even though, holding to God's truth alone may bring us the anger and even rejection from our family members!

Remember His words: ***"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. Anyone who loves family more than me is not worthy of me."***

But it's not just with family that placing Jesus first can become a battle in our hearts.

Doing so may bring suffering, sacrifice, and lose in so many areas dear to our hearts.

Just as soldiers risk death at the hands of their enemy, so also for Christians following Jesus. It's what we Christians say is our cross to bear.

Jesus said in our text: **"Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me"**.

Now, when Jesus talks about the cross, He's not referring to the troubles, disasters, pains, and diseases that we suffer.

We simply don't have any choice in bearing those things. We deal with those things because of our own sin.

Look, our cross is not the troubles or pains we bring on ourselves by disobeying God's commands either.

Rather our cross is a hardship or sacrifice, something that we could avoid simply by compromising God's truth. But Jesus warns us by saying: ***"Whoever finds his life will lose it"***.

Compromising Jesus to avoid our cross for a better earthly life, causes us greater loss than any loss we could have in life. That is, life eternal.

But eternal life is ours. Jesus continues" saying: **and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"**, and that's His promise to all believers.

A promise that braces us against all that the world may bombard us with as we battle to keep Jesus first in our hearts.

Now Jesus told His disciples: ***"He who receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me"***.

Christians today believe it and have put it into practice. Yes, through our hearing we too have received the testimony of the disciples. Therefore we have received Jesus.

And yes, even though we are unworthy sinful beings, God rewards us out of the bounty of His grace.

Jesus said: ***"Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward"***.

Okay, that sounds great, but what is a prophet, and what is a righteous man today? Well the definition for a prophet is one who faithfully proclaims God's word.

And as for a righteous man, he is one who is a believer in God's Word. You see, no one is righteous before God based on their own work and effort.

The only righteousness that stands up before God is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Sinners, like you and me, are righteous only when God freely gives us Jesus' righteousness.

So a righteous person is one who believes God's Word. Look when we welcome someone who is faithfully proclaiming God's Word we will receive a prophet's reward.

And when we welcome a fellow believer because they are righteous before God through faith in Jesus Christ, we will receive a righteous man's reward.

You might ask, what is the reward? Well its not earthly things such as fame, power, wealth, nor health.

Rather the reward includes the deep assurance that God's Word is faithful and true. And that He will keep His promises no matter what.

It also includes the spiritual peace that rests in Jesus, and His righteousness.

Confident that our sins are forgiven, and that we were reconciled to God through Jesus' death.

The reward is the strength to stand up for Jesus, and not a strength that relies on our inner power.

But a strength that gives up on our natural power, and looks only to the power the Holy Spirit through God's Word and Sacraments.

So battle on, dear Christians, battle on. Battle your heart to keep Jesus first. Battle on through conflict and loss.

Battle on, armed with God's gracious promises. Battle on.

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.