

The title for today's message is: **All Is NOT Easy in the Kingdom of God**

Jesus said: **Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.**

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

There was a young girl who loved to sing and wanted to make a career of it since it seemed like an easy way to make lots of money.

So when she won a pass to meet her favorite artist, the first thing she blurted out was: **"Oh, I would give anything for your career!"**

"Anything?" the artist asked. "Yes, anything" she said. The artist replied: "Would you give eight hours a day to practice like I do?".

Now for the first time the girl realized that being a successful singer wasn't going to be as easy as she thought!

Let me ask you this; what kind of things have you thought to be easy only to realize later that they were quite difficult?

To me ice skating always look easy that is until I got on the ice and realize that I can't stop without crashing into a wall or another skater.

So as Christians we sometimes expect living in the kingdom of God to be easy. After all, God loves us and has promised to take care of us, right?

Today we're going to learn something you probably already know from experience.

We're going to learn that all is not easy in the kingdom of God. Look, it wasn't easy for Jesus, and it won't be easy for us.

I wonder if the Disciples weren't a bit shaken when they heard Jesus speak the words of our text. Because Jesus made everything look so easy.

He hardly broke a sweat when He walked on water or raised the dead. And yet Jesus said: ***"I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed"***.

The baptism that Jesus was talking about was not like his first baptism. No! It didn't involve water, nor did his Father speak from heaven at this baptism.

This was a baptism of fire, that's right fire, which that led to Jesus' abandonment by His heavenly Father.

This baptism was nothing less than His appointment with hell on the Good Friday cross.

We've all had appointments that made us feel anxious for example appointments to the dentist.

But that's nothing compared to the dread that Jesus experienced in waiting for this baptism of fire.

When we go to the dentist we do so because it's for our good, and we often take a friend or family member with us to lend support and encouragement.

When Jesus kept His appointment with the cross He did so because it too was good for us, but unlike us He went alone.

Jeered by His enemies, abandoned by His disciples, and rejected by His heavenly Father.

While Jesus shuddered at the thought of going to the cross he did not hide from it, and thank God he didn't.

Because Jesus was whipped for the times we grumble about doing our chores; because He was spat upon for our hesitancy to forgive.

Yet, because He was crucified, we have peace with God. Today, tomorrow and for eternity.

Our sins won't condemn us come Judgment Day because in Jesus they have been forgiven, and so have mine.

I don't suppose we would expect anything less from someone who was prophesied to be the "Prince of Peace".

Yet it wasn't just the end of His life that was difficult for Jesus. He did not grow up in a privileged family like so many of us today.

His stepfather Joseph was a tradesman, working hard with his hands all day long making things out of wood.

And you can be sure that Jesus worked right alongside of Joseph and He probably even had calluses on His hands from working around the shop.

He probably even had to complete chores to do before he could go out with his friends, just as we did when we were young.

Even after Jesus became popular in the first year of His preaching, things weren't easy for Him. He certainly didn't own a home or drive a fancy car.

He didn't even receive a salary and He had to rely on others to provide food and shelter.

Then there were the religious leaders who ridiculed Jesus and finally brought about His death. No, things were not always easy for Jesus in the kingdom of God.

Should it surprise us then that things aren't always easy for us Christians today? It shouldn't, especially when Jesus said:

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division ”

That sure doesn't sound the way the Prince of Peace should talk, does it?

While Jesus came to make peace for us with God by earning forgiveness, He did not come to make life peaceful.

That's not surprising when you consider the nature of Jesus' message. Jesus tells us in Mark chapter 16;

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

My friends there is no middle ground here. You either trust in Jesus alone for eternal salvation or you don't.

Therefore wherever the message of the cross of Christ goes, fires are ignited.

When Jesus told the Jews that the only way to the heavenly Father was through Him, they got hot, real hot.

For example tell your polite neighbor that the fact he has stayed out of jail his whole life and has never cheated on his wife is still not good enough for entrance into heaven.

If he wants to be good enough for God, he needs to be as good as God. Even family members get upset when we say things like that.

Yet that's just what Jesus prophesied, He said: ***“From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law”.***

Yes, the cross of Christ and its message ignites fires wherever it goes. So if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen?

That's probably pretty good advice in most situations, but it isn't good advice when it comes to dealing with the fires that start because of the cross.

Unfortunately, it's exactly the advice some Christians follow when the cross starts fires in their relationships and families.

They don't like the heat so they simply get rid of the cross. No cross, no fire. No fuss, no muss.

Everybody's happy. Who needs conflict anyway? Can't we just all get along?

Is that the way we think sometimes? If a friend of ours says something negative about Christianity, do we usually just change the subject?

If somebody we know disagrees with what God says about sexuality and morality, do we clam up?

If someone we love is staying away from church, do we figure that's his or her business, not ours?

Yet listen closely to what Jesus said about doing that, He said in Matthew chapter 10:

“Anyone who loves his father or mother, son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me”.

If we think it's better to keep the peace in the family than to share and live the truth about sin and grace and everything the Bible teaches.

Jesus says that we have put our family members, really ourselves, before Him.

Be careful, my friends; Where there is peace, there may be no cross. In other words if our relationships with people who don't love the cross are always peaceful and peachy, it may be that we don't love the cross either.

Jesus warned Luke chapter 6: ***“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets”.***

We may all have a cross or two hanging in our homes, but do we have the cross hanging in our hearts?.

If not, that should be a concern, for where there is no cross, there can be no peace with God and for where there is no cross, there is no forgiveness.

No, all is not easy in the Kingdom of God. In fact living under the cross means that we will all have to suffer. Take a look at God's prophets.

Which of them, when called to glory, said: “No, not yet. More! More!” They all suffered and we can expect to suffer to.

Yes, consider Christ and the cross He suffered. He has filled you with forgiveness and He now fills you with His power.

Let Christ permeate your words and your actions. Let him prompt you to witness to the people you love the most. If a fire ensues, so be it.

The fire of battle that comes with the cross isn't nearly as hot as the fire of hell that comes without the cross.

And when the fire of the cross frightens, fix your eyes on Jesus. He endured the fire of His cross and He'll see you through the fire of your cross.

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.