

The title for today's message is: **Battle Your Heart to Keep Jesus First**

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.

It's the year 1939, some say we could have had peace instead of war. If only Great Britain and France could have just let Hitler have Poland.

That had worked the year before when they let Hitler have part of Czechoslovakia, British Prime Minister Chamberlain returned from Munich declaring "peace, peace."

It's the year 1941, some say there could have been peace instead of war, if only the United States had just let Japan do what they pleased.

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.

And we, my friends, are on the front lines of this war. We could find a kind of peace by appeasing Satan, by simply surrendering to him.

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

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 out for us.

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 Jesus first.

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

Some have said its because Jesus condemns the world's power. And the fact that He claims He Himself is the one and only Savior of the world.

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

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

And it seems today that the world wants all the different religions to work together recognizing that each one of them has contributions to make.

Therefore the Christian faith also confesses that Jesus Christ is the only Savior, That we're powerless to save ourselves.

However the world will not put up with that kind of exclusiveness. So 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 bit 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.

Remember 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 Jesus!

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

Following Jesus, even though, holding to His truth alone may bring us the anger and even rejection from friends and 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 say is our cross to bear.

Jesus said in Matthew chapter 10: **"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 all mankind suffer at one time or another.

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

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

Rather our cross is a hardship or sacrifice, that we could avoid by compromising God's truth, hiding Jesus, demoting Him in our hearts.

How tempting to do that to gain superficial peace! 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. Life eternal.

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

Yes, Battle your heart to keep Jesus first. What a wonderful promise Jesus makes to us as we follow Him.

A promise that braces us against all that the world may bombard us with. And as we battle to keep Jesus first, remember who's our ally.

Jesus told His disciples that those who received them and their message received Jesus.

He said, ***"He who receives you receives me", and then he added, "he who receives me receives the one who sent me"***. God the Father.

And still today the testimony of the apostles sounds out from the Scriptures. We have received it, that is, we have heard it and welcomed it into our heart.

We believe it, and put it into practice. We have received the apostles' testimony, so 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.

Look, 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 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 works in us 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.