

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost July 16, 2017

Matthew 10:34-42 (EHV) – ³⁴“Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.

³⁷“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward. Whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. ⁴²Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink because he is my disciple—Amen I tell you—he will never lose his reward.”

Introduction

A common refrain heard throughout our country and our culture is to live life to the fullest – to be all that you can be. Society hasn’t just taught us that refrain, it’s defined for us what it means to have a full life. Many a person would say that a full life means that you’ve done everything you’ve ever dreamed of doing, that you’ve purchased everything you’ve ever desired.

Many of you have probably seen the movie *The Bucket List* with Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson. It’s about two men who have cancer and set out to do everything they’ve always wanted to do before it’s too late. And, of course, by the time the credits start to roll, everything’s been checked off as completed.

Theme: Find Fullness of Life in Jesus.

Does that really define a full life – to have everything checked off on our own personal *bucket lists* by the time we eventually kick it? It would if we’re worshipers of the god Mammon (“stuff”). But, since Jesus said we can’t serve both God and Mammon, we must find fullness of life in some other place than in material, earthly things. The solution, of course, is obvious. In today’s text, we’re reminded exactly where to find fullness of life. **FIND FULLNESS OF LIFE IN JESUS.** Find fullness of life in Jesus **in spite of how life often treats you here** and find fullness of life in Jesus **as a result of your grace-given reward.**

Part I: ...in spite of how life often treats you here.

Using an illustration from baseball, people often talk about hitting what life throws at you. They also acknowledge that life – more often than not – throws curveballs and sliders.

The solution that’s usually presented is to follow *The Golden Rule* or to “pay it forward,” so that this world becomes a better and better place. We can’t eliminate all hardship – there are still going to be diseases and natural disasters – but we can at least try our hardest to do away with all the interpersonal strife. And maybe – just maybe – if we unite together behind a common cause, we can even do something about overcoming those natural things, too.

Let me ask you this: do you consider earthly peace to be more of a goal or a benefit? Another way of approaching the question is this: do you consider earthly peace to be an end or a means to an end? Why do you want earthly peace? If your answer is so that this world is a better place in which to live, then you're thinking of peace as a goal or an end.

Unfortunately, those who think along those lines are going to be sorely disappointed. Whenever you put two sinful beings into close proximity with each another, there's bound to be strife. That's because each sinful being is self-serving. Even if those two individuals are both Christians, there's going to be conflict as a result of the two sinful natures that remain inside of them. And when you add even more people into the mix, it can only get worse. Again, that's when we're talking about earthly peace.

But Jesus didn't come to bring that kind of peace. In the text, he says that he's come instead to bring a sword. The point is clear: peace brings things together; the sword cuts things apart. He then uses the examples of separation within families as well as separation from himself. **"I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it..."**

It wouldn't at all be a misapplication of Scripture to suggest that the "sword" Jesus brought was the double-edged law and gospel, to which the apostles would refer later on in the New Testament. And when it comes to the preaching of both law and gospel, there's no such thing as middle-of-the-road. As to the law: **"Now we know that whatever the law says is addressed to those who are under the law, so that every mouth will be silenced and the whole world will be subject to God's judgment."** The law's edge brings sin to the forefront, and sin utterly and completely separates everyone from God. And as to the gospel: **"All... are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."** The gospel's edge brings God's grace to the forefront and proclaims the world's reunification with God in an objective sense.

The problem is, unregenerate man (a.k.a. an unbeliever) enjoys hearing neither law nor gospel. Proclaiming the complete spiritual depravity of mankind turns people off. Proclaiming a purely grace-based salvation also rubs people the wrong way. The preaching of law and gospel in this world only invites persecution. In the text, Jesus calls it our cross. As a result of following after Christ in faith, we may end up severing friendships and yes, even family ties. Worse yet, to sidestep the persecution is to forfeit our fulfilling relationship with Jesus.

Transition

But it's to that full life that we must cling most tightly! Our fullness of life isn't found in friends and family, in possessions or achievements. It's found in Jesus! In spite of how life often treats you here, find fullness of life in Jesus as a result of your grace-given reward.

Part II: ...as a result of your grace-given reward.

“Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude from the heavenly army, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind.’” Those beautiful words are recited by children around the world at Christmastime – maybe from an older translation – along with Isaiah’s glorious commentary on the office of the Christ: **“He will be called... Prince of Peace.”** Those and other such words are etched upon our hearts, too. Jesus indeed came to bring peace – the peace of sins forgiven, the peace of being righteous before God, the peace of a salvation that’s “in the bag,” so to speak. There’s nothing left undone. Jesus has done it all by the perfect and gracious gift of his very self. That’s fullness of life in a spiritual sense. And that’s the only fullness of life that really matters.

So we can say with the man who wrote to the Hebrew Christians: **“The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?”** That letter to the Hebrews is very much an expansion on what Jesus is talking about in our text. It recounts for us the **“great cloud of witnesses”** who’ve already finished their fights of faith. Many of those early heroes of faith, the patriarchs, died of old age. Not a few others lost their lives at the hands of the enemy. The time was quickly coming when those Hebrew Christians would also have their lives snuffed out by persecutions. But no matter how they were to die, they had this in common – there was no such thing as earthly peace on the surface of this planet when their bodies were placed six feet under it.

But what did Jesus say in our text? **“Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”** He says of his flock in John’s Gospel: **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** (NIV) Find fullness of life in Jesus as a result of your grace-given reward. It was to that promise that the heroes of faith clung and it’s to that gracious promise to which we cling.

As we cling in faith to God’s grace-given reward of salvation, other blessings come along with it. **“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward. Whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink because he is my disciple—Amen I tell you—he will never lose his reward.”**

The main focus of Jesus’ words is on evangelism. That’s part of the fullness of our new lives in Christ, even here on earth. When the Holy Spirit works faith through his Word that we share, the Father and the Son come to dwell within the person who listens to us. We already have our reward of grace, and those with whom we share that wonderful good news also partake in that same blessed reward of grace. Even the most simple, loving expressions of faith we perform by God’s empowering illustrate the full life we have with Jesus. Back to our opening comments, we might pray for earthly peace so that we have more opportunities to testify to this love of Jesus.

Conclusion

I don’t think the world would say that any one of us has lived a full life, according to its definition. But I don’t think I have to tell you that the world’s definitions always leave a great deal to be desired. When you’re looking for fulfillment, find it in Jesus alone. When you’re about to *kick the bucket*, there truly need be only one entry on your list: By the grace of God, I have fullness of life in Christ Jesus, my Lord. Amen.