

## 1 THE DIVISIVE JESUS

## 2 Tonight's Text

- I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. 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. (Luke 12:49–53)

## 3 Gentle Jesus . . .

- “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child . . .” are the opening lines of one of Charles Wesley’s well-known hymns.
- But for painting a word-picture of Jesus, he could hardly have chosen a less applicable word than “mild,” especially in light of today’s gospel reading.
- How about this instead . . .
- “Divisive Jesus, strong and riled . . .”?

## 4 Division

- Maybe “riled” is not necessarily the best word to use to describe Jesus in Luke 12.
- But the word Jesus himself used in this passage as a descriptor of his ministry is division. Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. (Luke 12:51 NIV)
- Division is a troubling word, and as it happens, divisive talk and actions from Jesus or about Jesus keeps cropping up in the gospels.

## 5 Divisive Talk

- Consider the following . . .
  - “His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Luke 3:17 NIV)
  - In the early days of Jesus’ ministry, when he visited the Nazareth synagogue with his reputation as a preacher and healer preceding him, the congregation initially “spoke well of him.” (Luke 4:22)
  - But Jesus wasn’t content to leave it at that, and intentionally provoked them with his “hometown” comments to the point that they wanted to throw him off a cliff. (Luke 4:16–30)

## 6

- continued . . .
  - When Jesus spoke to a crowd at the festival of booths in Jerusalem about rivers of living water, some hearers decided he was the Messiah. Others doubted it, however, and the gospel narrator says, “So there was a division in the crowd because of him” (John 7:43).

- When a would-be follower told Jesus he first wanted to bury his father, the sense of Jesus' response was that the man should leave his family obligations behind, which, if the man had done so, would have effectively divided him from his family (Luke 9:57-60).
- In elaborating on his "I have come to bring ... division" comments in today's reading, Jesus talked about setting father against son, mother against daughter, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and vice versa in all three cases.
- And let's not forget that in the Matthean parallel to today's reading, Jesus says, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

## 7 Divisive Jesus

- Do we really want a divisive Jesus? Don't we have enough things that divide us?
- Don't we have enough things like politics, nationalism, ethnicity, economic status, social standing, educational level, religion, denominations, and other cultural issues to contend with?
- Do we really need a divisive Savior? Don't we need a uniter, instead of a divider!
- Don't we want someone who will make us feel good about ourselves, instead of someone who will confront us with the truth and point out our hypocrisies and the lies we believe about ourselves.

## 8 Divisive Personality

- When someone says you have a "divisive personality," what are they referring to?
- Generally the meaning is that someone is "disruptive, unsettling, alienating, troublesome, controversial, contentious, causing or tending to cause disagreement or dissension."
- Even the Bible itself says, Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. (Titus 3:10 NIV)
- However did Jesus have a divisive personality?

## 9 Caricature

- A caricature is an exaggeration of certain characteristics.
- No doubt Jesus did respond mildly occasionally.
- For example, of when he took a little child into his arms and said to his disciples "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me . . ." (Mark 9:37)
- Certainly, he was gentle with the child, and, while Mark doesn't describe his demeanor toward the disciples, Jesus probably spoke to them in such a way as to not frighten the child.
- But to brand Jesus "mild" from a few incidents like that is to caricature him.

## 10 Caricature

- Is it possible that we are doing the same when we focus on Jesus' words and actions about division?
- In his now classic Christian work, *Your God Is Too Small*, J.B. Phillips notes that distorting Jesus' nature can result in "the impossibility of a mature adult's feeling constrained to worship a god whose emotional equipment is less developed than his [or her] own."
- He goes on to say that a "second danger is that since it is axiomatic with Christians that God is love, this most terrible and beautiful of all the virtues becomes debased and cheapened."

## 11 Luke 12:49–53

- In considering whether the divisive Jesus might be caricature, let's go back and looked again at his words about division and his actions that led to it.
  - Examination of those incidents suggests that it was not Jesus personally that was divisive, but his call.
  - And that call demanded -- and still demands -- some significant decisions about what it is to follow Jesus and be his disciple.
  - Jesus too wanted his disciples to know and understand that not everyone loves the truth and because people's hearts are hard the fulfillment of Messianic hopes will meet opposition.

## 12 Unfair Persecution

- For Example . . .
  - The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. (John 7:7 NIV)
  - If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.' (John 15:24–25 NIV)
  - This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19 NIV)

## 13 Unfair Persecution

- "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." (John 15:18–19 NIV)
- Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. (1 John 3:12–13 NIV)

- Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. (Luke 6:22-24 NIV)
- Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. (Prov 9:7-8 NIV)
- Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. (1 John 3:13 NIV)
- All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Matt 10:22 NIV)

#### 14 Divisive Christians?

- Jesus’ call today still has a divisive element to it.
- He still calls us to distance or divide ourselves from those who urge us to morally compromise where we put . . .
  - family loyalty above doing his will,
  - our friends above doing his will,
  - our job or livelihood above his will, and
  - those who act as if peace and happiness lies in the abundance of our possessions
- Instead we need to stand up for the truth in a generation that calls evil good and good evil.
- In our individual case, the divisive part of Jesus’ call may be also quite specific and personally tailored to our life.

#### 15 Video

#### 16 What is Truth?

- When Pilate asked Jesus if he was a king, Jesus responded that his kingdom is not of this world and was actually from another place. (John 18:36)
- “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. (John 18:37 NIV)
- Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:37 NIV)
- Pilate then asks Jesus, “What is truth?”

#### 17 Crucify Him!

- Pilate then goes on to do everything he can to release Jesus.
- Pilate even says, “I find no basis for a charge against him.” (John 19:6 NIV)
- But the crowd shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him! . . . give us Barabbas” (John 19:15, 18:40 NIV)

- However, Pilate gives in to the crowd and hands Jesus over to be crucified.

## 18 The Truth

- Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. (John 14:6 NIV)
- The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 NIV)
- He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. (John 1:11–13 NIV)

## 19 The Verdict

- Jesus’ ministry was divisive because the truth forces people to make choices.
- Are we going to accept what it says or are they going to reject it?
- Those who reject it do so because they like what they’re doing and don’t want to change.
  - They will either become outright hostile because they have been offended.
  - Or they will become passively hostile and over time seek to undermine the truth with compromise and error.

## 20 The Verdict

- However, those who accept the truth, do so because they are contrite in heart and would rather please God and do what is right rather than please themselves, their spouses, their families, their peer group, or anyone else.
- They love the truth and so listen to God and harken to His voice.
- God sees people like this and has come to save them from the coming wrath, which will be poured out on all those who believe not the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thes. 2:11)
- Jesus has come not to bring peace but truth.
- However, all those who accept the truth will have peace.

## 21 What is Truth?

## 22 No Greater Joy . . .

- It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. (3 John 1:3 NIV)
- I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (3 John 1:4 NIV)