

Introduction

Difficult as it may be to grasp initially, prophetic perspective is the way that Jesus anticipates the Great Commission of Matthew 28 in the first gospel mission of Matthew 10. He tells us in a clear, forceful, and figurative way that the apostles will continue to preach the gospel in the towns of Israel until His second coming. He says, “**Go...to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**” (Mat 10.6), He commands them to “**proclaim the kingdom**” (10. 7), and He gives this thought provoking promise: “**you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes**” (10.23). Things to come that will occur at different times are compressed together by our Lord to teach us that we share in the apostolic witness to Christ, and to teach us how we share in that witness. He gives us instructions for the time between His comings. Figuratively speaking, all the towns of Israel are now Gentile towns and all Gentile towns are the towns of Israel. In the preaching today of the NT apostolic gospel, the apostles continue to preach.

Now we come to 10.34-36 where Jesus directs our thoughts to *His* mission. The words of these verses are difficult words. Whatever we do with the difficulty here, one basic thing must guide our thoughts, namely, this passage puts the apostolic gospel mission into the context of our Lord’s gospel mission. Consequently, it puts our mission into the context of His mission and that is why there is radicalism in Christian discipleship (involving radical love, suffering, and obedience in vs. 37-39).

Accordingly, I want to direct your attention today to the gospel mission of the Lord Jesus in its uniqueness, its purpose, and its significance.

1A. The Uniqueness of His Mission

Jesus came into the world to fulfill an appointed mission. Three times, He repeats the idea of His coming (10.34-35, **I have come...I have not come...I have come**). This is wonderful and it is like the tip of an ice burg. Notably, Jesus existed prior to His birth. He came to earth on a mission. The Father sent him (10.40). This idea of the Father’s sending is a strong emphasis in the Gospel of John. The apex passage is John 17 where we learn that His mission is a covenantal mission. In this high priestly prayer, Jesus speaks to the Father about giving eternal life to all that the Father gave to Him, and He refers to Himself as “**Jesus Christ whom you have sent**” (cf. Jn 17.3). The Father gave Jesus a work to accomplish on behalf of a people that the Father gave to Him in the eternal covenant of redemption. This covenant is what Jesus came to fulfill as the “sent one.”

Here in Matthew 10, He discusses the purpose of His mission in relation to gospel mission between the times. He refers to His coming in relation to the earth (v. 34), which widens the picture. Per prophetic perspective, He refers to the mission to the Gentiles across the earth. Thus, the towns of Israel are the cities of the world. He puts our mission in context of His mission (we go because He came).

How marvelous! What a unique person! Hence, no one knows the Son except the Father; no one but God can fathom the depths of His person and work (Mat 11.27). He was with God in the beginning and became flesh in order to fulfill His covenantal mission.

2A. The Purpose of His Mission (cf. the repetition of coming *to*)

1B. What we are not to think about the purpose of His mission

He says, “*You should not think I came to bring peace to the earth.*” This is surprising, unexpected, even startling. He is the prince of peace (Isa 9.6). He came to save His people from their sins (Mat 1.21). He is shepherd king (Mat 2.6). He announces the kingdom by preaching,

teaching, & healing (Mat 4.17, 23). This is good news and in that context, we do not expect the strong words that deny a purpose of bringing peace. Therefore, He is making a precise point (not denying other aspects of His mission, not denying that He is the Prince of peace).

What is the precise point? In the time of gospel mission, we are not to think that wars will cease on earth with all weapons of warfare turned into tools of agriculture. Peace will come to the earth when God **“shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore”** (Isa 2.4). In terms of prophetic perspective, the expectation was that Messiah would bring peace as the Prince of Peace, end all wars, and initiate the time of eternal Sabbath rest. Thus, in the perspective of the OT prophets including John the Baptist, it is surprising that the Messiah would come into the world and not bring peace to the earth. [Related to modern views on the second coming, this text points in a direction that flows against Post-millennialism]. The gospel mission brings in the kingdom of God promised in the OT. Fulfillment comes in the coming of Christ, but it is not the consummation of the kingdom, that will come at the second coming.

2B. What we are to think

Jesus says, *“You should think I came to bring a sword”* (implication from our Lord’s statement). This paraphrase captures the power of this text.

Many commentators understand the sword to be exclusively a reference to conflict (Morris, 266; it is not a literal sword but “an obvious symbol of conflict” or “a symbol of strife”). Thus, divisions arise even in the family because Jesus came to bring a sword to the earth (cf. vs. 35-36).

However, the context accents the relationship of the covenantal mission of Jesus and gospel mission to the nation (cf. the Christian harvest, 9.38, and finding those who hear and embrace the apostolic testimony to Christ, 10.13-14). Therefore, there must be a positive backdrop in these words about the sword; they cannot be ultimately and finally negative (to interpret the passage, we have to struggle with the text in this way).

Does the reference to the sword mean the opposite, namely, to *not* end war, but *cause* it? These words of 35-36 cannot be restricted to the extremely negative and troubling thought that Jesus has come to cause war.

We must look in another direction to understand what we are to think about the purpose of His mission, remembering that it is a gospel-good-news mission.

The question becomes, how do we think about His mission in a way that appreciates the reality of the gospel right here in the powerfully negative language of no peace but a sword, of division between family members, and of enemies within one’s own household? What part of the gospel helps us in this regard?

We have our answer in the doctrine of sovereign election that cuts like a sword. Let us unpack this in steps.

1) Election separates, distinguishes, and divides

It refers to the fact that Jesus chooses to reveal the Father to some undeserving sinners while He chooses to pass over others in the towns of Israel, that is, in the cities of the earth in the time between (cf. Mat 11.27, those who know God as the ones “to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him”).

This is good news because without it no one would come to Christ for salvation.

2) Sword does cut in more than one direction. Thus, by choosing some and passing by others, Jesus brings conflict into the families of the earth. The same sword that separates some people unto the Lord leaves other people under the condemnation of the law. Unbelievers call Jesus a devil and the malign His household (10.25). Then they wield a sword that may even involve seeking the death of Christians as Paul did. Jesus speaks of a figurative sword that is so penetrating that it sometimes becomes a literal sword.

Luke 2.34-35 puts the sword of Christ in front of us from His infancy. **And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."**

Election cuts across the families of Abraham and of the nations. Lost "Israel" is international in its figurative meaning. The nations are the lost covenant people from which God will form a new covenant people, the remnant that will constitute the new humanity.

There are two sides to God's saving work among the families of the earth. Jesus did not come to bring in the eternal state by judgment on the nations effecting final peace forever. He came to bring a sword of election and reprobation that separates between family members.

3A. The Significance of His mission

Here I want to pull some things together by commenting on some questions that focus how we have to wrestle with the relation of election to the family, to our families.

1B. Should we (can we) think of family members in a covenantal way?

This entire context shouts a "yes" to us.

Yes, we can do this in a number of ways. First, we should think of all family members of all families of the earth as "lost Israel" because the Lord says of Israel, "**you are not my people**" (Hosea 2.21-23). Therefore, those who are not God's people, the nations, are lost covenant people. Second, the gospel promise (believe and be saved) goes to the lost covenant people; they have the promises. Third, unbelieving spouses are "sanctified" by the embodiment of the gospel promise that enters the household through the believing spouse (1 Cor 7.14). Fourth, the children of one believing parent are sanctified similarly being raised in the context of the gospel promise embodied in the believing parent (1 Cor 7.14). Thus, we call them to enter the new covenant people of God by repentance-baptism (Mat 3.9; Act 2.38-39).

2B. What is our hope for our family members?

What is our hope in gospel mission per this text with its weighty contents?

Our hope in the sovereign Lord; *He* is our hope. His effectual work on the cross and the effectual working of the Spirit that arises from the cross is our hope for sinners in utter helplessness and need (paralyzed, blind, deaf, unclean, and dead in sin).

Regarding our children, we know that God regularly works within the family generation by generation. He saves fathers as fathers and heads of their homes, and this brings a sanctifying influence to all members of the household. The gospel comes to the families of the earth both in a process of time and in a corporate way. The coming of the kingdom is not a static event but an unfolding over time until the harvest. Furthermore, it does not come to individuals as such but to them as fathers, mothers, servants, children, and householders.

Therefore, even though election cuts across the family, we know that He promises to work His blessing in the family. Thus, fathers and mothers confidently lift their infant children to the Lord Jesus seeking His effectual blessing. As in the Gospels where parents brought their children to Christ, even their infants to Him, asking Him to bless them; likewise, the Lord encourages parents today to present their children to the Lord Jesus when they are infants, teens, and households in their own homes. We do this asking the Lord Jesus to grant them His blessing.

Now we have a definition of our hope as parents in the presentation of our children to the Lord. We do so petitioning that He be pleased to open their blind eyes to see His wonders in creation and to read of them with understanding on the pages of Holy Scripture. We hope and trust that the Lord will cause little lame ones to walk on the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. We wait upon the Lord as we work to the goal that our children's mute condition be turned to speaking words that glorify God. We pray for the unblocking of fragile ears to the strong sounds of the gospel preached each Lord's Day. We look to the Lord Jesus Christ to these ends; we entrust ourselves to Him accordingly and in this way we present our little ones to Him.

Of course, such petitioning only begins when they are little; it is a heartfelt prayer for our children all our days.

3B. What ultimate principle governs gospel mission in relation to the family?

The promise to parents regarding their children is governed by the ultimate principle of God's glory as He sees fit to work it out in the good of His elect. Thus, it is a general principle that children who honor and obey their parents will live long on this earth. It is not an absolute rule. It is a general fact that children can trust with hope for the future, and it is a fact in which parents can rest as they nourish their children on the promises of God. Parents are to bring their infant children to Christ asking Him to effectually intercede for them. Children are to be nurtured in obedience to their parents as the way of a long and eternal life (Eph 6.1-2). This is a promise that God will fulfill as it serves our good and His glory.

4B. How does this sword of Christ fit into the discussion of radical discipleship?

We know His blessing is not something automatic. This is a weighty fact; not all family members in all their generations are elect. We cannot presume upon the Lord. We know we must pray for our children, nurture them in the discipline of the Lord, and then when all the dust settles, we must commit them into the hands of Jesus for His blessing according to His sovereign purposes being realized on earth across the globe and over the centuries. Believing parents are to trust in the sovereign good pleasure of God. That is the final resting-place.

What our text gives to parents is a call to love God more than they love their children; they are called to give their children away to the Lord with the constant, yes, life-long prayer that the Lord spiritually touch them through His effectual intercession. The same thing applies to believers who have unbelieving spouses. From gratitude born of grace, they must give their spouses, children, and all family members to the Lord with the *confident but submissive* prayer that the Lord be pleased to open their blind eyes to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Conclusions

1) Jesus tells us how to think

We are to think about His coming that is not for peace and the end of wars, not yet. Now He is carrying out the Father's will in saving the Father's elect. His saving word cuts and separates. We are to think about that fact and absorb it into our souls.

2) Jesus tells us how to pray for our children and grandchildren

He did not forbid but encouraged the bringing of children to Him, even infants.

Regarding our young children and children who profess unbelief or whose confession of faith is less than credible, we have the first responsibility to present them to the Lord Jesus seeking His blessing. We pray for them all our days.

3) Jesus tells us how to act

He tells us to bless those who curse us knowing that we are blessed and that what happened to Christ will happen to us in various lesser ways.

We must do all that we can to point family members to the Lord while we wait upon the Lord and rest in His good will and sovereign mercy.

Putting Christ above all family members does not take us away from the family (to harshness and unkindness). Instead, as best we are able, we are to move toward them with the love of Christ. Paul put it like this: "dearly beloved, as the elect of God put on love" (Col. 2).

We take up the means. We are not passive. We are to work and wait, wait on the work and work while we wait.

4) Finally, Jesus tells us how to submit

This is challenging in the family context. Commit to the sovereign Lord. Love God above all earthly things and relationships. Here we say, "My Jesus, as thou wilt."