

06/22/2014 – COPC, Brother Andy

Due to the Blair Bradley family loss this week, I found myself with the daunting but wonderful challenge as what to preach from this pulpit this morning ... I want to share with you the richness of the biblical opportunities that we offer to the congregation here that led to this wonderful challenge that I had for what subject to preach. You know, we don't have a softball league, or even a softball diamond here to play on; we don't have a big-screen movie theatre to show the Superbowl or the latest hay, wood and stubble to come out of Hollywood; we won't be having a Vacation Bible School to have the kids play a bunch of games, get "sugared up", and then try to trick them with a little Jesus mixed in at the end. We don't have those kind of things here at Covenant of Peace Church. Lord willing, however, we plan to transform the humble buildings sitting in the field outside into more space to teach the Word of God, provide more accommodations and convenience for fellowship, and any other need that leads to the provisions and edification of the saints.

But now back to what we **do offer**, because it is already enough to edify you deeply. Let me explain ... I have been personally thrilled by the deep theological implications as we have read through Hebrews 8-10 this week in the New Testament reading plan, where each day as I hear or read and study the clear articulation of Jesus Christ as our perfect High Priest, the infinitely superior new covenant in His blood, and the way we are to live because of this eternal inheritance. So profoundly new is this doctrine each time that you look at it that it could have been easy to proclaim this truth this morning. However, although we were not yet with the congregation at the time, Blair already has great resources on this wonderful Epistle, readily available at the website.

Next, as we are reading now about the Kings of Judah in 2 Chronicles in the OT reading plan, there is a powerful message that could be preached about so many important precepts related to both God's Sovereignty and human depravity demonstrated with this people; the apparent contradictions of God's dealing with the divided kingdom in these times, and many, many more. But the time to introduce these topics is better fitted for an entire study -- perhaps one to come in our new building.

I am also currently reading a short book about "Becoming a Dad Who Leads" right now, and believe me, there are several sermons this nation needs on this topic.

Also, I am in the midst of our Puritan reading challenge this month, ***The Sinfulness of Sin*** by Ralph Venning, and boy are there a whole bunch of sermons just oozing out of that wonderful text ... This late Brother is becoming another of my favorites. It is also quite fitting that the cavernous division between sin and holiness as depicted in this book lines right up with the matter with which Jesus deals in our passage today – right in the middle of our years-long study through the book of Luke.

And so the decision about what to preach this morning came down to the profound importance and personal nature of right where we are in Luke. The type of division that Christ describes in this passage, as experienced by so many in the true church over the ages, is also being played out in our own family right now.

As Blair so clearly introduced last week, this division was both completely unexpected by men, yet profoundly important to demonstrate the Righteousness of God. Popular perception both in the world of the Jews in Jesus' day and of the modern church concerning Jesus have been profoundly wrong. The Jews were looking for the return of an earthly kingdom to re-establish the Jewish state and bring about Nationalistic Peace ... So many in the modern church are looking for a man of love who came to bring peace, that His message was peace on earth, peace through love. That's sort of the popular idea about Jesus and it's reinforced at the Christmas season to a world that doesn't find this Jesus offensive because people are reminded that a Child is born, a Son is given and He's going to be called the Prince of Peace and the angels, of course, announced to the shepherds that He would bring peace on earth and even the Jews had this expectation that when the Messiah came, peace would come with Him -- but Jesus absolutely shattered that expectation in this passage.

Look at Luke 12:51. "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no; but rather division." As Blair described last week, that's a very precise statement. That's a shattering statement to Jewish expectation. After all, Psalms 72 said that in His days, the righteous would flourish with an abundance of peace, and even Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, proclaimed that upon the coming of Messiah, the Son rise from on high would visit us to guide our feet into the way of peace, and even Jesus himself said to a harlot in Luke 7:50, "Go in peace," and to a woman that He healed from a hemorrhage, "Go in peace." And Jesus also said in John 14, gathering with His disciples, "My peace I leave with you.

And didn't He say in the 16th chapter of John, "These things I have spoken to you that in Me you might have peace"?

And the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2:17, borrowing words from Isaiah 57, "And He came and preached peace to those who were far off...Gentiles...and peace to those who were near...Jews." Colossians 1:20 says He came to bring peace through the blood of His cross, and the Apostles, according to Acts 10:36, were preaching peace by Jesus Christ. Shouldn't we expect then that He came to bring peace?

John came preaching the kingdom, and the kingdom is the kingdom of peace, and Jesus came preaching the kingdom, and the kingdom is the kingdom of peace, and truly He was and is the Prince of Peace, and truly He will bring peace, but there's a condition. There cannot be world peace. There won't even be Jewish peace. There can be no peaceful kingdom at all on this earth until He reigns in the individuals' hearts. There will be no national peace until there's personal peace and by now, we're toward the end of the ministry of Jesus, into the third and final year of His ministry. He's headed toward the cross. As we have already seen by this point in the Gospel of Luke, the unbelief and rejection of Israel is fixed. The religious leaders have rejected Him and already are plotting His death. The people will join in condemning him to crucifixion while asking for a known criminal's release, and will be forfeiting their privileged, foretold opportunity for true peace with God and so this is that major turning point in verse 51. "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no; but rather division."

As Blair explained last week, that's a paradoxical statement. "Do you suppose" is a verb that could be translated "do you presume." That's the implication of that verb. It's sensible for you to assume that I'm bringing peace. Right? ... Of course, absolutely, based upon all of those Old Testament promises, and His response in the Greek starts with the word "no", ohi, and a Greek speaking person would have heard an emphatic "No, absolutely not, I tell you, but rather division"... a completely disturbing statement as the promised peace was taken away. They had rejected the Prince of Peace. They had therefore forfeited the kingdom of peace. It could only come through individuals putting faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah Savior and if there was no peace between the sinner and God, there would be no peace among the people. There would be no kingdom of peace. There will be no kingdom of peace until salvation comes to the heart, so in place

of peace comes division. In Matthew chapter 10 verses 34-36, you have a comparative passage to this where Jesus said a similar thing.

Mat 10:34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Mat 10:35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

Mat 10:36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

Mat 10:37 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. [ESV]

Notice on that occasion, He said He came not to bring peace but a sword, and His language is even more direct. Jesus, who came as the Prince of Peace becomes the sovereign divider, becoming the **source** of disunity and separation.

Now let's take a few minutes to review some background in the chapter that we're in. If you go back to Chapter 12 verse 1 it tells us that Jesus was speaking to many thousands of people, probably tens of thousands of people. So many people were gathered together they were stepping on each other. The majority of these people, by the way, already had made up their mind to reject Jesus, but He was still the greatest curiosity in existence and the most profound teacher who ever lived and attracted massive crowds, but most of them stood with their leaders. They had swallowed what their leaders had been giving them to drink in terms of Jesus being satanic, but there were still some who could be classified as disciples -- That Greek word *mathetes*, or learners. It simply means that they were still open to what He was saying. Of course some of them were the Apostles. They had come all the way to faith and been called to ministry. Some of them were the 70 who also had been sent out to minister for Him because they were true believers. Some of them had become believers and there were some who were just still open and the end of verse 1 says He was really talking to them.

And the nature of this entire message is that it's a call to salvation. It's a call to come to Him, to come into the kingdom of salvation, to receive the forgiveness and redemption that He brings. This is an evangelistic passage. It starts in verse 1 and it runs all the way to verse 9 in Chapter 13, where we will likely be in a few weeks. There are a couple of interruptions for questions but, in the main, it's one long discourse. It is an instruction to obedience. It is a call by our Lord to the crowd and those in the crowd who were still open and still learning and still listening to receive His claims, embrace Him as Messiah and come into the

kingdom of salvation and receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life and then He delineates what they must do.

First of all, He says you have to turn from the dominating influence of the false teachers in your false religion. You've got to get away from the liars and the deceivers ... Does our message need to be any different today? ... Then He says you have to stop fearing men, stop fearing the retribution that comes from men when you step out of your religious environment, and fear God who can destroy your soul and body in hell. You must also confess Jesus before men as your Lord and Savior – He's either both or neither ... Once again, should our message be any different today? You must trust your life into the hands of the Holy Spirit because you'll be facing persecution. You must reject the love of material things. You must turn away from preoccupation with the world and you must pursue with all your heart the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and you must do it with urgency because verse 40 says, "The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." You don't know how long you have.

This is very strong and direct but the die is already cast for most. Israel has no love for her Messiah...came unto His own; His own received Him not. Israel has no desire for His kingdom. They have no interest for His salvation. They have no longing for His grace. They have no desire for the forgiveness He offers. The blindness of their minds through their own ignorance, satanic blindness and the deception of their false leaders, has manipulated them sufficiently into a state of rejection that they will unite in murdering their own Messiah.

So Jesus says He's come now to bring division. Instead of uniting all Jewish people in His kingdom of blessing, He divides them and He divides all men both in time and eternity. This is a very important point in Doctor Luke's account. This is a turning point here in this 12th chapter and from now on, the warnings begin to dominate. The urgency is ratcheted up. Here is just a teaser -- a trailer to use the movie lingo -- Verse 56, "You hypocrites. You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky. Why do you not analyze this present time?" You're better weathermen than you are theologians. Down in verse 59, "I tell you, you shall not get out of there until you've paid the very last cent," a promise of judgment based upon accountability for every violation of the law of God. In verse 3 of chapter 13, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Verse 9, "If you don't bear fruit, you're going to be cut down." Verse 24, "Strive to enter by the narrow door for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." There

will not always be an opportunity. Same chapter, verse 35, "Behold your house is left to you desolate." Chapter 14 verse 24, "I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of My dinner." The invited men in the story were the Israelites, the Jews. None of you are going to be in on the messianic banquet.

Verse 26, a parallel passage to Matthew 10 a few minutes ago, "If anybody comes to Me and doesn't hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brother, sister, and even his own life, he can't be My disciple. If you don't carry your cross and come after Me, you can't be My disciple." You have to calculate the cost as a man would building a tower, as a man would going to war. You have to be willing, verse 33, to give up all your possessions and this tone of judgment and warning continues over to chapter 19. Verse 41...and the people are disobedient. They are fixed. They are hard. They are stubborn. And as Jesus approaches Jerusalem headed for the cross, He saw the city and He wept over it saying...and here's the key..."If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace." You missed it! "But now they've been hidden from your eyes." Boy, that is one serious condition. When peace is offered and you reject it and then it's no longer offered or available.

Verse 43, "The days will come upon you when your enemies throw up a bank before you, surround you, hem you in on every side, level you to the ground, your children within you. They will not leave in you one stone upon another because you didn't recognize the time of your visitation," the opportunity for peace, and what He's talking about there is the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were massacred. Eventually, nearly a thousand towns in Israel were sacked by the Romans. The temple was destroyed. It was the end of Judaism. There's never been a sacrifice offered since then. They thought He was bringing peace...no, as it turned out; because they rejected Him as the Prince of Peace, He brought destruction. Verse 42, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace." That's the brooding, tearful statement of Jesus. I brought you peace and you didn't want it on My terms. So the warnings escalate and they escalate until finally, it's becomes hidden. There is a time. There is an opportunity, but God has the right to shut it down whenever He wants, as He did in history, as He does in the life of every individual who rejects that warning...Jesus, the righteous divider.

Go back to chapter 12 and He says, "I came to bring division." Let's look into that. Verses 49 and 50 are very powerful statements -- very dramatic and very

insightful into the heart of our Lord. In verses 49 and 50, we read this: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth and how I wish it were already kindled but I have a baptism to undergo and how distressed I am until it's accomplished." You read that and you might scratch your head and say, "What's He talking about?" I'll tell you what He's talking about. He's looking at the one event that is the dividing event for all humanity, one event that divides people into two categories, not just in eternity but in time also, one event that separates and that event separates everyone into two categories.

Let me take you into the language because it's very important. Verse 49, "I have come." Now you say, "Well, that's just a simple verb form." It's much more than that. If you just take your Bible software sometime (remember, eSword is free) and search the phrase, "I have come," when it comes out of the mouth of Jesus, you will be astonished how important this is. It's a technical term by which He introduces important precepts of His mission. It's a very definite phrase by which He summarizes why He's here. "I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. I have come not to violate the law but to fulfill the law. I have come to seek and to save that which was lost. I have come to be a light." Jesus repeats often why He has come and each time you see that phrase, it's another vantage point on His mission. "I have come. I have come to give life, to give light, to bring peace, to seek and to save, but if you don't accept the things I offer, I have come to cast fire upon the earth."

John 12:46, "I have come as light into the world that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness and if anyone hears My sayings and doesn't keep them, I do not judge him for I didn't come to judge the world but to save the world. I am come to save. I am come as light but he who rejects Me, does not receive My sayings, he has one who judges him. The word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day."

So the word either saves or it condemns. Jesus then here says, "I have come to cast fire on the earth." Fire is a picture of judgment. I mean it is pretty obviously that. You have that in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. We're familiar with statements like that. "I am come," He says, "from the Father. I have come into the world to save but I've also come to judge." Fire is emphatic in the Greek. The Greek reads this way, "For fire, I have come upon the earth." Fire is the first thing and this is prophesied in the Old Testament. You know, there were statements about the Messiah's coming that talked about fire and the Jews knew

that. Isaiah 66:15, Joel chapter 2 verse 30...there are number of places that promise fire and they all knew what that meant. Amos is one that I might just remind you. Amos 1, "So I sent fire on the wall of Gaza. It'll consume her citadels." And then it goes on to talk about the fire of God's judgment all the way down to verse 14. Chapter 2 of Amos further discusses this fire. "I will send fire on Moab. I'll send fire on Judah." Malachi chapter 3, as the Old Testament closes, talks about God coming in fiery judgment, but the Jews believed that the fire would fall on the Gentiles and that the peace would come to them. They never expected that the Messiah would come and the fire of judgment would fall on them and it is the fire of judgment.

Listen to John 9:39, "For judgment, I came into this world that those who do not see may see and that those who see may become blind." That's a very important verse. "For judgment, I came into this world that those who do not see may see and that those who see may become blind." His judgment is two-way. It is a judgment that saves and it is a judgment that condemns. It's two-sided. If you go back to Luke chapter 3 for a moment in verse 9, we'll look at a couple of verses there. Luke 3:9, he says, "For those who don't believe, of course, in Israel, the ax is laid at the root of the tree. Every tree that doesn't bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Verse 16, John the Baptist says, "The one who is coming is mightier than I. I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire and He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." So there's the fire of judgment, the fire of destruction that is unleashed.

But it's not only a fire of judgment; it's also a fire of purging. You see, the gospel is that fire that either purifies or punishes and Paul said it's life to life or death to death. In John 3, Jesus said, "If you believe, you have eternal life. If you don't believe, your unbelief puts you under judgment." Fire consumes what is combustible and does not consume what is noncombustible. It purifies the noncombustible and it destroys the combustible and so the coming of Jesus is a fire. It's a fire cast to the earth. To those who believe, it purifies. To those who reject, it consumes. And so Jesus is saying, "Look, I've come as fire," and then He adds this most interesting statement, "...and how I wish it were already kindled." He came for fire but the fire's not started yet. The fire hasn't been kindled yet. What does He mean by that? Well, He's talking about starting the fire. Kindling is used to start the fire and that's the intent of the language. What is He saying? "It has not been kindled." What's the kindling? What's going to kindle the fire? This is an amazing statement. "I wish it were already kindled." What's He looking at?

He's looking at His death, because in the next verse, He calls it a baptism that He has to undergo. The kindling that started the fire, the gospel fire that both purifies and punishes, the kindling was Jesus. He was judged by God. Before He judges, He must Himself be judged. He's looking at His cross. It's an amazing statement. The kindling of the fire of judgment is the cross. His death which is a fire of judgment that God puts on Him. God literally consumes Him in wrath, the just for the unjust, and He's punished for our sins and He says here...look at this..."How I wish it were already kindled." He wishes it were over.

Do you think the only time He ever suffered the agonies of His death was in Gethsemane? Do you understand that Jesus lived during His ministry in a perpetual Gethsemane? There was never a time in His life on earth when He wasn't aware of where He was going. What He suffered in sweating, as it were, great drops of blood under the stress in the garden just previous to the cross was only the culmination of a whole life of suffering the anticipation of having to be the kindling burned up by the judgment of God so that He could render a judgment both to purify and punish on others. He wishes it was already over. I doubt that there was ever a conscious moment that He didn't think about what was coming. Divine judgment would fall on Him from His own Father before it would fall on people.

So He says in verse 50, "I have a baptism to undergo," and again He says, "How distressed I am until it's accomplished." A baptism was a word the Greeks liked to use to speak about being immersed in something and we use it that way. It is used in Greek literature to refer to death but Jesus used it as being immersed in pain, immersed in suffering, immersed in judgment, divine wrath, immersed in death. He knows that's a baptism that He must undergo. He understands that this is necessary because He must bear the judgment for all who will believe.

I also believe that Jesus here was preparing His hearers about the division to come in their families over Himself.

He refers to it the same way in the 38th verse of Mark 10 where He says to the sons of Zebedee, "Can you be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" You want permanence in the kingdom. Can you suffer what I'm going to suffer? I have a baptism to undergo. I have an immersion into divine wrath and how distressed I am until it's accomplished.

So here He's saying, "I wish it was over." Our Lord here is anticipating the dividing event. He is pressed between the suffering and the purpose, between the anticipation of the pain and the plan, between His own will and the Father's will, but He never wavered when He said in the garden, "Father, if it's your will, let this cup pass from Me." He immediately responded by saying, "Nevertheless, not My will but yours be done." "I've come to cast fire," He said, "and it's going to be kindled by the cross and that's going to set the fire of judgment." That will be the dividing point. That is where all men are divided. All men are divided at the cross, both in eternity and in time.

Let's also look at another form of dividing...the dividing in eternity...and we have to go back to the previous passage just to pick this up. Backing up in the passage to verse 42, Jesus, remember, told a story. Blair covered this a few weeks ago. And He said there was a master who left, and this depicts the Lord, and he's coming and you don't know when he's coming and he has given his servants responsibility. Verse 42 describes a faithful servant who does what he's supposed to do and distributes the responsibility that he had appropriately and when his master comes back, he's blessed and verse 44, he puts him in charge of everything he has. This is a picture of somebody who's ready when Jesus comes. This is a picture of somebody who obeys the gospel.

God is the sovereign of every life. All men are accountable to Him and our Lord is describing a person who does what the Lord tells him to do, who's obedient to the Gospel, who makes the most of Gospel opportunity and he's ready when the Lord comes and he's blessed and he's rewarded eternally. This is one who believes in Jesus Christ. This is one on this side of the cross and the resurrection who believes in His death and His resurrection, who confesses Jesus is Lord, who believes in his heart that God raised Him from the dead. These are the faithful. But Jesus' coming was for the fall of some, Simeon said in Luke 2:34, and rising of some. So there are those who rise and they are the faithful and those who fall, the unfaithful.

Verse 45, we see another kind of person who has little interest in the return of his master, here picturing the coming of the Lord facing judgment. He lives a life in defiant rejection of what his master expects and commands and beats the slaves instead of providing for them, both men and women, indiscriminately evil. He becomes glutinous and drunken. This is a picture of an unfaithful person – and I would add a perfect depiction of many on religious broadcasting in America.

When the master comes back, there's a judgment rendered on the faithful and that judgment is the judgment that leads to blessing and reward and there's a judgment rendered on the unfaithful and verse 46 describes it. "The master of that slave will come on a day when he doesn't expect him, at an hour he doesn't know, cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers."

And there, by the way, the metaphor jumps into theology. With the word "unbelievers," it stops being a story and becomes reality and it tells us He's talking about unbelievers here and then He describes a slave in verse 47 who knew his master's will, didn't get ready or act in accord with this will, and receives many lashes and then He describes one who didn't even know his master's will and committed deeds worthy of a flogging who receives but a few. And I just want you to notice this...the cross is a dividing point. If you put your trust in Jesus Christ, if you believe in Him as the crucified and risen Savior, you're among the faithful. You have exercised your stewardship, your Gospel stewardship, appropriately toward God and when you face God, you will be blessed and rewarded eternally. On the other hand, if you do not do that, you fall among the unbelievers but you will notice that they're divided into three groups. Group No. 1, I will call defiant unbelievers. Verse 45, they're just absolutely flagrant, willful, opposite of what they're told to do. They're told to do one thing; they did the opposite. Told to use the resources to help others and they drank for themselves and ate for themselves and they were told to take care of others and they were destructive and abusive to others. This is defiant disobedience and this particular slave is hacked to pieces.

This is that willful sin the Old Testament talks about. You can read Leviticus for example. There are a lot of places where it appears, but in Leviticus, I'll give you one illustration of it. Chapter 26, "You do not obey me but act with hostility against me so I will act with wrathful hostility against you and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sin." If you know what I expect, if you know My Word, if you know My Gospel and you know My command and you defy it and you act hostile against that command, I will multiply your punishment seven times. In Numbers, can't resist looking at chapter 15 and verse 30. "The person who does anything defiantly, blaspheming the Lord, shall be cut off from among his people"...death penalty. In the previous verses, it says if somebody sins unintentionally, he can offer a one-year-old female goat for a sin offering but if you act intentionally and defiantly...capital punishment. The more flagrant your sin against knowledge, the worse your eternal punishment. That's why hell will be

more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, more tolerable for Nineveh, more tolerable for those to whom Jonah preached, more tolerable for the queen of the south than it will be for Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum. They're going to have a hotter hell, those people, because they knew the truth and rejected it. They were defiant against the Messiah and His Gospel...defiant disobedience. The severest punishment depicted is hacking someone in pieces. I think Jesus clearly placed the Scribes and the Pharisees in Group 1... their hate, hate against Him, violent hostility leading to murder.

There are, secondly, the distracted unbelievers. It's not such a blatant defiance and, by the way, But Group 2, in verse 47, that slave who knew his master's will and didn't get ready or act in accord with his will shall receive many lashes; just distracted, indifferent, never got around to it, negligent. Many lashes in the story is better than being hacked to pieces, signifying a lesser punishment. Are you saying that hell is going to be different? I believe Scripture teaches this. Everyone's hell will be personal and perfect judgment for their own individual sins ...everybody's hell is his own hell. You don't suffer collectively; you suffer individually. And this chapter teaches that those who defied the truth they knew received the greatest punishment. Please listen to me, any here today need to be especially cautioned because we honor the truth of Scripture very deeply at this church. As Pastor Blair has warned many times in the past, don't trifle with God. For those who are lost, every sermon you hear that preaches the true Gospel, whether here or elsewhere, will condemn you for even greater punishment for eternity if you continue to rebel. This is why Scripture declares that 'today is the day of salvation'.

But then there are the...I guess you could call them the never-enlightened unbelievers or the ignorant unbelievers; in verse 48, the one who didn't know. There are people in the world who didn't know. They don't know now. They don't know what God wants. They never heard the Gospel. Of course, we know what is popular today, "They're all going to heaven." -- People who never heard the Gospel are going to go to heaven. God somehow is going to overlook their ignorance and they're going to end up in heaven. God's going to be kind and gracious and if they lived up to whatever religion they were involved with that's going to be enough and God's going to let them into heaven. That is not what verse 48 says and verse 48 is explicit. "The one who did not know," the Greek says. He didn't know what his master wanted, didn't know what he was commanded to do, had no information, still committed deeds worthy of flogging.

In other words, even though they're ignorant, they're still...what?...sinful; will receive a few blows. There will be a less severe punishment for that one but it certainly doesn't say he's going to be blessed. It certainly doesn't say he's going to be counted with the faithful. It certainly doesn't say he's going to enter into the possessions of the Lord that the faithful servant is going to receive. No, ignorance doesn't get you heaven; it just diminishes judgment in hell.

All that being said, please don't misconstrue the implications of these levels of judgment in hell. As you can find in the this month's Puritan text, the Sinfulness of Sin, both the privations – the lack of good – and the punishments in hell are as inconceivable to man in this age as are the glories of heaven. Even the "few lashes" described by Jesus in verse 48 will be exceedingly terrible and eternal in nature. Hence the Great Commandment of Jesus the preach the Gospel to the entire world.

You see, the cross divides everybody. You're either with the faithful or the unfaithful. You're either in heaven or hell and hell will always be punishment, always cut off from the life of God, always void of peace and joy and satisfaction and fulfillment, to whatever degree it's experienced. This is such an important text for people who think that those who are ignorant of the Gospel are going to somehow go to heaven. They're not. The cross is the dividing point of all humanity. What you do with Jesus Christ on the cross in His death and resurrection determines your eternal destiny.

Finally, let's look at one additional way that Jesus is dividing in this passage. Verse 52, "For from now on..." Let's stop right there. Like the phrase we looked at earlier 'I have come...', This is another little sort of opening phrase that Jesus liked to use. He used it back in chapter 5 verse 10 when He said to James, John and Peter...He said, "From now on, you will be fishers of men." From now on sort of signifies the way it's going to be in the future...from now on. Later in Luke 22:69, Jesus, anticipating His ascension, said, "From now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of God in heaven." From now on..."From now on," He says, "this is how it's going to be." Throughout life here, five members in one household will be divided, three against two, two against three. They will be divided father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. Many of us in this little church...we know that the Gospel divides, don't we? We see it in our own families in the 21st century. And We just

saw it in this passage. At the cross, it divides. It divides for eternity, but Jesus Christ declares that He has become very divisive even here and now.

John 7 says, "And there arose a division in the crowd because of Him." John 9 verse 16, "There was a division among them." John 10, "There arose a division again among the Jews." He divided everywhere He went. Not just in eternity are these people divided, but in time they are divided. The Gospel is a serious problem to people who reject it and those who believe it are outcasts. In the time of Jesus, they were "unsynagogued" – we would call it excommunicated. They were thrown out of the synagogue...social outcasts...and it goes all the way down to the most intimate point of human unity, the family. Note that Jesus could have illustrated it by talking about a town or a community or even a neighborhood, but He takes it all the way down to the place where the most natural kind of unity exists among mankind and says, "This thing is going to be so divisive it's going to turn a family against itself...three against two or two against three," depending on how many Christians in the family and that's hypothetical. Of course, the odds might even be worse -- It might be one against four or more. The Gospel is divisive, and Christ declared that few will find the narrow gate that it provides.

About 190 years ago a man was sharing a trip from which he had just returned from Italy...that he met a family over there who'd come to saving faith in Christ. They'd come out of the Catholic Church which is a very, very difficult thing to do in Italy because of the persecution, especially in Catholic families, and they recently had a baby who they did not want baptized in the Catholic Church; so the grandparents would not acknowledge the child exists and will not call it by its name. They call the thing "it." This is just a contemporary illustration of the price that's paid in the intimacy of the family over the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Why should Jesus Christ be so divisive among men? Listen to this, as it is the heart of why my very own family is under persecution at this time. **Because those who will not embrace the Gospel hate the Gospel because it condemns them as sinners, condemns them to hell.** It is not really the believers that offend them, it is the Gospel.

Now you notice in verse 52 there are five members in a household and then they are sorted out in 53...a father, a son, mother, daughter, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law. You say, "Wait a minute. That's six." You're right. That's six. But remember, the mother-in-law is also the mother of the son who has the wife, not that that's a big issue but the Bible is very precise. The point is that there is going to be division

in the family and sometimes that division can be so severe that it can end up even in death. Listen to the words of our Lord near the passage we looked at Matthew earlier today, back to chapter 10 verse 21, in an instruction to disciples "Brother will deliver up brother to death, a father his child, children rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all on account of My name; but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. Whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next,". Those are tough words, and this level of persecution has not reached us yet in America – although for the first time in our history as a nation you can see how it might come about. And it goes on the world; always has gone on – just read Foxes Book of the Martyrs. So if you've been spared that, that's a blessing.

I understand that the Gospel that we believe, the Gospel that we preach, cuts us off from people. I understand that it indicts them, that it condemns them by virtue of its message, and thus it is understandably divisive. Really nothing new, by the way, even in the NT. The words of Jesus in verse 53 of our passage today, you might not have ever put this together, but He borrowed these from the prophet Micah:

Mic 7:6 for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.

Mic 7:7 But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. [ESV]

so the crowd would know that Jesus was speaking of something that was biblical. It was from the Old Testament.

Beloved, Jesus is the great divider. The cross is the great dividing event and at that point, we're divided in both time and eternity. He calls for sinners to choose blessing and reward in heaven rather than cursing and punishment in hell. He calls for you to make the break no matter what the breach might be in this life and if it's some consolation, and indeed it should be, I have some good news for you. Peter said to Jesus, and I'm sure speaking for all of the Apostles, in Matthew 19:27, "Behold, we've left everything and followed You. What's going to be left for us? We've left everything. Now where are we?" Jesus said, "I say to you this, that everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake shall receive many times as much and shall

inherit eternal life." That's good news. It's worth the forsaking because you get eternal life, but more importantly that phrase "many times as much", which will include enjoying God forever. Oh, and not only that, even here, you get us. You get the body of Christ for encouragement, prayer, and fellowship. You get many brothers, many sisters, many fathers, many mothers, many children, and you get many resources that are supplied by the family of God...Jesus the Wise Divider.

If you embrace Him, He will be to you the Prince of Peace. There will be some division in this life but you will enjoy a peace that passes all understanding and there will be in the future a revival, a great revival, when all Gods chosen come to salvation and people from every tongue and tribe and nation will come to salvation and then the kingdom of peace will come.

Beware, for we do know that the world can boast and plan and conspire, but cannot offer us true peace. They can say, "Peace, peace," but there is no peace, that peace comes only through Christ. Yes indeed, for the one who embraces Christ, that peace comes now and it comes forever.