

## Are You Totally In or Out?

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Two services

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*"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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. And a person's enemies will be those 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 finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it". Matt. 10:34-39*

It was Sunday night, June 19, 2016, when in the minds of many fans, the unbelievable happened. That was the night the Cleveland Cavaliers won the NBA Championship. They ended a period of 52 years in which the city of Cleveland had not won a major sports championship.

To some, they accomplished nearly the nearly impossible. The Golden State Warriors had won 73 league games that year. They went on to take a 3-1 game lead in the championship series. No NBA team has ever lost a 3-1 game lead and the championship, and if the series did go to a seventh game, it would be played on Golden's State home court. The Cavaliers came back to tie the series at 3-3, and then turned in a fantastic team effort to win the final game and the NBA championship on Golden State's court.

The Cavaliers had a terrific slogan for the playoffs which motivated them and was widely embraced by the City of Cleveland and most of their fans. It was "All In." They were totally dedicated to winning that NBA Championship. Improving their basketball team during the year and strengthening areas that were weak had been the main priority. Players put aside personal goals and sacrificed points and individual accomplishments that they might excel as a team. It paid off handsomely.

Christians might do well to adopt the Cavaliers slogan of "All In" and apply it to living out their Christian faith. For to do what Jesus calls us to do is not easy, and at times may seem nearly impossible. But we know that with God nothing is impossible. Being "all in" as a Christian calls for following Jesus. It calls for having the right priorities in life. It calls for one to make personal sacrifices.

Some of Jesus' words in Matthew 10 this morning may surprise you. It was probably intended as a wake-up call. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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. And a person's enemies will be those 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. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (vs. 34-39)

What is Jesus saying here? Is this the same person whom a prophet called "the prince of peace"? Is this the same man who said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives." Is this the same one? Yes, it is.

Let's not get confused here. It was not Jesus' purpose to bring division. An angel was quoted as saying that Jesus' purpose was to "save his people from their sins". Hopefully, most or all of us here today know Jesus has brought peace to us by his death on the cross, and he has brought peace for us by reconciling us with God the Father. But Jesus' coming into this world did not have the effect of bringing peace to the whole earth-yet.

It is interesting to note that Jesus' words are much the same as those of Micah the prophet as stated in Micah 7:6, "For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the members of his own household." In a tragic, similar way, even though divine peace comes to those who are given faith to trust and follow Jesus, conflict will often result between family members when some refuse to repent and believe in the Messiah. This, of course, can occur outside of the family unit also.

Jesus himself will sometimes cause division between people. This can be a division so brutal that Jesus uses the image of a "sword" in verse 34. Now don't misunderstand, the news is not all bad here. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs from our Concordia Seminary-St. Louis writes, "Some will hear Christ's call to faith and discipleship, and by God's gracious action through the Gospel they hear, will repent and believe. Others will hear the same call, but due to their own ingrained sin and stubbornness, they will reject the Christ who summons them to salvation." (Pgs. 538-539-Concordia Commentary on Matthew).

Let me give you examples of these two different reactions within a family. Lee Strobel, a well know journalist, was a non-believer when he got married as was his wife. Someone invited her to church one day and she went and found something that was missing in her life. She went back and came to know Jesus Christ by the ministry of God's Word. Lee saw her new Christian faith as a threat to their marriage. He wasn't happy about it at all. But he saw a change for the better in his wife over time. That, along with a gentle witness and a great deal of patience, led to Lee Strobel coming to believe in Jesus Christ as his Savior.

On the other hand, I have read about one young man who was endangering his life by taking drugs. They tried one thing after another to try to get him off of the habit, but nothing worked very long. Finally, a group of Christians took him under their care, and he came to know and follow Jesus as his Savior. His life had a dramatic turn around. He was eventually able to go home, where after a couple weeks his father said something to the effect that he would rather see him back "on drugs" than "on Jesus".

The same believers who are "lost sheep" in Matthew 10:6, can at times turn out to be "wolves" in Matthew 10, verse 16. By their very unregenerate nature, unbelievers do not want the salvation that Christ accomplished, and they may feel very uncomfortable with those who do. When this takes place in the family it is even more serious.

Sometimes this is how the situation plays out. The believer is challenged by the unbelieving

parent, or spouse, who says something like "Choose me and my ways, not your Jesus and his ways." What is at stake here is a Christian's relationship with Jesus and faith in him. There can be no middle ground. If an unbelieving family member demands allegiance or conformity in ways in which a Christian should not agree, then the Christian believer must love Jesus more than father or mother or son or daughter. Christ's own words give us direction here: "Whosoever acknowledges me before men, him will I acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32) That's from last week's Gospel reading. It is recorded just before Jesus said "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. "

Jesus may also bring division outside of the family. You may lose your job if you take Christian morals seriously. You may lose cherished friends. You may suffer some sort of persecution for your beliefs. This is happening in our country right now, and some of these cases have even been taken to the Supreme Court.

There is even more danger for a Christian in a Moslem country or a country where Christianity is not the major religion. One LCMS website recently told the story of a young woman who converted to Christianity in a Moslem country. Her parents threatened to kill her if she did not renounce Christ. She ran away. They eventually found where she was and kidnapped her. She finally managed to escape and is now in hiding. But she is still trusting Jesus.

This is not just some game we are playing. This is a battle for human souls for eternity. Are you taking your Christian faith seriously or are you just going through the motions? Jesus promises that even if you lose relationships, even if you suffer, even if you have to give up your bodily life, you will receive eternal life forever.

The Cavaliers came home to a wonderful celebration and an all day parade that reportedly involved over one million people. That was grand, but it is really small when compared with the parade and the celebration to come, when we will see the King of Kings, and we will celebrate the victory over sin and death, and we will live in a special new place that God is creating for us.

As a pastor, I am not judging any one. But I believe we should all ask ourselves this question: "Am I totally in, or am I out?" Amen.

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