

Lesson 8

Proper 8

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:34–42

These are surprising words from the Prince of Peace. He *did* come to bring peace. That was His legacy to His disciples as He brought His work of salvation to completion. (See John 14:27; 16:33.) Through faith in Him, we have peace with God. (See Romans 5:1.) As we live in Him, we can be at peace within ourselves. (See 1 John 3:19–20.) As we walk with Him, we may aim at enjoying peace with those around us. (See Romans 12:18; Colossians 3:15.)

112. What did the Prince of Peace mean, then, by saying, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword”?

In his book about discipleship, *Follow Me*, Martin Franzmann wrote: “The Messiah . . . brings no cheap peace, no half peace, no peace by compromise. He can create peace only by destroying evil; and since men love evil and cling to that which excludes them from the whole peace of God, His coming forces a decision between good and evil and proves to be, for all its peaceful intent, the sundering sword” (p. 96).

“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” is a quotation from Micah’s prophetic description of how badly Israel’s society had degenerated

113. How was Jesus using Micah’s words here? When commitment to Jesus brings division into a family, what can be done to promote peaceful relationships? (See 1 Peter 3:1–9, 15–16.)

114. How did Jesus emphasize the priority claim that He asserts on those who are His disciples? (See Luke 9:57–62.)

115. What is meant by the “cross” that those who follow Jesus must carry?

When, by the grace of God and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, we take Jesus seriously enough to empty ourselves of our own inclinations and will, He fills us with Himself. Then we will be neither attracted away from Him by competing attachments (not even to loved ones) nor repelled by possible suffering (the cross) as a result of following Him.

116. In the light of all this, interpret Jesus' *mashal*: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

Martin Franzmann summed up this consideration in *Follow Me*: "To find life in this world is to find a doomed life; to lose one's life in this world for the Christ's sake is to lose the doomed life and to find the one real life in Him" (p. 96).

117. What great blessing would be enjoyed by those who would receive Jesus' disciples when they were on their apostolic mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus? Why was it important for His apostles to hear these words?

118. A "prophet" is a speaker of God's Word; a "righteous person" is any Christian brother or sister who is serving in Jesus' name. What is implied by their being "received"? What is meant by the "prophet's reward" and the "righteous person's reward"?

119. Why does even a cup of cold water have reward value in Jesus' sight?

The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 28:5–9

Jeremiah consistently prophesied that Babylon would be God's instrument of judgment against the leaders and people of Judah because of their faithless trust in perfunctory performance of temple ritual. At the Lord's command, he even fashioned a yoke that he wore publicly in visual demonstration of his message. As Babylon grew more powerful and tensions in Judah grew, Jeremiah suffered persecution, imprisonment, and death threats because he was prophesying what the leaders did not want to hear. Nebuchadnezzar besieged and conquered Jerusalem in 605 BC. He made Judah a vassal state and confiscated and carried off many of the temple's sacred vessels and appointments—along with the first deportation of influential Jews into exile in Babylon. Because the temple still stood, the leaders promoted the hope of early liberation and the return of the articles from the Lord's house. The "house prophet" Hananiah responded to Jeremiah's dire prophecies by "speaking for the Lord" to assure that the hoped-for events would happen within two years. It was that false prophecy that Jeremiah addressed in this pericope.

Jeremiah said he sympathized with what Hananiah was hoping for and predicting but pointed out that prophets sent by the Lord generally had brought calls to repentance at times when Israel had been faithless or had fallen into pagan worship. The prophets' messages generally warned of ____, ____, and ____ if the faithless, rebellious ways continued. Jeremiah said that his own coming as the Lord's prophet and the message he had brought had been consistent with that tradition, while Hananiah and his cohorts, being professional prophets attached to the royal court, consistently prophesied the peace and prosperity the political leaders wanted to hear.

120. What did Jeremiah point to as the deciding factor in determining the validity of a prophet and his prophecies?

Read the rest of the chapter to see how this conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah continued and was concluded.

121. In today's Church, as we look to the future and trust God's grace and blessing, what should be emphasized: realism or optimism?

122. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 7:1–13

Here Paul is asserting that life under grace is more effective at producing the relationship with God that God desires than is life under the Law. The Law, when taken seriously, deadens desire for relationship with God because it continually exposes our sin to our view. We simply cannot accomplish what it requires of us. But life under grace renews us for living with God as it continually reminds us of His forgiving love and acceptance. It encourages our willing response as it covers our failures with forgiveness and blesses our successes.

Paul gave a brief illustration from marriage. He pointed out that when a husband dies, the wife is no longer tied to him but is free to marry another man. With his analogy, he is saying that the Law is like a husband who has died. It has lost its power, its ownership, and the deadliness of its effect on us.

123. How is it that we have died to the Law? For what purpose have we been set free from the Law's deadly effect on us?

124. How is it that the Law, which in itself is holy, righteous, and good, arouses in our sinful nature the inclination to reject and disobey its good commands? What fruit does this good Law end up producing in us? Which commandment does Paul point to as a clear example of how the Law prompts the sinful nature to rebel and disobey the command?

125. What is always the first effect of the Law on those, including Christians, who take it seriously? How does God use that effect in the dynamic of leading us to salvation in His Son, Jesus Christ?

In chapter 6, Paul wrote that we “were baptized . . . into [Christ’s] death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (vv. 3–4). Here he wrote, “You also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead.” Martin Luther echoed this in his Small Catechism, as he wrote that baptizing with water signifies that the old Adam in us, with all its sinful deeds and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance. We find, however, that the old Adam, the sinful nature, is a pretty good swimmer and hard to drown. Our struggle with sin is a daily reality. We readily relate to what Paul described as the tensions involved in the paradox of the Christian’s being at the same time a saint “through the body of Christ,” and a sinner still carrying around the sinful nature of the old Adam. We’re glad we have Jesus, our Savior.

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Almighty God, by the working of Your Holy Spirit, grant that we may gladly hear Your Word proclaimed among us and follow its directing; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:34–42

112. Jesus' saying that He came to bring a sword—Luke has “division” (12:51)—emphasized that faith in Him must be decisive and lead to discipleship in which relationship with Him is foremost. A Christian witness in word and lifestyle may have a judging effect on those who reject Jesus and His call and thus may produce tensions and animosity.

113. Jesus' quoting of Micah showed His disciples that friction resulting from one's relationship with Jesus will be felt most keenly right within a family that is divided over Him. In that situation, Jesus said, “A person's enemies will be those of his own household.” When there is division within a family over Jesus, the Christian needs to witness by loving deeds and lifestyle rather than by “nagging” words, asking the Holy Spirit to be operative in the situation to provide the right setting also for a spoken witness. Then, when the Spirit provides the opportunity, the Christian needs to be ready to speak clearly and earnestly. There is always the danger of allowing a quiet witness to slip into just going along with a negative situation. When that happens, the Christian's own faith and discipleship are threatened, and his witness is negated.

114. Jesus was asserting His priority even over life's good things and important relationships. Usually Jesus enhances such relationships. But as important as familial affection is, love for Jesus displayed in a life consistent with the faith is the primary responsibility of disciples and must be given priority when it is threatened.

115. The “cross” does not refer to problems and hardships that are just a part of life in an imperfect world—illnesses, accidents, losses, and the like. A cross is what a disciple carries because of his relationship with Jesus—self-denial, loving and forgiving in Jesus' name even when not inclined to, standing up and being counted as a disciple at the risk of opposition and rejection, and so on. If you soft-pedal faith and witness and just blend in, the cross is not noticeable; but if you are faithful in worship and witness, as the Spirit gives opportunity, the reactions and attitudes and actions of others may become a cross to carry. The priority place He has in our lives should be consistent with His priority place in our faith.

116. The Jews loved *mashals*, cryptic statements that required chewing on and digesting to fully appreciate the point they were making. “Find” life by making this earthly life and all it affords the primary focus of your search and you end up “losing” the life quality that really matters. “Lose” life by keeping earthly life and all it affords secondary to the primary “seeking of His kingdom and righteousness” and you “find” life—in which also “all these other things” are received as gracious gifts of your heavenly Father in His provident love.

117. Those who receive Jesus' disciples as they bring them the Gospel receive also Jesus and His Father. Jesus had just told His disciples that He was sending them out “as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matthew 10:16). They needed reassurance as His representatives that He meant it when He told them, “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20) and “The one who hears you hears Me” (Luke 10:16).

118. Receiving a prophet or a righteous man means being hospitable and providing for his needs, but more than that, it means honoring his faith and work and providing encouragement and support for his ministry.

119. The reward received is the same as that received by the prophet—the satisfaction of thus having a part in Jesus and His saving ministry. The righteous man’s reward is essentially the same—the blessing of walking on the way with Jesus. No gift given in love is negligible in the eyes of our loving Lord.

The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 28:5–9

Fill-in Answers: Because the prophets were sent by the Lord to call a wayward people to repentance, Jeremiah said, their messages warned of war, famine, and pestilence if the faithless, rebellious ways continued. Professional prophets are always tempted to scratch the itching ears of those who pay their salaries.

120. Jeremiah said that it is only when predictions come true that prophecies are validated. Time did validate his message. In 597 BC, Judah was conquered and made a vassal state of the Babylonians. Ten years later, as a result of an unwise rebellion against Babylon as an ally of Egypt, Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed.

121. As we look to a future that is under God’s gracious guidance and blessing, we surely must be optimistic for those who are the Body of Christ in the world. He will not forsake us and will ultimately take all who belong to Him into the eternal kingdom. In the meanwhile, we can be assured of His strengthening presence in all our needs. At the same time, however, if we look honestly at our world and listen carefully to the instruction of Holy Scripture, we will not imagine that there will be some kind of millennialistic golden era in which the Church will have major, universal influence on the world. The kingdom of our Lord will continue to be a spiritual kingdom—“in the midst of you” (Luke 17:21)—and the Lord’s “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14) will continue to be the Church’s experience until the end.

122. Jeremiah had to take a decisive stand against the wishful predictions of “peace, peace.” Similarly, Jesus said that His coming into the lives of individuals would produce a sword and division instead of peace, requiring His disciples to take a stand and carry their crosses.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 7:1–13

123. We have died to the Law through the death and resurrection of Christ. He, the Second Adam, became representative man for us, lived in full accord with God’s holy will for mankind, gave Himself into suffering and death to atone for our sins, and rose again to new life. In Him, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. We have been set free from the deadly effect of the Law so we may belong to another. We are freed to “marry” God’s grace and so may serve in the new life of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

124. Paul said, “If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin,” and he concluded, that the law makes us recognize sin, “in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.” We might think that the Law would lead to good behavior, but the sinful nature opposes everything that God commands and makes the opposite behavior appear appealing. We hear the commands of the Law and might think, “I won’t think and act that way anymore.” Our sinful nature says, “Oh, really?” and we end up entertaining the very thoughts and actions we wanted to avoid. Paul says, “Our sinful passions, aroused by the law, . . . bear fruit for death.” Paul refers to what we number as the Ninth and Tenth commandments—“You shall not covet.” Coveting is an inner matter—the desire for our neighbor’s things or people. The American ideal of getting ahead and enjoying a good lifestyle, the pressure to “keep up with the Joneses”—or being frustrated because that stays beyond our reach—is easily dismissed until the commandment comes along and says, “You shall not covet.” (See 1 Corinthians 4:3–5.) Francis of Assisi said that in all his years of hearing the confessions of people, he had never had someone confess the sin of coveting.

125. The first effect of the Law for those who are serious about it is that it always reveals our sins. In fact, the more we try to keep the Law, the more we see how we fail at every point. For Christians, it is sins of omission that are the most revealing of how far short of the glory of God we fall. (See Romans 3:19–20.) The awareness of our sinning, recognizing that it is “sinful beyond measure,” as Paul says, either leads us to despair because we will never be able to overcome our sinfulness and be righteous in ourselves or it humbles us to receive God’s solution to our sinful predicament. A righteousness *from* God, His gift of grace in Jesus Christ, His Son,

our Savior, is the only solution for us. It is *from* God because He is the only one who would have thought of restoring relationship with sinners by acting in our stead to redeem and rescue. Christians must imitate St. Paul, who wrote, “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Galatians 2:21).

It’s not the Law’s fault that it continually exposes our sins and produces death in us. The fault lies in our sinfulness and our sinning. *Torah*, the word used by Jews to speak of the Law of Moses, means “instruction.” Its call to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself directs people to inner attitudes and a lifestyle that is truly living in relation to God. Unhappily, sin has intruded and taken control of human nature. So Paul had to say, “The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.” But God has given us forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ. In the power of His Holy Spirit, the Torah is again instruction for living in relation to our heavenly Father under the grace and mercy of His Son.