Unwelcome Good News

Leonard Strydom 15 December 2015



I like a peaceful Jesus. You know, the one we read about in the Bible. The one Isaiah refers to as the 'Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6). The one who 'preached peace' so that we could become part of the family of God (Ephesians 2:17-19). The peaceful Jesus.

But Jesus, being no respecter of my theology, appears in more than these passages of the Bible. He appears in both scenes of peace and moments of conflict. Speaking to His disciples, Jesus boldly shocks them in Matthew 10:34-36 when He says, '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'.

> **'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword…'**

The day I started studying theology was the day I started understanding this Scripture. In those beginning days as a student, passionate for God and excited to share everything I had learned, I would speak to anyone who cared to listen (or didn't, but gave me a gap to speak). The problem was that people didn't seem to be all that welcoming of the Good News I wanted to share with them. In an instant, people would put up a false air of spirituality, a smirk of criticism or just dismiss me completely, leaving me quite distraught.

I started understanding why Jesus had to warn us about this. That for as long as the Gospel would be preached, it would not always be welcomed with open arms, and that should not surprise us. When preached as it should be, it will break into people's lives with conflict, there will be confrontation, and when it does it's work, it might even cause some to lose friends or family. God has always been after passionate followers and not half-hearted bystanders. That is why He seeks to take His place fully, or not at all. That does not sound very peaceful to me, but it is the Jesus of the Bible!

That's Jesus, but what about me?

Even in the apostle Paul's day, he understood that this confrontational message we preach is seen as 'foolishness' and is 'a stumbling block' to many. Knowing this, I for a long time thought that I would have to be that 'stumbling block' myself, answering every conceivable question and arguing against people's false beliefs in order to persuade them to follow Christ…but I had it all wrong.

> **I can…let my speech towards unbelievers be gracious, knowing that it is the Good News of Jesus that tears through the pretense, unbelief or hardness of heart.**

2 Corinthians 4 is one of my favourite chapters in the Bible, and it explains eloquently that 'the god of this world (satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel'. That is why people often appear closed to 'good news'. It goes on to explain that there is **one thing** that has the power to open up these blind eyes: the light of the Gospel! That, and not our own might, is the sword we fight with. I don't have to be confrontational (to the point of being bombastic), as it won't help much. The Gospel will be confrontational, however, and that will shine light into dark hearts.

With this in mind, I can be true to Colossians 4:5-6 and let my speech towards unbelievers be gracious, knowing that it is the Good News of Jesus that tears through the pretense, unbelief or hardness of heart.

God, through the Gospel, brings salvation. The bottom line is, I speak up with confidence, I step out boldly, knowing that I have great (but difficult) news, and then God alone does His works, because salvation belongs to Him.