

**REVEREND JULIAN MCALLEN**  
**The Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God**  
**(Matt. 10:34)**

This morning if I may I would like to look at a much misunderstood saying from our Lord. It is found in verse 34 of our Gospel reading this morning. So let me read it to you.

*‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.’*

It is one of the most misquoted, and as I have said already, misunderstood statements that our Lord has said. So if I may, over the next few minutes I would like to reflect on these words of our Lord, and what he means by them.

So firstly, let me make clear what this statement of Jesus does not say.

This statement of our Lord’s does not in any way condone violence, or excuse war. And there are two reasons why we can be sure of this. Firstly, you will have noticed already that Jesus is speaking figuratively. Straightaway, in the next sentence our Lord clarifies his statement. And he puts it in the context of family relationships. He says...

<sup>34</sup> ‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> 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;<sup>36</sup> and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

It is clear that Jesus is referring to disagreements that may arise among one’s own family when we share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, Jesus says that he came down from heaven not to destroy men’s lives but to save them.’ (Luke 9:56).

So when Jesus says, ‘I have come not to bring peace, but a sword,’ - the sword that Jesus is speaking of has nothing to do with armed conflict

between individuals, peoples or nations!

*That may be a disappointment to those who believe in Holy War.*

Now if Jesus is using the term 'sword' figuratively what exactly does he mean when he says, 'I have not come to bring peace, but a sword?'

**In the Bible the sword has always been associated with God's word.** In Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, he says, 'Take up the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.' (Ephesian 6:17).

We are told in the Letter to the Hebrews that the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.' (Hebrews 4:12)

So, it is the word of God which acts like a sword.

It is the very words that come from our Lord's mouth which will divide a household - and he is making sure his followers are aware of this. If you read the whole of Matthew chapter ten you will see that he is briefing his disciples prior to sending them out as Apostles - that it is his message of salvation will cause offence to some.

And what is the message of salvation? Jesus lets us know his message of salvation at the beginning of his public ministry after his baptism in the River Jordan by John:

'Repent and believe the good news, for the Kingdom of God has come near.'" (Mark 1:15). It is a good God reconciling a sinful humanity. It is this message that will create a disturbance, and some will take offence.

Now you may ask why the sword of the Spirit which is God's word cause such as dissension? And it is because our Lord calls us to examine our lives in the light of His teaching, and repent for those things we have done wrong.

And let's be honest, none of us like to be challenged on our behaviour, even with a forgiving God. Jesus is very interested in how we lead our lives. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5 to 8 Jesus

consistently points us to the moral law found in the Ten Commandments. You see our behaviour and how we live our lives is very important to God.

When, I first came to faith the Holy Spirit challenged me on how I was living my life. I thought I was perfect before I met God! But as I read the Sermon on the Mount and revisited the Ten Commandments left behind from Sunday School days I began to realise I was a liar, a deceiver, lustful, angry and unforgiving, a blasphemer, the list is endless.

But some folk will not like to be challenged on their behaviour, on their sinful nature. So do not be surprised if the message of salvation that you share brings resentment and animosity. **And remember it is not the message of salvation that causes offence it is the pride of the human heart that takes offence.**

And offended they were, whether it was the pride of the Pharisees, or the empty sophistry of the Sadducees or indeed the culture of the Greco-Roman world. Not everyone will like our Lord's teaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

'God will not forgive everyone', 'but he will forgive everyone with a repentant heart. This means we have to come to our Lord and Saviour with a penitent heart. What is it we said at the beginning of the service prior to confession.

'Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and live in love and peace with all.'

There lies the challenge. And some will accept and some will reject it.

Well, let me leave you with the words of the wise old Simeon, who coming to the end of his life, picks up the baby Jesus in his arms and prophesises. The words of Simeon that day said all that needs to be said.

'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many, and to be a sign that will be spoken **against.**' **AMEN.**