

SHAKING UP THE WORLD

Luke 12:49-53

This is an Alka-Seltzer tablet. If I crush it up in my hand, it is simply a nice, white powder. But if I put it in some water, it makes a lot of fizz. If I were a chemist, I would make this same illustration with sodium. Sodium is part of what makes everyday salt. We know that nothing special will happen when we put salt in water. But if you put even a small bit of sodium in water, it will react so violently that it could explode.

Like sodium in water, so was Jesus in this world. He said, "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division." You wouldn't expect Jesus to be the source of contention. He entered into this world as a part of a simple workman's family. He had no army to march with Him, except for His small band of disciples. He could seem from an outside view as harmless as sodium powder in a glass. But when He went out doing His ministry, He shook things up. He challenged the established religious community and constantly was at odds with them. He had such normally divergent groups as the Sadducees and Pharisees joined together in trying to kill Him in any way they could. People would get attracted to Him because of the miracles He did. But then He would let them down by assuring them that following Him would lead to a cross, not wealth and prosperity. The only people He seemed to accept totally were the outcasts, the riffraff who good people didn't associate with. People wanted Jesus to fit into their mold of what a Messiah should be—a political leader who would lead the revolution to overthrow the Romans. Jesus did have crowds of people on His side, ready for Him to say, "Let the revolution begin." But He didn't fit into that mold. Instead He shook up their plans as well.

Jesus continued to shake things up even after He ascended into heaven. His disciples at first were all

Jews. But He sent the Holy Spirit to show that His message was also for non-Jews. As Christians began to accept Gentile converts, this caused divisions among Jewish Christians. It also caused Jewish Christians to be at odds with their Jewish relatives. In our society the individual is first. It is not shocking for someone to choose a different religion, lifestyle, or orientation that the rest of his/her family. But in the Jewish world of Jesus' day, family came first. To go against the family was the highest treason, the worst kind of evil. So as Jesus predicted, father would be 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. This conflict spread into the Gentile world of Roman Christians, because in Roman society again family was first. Jesus set families against each other. He shook up the world.

But does Jesus shake up our world? Our culture has been heavily influenced by the followers of Jesus. We take for granted that there are schools, hospitals, and social services. Yet all those institutions began with the church. Over 175 years ago most schools and hospitals in this country were built and administered by churches. Churches in early America were known as "meeting halls." They were used not only for Sunday worship, but as the town hall and nerve center of the community. In rural America going to church on Sunday was an all-day affair, the main social event for many people each week. Church was second only to family as the chief social structure in our country. There is still a "Helsler Hall" at Iowa State. It was named after Dean Helsler, who, though he was a university official at a state institution, based his insistence on a "dry" Campustown and no "hanky-panky" at school on his strict Methodism. It would seem that Jesus is so much a part of our culture that there is nothing for Him to shake up.

But our world, our society has changed. It used to be that the priorities in our culture were “religion, family, school, friends, and radio/TV.” Now it is “friends, Internet/TV, family, school, and religion.” To be a Christian is to not fit into our culture. Christianity is countercultural. Yes, we are countercultural for getting up on a Sunday morning to go to church. But our faith also affects our lives during the week. I have heard students tell about summer jobs working with people who are not Christian. They say they can really tell the difference. They are made to feel out of place if they act according to their faith.

International students come to Ames and find that to embrace Jesus will put them at odds with their families. It isn't just a new religion they are embracing. They may have to renounce their families, the families who brought them up to believe that the family is more important than their own individual lives. Jesus' words, “From now on there will be five in one family divided against the other, three against two and two against three,” have real meaning to them. Jesus is not some harmless messenger of peace. He comes into our world now as He did 2,000 years ago to shake things up.

C. S. Lewis's children's story which was made into the movie “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,” uses the lion Aslan to depict Jesus. One of the children in the story asks about Aslan, “Is he safe?” The answer is, “No, but he is good.”

If we want a “safe” Savior, we won't find one in Jesus. If He doesn't come into our lives to shake things up, then that would mean that there is nothing to shake up in our lives. Our lives would be completely in order and we wouldn't have need for a Savior. Jesus loves us too much to leave us in the mess we are in. That is why He didn't stand down

in the face of opposition. He went to the cross and shook up the whole world. As he said in our text, “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were kindled.” Think of how weary you might feel after moving or how students felt two weeks when they moved into apartments or how they will feel next weekend coming to campus. You don't feel settled until the work is done, the pictures are on the wall, and the clothes are in the closet. Jesus felt that way about destroying evil in this world. He couldn't wait to go out and defeat what so often imprisons people in suffering. But He had to wait until His “baptism,” His suffering on the cross was over. Why did He have to wait? Because His death on the cross was the way He would save us from the time when He will destroy this world with all its evil.

Jesus comes to shake up our lives. It isn't easy or comfortable. It isn't “safe.” But when we honestly see the evil in our lives, then we know that we need shaking up. And He now gives us the courage to shake things up as well. Just as He won't put up with the evil in this world, He puts in us that same passion.

How might our lives be shaken up by Jesus? Will it be that we lose some favor with our boss at work because we think family is more important than the job? Will it be that we look “too good” because we refuse to join in making fun of someone or in drinking too much or in cheating? Will it mean conflict with a friend or relative because we care enough to confront that person with an evil in his/her life? It isn't easy. It isn't safe, but it is who we are as we see how Jesus loved us enough to shake things up in our lives and in the lives of the people around us.

Sermon delivered by Pastor Mark. T. Heilman
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