**Matthew 11:34-39**

Introduction

I. This month we are going through a Christmas series on why Jesus came to earth, according to his own words about himself from Matthew’s gospel

II. The context of this passage is Jesus sending the 12 disciples out on a short term mission trip through Israel and the mixed responses they would receive.

The Passage

I. The inevitable division that results from his coming (v. 34-36)

A. His coming did not bring peace but a sword (v. 34)

 1. A sword is an image of division (see Luke 12:51)

 2. His coming would be divisive and polarizing

B. This division would split up even the closest of relationships (v. 35-36)

1. This is precisely what happened in Israel the 40 years following Jesus’ ministry

2. This continues to happen today

II. The division is the result of the utter devotion he demands from his followers (v. 37-38)

A. Jesus is calling people to a love, commitment, and devotion to himself that is deeper than their closest relationships (v. 37) and even deeper than their desire to protect and keep safe their very lives (v. 38) and that is very polarizing and divisive.

B. Tim Keller: Jesus’ “self-centered teaching” is what distinguishes him from every other religious/spiritual teacher in history. While other teachers point away from themselves to the ideas they are presenting, Jesus constantly makes himself the center of the conversation and demands an utter allegiance and devotion not just to his teaching but to himself.

C. Devotion to him involves both an embrace and a letting go

1. v. 37: we are called to embrace “loving him” with a full love, but to do that we have to let go and hold loosely to our love for other human relationships in the sense that they can never gain priority over our love for him

2. v. 38: we are called to embrace “following him” but to do that we have to let go and hold loosely even to our very lives.

a. “take up your cross” = embrace death as a way of life. Come to terms with fact might that you might get you killed if you follow me, and recognize that following me means daily “dying” to your own desire to protect and keep safe your life and interests and comforts

b example: Band of Brothers: “We're all scared. You hid in that ditch because you think there's still hope. But Blithe, the only hope you have is to accept the fact that you're already dead, and the sooner you accept that, the sooner you'll be able to function as a soldier's supposed to function. All war depends on it.”

c. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.”

3. In all of this Jesus is simply saying that he wants to be first in our hearts and lives

III. What does this look like for us this Christmas season and beyond?

A. Jesus wants to be the one non-negotiable of our lives

1. During Christmas, the temptation is to let the culture shape our “non-negotiables” (e.g. presents, parties, vacation, time with family, etc.) and try to fit as much of Jesus as we can into that (e.g. a family devotional, a ministry to the poor and needy, etc.)

2. What we do during Christmas is probably a microcosm of what we do with our lives in general. We have certain “non-negotiables” (e.g. career advancement, a nice home in a safe neighborhood, well-educated children, etc.), and then we try to fit as much Jesus into those non-negotiables as possible.

3. What would it look like to reverse that equation so that Jesus is our one non-negotiable, and everything else has to fit around him?

 B. What will ever get us to change so that Jesus becomes our one non-negotiable?

 1. The Spirit of God has to work in our hearts and convince us of two things

 2. He must convince us that there is no other love like Jesus’ love

a. We need to recognize that when Jesus says “take up your cross for my sake,” he is not asking us to do anything for him that he hasn’t already done for us.

b. We need to recognize that we were Jesus’ one non-negotiable. He put loving and protecting us ahead of his own interests, comfort, and reputation

3. He must convince us that there is no other viable option from the one Jesus offers (v. 39)

a. If we try to protect and keep our lives and interests safe in the here and now, we will lose our life for all eternity, but if we give it away to him in the here and now, we will save it for all eternity.

b. Ultimately, Jesus is not calling us to make a huge sacrifice but is calling us to do the only reasonable thing there is to do, all things considered

c. Consider the parable of the treasure in the field (Mt 13). The man who sold all of his possessions for that treasure didn’t think of himself as making a huge sacrifice. He was doing the only reasonable thing there was to do.

**Discussion Questions**

1. On Sunday it was said that one of the potential dangers of the modern church is that we have been “inoculated with Jesus.” Discuss what was meant by that analogy. Do you agree, and if so, how specifically do you see that playing out in churches today?

2. Jesus explicitly says that he came to bring a sword that would divide people (v. 34). One main reason for that division was mentioned on Sunday. What other reasons from Jesus’ teaching and ministry caused such intense division? What implications do you see for us today?

3. On Sunday we discussed the idea of making Jesus the one non-negotiable of our Christmas and our lives in general. The following question was posed: What would it look like to reverse the usual equation so that Jesus is our one non-negotiable, and everything else in our lives has to fit around him? As you consider that question for yourself, what specific issues come up for you?

4. On Sunday it was said that the Spirit of God needs to convince us deeply of two realities if we are to ever fully give our lives over to Christ. Discuss those two realities (see the end of the outline above). Where do you find yourself as you consider those two realities?