

IT'S TIME TO TAKE SIDES

"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."
Matthew 12:30.

There was brought unto Christ a man who was possessed of a demon. This man was both blind and dumb. Our Lord performed a notable miracle in healing him, insomuch that the blind and dumb man both saw and spake. This miracle made a profound impression on the people. It forced many to conclude that Christ was indeed the Messiah. Although the miracle excited the admiration of the people in general, yet it raised the opposition and enmity of the Pharisees. Unable to dispute the miracle itself, the Pharisees tried to impugn the power behind it. They said, "He healed the man, but how did He do it? He did it by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the demons." Christ denied and completely refuted that malicious and blasphemous charge and asserted that He "cast out demons by the Spirit of God." Moved to righteous anger by His slanderers, Christ said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

This is one of those sayings of Christ from which most of us shy away. It seems too stern, too severe or too demanding. Yet there it is, however drastically demanding--a something that pours quietly and relentlessly from the lips of the Son of God.

Note the intolerance in the allegiance which Christ demands from us. He is willing to take the lowliest place on the cross, but He will not take it in your heart and mine. When He was born in the fulness of time, He did not ask for the splendor of the palace. He was born in a manger, reared in a lowly home, and grew to manhood in obscurist station. But the moment He enters the kingdom of the heart, where He is king by conquest and by right, there everything is changed, and with a great intolerance He refuses every place except the first. "Whoso loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me."

With Christ or against Him! An illustration is brought from the battlefield: "He that is not with me is against me." A second illustration is brought from the harvest field: "He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." In the battlefield of life, whose side have you chosen? In the great harvest field of the world, whose interests are you serving? Are we gathering or wasting?

Very obviously, there is no middle course between belief and unbelief. You either believe in God or you do not believe in Him. You must either accept the Saviour and live, or you must reject Him and die. You cannot take a middle way. You are either with Christ in your belief, or you are against Him in your unbelief. Those who are not with Him in profession and discipleship are against Him. They are servants of another master.

Our Christianity is not worth anything unless it is calling on us to take sides, to draw lines, to choose which camp we expect to live in, to let heaven, earth and hell know what kind of banner it is under which we are marching.

Why is it time to take sides?

I. Because Some Issues Are So Crucial.

Jesus Christ is one of these issues. Don't you see how urgently personal He makes the issue in our text: "He that is not with me is against me"?

Here were these Pharisees, and other rulers of the people, attempting to get rid of Christ and to explain away His miracles by saying that His works were performed through the power of Satan. Our Lord showed them how stupid their view of the matter was, since all of His ministry was against Satan.

In this one particular, however, the enemies of our Lord were right: they saw that the real issue was Christ Himself. They were up against the stubborn fact that He stood before them not simply as the son of Mary, which He was, but as the Son of God, which also He was.

It was as God that He had been speaking to them. It was as God that He announced eternal truth with an authority that their rabbis never dreamed of claiming. It was as God that He forgave sins. It was as God that He would in saving love lay down His life for a race of men who had lifted the rebel flag of their defiance against the will of their Maker.

These Pharisees and Sadducees understood this. They were against Him. There were others, however, who neither charged Him with being in league with the devil nor followed Him as the Lord of life. They were the would-be neutralists or inbetweeners. There is a story about a bat who suffered through trying to be neutral. He was watching a fight between some birds and rats, and he was determined not to get drawn into it. So, he said to the birds: "I'm not on your side; I'm clearly not a bird, for I have teeth." And to the rat he said: "I'm not on your side; I can't be a rat, for I have wings." The birds replied: "If you are not a bird, you must be a rat"; and they pecked him all over. And the rats said: "If you are not a rat, you must be a bird"; and they bit him all over. Some people are like that bat in that story; they watch the battle between the Lord and His opponents, and they try to be neutral. But such neutrality is a practical impossibility. Neutrality is impossible, but, even if it were possible, it would still be a very feeble and unhappy attitude to adopt.

A white man, lost in an African jungle, asked a native to help him out. The native said, "Follow me." When they had gone some distance, the white man, becoming doubtful because there was no marked trail, asked him if this was in fact the way. His reply was terse and to the point: "There is no way. I am the way." The native, shrewd and sure, got the man out. Christ is like that. True as it is that God has a pattern for us to live by as His children, it is deeply true that the pattern is bound up with the Person. It is Christ Himself. Christian living is not so much a pattern imposed on us as it is a Person indwelling us. Therefore, to miss the Person is to miss everything. To reject Him means that life is fatal, but to be undecided about Him means that life is futile.

So, on an issue as crucial as that of our relationship to Jesus Christ and His claims, it clearly is time to take sides. Few of us have been bitter or extremely hostile toward Him. Some of us have staked our all on Him. Others have been non-committal about Him. To such He says, "He that is not with me is against me."

II. Because Neutrality Tends To Become So Corrupting.

Let your mind linger a moment on a feature of our text that is easy to miss. It comes out in the little preposition "with." "He that is not with me is against me." We might have expected it to read, "He that is not for me is against me." But the preposition "with" gives the Master's thought another and richly suggestive turn. In the Greek the preposition "with" denotes two things: a community of interest and a community of action. Don't you see how much further that carries you than would be the case if Christ had said only, "He that is not for me is against me?" To be "for" Him might mean simply that you mentally approved of Him, that you intellectually believed in Him, that you sentimentally favored Him, that you would say a good word for Him. But to be "with" Him--ah, that is tremendously more! That means His interests have become your interests, His concerns your concerns, His enthusiasms your enthusiasms. It goes further. It means that His way of life is your way, His surrendering of will to the Father's will is yours, His investment of energy and devotion in the kingdom of God is yours. "With me" in a fellowship of interest and a partnership of action!

Now, suppose you aren't really with Him! Suppose you are trying to sidestep His strong claims upon you! Suppose you are not yet ready to line up with Him! You just want to drift along, never for a second considering any open opposition to Him. You simply are not ready to give yourself away to Him and let Him take the steering wheel of your life.

You may not know it, but your attempt to be neutral toward Christ is having a corrupting effect upon you. Your attempted neutrality tends to corrupt you in three ways:

1. Your will by taking away its decisiveness.
In the days of Elijah the prophet, the people of Israel were playing it coy in their religious life, not wholly for God, not wholly for Baal. The prophet called for a show-down: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him" (I Kings 18:21). Elijah well knew that the longer they went on with their semi-neutrality the harder it would be to arrive at a choice. Some of you are always about to stand up and be counted, but you don't do it. The reason some lives resemble rotten eggs is that in them are so many resolutions that have been warmed but have never hatched.
2. Your conscience by taking away its sensitiveness.
Do you think those Pharisees who said that Christ was in league with the devil came to such a tragically twisted, deadened conscience over night? Certainly not! They came to it by degrees. Some have a conscience "seared with a hot iron." Gradually it has lost its sensitivity, due to the refusal to take sides.
3. Your character by taking away its firmness.
There is more than meets the eye in these two words of our text: "gathereth" and "scattereth." "Gathereth" suggests order, unity, conservation and preservation. "Scattereth" suggests dissipation, disorganization, disharmony, destruction and loss.

Christ says, "Take sides with Me and your life will be pulled together, harmonized into a living whole, made firm and adequate for the moral struggle of living." But, suppose we don't take sides with Him, what then? One course is to fight Him, scorn Him, curse Him. There are some brazen and branded souls who take that trail. But the majority do not. Theirs is the way of being neither hot nor cold, neither hostile nor dedicated. They want to run with the church's hares on Sunday and hunt with the world's hounds the rest of the week. They want to be as nearly neutral as possible. Well, it can't be done. All the firmness goes out of a man's character when he continues to try to sidestep Christ.

III. Because Procrastination Is So Costly.

The years had gone by since these Pharisees were first confronted with and challenged by Christ. At the beginning they were more open, susceptible and neutral. But they delayed to receive Him. They hesitated to be identified with Him. Look now where they are! They are saying that He is a tool of the devil. Procrastination exacts too heavy a toll. Now is the time to take sides. Be with Christ and not against Him. See to it that your life and influence count for Him.