

I invite you to open your bibles to today's scripture text which can be found in the Gospel of Luke, the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, verses 13-15 which can be found on page 737 in your pew bibles. We continue in our series "the peacemakers". Today's scripture encourages believers to break free from the habit of focusing on other peoples wrongs and to promote peace by focusing on their own contribution to a conflict.

Our Fathers Word

*(Lk 12:13-15)*

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

14 Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"

15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

This is the word of God for the people of God

I would like to begin the message this morning by asking you a very important question. What is the most valuable thing in your life, or the most valuable thing you possess? Perhaps if I were to ask you individually, I would get a variety of answers. One might say, "well, I value a good job, a good position in life, in order that I might be able to support my family." Another is bound to say, "I value my health more than anything else in life." Another will no doubt say, "I value my wife, I value my husband, I value my family, they are very dear, they are very precious to me." Indeed, I would get a variety of answers. These answers to some extent have some merit, and go a little way to answering the question, what is the most valuable thing in my life.

All these responses fall short of coming to the real secret, or the heart of the matter. I would suggest to you that the most valuable thing that we possess is not a temporal tangible thing like those we have mentioned. But rather something that is intangible, something that is unseen, something that is seated within us, something that lives forever, that which we describe as the soul.

The Lord in this discourse here, is focusing attention on the soul, the importance of the soul, the value of the soul. There are many things which the man in this parable, and which we possess. The many uncountable blessings in the providence of God which we harvest, those which God continually bestows upon us each and every day. We have many possessions in life which are valued greatly, but we fail to value the thing which is most important of all, our soul. The Lord therefore takes up this story, and he illustrates to the people here to whom He is speaking, the importance of, and the value of, the soul. How important it is, that the soul will know God's salvation.

You see, the man in this parable was more concerned about saving the harvest, than he was about saving his soul. Most of us here, in this farming community know the importance of having the harvest safely gathered in. While we may not have labored in the fields, we should have a great sympathy with the farming community, and for the difficulties that some harvest's present them. How anxious we can be to see the good fruits that God has given us to be completely stored away before the winter comes, and we rejoice in harvest hope and in all that entails to us.

But there is something that eclipses that, far beyond that, far more valuable even than the gifts and the gathering in of the harvest. That is the gathering in of the soul, the harvest of the soul. The gathering of the soul of man into the place of safety, into Christ alone. The one alone who is able to bring salvation to the needy soul of a man or woman. Bringing them into a union and a relationship with Jesus Christ, who alone is the only way to God, and the salvation that we have revealed to us in holy scripture, that way, by the cross. By the sufferings and the blood shedding of God's lamb upon the tree. For a little time this morning I want to focus your attention, as the Lord did, upon the saving of the soul. The gathering in, of the soul.

There are some things to be learned here that are important. Imperative to our soul's future welfare, its future destiny, and it's future salvation.

As we now find ourselves in the peacemaker series, let's shed light through today's scripture on what can offer us the opportunity to be peacemakers, God's workers sent to harvest lost souls. Peacemakers intended to resolve conflicts in life leading to peace, forgiveness, and drawing us into salvation through Christ.

Today we will take a look at an illustration of an action that will turn us around, away from anger, away from an unforgiving heart, resolving conflict, and return us to a direction that will lead us back to the loving arms of Jesus. I am of course speaking of the "U-turn."

Abbreviations can be confusing. Just think of the people who come to our country and are not familiar with our cryptic traffic signs. Imagine that one of these people is driving down the street and sees a sign forbidding U-turns. You and I would read such a sign as saying, "No U Turn!" and understand that it is telling us not to turn our vehicle around and drive in the opposite direction. But if someone had never seen that sign before, he might conclude that the letter "U" stands for the word "You." (**point at congregation**) This could lead him to read the sign as saying, "No! **You** turn!" and conclude that he is being ordered to make an immediate turn. A change in meaning and emphasis can move people in very different directions.

We see a similar difference in meaning, emphasis and direction in our Scripture reading for today. Listen carefully to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

13Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 15Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:13-15).

Imagine how this man spoke when he approached our Lord. Where were his thoughts focused? Where did he place the emphasis in his demand for justice? It is altogether likely that he said, “Teacher, tell **MY BROTHER** to divide the inheritance with me”.

Our sinful nature gives us an inclination to judge others critically rather than charitably. As a result, whenever we experience conflict, our natural reaction is to blame *others* and focus on *their* wrongs.

This tendency is as old as the world, and has been around ever since the fall of man. When God confronts Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 after they were seduced by the cunning serpent to take of the forbidden fruit, Adam is quick to shift the focus to Eve’s conduct (Ge 3:12) *The man said, "The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."* Notice he not only focus’ the blame to eve, but he even attempts to put blame on God himself by saying “you put here with me!” Eve is equally swift to blame Satan for the sin that has brought cascading conflict into the world. (Ge 3:13)*13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

In Genesis 37, we see how Joseph’s brothers fanned sibling jealousy into a murderous plot by focusing endlessly on the ways their younger brother offended them. The account in 1 Samuel 18 and 19 shows how King Saul was obsessed with David’s conduct and repeatedly blamed him for their estrangement.

This pervasive tendency to blame others for conflict is so natural that we do not need to teach it to our children.

As soon as they can mouth the simplest words, they begin to use their tongues to shift the focus from their own wrongs to the actions of others: “He took my toy!” “She hit me first!” “He does it, too!”

I can recall this time when I was four, my sister and I were getting ready to go have family pictures taken. As my father sat reading his newspaper in his favorite chair, my mother finishing with her preparation for the occasion, Toni and I were on the couch fighting for the use of a hair brush. In her frustration in the moment she threw the brush at me, I ducked, it flew over my head, and broke a large mirror on the wall behind us. Without hesitation my father leaped from the chair demanding to know what just happened. Toni calmly stated that I broke the mirror with the brush. Fearing more about what Toni would possibly do to me later for not taking the blame I simply caved in and admitted guilt.

As we get older, we try not to be quite so obvious when we blame others for our problems, but the natural tendency is still there. If we are in a conflict, we ignore or pass quickly over our own deficiencies while developing detailed lists of what others have done wrong.

About 15 years ago I found myself spiritually broken over the emotional abuse of our female pastor by several members of the church I was attending. This conflict escalated to the point of a special meeting to discuss the situation. It was there, where several members literally ganged up on her with their list of complaints and attacks which resulted in her breaking down emotionally to the point of tears right there at the meeting. Rather than being a peacemaker, attempting to resolve the conflict that was tearing our congregation apart, breaking down this wonderfully gifted pastor, I simply gave into the unfortunate blame game

and then I walked out never to return to that church. I resolved it to be their fault that this experience pushed me from church attendance. For three long years this experience was the foothold that the devil was using to keep me out of church and away from serving our Lord.

Conflicts will do just that, they will close us off from healing, turn us away from our family, break our bonds of friendship and love, and even keep us from Jesus. We can even deny our worship of God in fellowship with our church family, sending us back into the wilderness, lost again in our brokenness. Thankfully our God understands our fallen nature and Jesus will seek us, and save us from ourselves.

The inclination to blame others for a problem and focus on their behavior is deeply engrained in our culture. Soap operas and political campaigns gain their most avid audiences when the players are lobbing passionate accusations at one another. And when we engage in courtroom battles, we are willing to pay large fees to have our attorneys minimize our wrongs and focus the jury's attention on our opponent's deficiencies.

The blame game always makes conflict worse. Blaming others for a conflict can do something far worse than generating a big legal bill. Look back at our text and notice how Jesus responds to the man's focus on his brother's behavior. Jesus says, "**Watch out!**" Our Lord gives an emphatic warning that there is great danger ahead when we focus on other's wrongs and ignore our own contribution to a conflict.

Jesus knew that the blame game always makes conflict worse. It takes our eyes off our own contribution to a conflict and blinds us to the steps we can take to promote reconciliation. Worse yet, dwelling on an opponent's behavior can escalate and expand a conflict by attracting the attention of other people and tempting them to take up sides. This dynamic divide's countless families, churches, ministries, companies, and communities every year.

Blaming others also causes us to look for and exaggerate others' wrongs, while ignoring their virtues. This critical perspective inevitably aggravates resentment, judgmental attitudes, and anger. As these feelings grow in our hearts, we can become consumed and controlled by bitterness toward others. As Psalm 73:21-22 warns, "When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you." No wonder Jesus says, "Watch out!"

**(You can change the course of a conflict with a prompt "You-turn.")**

Thank God that Jesus' warning does not end with the words, "Watch out." He graciously goes on to say, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

With this brief warning, Jesus is teaching us that we can usually change the course of a conflict with a prompt "you-turn." That's spelled, y-o-u ... t-u-r-n. Our Lord knows that driving straight ahead and emphasizing others' wrongs always makes conflict worse. Therefore, he commands us to turn around and look at ourselves. He essentially says, "No! Stop blaming others for this conflict.

YOU should be the first one to TURN around and look for the ways that YOU have contributed to this problem. TURN aside from blaming and take the road of repentance and confession. That is the way to peace and reconciliation!”

Jesus gives a similar exhortation in Matthew 7:3-5, he says:

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”

In his great love for us, Jesus is showing us the way that we can turn conflicts around. Instead of indulging our habit of putting the emphasis on others’ wrongs (and sticking them in the eye with our sharp accusations!), he teaches us that the shortest route to peace and reconciliation is to take a careful look in the mirror so we can identify and confess the “planks” in our own eyes. Then and only then will we be in a position to graciously and effectively help others to see how they too have contributed to a conflict and can help to resolve it.

### **Genuine reconciliation and lasting change require a transformed heart**

Confessing wrong words and behavior will usually change the course of a conflict. A simple confession will often break the cycle of blaming and subdue intense emotions. Sometimes it will also encourage others to reflect on their own conduct, which may eventually lead them to admit their wrongs.

If we want real peace, however, we must go beyond confessing sinful behavior. Genuine reconciliation and lasting change require a transformed heart.

Look again at Luke 12:15: “Be on your guard against all kinds of **greed**; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (emphasis added). Jesus is teaching us to go beyond surface behaviors and get to the root cause of our problems, which is usually a worldly desire that has taken control of our hearts and is compelling us to say and do sinful things.

Jesus offers a similar warning in Matthew 15:18-19, where he said, “But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

This truth is echoed and applied specifically to conflict in James 4:1-3, which says: What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Through these passages, God is teaching us that the key to experiencing genuine peace and reconciliation is to recognize, confess, and get rid of the sinful desires that rule our hearts. We cannot do this on our own. No matter how much we hate our pride, self-righteousness, envy, jealousy, and unforgiveness, we cannot sweep these things from our hearts through our own efforts.

But God **can**. He sent his own precious Son to the cross to pay the full penalty for the many sins that we have committed against him and one another. Through faith in Christ, we can experience complete forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

In Colossians 1:19-20, “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

When God forgives and redeems us, he also gives us a new heart. In Ezekiel 36:25-27, he makes this wonderful promise: I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

The transformation of our hearts is both an event and a process. When God saves us, he gives us a new heart that enables us to repent from our sins and trust in Jesus as our Savior. That event triggers a life-long process in which the Holy Spirit slowly and steadily transforms our hearts and minds so that we progressively put off our old desires and behaviors, and replace them with desires and behaviors that are pleasing to God.

Ro 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Eph 4:22-24 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

As the passages above indicate, God often uses conflict to move us along in this transformation process. Every time we are in a conflict, we have the opportunity to identify worldly desires that have taken control of our hearts, turned our eyes away from God, and caused us to do and say things that offend other people. As these sinful desires are exposed, we can confess them to God, seek his forgiveness, and ask him to help us find contentment and security in him alone.

As God purifies and liberates our hearts, we can also confess our sinful desires to one another. Instead of staying on the surface and talking only about our behavior, we can demonstrate the reality of God's transforming work in our hearts by admitting to the desires that have been ruling our hearts, such as greed, control, envy, and selfishness.

These humble and transparent confessions are far more likely to touch the heart of someone we've offended and move them to forgive us and also take a deeper look at themselves. When both sides in a conflict dig deep into their own hearts and confess both the attitudes and the actions that have offended others, peace and reconciliation are just around the corner.

The natural human response to conflict is either to run away from the situation or drive straight ahead and blame others for the problem. Jesus has opened the way for us to take a different and far better path. By his grace, we can make a humble "you-turn" by facing up to the sinful desires in our hearts and confessing the logs in our eyes. This radically different approach to conflict will bring honor to our Lord, set us free from the blame game, and place our feet on the path to peace, reconciliation, and lasting change.

My challenge to you this morning, when you find yourself in a situation of conflict, rather than running away, or playing the blame game, make the decision to make a “you-turn.” Make the right choice, that you are going to go in another direction. Lay out a practical plan for the route that you will take, with God’s help, as you go in this new direction.

Gracious God,

Thank you for sending us your Son, our Lord Jesus into our lives.

For making him our salvation, our life, and the King in our hearts.

Forgive us Father when we have been locked in conflict, unable to forgive

our brothers and sisters, unable to restore peace in our relationships.

Grant us your strength Lord to make a prompt you-turn, away from the

blame game that will lead to continued anger, and broken relationships.

By the power of your Holy Spirit transform our hearts and minds, guide us into

genuine reconciliation, lasting change, healing, forgiveness, and Love.

So that we will put off our old desires and behaviors and replace them

With desires and behaviors that are pleasing to you.

May all that we do be a reflection of the Love of Christ that resides within us.

Above all Father, may all the glory, honor and praise be yours through all we do,  
with our witness to those in our lives.

Amen