



Luke 12:49-53 (NASB)

“I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

OPENING DISCUSSION

There is nothing gentle about this text, it can feel like you have gotten on a horse that is much too big and much too fast for your little body to handle - yet off it goes. Please understand in this scripture we are faced with the fact that God is not safe, but He is good.

BIG PICTURE/MAIN IDEA

This text addresses the agony of Jesus and divisiveness of Jesus. and you don't know the real Jesus unless you accept both of these. The agony caused by his self denying love, the divisiveness caused by his teaching that referred back to himself all the time.

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

The Division

Is this a great text to preach on right after Christmas? Christmas is when we celebrate Jesus who came to bring peace on earth, and here Jesus says 'think not that I have come to bring peace on earth.'

Christmas is celebrating peace between man and God - that Jesus makes possible. Luke 12 is describing relationship, not with us and God, but between each other - Human relationships. Jesus actually creates division between people.

What polarises and divides people is that Jesus is always pointing to himself as the answer - its the Jesus saying I am the way, the truth and the life - by definition truth has to be exclusive, otherwise its not truth. Its the exclusiveness of the Christian faith that will ultimately mean some will accept Jesus and some will not.

Many other leaders, religious leaders will say 'don't look to me, I'm just pointing to the truth or a path to the truth'. Jesus is constantly saying look to me - look to me - I am the truth. Jesus says what you think of me - matters. Jesus is constantly asking directly and indirectly who do you say I am?

This is how Jesus was and yet his life was not just claims but also deeds - said another way: his life backed up his claims.

Some people have made great claims but have not had great lives to back it up, or they may have great lives but not made great claims.

If person has a great life, but not great claims - they have tremendous character or deeds, but they never talked about themselves - we admire people like that. If a person has great claims about themselves but not the life to back it up - we laugh at people like that.

But Jesus did both, great claims about himself and a great life/deeds. So you can't just admire him and you can't just laugh at him. You either decide to he is who he said he is, or you have to reject him. There are only two choices. That is the reason he divides people.

You can't be neutral about him. If you are neutral, you have not seen the real Jesus. You have only seen some fictitious picture of who he is.

The text goes onto describe this division among people in the same family. Remembering the culture he is speaking into, if you were born into a Jewish family, you were Jewish - no room to move. Jesus is challenging people's belief systems just because the patriarchs in a family believe something - does it mean you should too?

The Agony

"I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!" Luke 12:49

Here we get a moment, if you have eyes to see it, a rare moment, to see into his inner life. There was something on the horizon of His life that he looked at, and he says until its over I am constantly distressed, constrained, under attack like a city that is surrounded by an enemy army.

He has come to bring fire, but before he does, he has to suffer. What is this agony, this suffering he carries around all the time?

First (we have to look at every one of the phrases used) he has come to bring a fire to the earth: What is the fire he is speaking of. This fire is a fire of judgement - the cleansing fire of his judging wrath.

Now sometimes fire can refer to the Holy Spirit, many times seen as fire in the bible, but the reference to fire here is not about the Holy Spirit, if you want to talk about the Holy Spirit being fire, then use a different scripture, talk about Acts 2:3-4 where 'there appeared to them tongues as of fire' at Pentecost. Commentators agree here that the fire used here in Luke 12 is about judgement and purification/cleansing and not an encounter with the Holy Spirit.

Here you can talk about the link between fire and judgement, you may want to use Isaiah 66 and 2Thessalonians 1. In Luke 3 John the baptist makes an amazing statement that the one coming after me will baptise you with the holy spirit and with fire. Traditionally many people thought that the experiencing the holy spirit is like fire, and it can be, but this is not what John is saying especially as you read on in verse 17 of Luke 3. Its a fire of judgement that cleanses and purifies.

Fire separates! Fire separates the impurity from pure gold. If you want to cleanse something that lasts, you need fire. Jesus is saying here fire will purify ultimately the human race as we are designed by God to last eternally. If you want to cleanse something for all eternity - you need fire!

Only Jesus the righteous judge can do that, and how wonderful that day will be. Where all wrongs will be made right - Jesus longs for that day where the Kingdom will find complete fulfilment - 'and how I wish it were already kindled!'

How is judgement wonderful for the follower of Jesus Christ?

How do we see the Gospel in and through this text?

Before the fire comes, he must first be baptised.

Is Jesus talking about His baptism in Luke 3 where John the baptist baptises him and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him? No - that has already happened.

This baptism is actually more aligned to Mark 10 where James and John are walking with Jesus, they ask Jesus if they can be his vice presidents in the life to come? Jesus says "You don't know what you are asking," He said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?"

In the old testament this cup he is talking about, is the wrath of God, He is saying that he will be baptised with the fire of Gods wrath.

This is the astonishing thing, Jesus says: I will come to bring fire on the earth, but before I can, that same fire has to fall into my heart.

This is why judgement is wonderful for the follower of Jesus Christ? Because that judgement has already fallen upon Jesus, and if you believe in Him - you are free from the coming fire. The fire of God burned up your sin, your death, your old life to give you a new purified resurrected life, because the fire landed on Jesus and not me. So when the fire comes in the last days, we will be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3 - escaping the fire because we are in Christ.

The only thing that the fire of God's wrath could not burn away, was Jesus love for you. He rose from the grave.

So run to Jesus! Not out of fear of the fire, but because this is the love that you have been looking for your whole life. If you give yourself to him, his love can not fail.

Discussion Questions

1. If Jesus is the judge, it means you are not (we are hopelessly unqualified for the job). In what ways are you still trying to be the judge? Forgiveness is leaving matters in the hands of the judge the only one who can enact perfect judgement. Are there areas of your life where you are bitter or resentful and still trying to be the judge?
2. If Jesus is the judge and he says that the judgement has been fully paid - you are free! What ways are you still living with low self value or punishing yourself for the past?
3. If Jesus has the final say and is the perfect judge, then you can live free from the fear of death. Followers of Jesus never worry about if its practical to do good. Are there good works that the LORD has placed on your heart, that you are allowing fear to stop you from doing?

COMMENTARY NOTES

12:49. Jesus positioned himself within the situation just described. His coming will bring severe judgment. John the Baptist had said the Messiah would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire (3:16; cf. 3:9, 17; 9:54; 17:29). Baptism with fire is a picture of judgment on those who do not accept the Prince of Peace. Jesus' coming as Savior included the punishment of those who would not dedicate themselves to his mission. The last part of the verse surprises us. Jesus was ready to light the fire and let the unbelievers face their punishment. This is not a statement of frustration, with Jesus wanting to get the whole thing over with. Rather, it is a statement of dedication to the mission and readiness to complete the task even though it involves his own baptism of suffering.

12:50. This baptism differs radically from what Jesus experienced from John the Baptist. This is why he is headed to Jerusalem. This baptism comes from betrayers. This is the baptism of death, of crucifixion. Having set his face toward Jerusalem, he was focused on completing this baptism and thus showing himself to be the faithful servant of his Father. This baptism would not be easy, the coming suffering is increasing in the level of distress he experiences which culminates at Gethsemane.

12:51–53. Jesus again knew what the disciples were thinking. They saw him as a man of peace, perhaps the king who would win the war to end all wars and create the messianic kingdom of peace (see Isa. 9; 11). They still had much to learn about Messiah. Jesus came to divide families and friends. He was the dividing line. Dedication and faithfulness to him set a person apart from family and friends. The coming of Jesus the Messiah left no room for neutrality. You choose to be for him or against him. Your choice brings strong opposition and separation from those closest to you who make the other choice.