



Luke 12:49-53

Jesus – The Source of True Peace

Luke 12:49 " I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!

50 "But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!

51 "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.

52 "For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three.

53 "Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

I remember hearing a Pastor commenting on these verses and saying that he couldn't understand why Hallmark hadn't made a Christmas card out of them. On the Front in big letters it would say "Division" and then inside it would read: ***"Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division" (Luke 12:51)***

Now we all know why Hallmark hasn't produced such a card, only people with a truly warped sense of humor like me would actually buy it. But the reason he made the illustration was to draw attention to the fact that this saying of Christ's seems so totally out of accord with what is said about him elsewhere:

In Isaiah 9 you have that beautiful prophecy of the birth of the Redeemer: ***"For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.***

7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."

And you'll no doubt recall that the Angels in Luke 2:14 declared to the Shepherds on the night of Christ's birth: ***"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"***

So is Jesus contradicting what was said about Him elsewhere? Is he not the Prince of Peace but rather the Prince of Division? No, Christ is not contradicting what was said, he is and always will be ***Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*** We are going to have to do some digging in order to understand how both of these things can be true: that the end of the coming of Jesus into the world was to bring true peace between God and Sinners but that one of the immediate results would be division.

But that's one of the reasons that I love passages like this one, that are sometimes called ***"The Hard Sayings of Jesus."*** Those sayings that don't make it onto Christmas cards or banners at Football games because they are on the surface seem difficult to understand or hard to accept. They don't engender

warm fuzzies, but they do move you out of your comfort zone and force you to think deeply about who Jesus is and what He is all about.

So let's go through these verses, figure out what they mean, and then make some applications to our lives. We'll do that under four main headings: **Fire, Baptism, Division, and Peace.**

- 1) **Fire:** Fire is a powerful thing, it utterly consumes that which is combustible, and it purifies that which is not. So perishable things like wood hay and stubble are burned up, and when it is used to melt gold or silver the impure elements the dross floats up to the top, and the refiner skims them off.

In the Bible, fire is used to represent three main ideas **Judgement, purification, and the power of God.** It was always understood, that when the Messiah, the Son of God, came to earth to be with his people he would bring all three.

You can see all three of those themes together in the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah in Malachi 3 for instance:

Mal. 3:2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap.

3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.

4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, As in the days of old, As in former years.

5 And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien -- Because they do not fear Me," Says the LORD of hosts.

6 "For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

He, the Messiah is coming to purify his people, to cleanse them from sin like the refiners fire purifies precious metals. This is necessary because their sin separates them from God, we see that in that without that purification taking place it is impossible for them to worship him acceptably. The Messiah will also come to judge those who stubbornly cling to their sins. When the fire comes, either it will purify or consume, there is no middle ground.

In Malachi 3:6 we also see this wonderful evidence of the Love and Mercy of God. You remember that Hebrews 12:29 says "For our God is a consuming fire." All men, if they stood before God in their own righteousness, would be utterly consumed by his power. So God warned Moses not to let the people even touch Mt. Sinai while his presence was at the top lest they be killed and In Isaiah 6 you remember the prophet stands before God and his words are "**Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.**" God is so awesomely holy, that even this Holy prophet is in danger of being consumed because of his sin.

So why wasn't Isaiah destroyed? Why weren't the Sons of Jacob, that is the people of God, consumed by the Fire? Because our God is not only a consuming fire, he is a God who keeps all his promises, and he covenanted with his people beginning with Abraham to be their deliverer their redeemer, *their righteousness.* Yes, they aren't holy, but He is so he has promised to be their righteousness and he won't change his mind or ever go back on that promises:

Jer. 33:14 'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah:

15 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

16 In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'

Jesus, the Branch, the Son of David and the Son of God, is come to be Righteousness for his people, to interpose his precious blood and to kindle a fire on the earth that will purify or cleanse His people from their sins and to consume the unrepentant. By His Power, through Jesus he Will Justify, He Will Sanctify, and He will Judge.

That is why John the Baptist came saying things about Jesus like:

Luke 3:16 John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

17 "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

But when Jesus is speaking to His Apostles at this point, the fire he speaks of as coming has not yet come. *He longs for it to be kindled.* What needs to happen first?

2) **Baptism:** By talking about Baptism in verse 50, Jesus isn't referring to his Baptism in the Jordan by John. Baptism in the Bible can refer to washing, so that it symbolizes purification from Sin, but it also has a symbolic connection to dying and rising again so that for instance Paul can say that those: *"who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death"* (Rom. 6:3). It is this symbolic connection that Jesus uses to refer to his death and resurrection repeatedly. You remember in Mark 10:35 when James and John ask to sit on his right and left hand when he comes into his glory. Jesus says to them:

"You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

Jesus says, You don't know what you are asking guys. Before I can be exalted and glorified, I must first drink the cup of the Father's wrath to the dregs, I must go through a humiliating and agonizing death for sinners. That is the baptism he is looking forward to.

Jesus didn't look forward to this ordeal without trepidation. It was never in any sense "Woo-hoo, scourging, and humiliation, and crucifixion and then best of all enduring the wrath that would have been poured out in Hell on my people for their sins!" He even prayed in the garden *"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."* So why would Jesus be eager for His crucifixion and death to happen and distressed until it did???

It has been my universal experience, even with women who have had multiple children, that as their pregnancy progresses, that they are increasingly eager to have the child. They look forward to it! Why are they looking forward to it, when it will inevitably involve terrible and often prolonged pain? Two

reasons, 1st **the minor - because after that there will be relief!** No more going to the bathroom every 5 minutes, no more not being able to sleep comfortably in any position, no more needing a forklift to move from a sitting to a standing position and **then the major** – because of the joy of bringing that child into the world.

So too, when Christ's crucifixion is completed his time of humiliation of travail will be over, and then will begin the time of exaltation and all of the wonderful things that followed from his crucifixion, the coming of the power of the holy spirit, the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth, the application of redemption to all His sheep.

3) **Division:** This work of Jesus will not bring immediate peace amongst men. Far from it. The gospel is a divider. You saw in the words of John the Baptist in Luke 3 how it would divide between the wheat and the chaff, those who don't have faith in Jesus and those who do. And we have seen again and again that Jesus said that His true followers would be like Him, they would endure tribulation in this world. As the Power of God comes like fire it changes things, it turns the world upside down, men are changed drastically, and those who are opposed to that Gospel fire don't like it at all. *They want peace*, not true peace, the peace of inertia – the peace of things just going on like they always have – the peace of not being pricked in their hearts, not having their consciences awakened.

I am a bear when people around me are awake when I am trying to sleep, I am deeply unpleasant to be around. Now that is just physical sleep, you know how much more unpleasant people can be when you are spiritually awakened and they are still determined to remain asleep.

You know that the divisions that Jesus speaks of here exist in my and Joy's family, and they have led to some deeply unpleasant exchanges. I know many of you have already have encountered the kind of familial divisions as well, but we are fooling ourselves if we think we can be of one heart and one mind with people whose hearts and minds are fundamentally opposed to that which hold most dear. If you are saved by Christ and you believe that your entire life should be lived in serving him, loving him, glorifying him, and trying to follow his commands, how on earth do you expect to live in perfect harmony with someone who doesn't?

But still, while you may be grieved at the divisions that the power of the Gospel may cause in your families, we should be very grateful to God for two things. First that because the Gospel is a powerful thing, there is always hope that those divisions will be forever healed as your relatives too are brought to saving faith in Christ. And secondly, that at present while these divisions can force you to endure ridicule and scorn from even your closest relatives – and I have seen husbands treating wives with contempt because they are now living lives of holiness and devotion or parents saying that children are "dead to them" because they have turned from the "traditions" of their family to the living God – these divisions will seldom call upon you who live in the USA to be actually Martyred. That is not the case as we have seen this morning in places like Afghanistan. Convert to Christianity in a Muslim country and it is often your own relatives who will slit your throat.

So is the Gospel to blame for these divisions? Not at all, the Gospel comes to cleanse and to bring real peace, real healing, and men's corrupt hearts oppose it because they prefer sinful counterfeits.

People may even accuse you of making a stink as you witness. But let me draw an analogy if I may. When I was in high school, I took a job cleaning and painting a horse barn that hadn't been tended to

since the owner's daughter had gone away to school months before. Although it wasn't being cleaned the horses were still doing their business, and as you came near it, the stink was pretty strong. But what I found though was that as I began to clean it out by shoveling the mess into a wheelbarrow, the sink got indescribably worse. Shifting it literally made my eyes water. So was the answer not to clean it up??? Not at all, and as you seek to witness in this world if doing so makes a stink, remember that the problem isn't the gospel it's the corruption that has been festering away untouched for so long.

- 4) **Peace:** {Neville Chamberlain example if you have time} So back to our original question. How does this all work out? How does Jesus bring division and peace? Because "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" If you want false peace, illusions, and to be able to sins that only lead ultimately to heart break and destruction, then the Gospel will be foolishness and a cause of "unnecessary divisions" you will as AW Pink points out in your Sabbath meditation be able to find many a false prophet who will tell you smooth things and preach false peace where there is no peace. But if you want the Gospel which then you will need to seek out the Jeremiahs and Pauls, the true men of God who know they are sent to Comfort the Troubled and to Trouble the Comfortable they will bring you glad tidings of good news that when we were yet enemies Christ died for us and if we will only believe in Him and his Gospel then we will hear the good news: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"

He died an agonizing death with a willing and ready mind. Why? Well John Piper in his little booklet the Passion of Christ identified 50 reasons why Christ Suffered and Died – but all of them had one thing in common, he did it for us. He died for us, that we might be reconciled to God through Justification and have real Peace not only peace with God and Man, but the peace that only comes from knowing they are forever safe, knowing that they have eternal life and that they will live forever with Christ in heaven. Only faith in Jesus can do this, this is the means by which the fire he brings turns from being consuming to purifying and assures us that we are his people and he is our God:

Zec. 13:9 I will bring the one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; And each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.' "