

The Fire
Luke 12:49-53

As we begin our consideration of these precious words of scripture today, may I ask us to first take a moment to think carefully about who we really believe Jesus to be, especially His character as the loving Savior and Lord that we have come to trust Him to be.

Because in these next few words of the scripture passage that we will study today here in Luke chapter 12, if taken out of context and considered only by themselves, they really won't seem to be describing the Jesus that we have heard about all of our lives, the gentle and caring shepherd. And neither will they fit well within the comfortable idealized Christian life that we are accustomed to hearing about in most of our churches.

Taken simply as they are given, these words would actually seem to conflict with other very familiar words spoken by our Lord at other times, especially His comforting words about peace and harmony.

One particular verse that quickly comes to my mind is the one in John 14 where Jesus lovingly said,

²⁷Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
(John 14:27)

But then listen to the seeming contrast within these words of our Lord given in Luke chapter 12. Here, beginning in verse 49, Jesus tells us,

⁴⁹"I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!
⁵⁰But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! ⁵¹Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. ⁵²For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. ⁵³Father 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." (Luke 12:49-53)

Folks, how do we reconcile these seemingly opposing truths. Those words again in John 14, Jesus said,

²⁷Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
(John 14:27)

Here, on the one hand, Jesus tells us that He gives us great measures of peace, peace that no one and no circumstance of life can provide. And then, on the other hand, He tells us that He came to bring a fire, a fire that would divide, and separate, and bring strife, even among the closest of family members.

Reconciliation of these seemingly opposing differences within the plans, the purposes and especially the personality of the Lord Jesus does not come easily. And this is one more of the reasons why I strongly encourage each of us to spend more and more time reading and rereading these precious scriptures.

Understanding of the Lord's intent as He spoke these words can come only by our being able to see and to understand the context of what He is saying as it relates to the entirety of all that He accomplished, the life He led, the gospel He preached, the manner and the purpose of His death on the cross, the giving to us of His Holy Spirit, and the eternal plans that He has for each one of us. It's only as we view all of those together as one, that we can begin to see that Jesus' words, though seemingly in opposition, are actually working together to accomplish the plan of redemption that He has for us.

And He truly is bringing all of it into fruition, even and especially within these days that we now live within. He has brought division among us, yes, but He has also brought about great peace. And all of it is right. All of it is righteous.

In reading these words and in pondering their meaning, I'm reminded of the words of wisdom given through Solomon, in the Book of Ecclesiastes where he tells us that,

¹To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Those are simple words, but they will speak volumes to our souls if we will only listen. Such words, and the words that follow these, remind us that no matter how deep and difficult the matters of life may be or how joyous they may be, God is personally involved in all of them, that He is always providential and is always working those matters together to bring us good.

Listen to some more of those words given there in Ecclesiastes 3. There we're told that,

- ¹ There is a time for everything,
and a season for every matter under heaven,
- ² a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- ³ a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
- ⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- ⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
- ⁶ a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- ⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
- ⁸ a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

Note all of the many contrasts within these words, contrasts that truly are deep, and too difficult for our small minds to comprehend. But these words tell us of all the many providential plans of God that you and I are called to experience as we live and move and have our being on this earth.

And so then, as Jesus, the Holy and righteous, sovereign, and providential God of heaven and earth spoke these words of our scripture passage for today, both about division and difficulty and about peace and harmony, He had in mind all of the many plans and purposes that are in store for each of us.

And He was anticipating them. And He was anticipating doing whatever it took to bring them to complete fruition.

And in spite of how dark and difficult some of those circumstances of life might turn out to be, His plans for us would always remain gracious and loving, and for our benefit in every way to bring us a future and a hope.

That promise given in Jeremiah 29:11,

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

But again, these words were spoken knowing that such plans would not come about easily, because unfortunately, each of us is often like a hard and rebellious child, determined to have our own way, to accomplish the plans that we ourselves have.

And no, our plans are most often not righteous. And they do not bring about righteousness. Too often our plans are self-centered, self-seeking plans, plans that bespeak the great dilemma that exists among the people of this earth. And then consequently the necessity for all the many circumstances of life spoken about there in Ecclesiastes.

From God's lofty vantage point, He can easily see and hear and know the hearts of all men and women. And whether it be within a family, or in the workplace or in our neighborly relationships, that deeply ingrained spirit of self-centeredness and self-seeking runs rampant.

And here in these words of Jesus, He declares that He has come to provide a way to bring the hearts of men and women back to righteousness. And, of necessity, His methods will not be comfortable for us. Of necessity, He will need to bring a purifying fire, a cleansing furnace upon this crucible of life, a cleansing fire that will reach into men and women's souls and melt away all those impurities of dross that so infect and influence our souls, to purify our hearts so that holiness and righteousness can once again come in and reign within our souls.

And so that you and I will not be surprised or confused when it takes place with us, Jesus is here laying it out clearly and plainly. Here, He is warning us that as the purifying fire that He brings begins to burn within our souls, it will bring divisions, divisions that will erupt and separate even the closest knit of relationships.

And folks, it is inevitable. Sin is a powerful force that does not want to be denied. As God, at one time explained to Cain, "Sin constantly crouches at your door. It desires to have you, to possess you, to control you, but you must

master it". So then, there is no wonder that strife will take place. The sin within the souls of men and women will demand that strife.

As the words of Ephesians 6 remind us, most all of this battle begins within the unseen spirit world. But that battle manifests itself, it works its way out, within our visible world, within our ordinary personal daily lives.

And as we look around us, that battle can be clearly seen in the obstinate nature of people, people who continue to insist on having their own way, who insist on hanging onto their sinful habits and behaviors.

But thankfully, also within those same groups of people, we can see other people, people who want to be different, people who truly do desire to change, to be freed from their devilish bondage to sin. And that is when the rifts and the divisions that Jesus spoke about here begin to take place.

A son will want to change, but his father will not. A mother will want to change, but a daughter will not, and on and on, family members no longer fellowshiping with each other, lifelong friendships dying away.

And in many, perhaps most of those relationships, separation will, and often should, of necessity, take place. Some of the separation will take place in the natural course of events, but there will also be other times when those divisions will need to be intentional.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 6, God speaks about some of those intentional separations. There He commands us to not allow ourselves to be yoked together with those who do not believe in Christ.

Listen to these words. They are stern and they are difficult, but they are necessary, very necessary. There God tells us,

¹⁴Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

¹⁷Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” ¹⁸ “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Again, these are very stern and difficult words, but they are necessary. And this will surely take place, especially after, as these words tell us, the fire of the Holy Spirit begins to burn within us.

As believers in Christ, we have a whole new nature, one that no longer feels comfortable participating in behaviors that once were so common to us, drinking, drug use, carousing, cursing, coarse jesting, immoral behavior, adultery, and all the many other sins like those.

Yes, those were all a part of our former nature and we enjoyed them right along with our friends and family members. But no longer! With the new nature that the Lord Jesus puts within us, we begin to be repulsed by our old behavior and then by the behavior of our friends and family members.

And no, they will not be doing anything different from the things they once did. And they will not understand and will be surprised at your reluctance to continue to join in with them. They may chide you and, make fun of you and even eventually will reject you.

And it will be true. You will no longer be one of them. Because, as these words ask,

¹⁴ . . . what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

The new nature within you will not, cannot and must not fellowship with their nature as it once did. And very often, that will break your heart. And it will also break their heart. It is so sad when people take such differing paths.

Probably the most difficult and confusing of these circumstances takes place when it occurs within a marriage, a husband or a wife becomes a believer, but the other does not.

The question will arise, “must the believer then do as 2 Corinthians 6 demands and separate themselves from their marriage partner?”

Here again, is the possibility of thinking that some of God's word might conflict with another part of it, but that's not so. God simply makes different applications of His grace depending upon the circumstance.

In 1 Corinthians 7, concerning marriage partners, God gives these instructions.

¹⁰Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband. ¹¹But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife.

¹²But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. ¹⁶For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife? (1 Corinthians 7:10-15)

These instructions from God are so important in today's times when so many husbands and wives truly do want to love and serve the Lord, but their spouse does not. But the believing husband or wife must be patient and allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in their unbelieving spouse's heart. And while the fire that Jesus speaks about here might seem to further complicate the already difficult circumstance, that fire truly is the right and only answer.

I'm reminded of the way that firefighters battle back against raging forest fires. They use their own fire to fight the battle for them. And it works. And so does this special fire that Jesus speaks about here.

This special fire that Jesus would kindle within men and women's souls is a fire that would be brought by the Holy Spirit whom He would send to dwell within all who would call upon His name.

John the Baptist declared in Luke chapter 3,

¹⁶ . . . "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. ¹⁷His 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." (Luke 3:16-17)

To the one who receives Christ as their Savior and Lord, the fire of the Holy Spirit will come to live within them and will be in them a cleansing fire, one that will melt away all the dross of sin and self.

But sadly, to the one who does not believe, that same fire will be to them a consuming, unquenchable fire, one that destroys both the body and soul in hell.

So then . . . what are we supposed to do with this truth that we have received here today?

First, we are to examine ourselves to see if there is a fire that burns within our own soul, a fire that is melting away our desires for the former things of this world. If that be so, then we truly are saved and we must permit that fire to have full access to the remaining parts of our soul.

But if, in our examination, we find that there is no fire, great fear needs to enter in, else that fire will surely come at some time, and it will surely consume us.

Dear friends, if any of you are convicted that you do not have the Spirit of Christ burning within you, I beg you to turn, even right at this moment and to receive the eternal salvation that Christ freely offers to you. And to let His Holy Spirit fire begin to burn within your soul.

But also, if in your examination, you find that, yes you are truly saved, but you are just not allowing the Holy Spirit the access He needs within your soul, that you are quenching His Holy Fire, then again, I beg you. Turn and let Him have free reign within your soul. Call out to Him to come and set your heart and soul on fire with His burning flame.

One last thought concerning the sinful upheaval that takes place within families. As the division and strife begins to take place, always remember that the Lord Jesus is never the author, the initiator of sin or sinful behavior. Jesus does not cause us to sin. But rather, the behaviors being described with these family

members is the common response that occurs when the pure and unsullied holiness of the Lord Jesus is introduced into the sinful circumstances that take place within the self-centered and self-seeking behaviors of sinful family members. Rather than humbly surrendering to the Lordship of Christ, they rebel and they become even more sinful.

Within these few words, its easy to see the sinfulness of children not honoring their parents, of parents provoking their children to anger, and on and on.

So then yes, the holiness of the Lord Jesus really will bring the fire of conviction of sin. And if family members choose not to surrender and become humble, strife and division will be the result.

And again, as I mentioned a moment ago, if any of you find this sort of strife and division taking place in your own lives, I plead with you to examine your souls, humble yourselves and allow the Holy Spirit's fire to do His work in you.

I'll close with the words of John the Baptist from Luke chapter 3. John said of Jesus,

¹⁶ . . . "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. ¹⁷His 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." (Luke 3:16-17)

Let's pray.