

I've Come to Bring Fire

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[0:00] And we should remember that as Jesus says these things, he was surrounded by a huge crowd of many thousands. And within this crowd is quite the variety. There are Pharisees. There's Jesus' disciples.

! There's many who are just here to see Jesus and to hear what he has to say. We're in Luke chapter 12, verse 49. And Jesus says this, I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.

But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed. Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No.

But division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other. Three against two.

And two against three. They will be divided. Father against son. And son against father. Mother against daughter.

[1:17] And daughter against mother. Mother-in-law against daughter-in-law. And daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. He said to the crowd, When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, It's going to rain.

And it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, It's going to be hot. And it is. Hypocrites. You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right?

As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way. Or your adversary may drag you off to the judge. And the judge turn you over to the officer.

And the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. So Jesus speaks briefly on three different subjects here.

[2:37] First, he makes a statement about why he has come and the effect that it will have on people's relationships. Second, he rebukes many for their hypocrisy.

And third, he offers a specific word of wisdom to those who are in conflict with others. And I'd like to work through these three pieces in reverse order.

So we're going to start with the last one in verse 58. Here Jesus offers a very specific word of wisdom to those who are in conflict with others.

As you're going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way. Or your adversary may drag you off to the judge and the judge turn you over to the officer and the officer throw you into prison.

I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. So this is a very specific kind of conflict.

[3:44] We have a person and his accuser. This word was used specifically for those who were bringing a charge against someone else in a lawsuit.

Now it's general enough that it could cover any kind of charge or lawsuit. But our minds go very easily to something involving the borrowing of money.

Since at the end Jesus says, you will not get out of prison until you have paid the last penny. And so as we listen to his words we're probably envisioning someone who's failed to make payments on a debt and now the accuser has kind of come to collect what is owed.

And Jesus says, as you're going with the accuser to the magistrate, that's like a civil judge or kind of like in a small claims court, as you're going with the accuser to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way.

Make an effort to settle with your accuser on the way. Settle before you get to the magistrate. Jesus is giving us some wisdom.

[4:58] Before the conflict progresses into any kind of legal hearing, make an effort to resolve the conflict just between you and that person bringing a charge against you.

And it comes with this warning of what could happen if we fail to settle things before it gets to that legal situation. So he says, try hard to be reconciled on the way or your adversary may drag you off to the judge and the judge turn you over to the officer and the officer throw you into prison.

Notice how quickly things progress to a far worse situation. first you're just going to small claims court we could say. But next your accuser is dragging you before the judge.

The language intensifies because once the magistrate gets involved there's now a legal verdict or requirement that you must meet and then if you don't meet that then your accuser can now force you to appear before the judge perhaps the judge that's sort of the next level up and then things are very soon out of control.

The judge gives his verdict hands you over to the officer or kind of like our modern day bailiff. The bailiff throws you into prison and the way things that worked back then is very different than today.

[6:29] One source I read said that prisoners were sometimes beaten regularly so that their family members would pay the debt that they owed or their friends and of course they didn't just let you go free back then for good behavior in jail and they didn't feed you or clothe you or look after you your family and friends had to provide for your needs or you died in jail.

Prison was rough back then and Jesus warned saying I tell you you will not get out until you pay the last penny. Early on in the dispute maybe if you had made an effort to settle things and you'd scrounged up enough to offer even 70 cents on the dollar just maybe the accuser would have been willing to settle the debt and avoid all the hassle that would be far better for both than you having to go through the courts and legal fees and then there's the public shame and embarrassment of getting dragged before the judge and then thrown into prison.

By the time it gets to that point Jesus says you won't get out until you have paid the last penny.

Every last penny. The opportunity to settle for what you can manage is now long gone and the relationship between you and your opponent is now so much worse that not even one penny less than what you owed will be required.

And so the principle here is in conflict with one another we are wise to settle things to deal with things as soon as possible right at the beginning before things progress because the more we fight or the longer we delay to do what's right by the other person the harder it's going to be the uglier it's going to get and fast.

Let's think of a couple practical examples. Maybe you're not thinking and something slips out of your mouth and you say something you just knew you shouldn't have said to a person in the conversation.

[8:50] what should you do? Well before those words even have the time to land in the heart of the other person humble yourself before them and apologize to them.

Admit I shouldn't have said that. Would you please forgive me? I'm sorry. Settle it before there's even a chance for it to progress any further. Or we could apply this generally to how we handle our financial problems.

That's what the parables or the wisdoms related to here. A wise person of course avoids borrowing if at all possible from the get-go. As Solomon said the borrower is slave to the lender.

But then probably most people have not really lived by that and we have debts. And what do we do? Well we sort of do the best we can to juggle all the bills and the payments with the money that's coming in.

But here's the rub. We have within us this impulse to spend. To get things that we don't have. Things that we don't really need.

[10:01] But we desire them so strongly and then we just we do it. We go against our better judgment and we reason to ourselves oh it'll be alright. I know I probably can't afford this thing but we'll manage it somehow.

wow. And then something unexpected happens and one day there's not enough to pay the bills when they come due. And then the phone starts ringing and it's the bank or the company. And in principle this same scenario that Jesus describes can play itself out in our lives. We might not be thrown in jail in our culture but we might have companies that are unwilling to provide services to us.

We might have SAS power threatening to cut the power off or the bank telling us that they're foreclosing. Or we might look out the window to see our vehicle being taken away repossessed. Our reputation in our community can be ruined. Maybe you know someone who's been through bankruptcy or had their wages garnished or their vehicle repossessed.

[11:12] make an effort to settle says Jesus before it gets out of hand. Try hard before it gets to that legal situation.

That's the first piece of wisdom that Jesus gives or the first one that we're looking at anyway. Let's now look at what Jesus said before all this in the verses prior starting in verse 54.

Jesus said to the crowd when you see a cloud rising in the west immediately you say it's going to rain. And it does. And when the south wind blows you say it's going to be hot.

And it is. Hypocrites you know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?

This is a rebuke from Jesus. He straight up calls them hypocrites. Normally that word brings to mind a person who says one thing and then does another.

[12:25] A person who calls people to a certain standard of righteousness but then doesn't live that way themselves. And that's right. That is what the word means.

But the word can also have this very strong idea of being an actor. Being a pretender. And Jesus seems to say that they're pretending that they don't understand the present time.

This is the pinnacle moment in the story of the world. And especially in the story of God and his people. As we've seen God has given countless signs that this is it.

That his son Jesus is the Messiah. He is the son of God. He is the savior that we need. And God has unleashed his power in all kinds of miracles, wonders, exorcisms, healings.

And some are seeing these signs and recognizing that the time of God's fulfillment is here. But many are sort of faking ignorance.

[13:38] They're pretending or acting as if nothing too special is happening. As if nothing conclusive is going on. We've heard how the Pharisees will stop at nothing to explain away the miracles of Jesus.

Oh, he did that by the power of the devil. Or he did that on the Sabbath day. But we don't even really know who his father is, so how can we trust anything he says?

And Jesus is calling them on the carpet here. He says, you guys are pretenders. You guys are able to discern what the weather's going to do based on the telltale signs.

And so you're able to understand what God is doing right now because you see the telltale signs. You're pretending that you don't know what's going on.

But you do know. You're deliberately refusing to acknowledge the times that we're in. You're refusing to acknowledge me.

[14:50] what about you? Have you acknowledged Jesus as Messiah? As the Son of God?

As the Savior you need? Do you see the signs that God gave to show that it's true? are you pretending to not really understand who Jesus is or what he asks?

As I've often said we might be able to fool the people around us but we can't fool God. We can't fool Jesus. He sees right through.

Finally let's look at that first thing that Jesus said in this passage. these least some of the least popular words of Jesus. Verse 49 I have come to bring fire on the earth and how I wish it were already kindled but I have a baptism to undergo and what constraint I am under until it is completed. Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No I tell you but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other.

[16:15] Three against two and two against three. They will be divided father against son and son against father. mother and daughter against mother.

In all my years as a follower of Jesus I have seen the inside of many Christian bookstores many cards many posters plaques figurines and journals with many different Bible verses on them but I have never seen these words on any of those things.

I have come to bring fire on the earth and how I wish it were already kindled. What is Jesus talking about here?

All throughout the Bible the language of fire like this has to do with judgment. It has to do with punishment from God.

In fact if we think back over parts of the Old Testament story there's quite a few times when God literally actually did bring fire down upon the earth and not just to scorch the land like a natural disaster but to burn up to destroy people and the pattern that we see in the Bible is that God does this as a punishment for wickedness.

[17 : 42] The very first time we read of something like this in the Bible is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah two exceedingly wicked cities of the ancient world.

So wicked that God said the outcry against those cities from all the neighboring peoples had reached his ears.

They were praying for God to deal with them and do something about them. So wicked that the men of those cities would gang rape strangers who were passing through and eventually God says enough is enough I'm going to give them what they're due and God rains down fire and brimstone upon these cities and destroys them.

Later on in the story God makes his presence known to the children of Israel in the form of a pillar of fire. He would show himself as a pillar of cloud during the day and then at night as a pillar of fire as he led the Israelites out of Egypt in the wilderness and there comes a moment in the story where two of Moses sons blatantly disregard the commands of the Lord and in Leviticus chapter 10 we read about how fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed these two sons of Moses a little later on we read about a time when the Israelites are continually grumbling and complaining against God not long after he had rescued them from slavery in Egypt and fire from the Lord begins burning up and consuming the outskirts of the Israelite camp and then a little later we read about fire from the

Lord consuming 250 men who were actively participating in the rebellion against Moses Moses was the man that the Lord had chosen to lead his people and so they weren't just opposing Moses but they were opposing the Lord as the story goes on fire becomes not only a thing of actual judgment but a symbol of God's wrath but the important thing to note is that God's fire whether literal or his wrath is always directed towards evil it always comes down upon the wicked it's always pointed at sin it's a punishment for wickedness but it's also a thing that purges wickedness it removes it destroys it here's a couple key passages from the Old

[20 : 37] Testament that speak of this Deuteronomy chapter 4 verse 23 be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden for the Lord your God is a consuming fire so to worship anything or anyone other than the one true creator God is evil it's wicked and so God reminds them that he is a consuming fire he will destroy and burn up those who do this with a righteous jealousy because all glory and praise and worship rightly belongs to him and to him alone Psalm 21 David is speaking to God he says your hand will lay hold on all your enemies your right hand will seize your foes when you appear for battle you will burn them up as in a blazing furnace the

Lord will swallow them up in his wrath and his fire will consume them you will destroy their descendants from the earth their posterity from mankind though they against you and devise wicked schemes they cannot succeed again we see that God's fire and wrath are pointed at his enemies they are pointed at those who plot evil and devise wickedness Psalm 50 verse 3 our God comes and will not be silent a fire devours before him and around him a tempest rages Psalm 97 verse 3 the Lord reigns let the earth be glad let the distant shores rejoice clouds and thick darkness surround him righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side notice the connection here between fire which consumes his enemies and justice

God is not just angry like the Hulk throwing a temper tantrum because he can't have what he wants no God's fire and anger flows out of his righteousness and justice he hates what is evil and he loves what is good and so he destroys and he consumes wickedness and those who come against him in rebellion in Isaiah 66 God speaks tenderly to his people and he tells them that he will make all things new for them he will comfort them he will give them peace and safety and prosperity he says when you see this your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass the hand of the Lord will be made known to his servants but his fury will be shown to his foes see the

Lord is coming with fire and his chariots are like a whirlwind he will bring down his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire God speaking in this passage of what he will do at the end of our world's story skip down to verse 22 and we read this!

As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make will endure before me declares the Lord so will your name and descendants endure from one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another all mankind will come and bow down before me says the Lord!

[24 : 35] And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me the worms that eat them will not die the fire that burns them will not be quenched and they will be loathsome to all mankind that last part about the worms not dying and the fires not being quenched Jesus will quote that later on as he teaches about hell to the people in his day and so from Genesis to Malachi the entire Old Testament we learn that God is a consuming fire and this relates to his righteousness his justice he desires to purge his world of evil and wickedness and so he promises repeatedly to bring fire upon the earth at the end and to destroy the wicked let's now flip to the New Testament one more passage first second

Thessalonians chapter one verse five Paul says first before this to the Thessalonian Christians that he boasts about their perseverance and about their faith which they've maintained through trials he says your perseverance and your faith in the midst of trials is evidence that God's judgment is right and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are suffering God is just he will pay back trouble to those who trouble!

you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well this will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels and will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus there we see it again Jesus is coming back from heaven in blazing fire to punish the disobedient all through the book of Revelation the last book of the Bible we read about fire and how God will send it down on the earth on the wicked and then at the very end we read of how he will throw the devil and anyone whose name is not found written in the book of life into the lake of fire and so this truth of God's nature his justice his righteousness his desire to purge evil and wickedness this truth runs through the

Bible from cover to cover and alongside this truth runs the truth that God is merciful and loving and that out of his compassion he has made a way for the guilty to be spared of his punishment and so back to Jesus in Luke 12 49 he said I have come to bring fire on the earth and how I wish it were already kindled do you hear how Jesus the son of God has the same heart as his father the same desire to consume and purge wickedness and sin but even though that's one of his reasons for coming Jesus says there's something I must do first I have a baptism to undergo he says before Jesus moment to bring the fire of justice to this world he must first be plunged into suffering and death in order to provide a way of escape for all who will repent and believe and what constraint I am under until it is completed these words are telling they tell us that for Jesus to be face to face with sin and wickedness is difficult as some translations put it and how distressed I am until it is finished it's like Jesus is saying I want to do something about the sin and the wickedness and the corruption and the brokenness in this world I desire to bring the purging!

[29 : 18] and cleansing fire to it it distresses me deeply but there's something I must do first in the book of James we read that God's mercy triumphs over judgment he could make all the sin and evil go away in an instant in a blaze of fire but his mercy is even greater his compassion is even stronger than his desire to bring justice he doesn't want us to perish even though we deserve it we should not for a moment think that God would be happy to watch us burn God pleasure in our destruction listen to what God said through the prophet Ezekiel long ago Ezekiel 33 verse 11 God is not malicious God is not malicious because he is compassionate and loving he does not delight in our destruction.

It would satisfy his justice, yes but he would rather we repent and be reconciled to him. Jesus longing to bring fire upon the earth reflects his justness and his righteousness but his mercy and his love constrains him to let that longing go unfulfilled until he has provided the way of escape for all who will repent and believe.

It's like this world is infected by a deadly contagion that just continues to spread and wreak havoc. It doesn't just affect our bodies but it affects our minds and our hearts and even our souls.

And the only option to fully and finally clean up the mess is the nuclear option. It's to wipe out the population entirely and eventually it must be done.

But before God does it he offers us the cure a way to be saved and Jesus is and has the cure to this deadly virus.

[31 : 53] He's holding open the door for us to receive it. He's the only bomb shelter where we can find safety from the blast and he's inviting us in.

And yet many are stubborn and refuse to listen. The last few verses of this section are sobering. Jesus states that he's not come to bring peace on earth but division. And these words make us think because there's a lot about how Jesus, the Messiah, will bring peace.

Think about those words we hear at Christmas time every year about how Jesus is the prince of peace. Peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests.

Peace among the nations and that peace will come. But here in Luke's gospel Jesus is talking very specifically about how his coming brings division within families.

[33:04] And it's not that Jesus wants that division in families. It's that Jesus is so polarizing as we've seen. Some believe in him and accept him but many just stubbornly reject him.

And so as Jesus stays true to what he has come to do which is to proclaim the word of God to us this mixed response is inevitable.

Families must be divided. And Jesus knows this because some will respond in faith and repentance while others will not. They will not accept him.

And so there will be some families where only two of the five believe. Or where three embrace Jesus of the five but two do not.

He says there will be some families where a father follows him but a son will not. Or where a son embraces him but the father will not.

[34:16] Probably all of us have some family if not immediate then extended where we see this to be true. rare is that family where every member in it has fully embraced Jesus and is following Jesus.

This is how it must be says Jesus. He knows that his ministry of speaking God's word will have this effect. And if that's the case in your family this morning if you know someone that's on your heart we must hold on to that truth that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked and he desires all to come to repentance.

Let's not give up praying for the salvation of our loved ones. Even the family of Jesus the earthly family of Jesus was divided over him.

There were moments where his mother and his brothers all opposed him John tells us that even his own brothers did not believe in him.

But later on his brother James had a change of heart and his mother Mary was numbered with the believers. Jesus knows what it's like to have division of the worst kind in the family.

[35:49] These words of Jesus are hard. but they're true. They help us make sense of what's really going on in the grand story of our world.

There is no comfort here for the unbeliever unless they turn to God and embrace Jesus. But there is a whole lot of clarity for us who believe in Jesus' name.

God helps us understand the times. Let's pray. Father we thank you for these words and on the top of our hearts and minds is those we know and love who don't know you and we ask that you would work powerfully in their hearts and bring them to repentance.

Grant them repentance. Fill them with faith. Open their hearts to see their need for you and to respond in accepting you.

Lord we don't like to think of the fire but we know that's what you've saved us from and we want to see that in the lives of all we know and love so we just commit those people to you.

[37:15] We ask for your grace for them. In Jesus name Amen.