

Are You Telling This for Us?

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 0 0] You might want to open your Bibles at Luke chapter 12, which Craig read so well for us just a moment ago. I often find at the end of readings like this, when the reader says, this is the word of the Lord, and we think, I must say, in preparing this, it's felt a little bit like being on a whitewater raft.

Jesus keeps saying things he shouldn't be saying, and so I want you to be prepared for that. I mean, look at the centre of the passage, at the heart of the passage, verse 49, it's on page 71, Luke 12.

At the heart of the passage, Jesus says this, verse 49, I came to cast fire upon the earth, and would that it were already kindled.

Doesn't that seem like the opposite of what you hope Jesus will say? The reason I've come to earth is to set on fire this world, and I'm longing that it should already happen.

Why does he say that? The reason he says it is because the world in which you and I live is no longer in the way that God originally made it.

[1 : 1 7] It's still beautiful, and we still see vestiges of God's lovely creative work, not only in creation, but in the lives of our friends. But at the deepest possible level, at the level of our connection with God, there is a rupture which is impossible for us to fix.

And I don't think there's anyone who really believes that the United Nations are going to solve the problems in Afghanistan. Does anyone here believe that stricter sentencing is going to cure gang violence in Vancouver?

Or that \$900 million are going to keep the 2010 Olympic Games safe? Or an injection of \$10 billion into the marketplace is going to cure our good old garden variety greed?

Or that the creation of wildlife parks are going to save the 38% of life forms on our planet that currently face extinction? No, no, no.

The problem is too deep. And at root, the problem that the Bible says is we've rejected God, and we have exchanged the glory of God for idols.

[2 : 3 0] And Jesus has brilliantly exposed our domestic idols in this chapter. The fact that we desperately love the approval and applause of others, and that we worship food and clothing and possessions, and we set our hearts on things that you can put a dollar value on instead of the treasures in heaven and being rich towards God.

And all the education and all the religion and all the morality and good breeding in the world is powerless to transform our hearts and to liberate us from our love of those idols.

It's our rejection of God that leads to both genocide and greed, carnage and covetousness.

Karma won't fix it. Yoga won't fix it. What it's going to take is fire. The fire of God. See, faced with a rebellious creation, God has two choices in a sense.

He can just annihilate it and start again. Or he can bring recreation and redemption from that old rebellious creation.

[3 : 48] And that's what God has chosen to do. And because God is fire, he will bring the transformation through fire. Do you remember last year when we looked at the book of Exodus? How did God appear first to Moses?

It was in the flame of a burning bush. And how did he lead the people out of slavery into redemption? It was in a pillar of fire. And how did God appear to them on the top of Mount Sinai?

You remember the appearance of the Lord was like a devouring fire in the sight of his people. Very important for us. Fire has two purposes.

It's to consume and to destroy what is evil and impure. And the other is to cleanse and to purify what really lasts and is precious.

So if my robes get dirty, and my robes do get dirty from time to time, they get wine on them. I tell you this, not to be offended when you see wine on my robes.

[4 : 46] And when they go back into the vestry, it smells like a bit of a locker room in there. I don't cleanse these with fire. I put them in the wash.

Or someone puts them in the wash for me. Because they're not going to last. But if you take a chunk of gold out of the ground as iron ore and you put it in the fire, the fire divides what is evil from what is good.

It purifies and burns off what is worthless. And God's creation is full of evil and full of oppression and full of cruelty. And Christ has come to cast fire on the earth, not just for judgment, but for redemption.

His work is to cleanse the universe from what is precious, for what is precious. So the last book of the Old Testament, the book of Malachi, God speaks about the coming of the Messiah.

And he uses fire twice. Once for purifying and once for judgment. Let me read you. Malachi 3. Who can endure the day of his coming?

[5 : 50] Who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and full of soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.

He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver till they present right offerings to the Lord. He's going to purify. But then in Malachi 4 we read this.

The day comes, behold, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and evildoers will be stubble. The day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. Christ has come to cast fire on the earth and it's the fire of cleansing by consuming all that is evil.

And what is it that changes the fire from being a fire that will consume us to being a fire that will cleanse us? What makes it into the redeeming fire?

[6 : 58] The answer is the very next verse, verse 50, where Jesus says, I have a baptism with which to be baptized with, I'm sorry, to be baptized with, and how I am constrained until it is accomplished.

I'm under stress. He's had his water baptism. He's talking about the baptism of fire, which is his death. And in the cross of Jesus, as Jesus dies on the cross, the fire that consumes evil, Jesus takes and pours it into himself.

And he is consumed so that we might be cleansed. Do you remember the Old Testament story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal? The prophets of Baal, they call down fire on the altar and Baal is a useless idol, so he can't do anything.

And then Elijah steps up and he pours water over the sacrifice and he calls on God and God pours down the fire on the burnt offering and consumes it. This is the opposite.

As Jesus is on the cross, God pours down the fire of his judgment and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ consumes the fire. You might have heard recently that there have been terrible bushfires in Australia.

[8 : 18] It's the worst peacetime disaster Australia has ever suffered. More than 200 people have been killed. Thousands of homes have been destroyed. Politicians on newscasts tearfully talking about hell's fury and there's been a remarkable outpouring of help.

One of the lovely stories out of the fire is the story of a nurse, a 56-year-old nurse whose name is Roz Addison, who saved herself and three female German backpackers who are staying in her home.

And she describes in an interview the sound of the firestorm coming up the hill towards their house. It's so dangerous because Victoria had not been burned off for 20 years at least, this area.

And so there was so much fuel for the fire. It was 49 degrees and there was much wind gusting around at 100 kilometres per hour. So Roz had watered down her house and her yard and she took the girls inside and they put wet towels over their heads and she said that the sky turned black and the fire alarms were screeching.

She said, when I heard the windows of the lounge room shatter, and I quote her now, she said, I told the girls that the house was on fire but that we would be okay. I finished the quote.

[9 : 35] We would go to a spot in the garden which had been burned black. There would be no fuel. And that's exactly what they did.

And they were saved. And in a typically Australian touch, she finishes her interview by saying, I said to the girls, that's it girls, the complete Australian experience.

And then we discussed colours for the new sofa. Where is the place of safety in the fire? It's the place where the fire has already burned, where there's no fuel.

And that's what's happened on the cross. You see, what makes the fire of God into the fire of judgement, what is the fuel of God's fire, is our sin and our idolatry and our rebellion.

If we were without sin, God would still be fire. But it would not burn us. It would give us joy and delight and heat and warmth and life and love.

[10 : 50] There is only one place of refuge and redemption. It's the place where the fire has already burned. It's on the cross where Jesus took our sins. And as we go to the place of the cross, the fire changes from being a consuming fire to being a fire of cleansing.

That's why we run to the cross. That's why everything we do is centred around the cross of Jesus Christ. We run to Jesus. We repent of our sins. We give him our sins. And I think that's probably why at the end of this section in verses 57 to 59, Jesus appeals to his hearers and he says, do not delay.

Do not procrastinate. Settle things with your judge now. The reason I've come, the reason I've died is to bring the power of God and the fire of God to bear on your sins so that you can be free and forgiven.

Here is the choice. It's a very simple choice. You either allowed Christ to deal with your sins or you will have to deal with them. Now I recognize how divisive that sounds.

And so did Jesus. Look back at verse 51. Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth?

[12 : 10] No. I tell you, but rather division. Henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. It's amazing, isn't it?

I mean, Jesus keeps undermining our sentimental views. I reckon if you went downtown into Vancouver and asked a hundred people the question, did Jesus come to bring peace?

They would say, absolutely. And if they were churchgoers, they might say, did not the angels sing and do not the Christmas cards say, peace on earth and goodwill towards men?

And we would say, actually, what the angels said was peace on earth and goodwill to those on whom God's grace rests.

peace. Because Jesus is not talking about political peace, he's talking about peace with God. Jesus has not come just to stop wars that will happen in the end.

[13 : 09] He has not come to do away with the need for the United Nations. If that's what he meant, his ministry was a complete flop, wasn't it? No, Jesus has come to bring a deeper and profounder peace, not just the political absence of wars, he has come to bring shalom, the harmony of the creation.

And because the creation now is marked by disharmony and sin and idolatry, that harmony and that peace can only be established through fire. And so that the creation will be taken and it will become a kingdom where there is no evil, where there is no oppression, where there is no death, where there is no sin anymore.

But some of us prefer our idols and that's why there is division. Some of us will go to Christ and we'll ask him for cleansing and for purification to be free from Satan and we'll allow him to take our sins and others of us will say no, I will justify myself, thank you very much.

I will try and build my own place of safety and security. I'm not lost. I don't need a spiritual doctor. I'm not sick. I don't need the death of Jesus to forgive me from my sins.

And I think one of the reasons this is so difficult for us is that we love unity and we love unity because that's the way God made us. God made us like him.

[14 : 45] Because we've been made by one God, we are constitutionally geared towards loving unity unity. And in the end God's great purpose as he states later is to unite all things and to bring all things into unity under the feet of Jesus Christ.

But if you've been reading Luke until now, even in the most superficial way you'll know how divided people were over Jesus. I mean these were the most beautiful and compassionately heartbreaking miracles the world had ever seen.

Signs of power and glory, the finger of God, teaching that the world has never heard, yet people hated him. They said it's the work of Satan and people still do today.

That's why Jesus warns us about division right down to our own families. It's very helpful I think. It's helpful because we find division confusing and frightening the closer it comes to us.

I mean shouldn't the sign of Jesus coming into our family be peace? Well it all depends what you mean by peace. Do you remember the last time Jesus spoke about peace in Luke's gospel?

[15 : 57] It was back one page in chapter 11 verse 21. If you have your Bibles open just turn there for a moment. He's speaking about the kingdom of Satan in verse 21.

He says when a strong man meaning Satan fully armed guards his own palace his goods are in peace. There is a peace in Satan's house.

It's the peace of slavery. It's the peace of prison. Jesus has not come to a world of people who are spiritually neutral.

He hasn't come into a sort of a spiritual Switzerland. He's come to people who are lost, who are possessed, who are under the power of the strong man. God's love.

We are very much at peace in our slavery. When Jesus breaks someone out of that slavery and they learn about the power of the kingdom of God, it's deeply divisive to the kingdom of Satan.

- [16 : 57] It's an offence to the ruling idols and that sort of betrayal will not go unpunished. When you break free from Satan through the power of the kingdom of God, those who are still committed to the idols of approval and money find it deeply offensive.

When you begin to store up treasure in heaven and begin to have a priority on Jesus Christ and a stronger allegiance to Jesus than their approval. That's why Jesus keeps using the language of kingdom, kingdom, kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God means that Christ in becoming a Christian is not a little change in giving me peace in my life. It's a complete transformation. It's putting the universe under a new ruler, a different master, the Lord Jesus Christ who has the power to change us to be like him in his resurrected form.

The kingdom of God is about God restoring Jesus Christ as king of all. It's about the renovation of the world and us by fire, recreating, remaking, redeeming.

Kingdom is not a little place. It's the power of Christ for salvation. salvation. And the key thing to understanding the kingdom is that there is a paradox.

- [18 : 18] Sometimes the kingdom is future and sometimes the kingdom is present. This is very important to understand. So let's just look, shall we?

I want to give you a couple of future references. In chapter 11 verse 2 Jesus teaches them to pray.

When you pray he said, Father hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come. Is that future or present? Future, right? Just nod.

Yes. Thank you. Turn over to chapter 13 verse 28. He's speaking to the Pharisees.

He says, there you will weep and gnash your teeth, 1328, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out and men will come from east and west and from north and south and sit at table in the kingdom of God.

- [19 : 19] Future. Go back to chapter 11 verse 20. In this same section Jesus says, if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, the kingdom of God has come upon you, present.

And over to chapter 12, just before our section, verse 31. Seek his kingdom and these things will be yours as well. Fear not, little flock, for it is your good father.

What it should say is it's the father's good pleasure to have given you. It's a past tense. Trust me.

You can look it up. It's present. So the kingdom is future and present. This is absolutely critical to understanding the two little parables in verses 35 to 48.

Jesus is saying that the life of the Christian and the whole life of the church is about this paradox that we live now in the kingdom in the light of Christ's coming.

- [20 : 39] Both parables are about the household of the church. The master goes away. The servants know that he will come back but they're not sure when.

And both parables are about the great temptation of the church which is not to commit some great evil but it's just to go asleep. A great temptation for us is not to do a massive and naughty wrong as a church but it's failing to do what is right.

It's gradually losing interest and care because the kingdom is away and it seems like such a long time. And in these two parables Jesus contrasts two different kinds of church.

One church is seeking the kingdom. It is alert. It's alive. It's awake. It's waiting. It's blessed. And the other kind of church shows the effect of going back to our favorite idols.

It shows what a church is like when we grow fearful of the approval of others. When we're more anxious about our treasures and our possessions than about the kingdom. It becomes sleepy. It stops caring that the master will return.

[21 : 47] Let me read a couple of verses. 35. That your loins be girded, your lamps burning, be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks.

Blessed are those servants who the master finds awake when he comes. What does it mean to be awake and alert and waiting for Christ? It serving.

While we wait for the master to return for the kingdom, we gird our loins, long robes like this that they used to wear. We pull them up, we tuck them in, we tie them in the belt.

We don't let the cares of this life entangle us so much, but we grab up all the things of our life and we use them for the sake of the lot of stuff going on.

People will be keen to find out how they'll be praying about how the kingdom of God bears on them now. They'll be treating each other equally. They won't care about position.

[23 : 04] They'll be seeking to actively care and to serve. And it also means having our lamps burning, having the fire of God which comes to us in the death of Jesus Christ and holding it out for others.

It means bearing unashamed witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. A church that's pleasing the master who returns is a church that's praying for their friends and family to become Christians and seeking to make an impact where they live.

And in verse 39 it's going to be a kind of church that guards the treasures of the church that won't let the thief come in and steal particularly those things that make the church unique.

And what about the leaders of the church verse 42 the Lord said who then is the faithful and wise steward whom the master will set over his household to give them their portion of food at the proper time blessed is that servant who is master when he comes finds so doing truly I say to you he'll set him over all his possessions but if the servant says to himself the master is delayed in coming and begins to beat his men what should the leaders of the church be doing they should be feeding God's people they ought to be bringing out the food at the right time for the household of God they're meant to represent the absent master in a way that he cares for his household particularly in timely food why is

Jesus telling us this the contrast is obvious what does a church look like when the fire goes out and it's no longer a living church just a church in name a formal church well it's a church that's going to go through the motions but it's going to do the very minimum it's going to have people who don't want to get actively involved in serving others it's going to be embarrassed about evangelism its numbers might be likely dwindling it's not going to care about making disciples there will be little interest in praying together or taking any risks for the sake of the gospel the dead church will let thieves come in and steal the treasures of the church particularly the gospel itself more than that the leaders of the church they don't really believe that Jesus is going to return they think that's just empty nonsense and so they put themselves in charge thinking that they can run things and they prefer their words from Jesus words so that they can hold on to their position of power and instead of feeding

[25 : 49] God's people they begin to abuse God's people and persecute God's people and beat God's people they don't really care about the serving business very much and they become self indulgent and at a time when they ought to be watching for the Lord Jesus to come and caring for his people instead they use the resources of the household for their own desires and they get drunk it's a great picture isn't it and what changes our waiting brothers and sisters from just being a grind of hard work and continuing on to being fire and blessing and the answer is it is the power of the kingdom which is here and coming and Jesus shows the power by giving this little picture of what he's going to do when he returns in verse 37 and I finish with this verse 37 blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes truly

I say to you he will gird himself he will gird himself and have them sit at table and he will come and serve them blessed I tell you are those servants he says now this would have been an absolute shock to Jesus hearers masters never did this but we have a master who has served us and the reason service for us is such a privilege is because we're serving Jesus he served us in his life he served us on the cross he served us in the resurrection and he is going to serve us again when he comes in glory he served us in the cross he endured the fire of God and the wrath of God to create the one safe place where we might enter and when we enter that place we can stand before God and we can serve him without fear and when he comes again he's going to bring us into that great feast he's going to sit us at table and he's going to serve us we'll sit down with him we'll sit down with the others in the kingdom and eat and drink and old bishop ryle said this about this verse the meaning evidently is that there is no degree of honor and glory which the

Lord Jesus will not gladly bestow on those who are found ready to meet him in the day of his second advent isn't that great and then the old bishop refers to these verses in Isaiah on this mountain the Lord almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples a banquet of aged wines of best meats and the finest of wines on this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all people the sheet that covers all nations he will swallow up death forever the sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces he will remove the people's disgrace from all the earth the Lord has spoken and in that day they will say surely this is our God we trusted in him and he saved us this is the Lord we trusted in him let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation amen let us pray father father god we come before you this morning and we want to praise you and glorify your name surely you are our god we trust in you and you have saved us father god this morning we lift before you our world our world that you have come to save we pray that your kingdom would come both in the present tense and the future tense we pray for our brethren around the world especially those in countries where

Christians live in hardship we pray that you would sustain them that they would be in the midst of your peace in the midst of storms lord in your mercy father god this morning we want to lift before you missionaries that we pray and support especially we ask your blessing on heather bellamy in afghanistan lord we thank you for the work that has gone on in the tea house and in the development of the garden we thank you for your blessing on that work and we especially pray for heather lord as she is so weary after these many years of work we pray that you would give her your renewal and your sustenance we pray that as she has served these many years that you would bring people into her life to serve and sustain her lord we also pray for richard and don bates in cairo and for your strength hold in cairo so we pray that you would uphold their ministries and bring glory to your kingdom through their work we also ask for

Susan Norman with InterVarsity in Kingston we pray for her ministry and indeed the ministry of all the Christians on the campuses across this country lord that your gospel would be heard on the campuses and by the young people of our society, many of whom know nothing of your saving grace.

[32 : 19] Lord, in your mercy. Father God, we lift before you the ANIC parishes facing legal action.

We especially pray for St. Matthew's, the Church of the Good Shepherd, St. Matthias and St. Luke, and ourselves, St. John's. Lord, we pray for your hand to be upon the court case, that your will would be done.

Lord, in your mercy. Father God, we lift before you people in this parish who are in need. We pray for Paul, for Gail, Lee, Ben and Nancy, Elizabeth, Rowena, CJ.

Lord, we pray for your healing hand to be upon those lives. We also ask, Lord, for Mehran. We pray for good news this Tuesday.

Lord, we pray for you. And Lord, we pray that you would sustain him as he waits. Give him peace and give him sleep. And Lord, in the quietness of our own hearts, we lift before you the people known to ourselves.

[33 : 42] Lord, in your mercy.

Father, we pray for your transformation in our lives.

We pray for your fire to purify us. Lord, we place ourselves in your mercy and in your care.

We ask for your forgiveness that comes from the cross. We ask for your peace, for your salvation, for your joy.

We pray for ourselves and, Lord, also for those we know and those we love. That they, too, would know your peace.

[35 : 05] Lord, in your mercy. And, Father God, we pray that we may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that we may approve what is excellent and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Amen. Amen.