

Luke 12:49-53

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 0 0] Well, if you're here in the building, you have the passage in front of you. And if you don't, you'll need to have Luke 12 at home open. And I think you'll agree that as we move through Luke 12, Jesus' teaching becomes much more simple.

And as it becomes much more simple, it becomes much more searching. And in this little section that Grace just read for us, Jesus lays bare his heart and in one of the most vulnerable moments in all his ministry, he tells us what he is feeling.

Until now, he's been teaching his disciples and saying what they will be feeling. But now he tells us what he is feeling. And if you look at verse 50, he says, My emotions are completely governed.

This is this word locked up. I'm gripped by this thing. And I'm distressed. It's so important to me until it's accomplished.

Very human moment. And at the same time as he opens his heart to us and has this human moment, he also speaks with majestic divine authority.

[1 : 1 2] He says, verse 49, This is why I came. I came for this. And you know that whenever Jesus uses this idea, I came.

It's not like a delivery van. Yes, I've just come to pick up a package. It's a heart statement about the purpose for which he does everything. This is the reason I've come from heaven.

This is the reason I was born. This is the reason for my teaching and my miracles, for my death and my resurrection. And in Luke's gospel, there are only two other places where Jesus uses this language of coming.

One's positive and one's negative. The positive one, he says, I've come to seek and save the lost. Remember? And the negative one, he says, I haven't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

And here, did you notice, in the space of three verses, Jesus gives us two more. The first is positive, verse 49, I came to cast fire on the earth.

[2 : 1 3] And the negative one is in verse 51, Do you think that I've come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. This is the engine room of the whole passage as Jesus speaks about what is driving him.

And he reveals why he came and he reveals why he has not come. So let's just take those two points very simply. Why Jesus came, verses 49 to 50.

I'm going to read it again because it's alarming and astonishing. He says, 49, I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled.

Jesus is longing to throw fire on the earth. It's the reason for his coming. You say, what does that mean? Well, the last person to speak about fire in Luke's gospel was John the Baptist, do you remember?

And he says, look, I'm baptizing you with the water, but the one who comes after me, he will baptize you with fire and the Holy Spirit. And John, in that context, is speaking about judgment because the very next words he uses are this, his winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor, to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

[3 : 35] So clearly there is a note of judgment in fire. But that is not Jesus' primary meaning here. John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets.

And if you move back to the last book of the Old Testament to Malachi, we find that the coming of the Lord to his temple means fire, and that fire brings three things.

It means three things. And the first thing in Malachi it means is purifying. So in chapter three of Malachi, we read, who can stand when the Lord comes?

It says, he'll be like a white hot fire from the smelter's furnace, and he'll come as a refiner of silver, and he'll refine his people like gold and silver until they're fit for him, pleasing to the Lord.

So the main purpose of Jesus' coming is not so much destruction, but purifying, refining, like you do with precious metals, silver and gold.

[4 : 40] And it takes fire to burn off the junk and the impurity until the refiner can see the reflection of his own face in the metal. So the coming of Jesus in fire is to purify us, to burn away our sin until we reflect his image back to him.

That's the first thing about fire. The second is not just purifying, but there is judgment and destruction in it, in Malachi 4. The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace.

And on that day, the arrogant and wicked will be burned up like straw, consumed root and branch. So the same fire that purifies his people burns the arrogant and wicked and all that stands against God.

And thirdly, not just purifying and not just judging, fire is also a symbol of life in Malachi. And in chapter 4, we read this, It's a picture of new life, of dancing and of jumping.

And this is all that Jesus is talking about. This is why he has come. And this is what he's longing for. To bring the fire of purification so that we'll please God. Burning away everything that stands against, between us and God.

[6 : 11] Destroying everything that will finally stand against God. And giving us the new life of the Holy Spirit so that we would reflect his image. Here's the question. But why is Jesus in so much distress about this?

And the answer is because of what it will mean for him. And this is why verse 50 is there, right after verse 49. Jesus changes the picture from fire to water because for him to bring fire is going to mean his own complete destruction.

Verse 50. I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished. If anything, Jesus feels more deeply about the water than he does about the fire.

And every time it's used in the Gospels, baptism refers to Jesus' death. It is a great drowning, a great flooding, a plunge into the overwhelming depths of waters.

And Jesus is speaking about his suffering on the cross when he bears our sin. And when the wrath of God floods over him as he becomes and bears our sin for us, overwhelmed with the evil and the sin of the world in the great act of purification.

[7 : 30] And he's distressed and in anguish for it to happen because it's the engine room for his ministry. It's the engine room for our salvation. And here he is early in his ministry, and it will be inconceivably painful for Jesus because he knew no sin.

He will be made sin for us. And while there's anguish in his heart at the prospect, the anguish is more driven by his desire to accomplish it, to purify us, to give us life through his death.

That's what it means to him, and that's why he came. It's why he says to his disciples gathered around him in front of this huge crowd, how I long for the baptism of my death.

It will lead to my resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit, and then the bringing to heaven of many sons and daughters to glory. And until I come again and bring the new heavens and the new earth, burning the creation and purifying it back to fire, where I will create a place for us to dwell together with my Father.

That's why he came. Secondly then, why did Jesus not come? Verses 51 to 53. Well, listen to this question.

[8 : 47] Do you think, 51, Jesus says, that I've come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.

Just think about this for a moment. Just think about that question from Jesus. Do you think that Jesus came to give peace on earth? I think we would mostly say, well, yes.

Actually, we thought you did. I mean, didn't John the Baptist's uncle say, you'll guide our feet into the way of peace? And didn't the angels, when they appear to the shepherds, sing glory to God in the highest and peace among those with whom he's pleased?

And don't you weep when you get to Jerusalem in chapter 12 saying, would that you had known the things that make for peace? And certainly in the crowd, the disciples and the crowd are thinking, well, you might be the Messiah.

If it's your desire, it's your job to kick the Romans out and set up a kingdom of Israel which will be the most powerful nation on earth. And don't you think if we took this question, did Jesus come to bring peace on earth, and did a hundred beach interviews in public, that almost all of them would say that's exactly why Jesus came.

[10 : 03] I mean, to bring peace on earth. Isn't that what Christmas cards and the carols say? But if that's what Jesus came to do, he's done a bad job. I looked up yesterday, there are now 40 wars rolling in the world today.

If Jesus had come to bring an end to war and strife with his first coming, I think you'd have to say he's a failure. So when you go back and look at the angels' words at the beginning of Luke, glory to God in the highest and peace among those with whom he's pleased, what it literally says is peace will come to those on whom the favour and grace of God rests.

It's peace with God. This is at the top of the agenda for the New Testament. So when a Christian makes peace and reconciliation with God, that is what's made possible through the death of Christ on the cross.

Now it's certain, isn't it, that when he comes a second time as the judge and the living and the dead, he will bring an end to all war and strife and suffering.

But until that time, he warns us there will be wars and strife all over the world. So when the apostle Peter preaches Jesus and he says, Christ came preaching peace, he's talking about peace with God.

[11 : 24] And when the apostle Paul says that Christ is our peace, he goes on to explain, he came and preached peace to you who are far off and peace to those who are near, for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

But here Jesus is saying, I have not come to bring united nations peace, but rather division. Now what does that mean for us?

Well, it means this. It means that having peace with God is going to create division between you and other people because we have to make a choice.

We have to decide whether Christ is Lord or not. We have to decide whether to stop warring against God and enter into his peace. We have to decide whether we're going to humble ourselves and take up our cross daily and follow him.

We have to decide whether we're going to receive forgiveness of sins through his death and worship him as king and seek first his kingdom. And I know, even as I say it like that, we just don't like binary choices, do we?

[12 : 33] We like options. Options make us feel powerful. We have trained ourselves as consumers to express ourselves through our preferences.

And the more important the decision, the less we like this binary idea because we want to be in charge. We want to be in control. That's exactly what Jesus is talking about. He is worth more than all we could choose.

He opens the door to life of the kingdom of heaven. He alone makes peace with God through his baptism of death. And then he calls each of us to a decision. And there's no more important decision that any of us could make.

And it's a decision that we have to keep affirming day by day. But it has consequences. Right from the start of the gospel, this has been clear, that the bringing of peace by Jesus is also going to divide people.

Do you remember on the day when the baby Jesus was brought to the temple and Simeon says, Lord, you're letting your servant depart in peace? He immediately goes on and says to Mary, behold, this child, he's appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, for a sign that will be opposed.

[13 : 44] And a sword will pierce through your soul also, so that through the hearts, so that the thoughts from many hearts will be revealed. That's what Jesus means here.

He says, from now on in one house, there will be five divided, two against three and three against two, and he goes through the five. Jesus is not anti-family.

Jesus loves families. God created families. Jesus reveals God as the eternal father, himself as the eternal son. When we put our faith and trust in him and begin to follow him, along with the purity and new life, he gives us a whole new kinship structure.

He's just said in Luke's gospel, my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. And as a sign of how much Jesus loves families, when we give him our families, he gives them back to us to serve as Christ would.

Let me put it differently. If you give yourself to Christ first and join his family, he gives you back to your family as a changed person, kinder, more peace loving, more faithful, more consistent, more patient, reflecting the image of Jesus to others.

[15 : 08] Jesus is just giving us a dose of realism here in explaining what it's going to cost. From now on, he says, there will be division in the family. And the reason is simple.

Jesus cannot share first place with anything else or anyone else. We can't divide our loyalties between Jesus and anyone else.

And it's going to have very practical implications in the closest and most precious relations that we have, even within our families. And I think even the fact that he's telling us this is a great kindness, because this is the lived experience of so many of us.

Many of you will have heard of the American award-winning journalist, Lee Strobel, who trained in law and journalism. He was a committed atheist. He mocked Christians and was hostile to any notion of God.

And then, when he was 27, his wife became a Christian. And he hated it. And he says, I did not want to be married to a Christian. I did not sign up for this.

[16 : 10] And he thought about leaving the marriage, divorcing her. Listen to what he says in a book. I had married one Leslie, the fun Leslie, the carefree Leslie, the risk-taking Leslie.

And now I feared she was going to turn into some sort of sexually repressed prude, who would trade our upwardly mobile lifestyle for all-night prayer vigils and volunteer work in grimy soup kitchens.

And to his great surprise and fascination, something different happened. He saw fundamental changes in a character, but not in a personality.

And while they clashed over many things, the more she loved God, the more she sought to love him. And she worked very intentionally at making the marriage better. So, he decided he would do his own research and get to the bottom of this.

And over a two-year period, he became convinced of the truth of Christianity. And he turned his life over to Christ. And he wrote a book called The Case for Christ. Now, that's a story with a very happy ending.

[17 : 15] I'm aware of that. But just go back to those early months and put yourself in Leslie's shoes. By following Jesus Christ, you've brought a new loyalty into your home, which your husband thinks is absolutely ridiculous.

What do you do? What did she do? She prayed. She loved him. She reached out. And in an interview I watched, she said, it was actually the Holy Spirit in me that was growing me.

And my faith in Christ was making small changes that I didn't see, but he saw. It's because through the death of Jesus, she has been changed.

It's exactly the change that Jesus has been talking about throughout Luke 12 that happens to every single one of us who turns to Christ in faith. It's a deep and pervasive transformation that happens through the forgiveness of sins and the fire of the Holy Spirit living in us.

But it will bring pain and division, perhaps within a marriage, perhaps between parents and children, or between children and parents. I mean, what a massive heartache it is if you're a believer and your children wander away from Christ and show no sign of returning.

[18 : 35] And they think that what you believe is horrifying, oppressive, out-of-date nonsense. It's exactly as Jesus says here, they are against you. In many places in the world today, when you become a Christian, your family will not just disown you, there'll be violence.

If you go to the Open Door website, tell stories, testimonies of those who've come to faith in places where Christianity is persecuted. You don't have to read far to come across a story like Chen's in Laos, who grew up in a tight-knit Buddhist community among the Hmong people.

When he came to faith in Jesus Christ, his family tied him up and beat him, repeatedly, trying to get him to deny his faith. This is the division that Jesus is speaking about.

And it's seen in anger and it's seen in resentment. And here in Vancouver, it takes slightly different forms. But it's a fundamental issue because people are quite happy for you to talk about spirituality or faith journey.

But if you begin to worship Jesus Christ as Lord, you'll be viewed as a betrayer. You're a traitor. And you begin to change the level of your character and you have different priorities.

[19 : 56] And this can have ramifications within your family. And even though the family, as I said before, is God's idea and he gives us back to our families to strengthen and nourish our families, there is something more important to us now.

It's Jesus Christ. What Jesus is talking about here are not just nice religious ideas. I mean, if you live on the West Coast, like we all do here, you are likely seeking food and clothing and pleasure.

And when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, you seek something else. You seek the kingdom of God. And it doesn't matter how nicely and lovingly you do it.

At some level, you are a traitor to the pursuit of food and clothing and pleasure. If you follow Christ, you begin to lay up treasures in heaven. That's going to cause division with those who don't believe.

Life is about the abundance of possessions, we believe. These words are so helpful from Jesus because it's difficult to navigate in a family. When the family is laying up treasure for the family, if you're trying to do something else entirely, trying to be rich toward God, he's saying that the fire and the water are profoundly divisive.

[21 : 10] That your faith in him means you're going to stop caring so much about what other people think of you and to begin to believe that your value doesn't come from your status or achievement or choices, but from the heavenly father who highly values you.

And if you're considering turning to Christ, you're considering the claims of Christ, you might say, well, I just, I don't want that sort of division in my family, frankly. But if you keep reading Luke's second volume in the book of Acts, you'll find that's not really the right way to think about it.

Those who turn to Christ in the book of Acts, who experience his forgiveness in new life, find something infinitely worth more than all this life and they begin to share it with their families and whole families come to faith in Christ.

And if you're serving Christ now and you're in this difficulty, what he says to us is fear not. He knows exactly what is happening for us. He knows your family.

He knows your pain. He knows your need. And he knows what they need. And he is purifying you by fire as he's washed you through his death and he's brought you to his heavenly father who has the power of life and death, regards you as his precious child and delights to give you his kingdom today and each day until we're face to face with him.

[22 : 44] He's not. I mean today as a young man because of the truth or my mother who has the power of life and death, who has to say before or not. And if that person takes place with his father and to let you keep him to become as new, he matters to plot that the truth will stay in context to life, what we have actually made survive upon 30 ?

It has to happen in your life. He's traveling to a full life and helping him to be safe in context. and him is a city who has a real date because of the truth can miss us.