

Luke 12:49-53 (PM)

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[0 : 0 0] Luke 12, 49 to 53. I think we hear these words from Jesus. We hear these words from Jesus and we instinctively say, hang on, hold on, wait a minute.

That doesn't sound right. I came to bring fire. I came to bring division. And then Jesus says in verse 50, I'm really stressed out.

This doesn't fit the Jesus of popular imagination. The super chill, hippie-ish, moral teacher. One of my scholars, one of the scholars I read this week said this about the passage.

They said, these are not popular teachings, but if you don't know Jesus, or they said, but you won't know Jesus unless you know these things about him. So let's dig into these words and we'll look at the passage under two headings.

One, the agony of Christ and two, the divisiveness of Christ. The agony of Christ and the divisiveness of Christ. So one, the agony of Christ.

[1 : 0 3] Verse 50. I have a baptism to be baptized with and how great is my distress until it is accomplished. It's an interesting passage, isn't it?

We're getting this glimpse into the humanity of Christ, the inner life of Jesus. Jesus was clearly very stressed out. There was something on the horizon that was completely overwhelming.

He felt dread about it. Does Jesus know stress? He does. Does he know your stress? He does. Does he know what it's like to be stressed out? He does.

And the dread he experienced had to do with this baptism. What is that? We know Jesus was already baptized. So what's this talking about? There's this great little story in Mark 10 where the disciples, James and John, ask Jesus for a favor.

And they say, when you go to heaven and run the universe, can we get the next two slots in leadership? It was a very cheeky. It was a very cheeky request. And Jesus says in verse 38 of Mark 10, you don't know what you're asking.

[2 : 1 3] Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? And he's talking about the cross there, isn't he? And this is what Jesus is talking about. And look, he's talking about the cross.

The cross was the thing that was looming larger and larger in Jesus' life as he headed towards Jerusalem. It caused him great distress.

The shadow of the cross hung over his ministry. Now, if we go to verse 49, we'll understand this a little bit more. We'll understand what the baptism is a little bit more. And we'll understand the nature of the stress a little bit more.

In verse 49, Jesus says, I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled. Now, this fire. What is fire? It's obviously a word picture. What does fire mean in the Bible?

It can mean a number of things. It can mean the Holy Spirit. But it doesn't mean that here. That doesn't make sense of the passage. In the Old Testament, it usually referred to judgment. And using the word fire instead of just saying judgment is very helpful to us because it nuances the idea of judgment.

[3 : 18] It's not just, you know, anger and, like, destruction. It's a cleansing fire. That's why they use the word fire, not just judgment. It's because it's a cleansing fire.

It's a helpful picture is back in the days the silversmiths would burn, would burn silver to separate out the silver from the dross to purify this precious metal.

And this is what Jesus wants to do. This is what he's talking about. He's saying the fire that's coming, he's saying, I want to cleanse the earth so that the only thing left is precious and pure and good.

And that is a wonderful thing. Now, for that to happen, though, judgment needs to happen. Evil must be paid for. But Jesus says that judgment will first fall on me.

And that's what happened on the cross. The cross, and this is pulling all the threads together, the cross was a baptism of fire, a baptism of judgment. Jesus was immersed in God's anger.

[4 : 28] And this is what distressed Jesus as he headed to Jerusalem, knowing that he would carry the judgment of God on himself for us. Tim Keller talks about this really well, I think.

So let me read a slightly sort of extended quote from him. He says this, Consider the relationship he lost.

If a mild acquaintance denounces you and rejects you, that hurts. If a good friend does the same, it hurts far worse. However, if your spouse walks out on you saying, I never want to see you again, that is far more devastating still.

The longer, the deeper, the more intimate the relationship, the more torturous is any separation. But the son's relationship with the father was beginningless and infinitely greater than the most intimate and passionate human relationship.

When Jesus was cut off from God, he went into the deepest pit, the most powerful furnace beyond all imagining. He experienced the full wrath of the father, and he did it voluntarily for us.

[5 : 44] Now that last line there helps us understand verse 49, the last part of it. I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled.

Even though Jesus is just overwhelmed by this thing ahead of him, he says, let's get it done. He is willing to see it through. And what does it tell us?

It tells us that we are loved more than we know. It tells us that you are loved more than you know by Jesus. That's the first point.

The agony of Christ. An agony which was endured for us. Now, let's talk about the second point, the divisiveness of Jesus. The divisiveness of Jesus.

And these words in verse 51 are quite shocking. You think that I've come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. I'll forgive you if you're sitting there thinking, hang on.

[6 : 49] What about all those Christmas cards, right? They talk about peace. The peace that Jesus is supposed to bring. Isn't that like a thing? Peace, right? Isn't that like a thing that Jesus wants to do?

So what's he talking about here? What does he mean he wants to bring division? I think one way you could, one big picture sentence that could explain this is I think it's Jesus is saying, don't be naive about the reality of following me.

And the reality is this. You have peace with God because of the cross. And you will have peace with lots of people, even some people that are really difficult.

Because the gospel is about reconciliation and forgiveness. You'll have these miraculously peaceful relationships. But not everyone is going to be happy with you being a follower of Christ, even some people in your own family.

And that's the example that Jesus gives us here. Father against son. Mother against daughter. Now the goal, of course, is not division. You know, Jesus is not saying aim for division in your family.

[8 : 00] No, of course not. But it does happen sometimes. And it's very, very painful. So why does it happen? It can happen for lots of reasons. I'll give you a few examples. Sometimes it's just on us.

It's just that we're jerks, we're bullyish, we're arrogant in our faith. But I don't think this is what Jesus has in mind here. It's more this type of thing.

It's a division that is often the result of living a certain way, thinking a certain way about life that diverges from sort of normative cultural practices.

That, if you do that, think this certain way or live a certain way, that can be threatening to others. Saying that you believe in an absolute truth, for example.

Believing that, for example, in order to be an authentic person, you look to something outside of yourself. Believing to be fully human, you look to a transcendent order instead of looking inwards.

[9 : 03] Believing to be fully human, you look to a certain way. In this cultural moment, that's crazy stuff. You're a traitor to mainstream culture, if you think like that. I think one of the really interesting things is how our language has evolved in the last few years to affirm, to reaffirm your designation as a crazy person, an out-of-step person.

Anything outside of normative ways of thinking, what a guy called McIntyre would say is emotivism, just a normal way of thinking, is thought of in terms of having a phobia.

I'll give you an example of this. So the transgender issue, I think, is a really important conversation. But if you take a position, and your position is, even if it's not even like a Christian position, if you are like a science person, and you sort of say, listen, I think Western society is running too far ahead of the science on this issue.

If you think along those lines, the label is you're transphobic. It's not that you just have a different position. You can't exist in the space of having a thoughtful, considered, but different position on something.

You are phobic. And language has changed to create this word phobic, right, to add that as a suffix to things. And it's very effective.

[10 : 39] It's a very effective suffix, because what it does is it delegitimizes any opinion outside the norm. So it's not that you have a different idea. It's no, it's you're irrational, or you're neurotic, or you're a bigot.

You're phobic. You don't have a rational opinion. You have a hate-filled, crazy opinion. I'll give you another example. Let's say you're single and celibate. You could be straight, you could be same-sex attracted, but you're celibate because you think this is, you're convinced that this is how God wants you to live.

Some people, perhaps people in your family, will think you are odd. You're out of step. You're a traitor to the modern maxim of maximized pleasure. So ipso facto, some will view your position, your way of doing life, as a judgment on their choices.

They will resent having you around because you represent a challenge to the way they live. That can be a source of division. For others, the source of family division, it could be you as a Christian.

You've chosen a life that, to your family, seems a bit second class. You could have parents who aren't followers of Jesus, and you want to become a missionary, or a minister, or live amongst the poor, and they think you are wasting your talents.

[12 : 02] You are wasting your connections. You are wasting your life. Now, it can go the other way as well. I spoke to some parents recently whose kids, who are adults, think that what their parents believe is so ridiculous, and they're actually angry about some of the things their parents believe.

And I'm chatting to these parents, and they're weeping, and it was just so painful. It was very hard. Look, Christianity is a minority movement. And when a minority movement bumps up against a majority culture, there will be friction.

And there will be friction in places where you have previously only known unconditional love. And that's really hard. Jesus says, this is not the goal, but let's be real, it might happen.

And it's helpful to know that Christ experienced this himself. Jesus knew the pain of this division. I'm not talking about the religious leaders hating him. I'm not talking about his disciples betraying him.

I'm talking about his own family. In Mark's Gospel, chapter 3, there's a story of Jesus' family trying to stage an intervention. I'll read a couple of verses.

[13 : 17] Then he went home, that's Jesus. Then Jesus went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, he is out of his mind.

So Jesus was out doing Jesus' stuff. It was really great. He had these disciples. He went back to a house, but a whole crowd gathered around the house. And you can imagine his family looking out the window, seeing what's going on.

And they slam their hands down on the table, and they say, look, this has gone far enough. Jesus' own family thought he'd drunk the Kool-Aid and gone crazy, and he was taking this whole religion thing too far.

I find that very comforting, because it is a very painful situation. Most of my family are not Christians. And I find it comforting to know that Jesus knows what division in family is like.

Let me finish up. The Bible presents us with a real world here. It is shockingly honest. The difficulties of life are not minimized.

[14 : 21] They are not sugar-coated. Christ really did agonize over the cross. He really did stress out over the cross. It was a shadow over his life.

Christ really did have a family who initially thought he had taken the whole religion thing too far. You might know that reality.

Christ endured these things for us. We endure because Christ is worth it. He acknowledges the cost is real here.

But he says it is worth it. Amen. Father, this hurts us.

Amen. Vidas Cocoa GI splashing Será■■■■os Feel For Meg Argent Clark That hurt.

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