

## Sunday, March 10, 2024 | The Road to Redemption

### Week 16 | Luke 12:49-59 | "Fire On Earth"

Last week, we unpacked the topic of Christ's second coming. Someday, Jesus will return, and when he does, he will reward the faithful servants and punish the unfaithful servants. A faithful servant will be ready and waiting to welcome the Lord home with open arms and lights on. In response, the Master will serve them a grand celebration and give them a grand possession. But those who are "Christians" in name only, who live an apathetic and sinful lifestyle, will be surprised when the Lord comes home. In response to their faithless lifestyle, the Son of God will dismember and beat the unfaithful servants. And rather than go to heaven, they will take their place alongside the unbeliever in hell. So, make no mistake, **readiness distinguishes the Christian from the "Christian," while sinfulness distinguishes the "Christian" from the Christian.** Be ready for Jesus' return, and you will be forever rewarded, whereas the carnally minded will be eternally punished.

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Today, we'll be talking about *conflict*. When it comes to Christ, there is no Switzerland—i.e., neutral ground. Everyone chooses to be *at peace* with God or *at war* with God. Though the Lord is rightly called the 'Prince of Peace' (cf. Lu. 2:14; 7:50; 8:48; 10:5-6; Ac. 10:36; Eph. 2:13-17), make no mistake, the tranquility he brings is heavenly, *not* earthly. Jesus reconciles the believer to the Father, making them the children of God (cf. 1 Jn. 3:1). And, in doing so, a conflict that began with the Fall in Gen. 3 comes to an end (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Col. 1:20-22). However, a consequence of that reconciliation is that anyone who puts their faith in Jesus is *alienated* from the world.

Thus, to say that Jesus is a polarizing figure is an understatement. By his own admission, the Lord is like a wildfire that, from the world's perspective, wreaks havoc. Those unmoved by the Son of God, who live an unrepentant lifestyle, will feel as if Jesus is an agent of chaos who does not bring *peace* but *disunity*.

The Christian must come to grips with this uncomfortable truth. Otherwise, they risk being blindsided by the hate they will *inevitably* face from those who oppose the gospel.

Jesus' presence on earth means three things:

i. **The earth is divided.**

**READ:** Luke 12:49-53 (ESV)

<sup>49</sup> “I came to cast **fire on the earth**, and would that it were **already** kindled! <sup>50</sup> I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my **distress** until it is accomplished! <sup>51</sup> Do you think that I have come to give **peace on earth**? No, I tell you, but rather **division**. <sup>52</sup> For from now on in one house there will be five **divided**, three **against** two and two **against** three. <sup>53</sup> They will be **divided**, father **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** mother-in-law.”

Jesus simultaneously brought heaven’s *peace* on earth (cf. Jn. 14:27; 16:33; 2 Cor. 5:19) and heaven’s *fire* on earth (cf. Lue. 11:23; Jn. 15:18-19; 1 Cor. 1:23). And to be clear, this is not a *refiner’s fire* in the sense that he came to *refine* and *sanctify* the believer (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-13). Instead, it is a *forest fire* in the sense that he came to throw the world into chaos.

Notice also that the Lord says he “**would that it were already kindled!**” He not only wanted the fire, but he also wanted to hasten its arrival. In a way, he was ready to throw gasoline on the fire. Yet, at the same time, Jesus uses “**baptism**” to illustrate that when the fire does come, he’ll be engulfed—i.e., *baptized*—by the waters of divine judgment during the crucifixion. Later in Luke, we’re told, “**And being in agony [Jesus] prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground**” (Lu. 22:44).<sup>1</sup> So, on the one hand, he’s ready to set the world on fire, but on the other hand, he’s also in “**great...distress**” because he knows that, once the match is lit, he’ll be the one that gets consumed first.

Therefore, the Lord did not *relish* in the fire, as if he got some enjoyment from the discord. Jesus was not a masochist. Instead, he wanted to be done with it. Since Jesus would not avoid the cross (he came to die, after all), he’d prefer that it was sooner rather than later. In a way, he’s impatient and ready to get things finished.

What does the “fire” represent? *Division*. Jesus says, “**Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.**” Though Christ is for all, not everyone will accept Christ. But those who follow Jesus will be ostracized, criticized, and villainized by those who do not follow Jesus. Anyone who does not have the light of Jesus will not only hate Jesus but anyone who identifies themselves with Jesus. The world hates Christians because it hates Christ; before unbelievers ever hated believers, they hated the Son of God *first* (cf. Jn. 15:18-25).

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<sup>1</sup> The medical term for this is hematidrosis. For more on this rare condition, see this article: <https://www.gotquestions.org/sweat-blood-Jesus.html>.

But make no mistake, the animosity between non-Christians and Christians will seep into the home. Followers of Christ will find that their own “father...son...mother...daughter,” and even their own “in-laws” will be turned “against” them. The home is not exempt from the conflict brought about by Christ. In fact, the term “against” is used *eight* times in these verses. The Lord wants to repeatedly emphasize that this division is not a tiny spark but a blazing inferno. If the world is divided on Christ, why not the family?

Interestingly, this familial opposition is something that Jesus himself was well-acquainted with. Jesus' own brothers didn't believe that he was the messiah. In fact, in John 7, because they didn't see him as anything more than their older brother, James, Joses, Judas, and Simon—i.e., Jesus' blood relatives (cf. Mar. 6:3)—ended up hating and mocking their brother. So, when he said that a Christian's family members would be turned into opponents (cf. Mat. 10:21-22), Jesus spoke those words from *personal* experience.

## ii. The end is near.

**READ:** Luke 12:54-56 (ESV)

<sup>54</sup> He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. <sup>55</sup> And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. <sup>56</sup> You hypocrites! You know how to **interpret** the appearance of earth and sky, but **why** do you not know how to **interpret** the present time?

Jesus' rebuke is easy enough to understand. Even people at this time could discern, with some certainty, that rain was coming or that it would be a hot day. Yet, despite their ability to read the weather, they could not “interpret the present time”—i.e., they did not realize they were living in the messianic age, an era of great *salvation* and *condemnation*. They were blind to the signs. A dark cloud was directly above their head, yet they ignored the *coming rain*. A cloudless sky was stretched from horizon to horizon, yet they ignored the *scorching heat*.

Do not sympathize with Jesus' generation. It is not that they could not see that the messiah had come; they did not *want* to know. Their problem wasn't *ignorance* but *stubbornness*.<sup>2</sup> Though they could discern the weather, they refused to utilize their mental faculties regarding Jesus. The Lord made it painfully obvious that he was the messiah. There was no mistaking the signs. Yet his generation refused to see that the writing was on the wall: Jesus is the Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 9:51-24:53*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1996), p. 1198, explains that the Greek term ὑποκριτής (“hypocrite”) “suggests more of a problem with the will than anything else.”

One of my favorite lines in one of my favorite Bible stories is John 9. There, a man who had been healed of his blindness by Jesus was interrogated by the Jewish leaders. And though the man knew very little about Jesus' identity, he knew, at the very least, that only someone who came from God could've healed his blindness. Unsurprisingly, the Jewish leaders disagreed; this claim went against the narrative that Jesus was an agent of the Devil. And so, the Jews began arguing with the blind man until, finally, the blind man got fed up with their stubbornness and said, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes” (Jn. 9:10).

Much harm has been done in the world due to a lack of knowledge, but even *more* has been done by those who are *obstinate* toward truth (e.g., Those doctors who were resistant to Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis' proposal that they should wash their hands.).<sup>3</sup> It is bad enough that we make mistakes because we don't know better; it is considerably *worse* to make the same mistake when you, in fact, do know better. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.” Thus, contrary to the saying, ignorance is *not* bliss; God's word, world history, and personal experience all attest to the destructive force of willful ignorance.

### iii. The debt is due.

**READ:** Luke 12:57-59 (ESV)

<sup>57</sup> “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? <sup>58</sup> As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. <sup>59</sup> I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”

The Greek term translated as “officer” is **πράκτωρ** (praktōr), and it refers to a tax collector.<sup>4</sup> So, together with the term “penny,” the scenario Jesus describes becomes clear. On the one hand, we have someone who owes a debt to the tax man; on the other, we have the tax man heading to court to extract the debt. The person who owes the taxes is dead to rights; should he stand

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<sup>3</sup> Strohlic, Nina, “‘Wash your hands’ was once controversial medical advice,” March 6, 2020, *National Geographic*, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/handwashing-once-controversial-medical-advice#>, [accessed, January 30, 2024], explains that, though Semmelweis tried to demonstrate the harm that unwashed hands could have on patients (particularly women in labor) in the mid-1800's, it didn't become common practice until the 1870s, and, amazingly, “It wasn't until the 1980s that hand hygiene was officially incorporated into American health care with the first national hand hygiene guidelines.”

<sup>4</sup> Bock (1996), p. 1199.

before the “judge,” a conviction is assured. So, in light of the inevitable, the debtor will “make an effort to settle with [the tax man]” before they get to court. That way, he can avoid debtors “prison.” Should he fail to make every effort “to settle” his debts, the result is a life sentence. Jesus says the debtor “never get out until [he has] paid the very last penny.”

#### **ILLUSTRATION:** Mugshot

With Jesus’ arrival, judgment has come, and it is time to pay the piper.

#### **READ:** John 3:16-18 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

The world is not heading to court. A verdict has *already* been pronounced, and a payment has *already* been paid. Jesus Christ paid the debt we owe. On the one hand, for the believer, it is a blessed realization to know that our sins have been paid and that we’ve been reconciled to God and are at peace with him. However, on the other hand, for the unbeliever, it is a dreadful realization to know that, in rejecting God’s only Son, they’re rejecting their free pardon. And because of that rejection, they will be expected to pay back their sin debt in full, a task that will prove impossible since they’re in prison. They’ll be confined for all eternity.

#### **So, what’s the takeaway?**

Being a disciple of Jesus means we are loved by God but hated by the world.

#### **READ:** John 15:18-21 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup> “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

#### **READ:** John 16:1-2 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. <sup>3</sup> And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. <sup>4</sup> But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told them to you.

The N.T. (particularly the Book of Acts) and over 2,000 years of church history testify to the reality of Christian persecution.<sup>5</sup> Love (especially for enemies) distinguishes Christianity from all other philosophies and religions (cf. Jn. 13:35).<sup>6</sup> But, contrary to what one might think, this radical kind of love is the catalyst that sparks countless hate crimes aimed at Christians. When a community’s sinfulness is exposed by the True Light (cf. Jn. 1:9), the darkness will vehemently oppose his advances, often using deadly force to do so.<sup>7</sup> And just as Cain killed Abel "because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 Jn. 3:12), so has the world killed Christians. **God's love leads men to *repentance* (Rom. 2:4), or else it leads them to *violence*.** They either become the children of God, endeavoring to save others, or they remain children of Satan, where murdering is the family business (cf. Jn. 8:44).

Ignorance of God and Jesus Christ is a breeding ground for brutality. Christians mustn’t be naive about persecution. If Jesus suffered, so will his followers. We must be ready.

To experience a hardship without warning is *worse* than if one were already prepared for its arrival. And while it is true that preparedness does not always lessen the pain, it will make the hardship far more bearable. The rain is coming; flooding is inevitable. Only those who’ve built their house on the rock will survive the storm (cf. Matt. 7:24-27; Psa. 61:2a).

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<sup>5</sup> This does not ignore the atrocities that have been done in the name of Christianity throughout the years—e.g., the Crusades, the witch hunts in 17<sup>th</sup> century New England, how slavery was supported by many churches during [the Civil War](#), and how many evangelicals opposed [the Civil Rights movement](#), etc. Without a doubt, the Church will have much to answer for. However, by and large, Christians have been persecuted more than they've been the persecutor. In fact, according to a [Pew Research article published in 2020](#), Christians experienced harassment in more countries in 2018 than any other world religion. Christian persecution is both a historical fact and, as Dr. E. U. Ochab puts it, "[part of a global phenomenon](#)" that has reached the modern age.

<sup>6</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 464, "The Qumran community stressed love within the brotherhood but "everlasting hatred for the men of the pit" (1QS 9:21-22)."

<sup>7</sup> Carson (1991), p. 524, "If the union of believers with Jesus constitutes a community of love, that community stands over against the world."

## **Video Description:**

### **The Road to Redemption | Week 16 | "Fire On Earth" (Luke 12:49-59)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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The Christian must come to grips with an uncomfortable truth: being a disciple of Jesus means that, though we are *loved* by God, we will be *hated* by the world.

**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:**

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