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## Do You Think I Came To Bring Peace on Earth?

**Luke 12:49-53**

"I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. 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."

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We are again here talking today about a gentleman who lived 2,000 years ago. He walked the earth then, and he is the most talked about, most written about, most influential man in all of history. He is known as the greatest leader of all time, and it would be hard to argue against that.

He has many, many followers down through history. He's known by many of us as the Good Shepherd, the Light of the World, the Hope of All Mankind. Yeshua, the Great I Am. To see him was to see God.

He said this was God incarnate, God, Immanuel, God with us. God coming to the earth to reveal himself more specifically to us. And in his leadership, he spoke to us with the same word that he created all things.

And he said of those who are listening and those who know him, he said, as the Good Shepherd, "My sheep hear my voice. They hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I will give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."

He came as a Good Shepherd to claim a people for his own. To call a people. To follow him. To bring light into the world. To bring hope into the world.

And to do this, he often stirred up things by asking questions of people. And today we're looking at another question that he asked a very large crowd of people when he was teaching them.

Now, he had just been teaching them about the linear nature of human history and how we're headed towards an end. And there's a culmination where all people will be held accountable for how they lived.

He was talking about the consummation of all things and his future return to the earth, and how human beings will all stand before him and give an account.

And then, all of a sudden, he launched into our text for today, and he said this: "I came to bring or cast fire on the earth. How I wish it were kindled already."

This sounds like the meek and mild Jesus we love to believe in, doesn't it? The very nice, politically correct, all-inclusive Jesus that is exalted in our world today. "I came to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish," he says, "it were kindled already."

What is he speaking of? What is he talking about?

In the scriptures, fire in the Bible is used to really represent four different things. One is the presence of God. We see the presence of God as a pillar of fire. In the Old Testament, we see Moses see a burning bush in the presence of God.

But fire is also used as a purifying symbol in the Bible. All through the scriptures, we read about God refining people through the purifying challenges and trials of life that he allows to come our way. First Peter, chapter one, verse seven, talks about God allowing tests to test our works and our lives to purify us before him. Corinthians speaks of the purifying fire at the end of time that burns up all that is rubble in our works, but preserves that which is gold and silver and honoring to God. Fire is a purifying, redemptive symbol in the Bible.

It's also a symbol of judgment. Judgment is used as a symbol in fire at the end of all times. The Book of Revelation speaks of this. The book of Daniel speaks of the lake of fire, where the final judgment will occur for all those who didn't love God, rebelled against him, didn't come to believe in the forgiveness available through Christ.

Genesis, chapter 19, speaks of sulfur of fire raining down on cities like Sodom and Gomorrah as judgment for their life of sin, their complete giving over to sexual indulgence. I have had some friends visit the location of Sodom and Gomorrah and bring back bowls of sulfur that didn't fully burn up but were pounded into the ground, and some remnants of buildings that were just destroyed by fire falling from the skies.

There's also this idea of fire being a passion, a stirring in the hearts of people. The prophet Jeremiah spoke about a fire inside of him, burning with God's revelation of truth, so much so that he couldn't keep his mouth shut. It was welling up in him, so it had to come out.

Luke speaks of some individuals walking with Jesus after his resurrection, and as he was talking with them, their hearts started to burn within them, a passion and a zeal and a fire. Romans, chapter 12, encourages us not to be lacking in passion or in zeal.

I don't know all what Jesus is speaking about here. Maybe all of it. "I came to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish that it were kindled already."

But he couldn't kindle it yet because he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with. And how great is my distress until it is accomplished!"

Now we've gone from fire to water. We've gone from judgment to baptism. Now, when the Bible uses the word baptism, it is the Greek word baptizo, which means to dip, to plunge, or to immerse.

We often use this word baptism when we're talking about water baptisms. When we baptize someone, we cleanse them or sprinkle them. Sometimes people are immersed in water, and they experience a baptism in that way. I just happen to be in Okoboji last weekend and came across a baptism in the lake where a church was baptizing 2627 people. Chris and I watched that for a while.

It's not speaking about that. Jesus isn't.

Sometimes the Bible refers to baptism as a baptism of the heart in the New Covenant, where the Holy Spirit comes in and awakens our heart and baptizes the old inside of us and creates the new. And we're regenerated. Remade by God.

But Jesus isn't speaking about that. He's using the word baptism here to describe how he would be completely overcome or submerged by the crushing weight of human sin and the agony he would experience in the judgment at Calvary, when the judgment for human sin would just wash over him, and he would be crushed and buried with judgment.

"I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am."

Can you imagine knowing, over the course of your life, the shadow of suffering and crucifixion is following you everywhere you go? It would be distressing.

Jesus says this here: "I have a fire to bring, but I can't bring it until I am crucified."

And then he asks our question. This is just context.

"Do you think that I have come to bring or give peace on the earth?"

Well, if you've studied the Bible, you would say, most likely, along with most, "Well, yeah, I think that's why you came, to bring peace."

Peace. That's what the prophets, in some ways, insinuated.

The prophet Isaiah, some 700 years before Jesus Christ: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. The government will be upon his shoulders. He'll be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end."

Peace.

Micah said, "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of Almighty God, in the majesty of the name of the Lord is God, and they will live securely with him, and he will be our... He will be their peace."

Isaiah also said he would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. And the punishment that would bring you peace would be upon him.

Clearly, he was a man sent by God to offer peace to all who would desire it, specifically in two ways, at least two.

One, God offers us a peace with God. There is only one way human beings find peace with God. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome and said it this way: "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Apart from him, we have no peace with God.

There is one mediator, Paul wrote to Timothy, between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation, wholeness, redemption is found in no one else. There's no other name under heaven given among men by which we can be saved. It's Jesus is our peace with God. There is no other peace with God. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's a confrontational, debatable, argued-over, divisive statement, but it's true.

And then we have peace from God. And this is a supernatural peace that can guard our hearts and minds, a peace that can reign in our lives no matter what's happening in the world. It's an internal peace that can affect our souls and our minds. It comes from the Spirit of God.

When Jesus was walking with his disciples, he said this to them before the Spirit was poured out upon them. He said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled."

Paul said to young Timothy and to the believers in Philippi, a disciplined life, spiritual life of prayer can help you apprehend and walk in this peace that transcends all understanding, guarded by Jesus only.

But I would suggest to you Jesus is not talking about either one of these pieces or these kinds of peace in our text for today. He is speaking about this idea of peace in the world right now, peace in all human relationships, this lofty idea that we're all going to get along as one big happy family in the world.

And this is what he's bringing his question about.

"Do you think I came to bring that kind of peace on the earth?"

And when we understand it that way, we might not be so surprised when he says, "No, I didn't come to bring that kind of peace on the earth. Rather, division."

And he says it's going to begin at the very core of human community, in families.

"From now on, in one house there will be five divided against three and two against three. Son against father. Daughter against mother."

From in-laws, spreading out, I will bring tension. Tension into relationships in the world, not peace.

That's what he's saying.

Why? Why is he saying this?

I think he's saying this because he knows that when a person chooses to respond to the call to follow him, their life starts to change. They start to come out of darkness and into the light. And as their life starts to change, it starts to change everyone else around them and how they relate with this person.

And those that are loving darkness more than light, and their friend or family member is moving towards the light, they get uncomfortable with what's happening. It starts to disturb them. And so tensions start to rise right in families and core relationships.

When Jesus shows up and starts to transform an individual, everyone has to adjust. Everyone has to shift. Everyone has to move. And the pot is stirred. Tensions rise, emotions build, and divisions start to come.

I've seen it so many times. When I was in college ministry for ten years here, I watched so many college students come to college here, UNI or Hawkeye, and all of a sudden they got exposed to the living Christ in a new way. And the fire of the Lord Almighty came up in their hearts, and they all of a sudden were thinking about doing mission trips and inner-city care. And they would call home and tell their parents these things.

And it wasn't long after I'd get a phone call from some parents, and they would start to ask me, "What is going on with my son or my daughter? What are you doing to them there?"

And I would say, "I don't know. Explain what you mean."

They would say, "Well, they're all excited about Jesus. They want to go to Africa and serve him. What's happening?"

I said, "I don't know. Let me get this right. Your son or daughter came to college. They've come alive in Jesus. They want to serve him somewhere in the world. And you don't like it? Is that what I'm hearing? Just wanted to clarify."

Tension. Tension from the zeal of the Lord Almighty entering a soul.

We had one of those students here just a couple weeks ago. Mark Walter, off in Japan, serving the Almighty. They're spread all over. God sends his people. He changes things when he shows up.

What is Jesus saying to us here? If we're following him, what is he communicating?

At least three things, I think. At least three things.

I want to fire through these.

He is for sure saying this: There's something more important going on in the world today than attaining world peace, maintaining peace at any cost, even in our families, in our friendships. There's something more important than keeping the peace.

Secondly, if we push that a little farther, I think he's saying to us, going along to get along is a strategy that's very popular in the world today. And, you know, it's not totally wrong to go along to get along in a lot of sort of gray areas.

But God has told us that the highest value in following him is not going along with everything just to get along. There is something more important.

He inspired Paul to pen these words: "As much as possible, as far as depends on you, live at peace with everyone," which insinuates it's not always possible to stay at peace with people.

As a matter of fact, Jesus said, "If the world turns against you because you are following me, don't be surprised because it hated me first."

Don't be surprised if even those closest to you turn against you because you've come alive in me.

Now, of course, we want to be careful in these things, but these are truths that Jesus has taught us.

As a matter of fact, Paul confirmed it this way, writing to Timothy: Anyone, anyone who wants to live a godly life, follow Christ, at some level or another, they're going to be persecuted.

There's something more important going on in the world than keeping peace with everything. The going-along-to-get-along strategy is not the highest value that we have in following Jesus. Allegiance to him is.

And then thirdly, learning to live in great tension in our relationships while continuing to choose to follow Jesus and depend on him, whatever the cost of following him, is what he wants so he can do his work in us and in everyone around us.

The call upon Christians is not to learn everything we can about Jesus, get every t crossed and i dotted of what we believe about him, to perfectly, structurally worship him.

The call on Christians is, no matter where he leads or what he calls us to do, to follow him. Follow him.

Certainly, our faith makes a difference in what we believe. But it's when people pick up their cross, throw it over their back, and say, "Jesus, on Monday, on Tuesday, on Wednesday, on Thursday, wherever, whenever, at whatever cost, I will follow you."

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the chance to encourage each other by your Word. I am mindful that my voice is frail and human, but it's your voice we're listening for. And you have said your sheep hear your voice.

So whatever you're saying to each of us as individuals, by the voice of your Spirit, and you're resonating it within us, I ask that you would give us ears to hear, hearts to follow, and a passion and a zeal for you that goes beyond the fear of man, the concern of our reputation, the worry over worldly things, that you would bring this zeal to consume us as your people.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.