

Christ Came to Divide, Part 1

Luke 12:51-53

Jesus sees the world as divided into two basic groups. His work as Messiah acknowledges two basic groups. There are those who will go through the fire of his judgment, and then there are those who are included in his baptism. Who avoid the fire of his judgment, but he takes on the judgment through his own baptism, as it were by fire.

Today is a passage that's going to cover the implications of this division and how it plays out in our lives and even as intimate of a setting as our home life. Let's start just by looking at two verses Luke 12:49-50, Jesus says "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."

Jesus is here looking ahead, looking to the end of time. The fire of divine judgment that he is going to come and cast upon the earth. But between that time, the time and still future to us, between that time and now, Jesus finds himself under the

deepening shadow of the cross. Just a few months' time, he will soon go through the fire of divine judgment on behalf of his people.

Representing them, Jesus will take upon himself their sins and he will go through a baptism as it were; a full emersion in the fearful wrath of God. This is why Jesus came. "God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf." Which points to the baptism that Jesus had to be baptized with. "In order that we might become the righteousness of God in him." This is the only basis of our salvation. There is no other foundation of our salvation than the work of Christ and this is the very heart of the gospel that we proclaim to others.

Jesus sees the world in those two verses as divided by judgment. Divided by the judgment of God, that he will pursue in his role as Messiah. There are those who will go through the fire of divine judgment on their own, with no protection, with no refuge from the angry wrath of God and there are those whom Christ will represent in his baptism into judgment. He'll go through the judgment for them. That is the most fundamental division that exists, the most basic, the most radical. And there are implications of this division in our relationships. Look at verse 51, Jesus said, "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 her mother-in-law."

Frederic Godet commenting on these verses said this, "Jesus sees himself about to be plunged into a bath of flame from which he shall come forth with the torch which shall set the whole world on fire." And that fire, that flame, is in the home. As we've been seeing in our own nation, the fire of division which is conflict, it's shocking, it's even alarming. I mean who loves conflict, who likes it, only a madman. Who wants to see the upsetting of peace? Who wants to see the disruption, the division, the violence? You'd have to be a madman as I said, or woefully immature to love conflict, to love controversy, to seek conflict and division, after all "Blessed are the peacemakers" right?

We love peace, we long for peace, but here's where we need to be very careful. Are we to love peace at any cost? Will we compromise for the sake of peace? Will we set aside principle and truth to get peace? Will we refuse to speak up in protest? Will we shrink back from doing what's right to keep some

ostensible peace in society, peace in the workplace, or even peace in the family, peace in the home?

The love of peace is a good thing, but like any good thing the pursuit of peace becomes idolatrous when it is not grounded in righteousness. When the love of peace is not guarded by truth, when it's not pursued in wisdom, when it's not aimed at holiness. In the absence of other virtues that scripture places on equal priority, righteousness, truth, wisdom, holiness, any such peace without those virtues is a false peace.

Which is what characterizes all false religion. How quickly the dove of peace can turn into a bird of prey. So as we grapple with Jesus' words here, we need to take them at face value. We don't want to try to soften them or modify them in any way, we need to accept them on their face. We need to then set our expectations according to what he is telling us here so we can prepare our minds for whatever consequences we will face for the sake of Christ and his gospel.

Some very real consequences of following him aren't there? Division that's deep that affects personal relationships. It creates conflict within the refuge of every home, which forces every single one of us to a choice. Who will I fear? Who will I prefer? To whom will I be loyal, flesh and blood or God? So two

points, first one, number one, the presence of spiritual division. Number one, the presence of spiritual division. It is a fact that there is the presence of spiritual division in the world. Because there exists a fundamental division between the godly and the ungodly, listen, you need to not be surprised by division, but you need to expect it. Do not be surprised by division, expect it. Again verse 51, "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."

So his question here as he talks about the implications of the division of humanity, it's aimed at contradicting this popular Jewish notion, alive and well during Jesus time, a common misconception, that the Messiah's coming would usher in an unprecedented reign of, of peace and prosperity in their time. Now, if Israel had repented at Christ's first coming, peace would have come to Israel. Sadly that didn't happen.

But in the sovereign plan of God, Israel's rejection has meant salvation for the Gentiles. Romans 11:25-27 says this, Paul says "I do not want you to be unaware this mystery brothers a partial hardening has come upon Israel. Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and in this way all Israel will be saved," in what way, he says, "as it is written the deliverer

will come from Zion he will banish ungodliness from Jacob this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

So the banishment of ungodliness from Jacob as the deliverer comes from Zion, from the, the stronghold of Jerusalem, that did not happen at Jesus' first coming because Israel did not turn to Christ in repentance and faith. What Christ saw, what Jesus saw in Israel at this moment was the hardening of the nation. Exactly what was prophesied, no peace, there will be no peace apart from repentance and faith. He will not compromise for the sake of peace.

There must be repentance and faith and that's not going to happen for Israel until the last days. Sometime earlier in Jesus' ministry before he left Galilee you may remember we covered this in Luke 9. When Jesus sent out the twelve he gave them some instruction as he went out and some similar words set their expectations. Similar to what we're reading right now, Matthew 10:34 he says "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth, I have not come to bring peace but a sword."

The disciples needed to realize as we do, in taking Christ's Gospel of peace to the world not everybody is going to be excited to receive it. Many will reject it, it will reveal a deep internal division that's only exposed through gospel

proclamation and righteous allegiance to God through obedient living. This is why Paul warned Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:12 “Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. While evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

So for all who represent God and his Gospel, whether it's Christ, his apostles, Christians today, Christians ever since the time of Christ and his apostles. Or if we go back and look at the prophets and the priests of old. All who desire to live godly will be persecuted, rejected in their own time and rejected by their own people. By own people I don't just mean their own ethnic tribe. I mean family members as well. This is what Christ is saying.

We see this in the Old Testament as faithful prophets warned the people about coming judgment. For example, God promised to destroy Jerusalem in the Babylonian invasion. He'd warned them, warned them, warned them, sent them prophet after prophet. Priests teaching the law, prophets calling them to obey the law, to repent of their sins, to turn to God, to turn back to Yahweh, they didn't. And so the warnings got stronger. The warnings became more frequent and he said, God said “You are going to go into judgment, you're going to be sent into exile,

unless you repent.”

Judah ignored the prophets, they preferred to listen instead to false prophets. You can see it in Jeremiah chapter 6, if you'd like to turn there just briefly in your bibles, Jeremiah chapter 6 in verse 10, God said, he said clearly and plainly by the mouths of his prophets, “There is no peace for the wicked.”

The people though, from the kings and his officials to all the way down to the common people all through the land, they preferred to listen to the voice of false prophets, of rebellious priests. All of them who were telling the people what they wanted to hear. In Jeremiah 6:10 it says this “To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold their ears are uncircumcised they cannot listen. Behold the word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn and they take no pleasure in it.

Therefore I am full of the wrath of the Lord. I am weary of holding it in, pour it out upon the children in the streets, upon the gatherings of young men, also both husband and wife shall be taken. The elderly and the very aged, their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields and wives together. For I will stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the



land declares the Lord. For from the least to the greatest of them everyone is greedy for unjust gain. And from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace."

Listen we hear the same refrains today all throughout our society the general call of peace is always the mark of false religion. When you hear people saying, peace, peace, when there's nothing but wickedness and corruption, there's no call for peace. When we look past all the wickedness in our world and say, God bless America, what we ought to be saying is, God, bless us with the coming of your justice and your judgment on this country. Because we want to see your justice reign, your justice and your truth prevail and only then do we want to see peace cover the land when everything is made right before you.

False religion though, soothes everyone saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. It's only true religion that cries out, repent and believe, contrary to the false prophets who scorned and abused Jeremiah, contrary to Israel's corrupt spiritual leadership, Jesus said deep spiritual division exists. And there is no peace, his disciples need to factor that in.

They need to adjust their thinking, they need to expect this. Jesus said in Luke 12:51, "Do you think that I've come to

bring peace on earth? No I tell you but rather division.” Then in verse 52 he told them from now on houses would be divided.

Let’s make a few observations here before moving on. I’m going to give you five observations just of the text here. First observation, the question that Jesus asked “do you think that I have come to give peace on earth?” The verb translated here, I have come, that’s not the same verb we talked about last time, the verb *erchomai* that Jesus used back in verse 49. Remember we said last week that Jesus used that verb *erchomai* combined with an infinitive, now not always but often, he used it as a technical way of referring to his mission.

So, “I came to cast fire on earth” Luke 12, that’s not the same verb that’s used here. The verb here in verse 51 is the verb *paraginomai* which points more to his arrival on the scene. So it’s not I came in the sense of my mission. I’ve arrived, in the sense of, here I am. “I came to cast fire” verse 49, and now that I’ve arrived, verse 51 it’s not for peace but to expose that basic division that exists.

This raises a second observation, another observation, back in Luke 10:1. The Lord appointed seventy two messengers, seventy two, you can call them evangelists, or missionaries, but seventy two and he sent them on ahead of him two by two into every town and place where he himself was about to go. We saw back then in

that study in Luke 10 there were receptive towns, Luke 10:5-9, and there were other towns, other people, other homes, that rejected the messengers. Jesus told them in Luke 10:10-12, "When you enter a town and they do not receive you go into its streets and say even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God is near."

Your rejection doesn't change the fact that the kingdom of God is on the march and it's coming through your town and it's visited you, it's passing through, and I tell you it will be more bearable on that day than for Sodom, on that day than for Sodom, than for that town. So the result of Jesus visiting anywhere is to reveal the division that exists between receptive hearts and rejecting hearts.

We can add a third brief observation, third observation, Jesus says do you think that I've come to give peace, and his answer when he says, "no I tell you but rather division." No, is really strong here. It's an emphatic form as in, by no means did I come to bring peace. Again he's just being emphatic that there's no peace apart from repentance and faith. There's no peace apart from reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ and through him alone and his arrival, whether it's then or his arrival now through the gospel that we preach, his arrival makes

the fact that that deep division plain and obvious.

A fourth observation, look at verse 52, Luke 12:52, when Jesus says, "From now on in one house five will be divided" and so forth. That expression, from now on, that's one that Luke highlights throughout his Gospel. From now on, from now on, it signals a before and after. It, It's a watershed moment, it's a dividing line event, from now on. Mary said, chapter 1 verse 48, "From now on all generations will call me blessed." And so it is, we call her blessed to this day.

Jesus said to Simon, Luke 5:10, "From now on you will be catching men." He left behind the fishing and started catching men, and it was. Jesus said to his disciples later on, Luke 22:18, "From now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes," and so it is to this day. From now on, the deepest most basic identity, from now on it will not be a family identity. From now on it will be a spiritual identity. From now on a dividing line between those who are in Christ, and those who are outside of Christ. From now on, that's the watershed.

And finally a fifth observation when Jesus says in verse 52, "From now on in one house there will be five divided." The verb form makes it plain here, it's a perfect passive. And it can be translated literally as, "they will have been divided."

So the division is something that is revealed to them. It's not caused but it's revealed whenever it is that Christ arrives.

Okay so, what's the takeaway of those five observations, so what? Two things, first take away. This is why the clear proclamation of the true Christ is so very critical because in order to see this division plainly we need to present Jesus for who he really is. And that is to say we need to present him in the fullness of his messianic ministry, not just the parts of him that we think others are going to like and accept.

If we only present the, the friendlier version of Jesus, savior, comforter, friend, things that are all true, but if we fail to present his role as conquering king, as inflexible judge, as the one who comes to execute justice and cast fire on the earth, then you know what, we're presenting a distorted Christ. We're not presenting the true Christ. We're not presenting the full saving gospel to people. And so if we present a distorted Christ well it stands to reason that we're not going to see the division clearly. Everybody likes a friendly happy Jesus.

The second take away from those observations is that the fact of division isn't necessarily indicative of a problem. Division, when you present the gospel, when you live according

to righteous principle, when you live according to the Lordship of Christ, division could indicate a problem. You could be a divisive contentious person, you could be a real jerk, maybe you're the problem. You're the one revealing division because nobody likes you because you're a contentious person and you're constantly stirring up trouble.

Suppose someone acts in a godly way, impeccable integrity, preaches this full gospel, lives in accordance with it, in boldness in humility presenting the truth, listen, division will be an effect of a clear gospel, in living according to a clear gospel. If you're life and your witness and your gospel is not revealing any division between you and the people you know, you might want to ask yourself a few questions, hard questions, about your own clarity.

Ask hard questions about your own life. Is it clearly, distinctly, unambiguously, Christian in the pattern of Christ or is there some level of mediocrity there? It happened in the homes where into which Jesus came. It happened in the villages where he arrived and we know that Jesus did everything in a righteous and gracious way. There was nothing lacking in his witness.

Still, his arrival meant, verse 52, "that in one house five are divided, three against two and two against three." There are two saved by grace, and three who remained in sin, or vice versa. Who he is and what he has said and what he has done, who he represents, Jesus Christ always comes and exposes the division that exists between the righteous and the unrighteous, between the repentant and the unrepentant. So, when you see that happening, when you see division apparent, clear, don't be quick to assume you've done something wrong, that you haven't been clear, or even that you've caused division. Remember what Jesus says here and recognize that the gospel, its very purpose is to expose a deep divide.

Folks don't be surprised by division, instead expect, and in fact, you might even be a bit encouraged when the division becomes apparent, because that could be evidence that you've made the gospel clear, that your proclamation is true, and clear, and understandable, that your life is demonstrably Christian. So Jesus would have us set righteous expectations here, that's what this is about. He wants us to set righteous expectation. He wants us to know that his gospel, it reveals a division in the society at large. So don't be surprised by the division. Take courage, expect it. Stay loyal to Christ over all others even family.