

Christ Came to Start a Fire, Part 1

Luke 12:49-50

Luke 12:49, it is a portion of Scripture that is unique to Luke's Gospel, you're not going to find this section in any of the other Gospels, these two verses anyway. But this portion also provides very unique and privileged insight into the thinking of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. There in Luke 12:49-53, from the Prince of Peace himself, we hear what sounds more like a call to arms. More like a summons to war. This is a preparation for, for judgement and conflict. And in the context of our cultural religion, where the greatest virtue is to be nice. This text really strikes our ears as somewhat disturbing, as unfitting of the gentle Jesus, meek and mild. But for those who are familiar with the whole counsel of God, the full scope of divine truth and revelation. This is the Jesus that God truly does reveal. This is the Christ of God.

If you found your way to Luke 12:49, I'll start reading there. Jesus said, "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 her mother-in-law."

Christ came to bring salvation. He came to win redemption for sinners, but he also came to start a fire. He came to execute judgement on the earth. Christ came to win peace, to reconcile sinful man with holy God. But his work creates a deep, deep division. And that division draws a line, the dividing line, down the middle of humanity, separating those loyal to the family of God. Separating them from those who are loyal to their earthly families. Those who prefer their earthly families to their kingdom families. That's what this text is drawing a line through. This is what Jesus is referring to.

And my aim in this morning's sermon, the aim is to help you see a fuller picture of Christ's mission than maybe you have realized before. And what we're gonna do is we're gonna follow Luke through this portal of revelation, what he has revealed

about, giving us insight into Christ and his thinking. And we're gonna get a very privileged perspective. What we're gonna see, what the world and its history looks like from Jesus' point of view.

Not only will you come away, hopefully, today with a greater depth of gratitude for your own salvation. But you will find every motivation here to re-double your efforts to present your life to God as a well stewarded life. To present your life to God as an act of daily devotion and worship to him. I hope that you come away from this with a deeper loyalty to Christ. A deeper loyalty to God and his family. A deeper longing to be with him, even if that means separation from dear, dear people in this world who rebel against him.

We're going to cover verses 49-50 for today and before I give you an outline, I need to make an important grammatical observation so that you can understand the, the significance of the text before us. When Jesus uses that language in verse 49, I came, and then he combines that verb, I came, with a verb in an infinitive form, that is, as in here, to cast, that's an infinitive. He's talking about Messianic purpose. He's talking about the purpose of his mission as Christ, as the Messiah.

The verb, I came, it's the verb *erchomai*. Jesus uses that grammatically to reveal the purpose of his mission. And I want to show you a few examples of that, just as we're getting started here so you can see how that verb is used, really as a technical expression to refer to Christ's mission. And I just want you to turn over to Matthew's Gospel, just for a few examples of this. Matthew's Gospel and starting in chapter 5. Jesus says there in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come" and that's that verb *erchomai* again. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I've not come to abolish them but," and you carry that verb forward, I have come "to fulfill them." So there's the verb *erchomai* with the infinitive, to abolish and to fulfill. He's talking about the purpose of his coming and his purpose is not to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but rather to fulfill them. To fulfill everything written in them.

Turn over a few pages to Matthew 9:13, Matthew 9:13, and there Jesus says again, using this verb and using infinitives, he says "I came," *erchomai*, "not to call the righteous," but, carry the verb forward, "but to call sinners." Again the verb *erchomai* with the infinitive, to call, shows the purpose of his coming. It's not to call those who think they're already righteous. Those who think they're already good to go. The

purpose of his coming is to call those who know that they're sinners, and are reaching out for a savior.

When Jesus called and commissioned, sent the twelve, you can turn to Matthew 10. A section is parallel here, Matthew 10 is parallel to Luke 9:1-5, but in verses 34-35 of Matthew 10, we find Jesus saying the same thing there that he says in our text, almost verbatim. And again, it's the *erchomai* verb with the infinitive, to bring. I don't, I don't want to have you turn there, just for the sake of time, but in the Gospel of John, namely John 9:39, if you want to look these up later, you can write them down. John 9:39, John 10:10, John 12:46.

Jesus uses that *erchomai* verb, I came, I have come, and then he combines that verb with what's called a *hina* purpose clause. We translate a *hina* purpose clause with the words, so that, or in order that, we're trying to show purpose by its use. So for example, John 9:39, "Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world,'" and here it is, "*in order that* those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.'"

Again it's that reversal of those who think they see, but they don't. For them to realize and enter into their blindness. For those who know that they don't see and they know that they're in darkness, they know they need the light of God. He

came, *in order that*, that those who don't see may see. John 10:10, "I came," here it is, "*in order that* they may have life and have it abundantly." His coming was with purpose. John 12:46, "I have come into the world as light, so that," for the purpose of, "whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."

So back in Luke 12:49, this is yet another instance of this pattern, this technical pattern of Jesus speaking about Messianic purpose. He's revealing the purpose for which he came into the world. The verb *erchomai* plus the infinitive, I came, *erchomai*, plus the infinitive, to cast. "I came to cast fire on the earth." This reveals a purpose of Christ's coming. It's very significant.

So with that in mind, we're going to ask and answer several questions in the text and you've heard this before, good observation is done by asking these five W questions and the H: Who, what, when, where, why, and how. Those are, if you want to do some good Bible study and have good observation out of the text, just write down what you can find in the text, who, what, when, where, and why, and how. And that's really what we're going to do here. Not in that order, and we're going to combine some of them. So I'm going to give you, not six, but I'm going to give you four points.

Four questions and four outline points. Let me just name the points for you. Give you the questions, but then we'll cover them as we walk through. First question is, why is Jesus thinking about starting a fire? What is it that calls this imagery to mind and makes him think about starting a fire? Second question is what. What kind of fire does Jesus want to start? And this will also answer the where question. What kind of fire does Jesus want to start and where does he want to start it? It's kind of important. Third, when, when will Jesus light this fire? And again, in answering this question, we'll answer the how question. How is this fire going to burn? What is it going to look like? And finally, fourth, very key, very important, who will suffer the fire? Who will suffer the fire?

So why, what, where, when, how, and who. I hope I can keep it all clear for you. Alright, so let's go to the first question, why. Why is Jesus thinking about starting a fire? What's this arsonist impulse coming into our Lord's mind right now? Put another way, why is Jesus thinking about and revealing to his disciples this aspect of his purpose? What makes him think about fire here and now? And then why is he telling his disciples about it?

If you look back over the context of Luke chapter 12, go back to the beginning. You see that Jesus has really been teaching his disciples primarily in this chapter. He's been teaching them, as we've been saying, in the context of this unbelieving, primarily unbelieving, hostile crowd of Jews. He calls them in verses 1-12, his disciples, he calls them to fear God and not fear man. And he calls them to find rest in the fear of the Lord, even in the most difficult of circumstances, like it says there in verses 11-12, when they're called before authorities. Jesus wants his disciples not to be anxious in that context.

He wants them to be confident, knowing that the Holy Spirit is going to be there with them. He's going to be strengthening them in that hour of trial. He's interrupted in verse 13 with this unbelieving man, who is under the persuasion of his own covetousness. He comes in asking a question that completely misses the point, seems to have no sense of understanding, of timing, of when a, when a good question might, might be asked. But Jesus, you know, he sees the man's heart as completely consumed by temporal things. He's unable, even unwilling to hear, learn what Jesus has to say, but Jesus takes it as an opportunity.



What a wonderful teacher we have, that he takes, even an interruption like this. Provides Jesus with an opportunity to warn the crowds about covetousness, which is verses 13-21. He's also able to turn once again and strengthen his disciples. In verses 22-34 He teaches them why they should never worry. Why they should never, ever be anxious about anything, and especially something as small and insignificant as money, as food, as clothing, as their lifespan. Don't worry, be worried about anything. Why? Because disciples of Jesus Christ should instead trust the father and seek his kingdom. Verse 31, after all, it says in verse 32, "it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." So, sell your possessions, give what you have, be generous to people, Jesus says, you're banking away an eternal treasure that pays eternal dividends. So go for it.

With that assurance fixed firmly in their minds, the assurance that the father loves them and cares for them, sustains them. He's given them absolutely everything in giving them the kingdom. Jesus really wants to free his disciples from anything that would hinder or constrain their free and relentless pursuit of fulfilling their stewardship in this life. It's what he's saying. Verses 35-48, where Jesus is telling his servants, his disciples, be ready, always be ready. Have yourself ready at all times. Be watchful. Be eagerly waiting,

eagerly, joyfully anticipating the return of the Lord. Keep doing what God has called and gifted you and commissioned you to do. Always with a eye to executing your stewardship with faithfulness and wisdom from God.

That servant, who is ready and waiting, who's always anticipating the Lord's return, looking to the skies as it were. Even as he does his work, the steward who is conscious and thoughtful and intentional about pursuing a wise and faithful stewardship. According to verses 35-44, that servant rejoices in the presence of his master when his master returns. He has nothing to be afraid of. He longs to see him and when he shows up, he is excited. He is rejoicing. He's in fellowship, and that master then is joyful to share himself intimately with them. To sit down and share a table of fellowship with them. He rewards him with an even greater stewardship of kingdom service.

So all this talk of kingdom priority, as Jesus here, he's anticipating his own return. Even as he teaches, he's thinking about coming back. Contemplates his own joy that he'll have in rewarding faithful disciples for faithful stewardship. I'd imagine, he can't wait to bring these guys into the fullness of what he's thinking, of what he sees. He wants to show them the consummation of everything that he sees out in the future.

So in one sense he is rejoicing here, he is eager to reveal things to them. But there's another aspect here of what Jesus is thinking, and it's in the more immediate context. As he looks ahead to rewarding faithful servants, he's also mindful that he will enter into judgement and punish those servants who've been wicked, unfaithful, those whom he will condemn and remand to a fiery judgement in hell.

The section on stewardship ended on that note of judgement, there in verses 45-47. He's depicted the cruel brutality of the wicked servant, cold indifference of this selfish and passive servant. And then laziness of an ignorant servant. All of them are going to suffer punishment, to varying degrees suffer punishment, but suffer they will. And they will be assigned to a place, as he says there in verse 45 with the unbelieving.

So Jesus here is looking. He's prompted by his own teaching and what he's instructing his disciples about. He's prompted to look beyond the present moment. And he's looking, as it were, down the corridors of time to see all that lies ahead. And he has an eagerness here to see his mission through to the very end. Verse 49, "I came," this is my mission. "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled."

The word fire, Jesus has that at the front of his sentence, which shows a strong emphasis. Literally it sounds like this, "fire I came to cast on the earth." It sounds like a gunshot, doesn't it? In Greek it's *pur*, "*pur* I came to cast on the earth." It suggests suddenness. The rest of the sentence shows an eagerness there, "would that it were already kindled." As in, enough already, let's get on with it, let's start the fire burning. It's clearly not kindled yet though. It's clearly not started.

So we need to ask our other questions here. What fire? Who's getting fired and when's it going to happen? Where's it going to happen? So let's start with that second question. What kind of fire does Jesus want to start? What kind of fire? Some commentators think Jesus here is referring to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And that happens at Pentecost, when the tongues of fire are the symbol. And they say that that's the symbol pointing back to this instruction. Other people say that this fire refers to, quote, "a new faith or religion. A burning enthusiasm in believers, creating fierce antagonism in unbelievers, deplorable but inevitable," end of quote. That's the fire, this enthusiasm.

Another person says the very passion in Christ's heart would set his friends on fire and his foes in opposition. So is the fire the Holy Spirit? Is the fire the enthusiasm of a new religion? Is the fire passion in Christ's heart that gets put into our hearts and we go set everything else on fire? The first problem with all of those views is that they depart from the language that Jesus actually used here. In verse 49, He said, "I came to cast fire on the earth." To throw fire down. The word cast is *ballo*, it's the same word used of Jesus when he was performing exorcisms, to cast out demons. So there's this immediacy to the word. There's a, there's a violence even. He didn't cast the Holy Spirit on the earth. That's not the language that's fitting for Jesus sending the third person of the Trinity to be the comforter, helper, and advocate for the believer.

The verb Jesus uses about the coming of the Spirit is *pempo* which is, to send. So when the Helper comes, John 15:26, "whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who," no is not cast from the Father, but "proceeds from the Father." He sends the Holy Spirit. He doesn't cast him. Same thing could be said for the other views. They don't fit the violent language, the immediate sudden language of casting something down. Jesus didn't come to cast the enthusiasm of a new faith upon the

earth. Or he didn't come to cast a passion of his own that would set his own friends on fire and set his foes in opposition to him.

There's a second problem with all those views I just named. They ignore this prepositional phrase here, that he came to cast fire, where? "On, upon the earth." So this answers not just the what question, it answers the where question. This fire is going to be happening, it says, on earth, on the earth. The way that any speaker at that time would understand that is it's on terra firma. Where they walk around. Where they live and move and have their being. So this is global comprehensive, a fiery inferno that sets the whole world on fire. So this is truly Biblical proof of global warming, right here. In the extreme.

The only credible view, the only way to see this fire that Jesus is going to cast on the earth. The one that he wishes is already kindled. It is the fire of divine judgement. The fire here, is the fire of divine judgement. It is the final judgement of God's burning wrath, that is going to come and fall upon the entire earth. It's prophesied clearly in the Old Testament. But it's also taken up and prophesied again in the new, the new connecting to the old. The Old fulfilled in the New. And in thinking about his mission as the Messiah, Jesus is looking at

his mission, not just specifically to the cross ahead of him. He's looking at it comprehensively. In its full scope, in all of its fullness. He's thinking about its end. He's thinking about its culmination here.

In fact end of verse 50, the verb translated in the ESV, it is accomplished. Other translations, it's translated, something familiar to you and me, it is finished. The end of the world is on his mind. The culmination of all prophetic texts of Scripture is on his mind. And in light of his own stewardship. In light of the wickedness of those servants who were gifted and entrusted with, with gifts from God. In light of the retribution coming to, for those who spurn their gifts and their stewardship. The image that comes to the mind of Jesus is the image of fire.

A vivid, terrible, painful picture of divine judgement. To show you this theme, that fire is judgement here, I want to trace this concept of fire and burning wrath of, of God. Just starting, really in Luke's Gospel, during the ministry of, you can go back Luke chapter 3, and you can see there, Luke chapter 3 and the ministry of John the Baptist. John the Baptist in Luke 3:9, he warned the people there as the forerunner to the Messiah, before the Messiah's mission and ministry started. He warned the people, Luke 3:9, "Every tree therefore that does not

bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” That’s judgement language. He doesn’t cut off the bad branches and make them enthusiastic. He throws them in the fire to burn them up. Judgement language.

If you return to that same imagery a couple verses later, verses 16-17, he even expanded the thought there. Luke 3:16, John said that Jesus, when he comes, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit,” that’s one baptism, “and fire,” that’s another baptism. He makes a sharp distinction between the two. The Holy Spirit and fire. And then he elaborates that in the next verse, verse 17. Jesus has a “winnowing fork in his hand. He comes to clear his threshing floor, to gather wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” Look ahead to Luke 17. Luke 17, in verse 28, Luke 17:28. He’s responding here to a question the Pharisees asked him in verse 20 about the coming of the kingdom.

And Jesus warned them there that the coming of the Son of Man would be like a day like any other day. It would seem like any other day. Verse 28, everybody’s going to be preoccupied with “eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting, building,” until suddenly in verse 29, “fire and sulfur rain from heaven and destroyed them all. So it will be,” like it was



for Sodom and Gomorrah, “so it will be”, he says in verse 30, “on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.” No one listening to Jesus teach on these occasions would have any confusion, whatsoever, of what he was talking about. Fire, burning, we’ve read our Bibles, that’s judgement language. They’re vivid expressions here of the impending doom of divine wrath coming to earth on the Day of the Lord.