

Christ Came to Start a Fire, Part 2

Luke 12:49-50

Christ came to bring salvation. He came to win redemption for sinners, but he also came to start a 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. He's speaking to a

people who were steeped in Old Testament language. All of them grown up going to synagogue, very religious society, going to synagogue, taught in the home out of the law and the prophets.

You can actually turn, I'd like to show you some of that. Starting in the prophet Zephaniah. What Jesus is saying about fire and burning and judgement. Vivid expressions that come right from the Old Testament, just a few texts and starting in Zephaniah, chapter 1, short prophecy of Zephaniah. Just three short chapters, but man they will skewer you. Incredibly strong because the theme of Zephaniah's prophecy is the coming Day of the Lord judgement. "Day of the Lord," put quotes around that. That's an actual thing, that's a concept of end time's doom and judgement. Day of the Lord. It's near fulfillment for those who listen to Zephaniah prophecy was the Babylonian invasion. But that was just a prelude, that's just a preview of what's coming in its far fulfillment, and that's what Jesus had in mind when he said, "I came to cast fire on the earth."

Starting in Zephaniah 1:2, God says, "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth." In case you're wondering what everything means, verse three, it's man and beast, it's birds and fish. So he even gets into the water. He'll sweep away the rubble with the wicked. "I will cut off

mankind from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. And then look at verse 14, Zephaniah 1:14, "The great Day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the Day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there."

"A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will bring distress on mankind, so they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth."

Clear enough yet? Yes. "Gather together, yes, gather." Chapter 2 verse 1. "Gather, O shameless nation, before the decree takes effect-before the day passes away like chaff-before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the Lord." Isn't that powerful? Powerful imagery; gripping and terrifying. Look down at chapter 3 in verse 8, it says, "'Therefore wait for

me,' declares the Lord, 'for the day when I rise up to seize the prey."

He's talking here about a time far in the future when God acts on his decision. And what's his decision? It's "to gather the nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger, for in the fire of my jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed." Folks, that's gonna happen by the hand of Christ, the anointed king.

Look what it says, Zechariah 13:7, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," who is that? That's Jesus Christ standing next to Yahweh. Anyway, "'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,' declares the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land, declares the Lord, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, one third shall be left alive. I will put this third into the fire, refine them as one refines silver, test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. They will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The Lord is my God.'"

So God has struck the good shepherd, and he struck him for the salvation of his people there in verse 7. And although

Israel has rejected its Messiah, verses 8 and 9 speak of a future time when God will enter into judgement with Israel. He will regenerate by the Holy Spirit a remnant for himself. They will believe. They will be tested through fire. This is talking about a future remnant of Israel, which is going to be saved and when that happens, God will act to protect them from the invading nations.

Look now at Zechariah 14:1, "Behold, a day is coming for the Lord, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west be a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, the other half southward.

"You shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of

Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there should be no light, cold, or frost. There shall be a unique day, which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light.”

Without going into all the detail that’s there, but you can see this is an end of times future judgement. And these are the texts, the kinds of texts Jesus has on his mind. There’s a future time when he’s going to enter into judgement with Israel. He protects the redeemed of Israel. He judges Israel and cuts off all of their unbelieving. But he protects the redeemed of Israel, those who come to faith in him. He enters into judgement with the nations. This is how Jesus understood the times at the end of the age. And so he said, “I came to cast a fire on the earth, and would that it already were kindled!” I want to show you one more Old Testament text, look at Malachi 3:1. Malachi has prophesied about the forerunner of the Messiah.

Malachi 3:1, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come into his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can

stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap."

He's coming to refine the land. He's coming to cleanse the land with fullers' soap. Lye that burns everything away. And then this in verse 5, "I will draw near to you for judgement. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts."

God is coming, in Christ, entering into judgment, first with Israel and then through Israel with the rest of the nations of the world. He comes to execute punishment, a retribution on the ungodly and he will rescue "you who fear my name." He will enlist them into his ranks. Bring them with him. Christ at the head of the hosts and they will, as it says there, "tread down the wicked." The wicked burned up, charred completely, will be as ash under the soles of their feet.

That's quite a vivid picture and this is what our Lord has in mind as he tells his disciples, "I came to cast fire on the earth and would that" or "I wish that" is another way to translate it. But it's not a hopeless wish, it's not that he

doesn't believe it's going to happen. He just wants it to happen now. And we need to be careful too, to not see Jesus as some kind of war-monger. He's not a lover of violence and bloodshed. Not at all. He truly is the Prince of Peace. But before peace comes to a rebellious, God-rejecting world, there must be war. For those who refuse to repent and believe, for those who refuse to fear the Lord, refuse to bow the knee to Christ, listen, there is no peace, only war.

Peace does not come through compromise. It doesn't come through setting aside righteous principle. Ignoring sin, entering into a truce with those who sin. God does not simply agree to disagree. He sends his Christ to enforce the peace, to rule with a rod of iron and to execute judgement. He looks ahead to that day, Jesus does with eager anticipation. He longs to see God's justice prevail. He longs to see God's righteousness wash over the entire land.

Folks, can you sympathize with that? I sure can. I long for this, as we see a spirit of wickedness and rebellion; open defiance against the Lord God and his law growing in our own land. And it's not that we rejoice in seeing people suffer and burn. But we do rejoice in the righteousness of God, don't we?



And we sympathize more with God and his interests than we do with man and his.

Especially sinful man, we hate this continuing prevalence of sin, as there is wave after wave after wave of sin, degrading sin, horrendous immorality that just saturates and deluges our world. I saw a post a few days ago which noted, that whatever the true numbers of COVID deaths are in 2020, abortion was still the number one cause of death globally. A record number, 42.7 million babies were murdered in the womb in 2020. Does that make you sick to your stomach? Our sin is more deadly than any plague or sickness or pandemic.

We long for Christ's return, and that's why we gather here, Sunday after Sunday. People need their consciences informed. They need to be taught to protest against sin. They need to resist the culture. They need to proclaim repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ because he is the only salvation. He is the only way out of this fire.

So we long for Christ's return. We long for God's righteousness to reign in Jesus Christ. To see the earth filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:9. Habakkuk 2:14. And if we, as mere children of the father, yet so small, as redeemed of the Lord and yet still

sinful, as enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and yet so weak and so inconsistent, if we can see the need for God's righteousness to reign and cover the land, how much more Christ? I mean, what do you think his view is? That's why Jesus longed for the kindling of this great fire of divine judgement.

Which Isaiah spoke of in Isaiah 66:15, "For behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." So bring it. Amen? Bring it. As to the timing of all these, Day of the Lord prophecies, we've asked the why question, the what question, where.

Let's ask a third, a when question. When will Jesus light this fire and how will it look? You should still be in Malachi. Take a look at the end of that book and the end of the prophecy of Malachi. Malachi 4:5, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome Day of the Lord comes." Very important prophecy there. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome Day of the Lord comes." Not really talking about forerunner language there, the forerunner to the Messiah, this is talking about forerunner to the Day of the Lord. A little different.

So let me ask you something. When did Elijah come? Was it in the ministry of John the Baptist, who was the forerunner to the Messiah? Is that what Malachi was pointing to? Or is it something else? For some, the prophecy about Elijah coming was fulfilled in John's ministry. No need for a further coming of Elijah for them. For others though, the coming of Elijah is still future.

Turn to Matthew 11:7, "Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John," and he said about John that John was more than a prophet. I mean he's, he's the culmination of all Old Testament prophecies, the last Old Testament prophet. But, "He's more than a prophet, verse 9. "And he of whom it is written," Matthew 11:10, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you." That comes directly from Malachi 3:1. Which we read earlier.

But look down at verse 14. This is where Jesus says something very interesting, he says, "if you're willing to accept it, he" that is John the Baptist, "he is Elijah who is to come." And then this, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus continues, he condemns his own generation because they rejected John's ministry, verse 18. They slandered him. They

dismissed him as a demon-possessed man. Had nothing to do with him.

Malachi's prophecy again, Malachi 4:5-6, "I'll send you Elijah the prophet before that great and awesome Day of the Lord comes." And then this very important word, "he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." So again, we gotta ask, did that happen? Did the hearts of fathers turn their children, children their fathers? Did John's ministry have a widespread impact in Israel, turning families to one another? No it did not.

In fact, if you remember what Jesus said in our text, Luke 12:52, houses are divided. Hostile to one another. They're not together, united in the fear of the Lord, in the worship of Christ the Messiah. "They're divided father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother," and so on. So for most of Israel, for most of those who live on the earth when Jesus came, Elijah's coming did not happen with John's ministry.

For that unbelieving generation, they forfeited the privilege of his ministry. Which was intended to prepare their hearts to receive their Messiah from God. For a few though, for

a small remnant of Israel, followed by this massive influx of us Gentiles. John's ministry, his message of repentance, you know what? It did its work. It did prepare hearts for the Messiah's ministry. It did turn hearts of fathers to children, children to fathers. It did bring family unity in the Lord. There's a coming generation of Israel though, for whom the coming of Elijah will mean the visitation of divine judgement. It will also be the prelude to Israel's repentance.

Turn over to Matthew 17, now to set the scene, this is following the transfiguration. Jesus is coming down the mountain with Peter, James, and John. In Matthew 17:10, "And they ask him a question, they say, 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah, first Elijah, must come?'" Why are they asking that? Well they just saw Elijah standing with Moses and the two of them talking with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration.

So they watched that, they asked Jesus, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" And Jesus answered in verse 11, "Elijah does come, and he will," notice the future language there, "'He will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly

suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.”

So, Elijah did come in the ministry of John the Baptist. He came in the spirit and power of Elijah, Luke 1:17. For most of Israel though, Elijah was unrecognized. But Jesus says, promises right here, Elijah will come, in the future and he will restore all things. Which is when Malachi 4:5 says, this will happen “before the great and awesome Day of the Lord comes.”

Does the Bible give us any indication of maybe when that might happen? Any clues? Any evidence of the time of Elijah’s coming? Well obviously I wouldn’t ask all those questions if I wasn’t prepared to give an answer. So, yes, it does, and it’s called the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation. You can turn there. In answering the questions in our outline about when all this will come to pass. What it’s all going to look like.

I want to take you on a bit of a jet tour, ah maybe a helicopter tour. You know, we’re getting up there but then we’re going to come and swoop down and maybe do a, a map of the earth kind of course and see if you can follow some of this through Revelation. It’ll be short. But hopefully it’ll be helpful in answering some of these questions. The same Jesus who told his disciples that he came to cast fire on the earth. That he’s

eager to see it kindled, this is the same one, by the way, who has given this revelation to John.

So don't miss the point that what he thought about in Luke chapter 12 is what he's expanding on in the Book of Revelation. About sixty years after he ascended bodily into heaven. Jesus told John in Revelation 1:19, He said, "Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this." The things that you've seen, that's chapter 1. Those that are, that's chapters 2 and 3, the letters to Christ's churches. The things that are to take place after this, that's recorded in chapters 4 through 22. Things that you've seen, the things that are, the things that will take place after this. Chapters 4 through 22, that's the last point in the outline of Revelation. It's a long point.

Those are things written in those chapters that pertain to Israel, not primarily to the church. But to Israel. We know that Revelation, as a book, as a work, is written for the instruction, the edification, the hope of the church. Revelation 22:16 says, "I, Jesus have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches." So it's for the church. But much of it is not about the church, it's about Israel.

After Revelation 1 through 3, the Lord has come for his bride. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 talks about the rapture of the church. This happens after Revelation 2 and 3 but before Revelation 4 and 5. After the Lord removes the church from the earth, a period of chaos will ensue. You can imagine that. How many ever believers there are on the earth, I mean maybe we're not here, maybe we're all driving in our cars, flying in planes, some pilots, some bus drivers, some train operators, all kinds of industries around the world and what happens when he takes us to be with himself? A lot of wrecked stuff. A lot of collateral damage to that event.

So the earth's inhabitants are going to have to adjust to this new normal. They're going to have to find a way to explain this strange phenomena of all these people disappearing. The Antichrist will be alive at that time, maybe not revealed fully, but he'll be working his way into power.

The nation of Israel, at that time, is going to dwell in relative security in the land. So much so that it constructs a new temple, reinstitutes sacrifice; even the city of Babylon will be rebuilt. It'll grow into wealth and prominence as the economic center of the world. It'll be greater than London, Tokyo, New York, all these other wealthy cities combined.



And during this period, near the start of the great tribulation, the prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39 will come to pass. Gog and Magog, which is modern day Turkey and Iran, perhaps even Russia. This Gog, Magog alliance will invade the nation of Israel. And Ezekiel 38:11 says that they will “fall upon a quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, having no bars and no gates.”

From one perspective, this invasion, it is used of God to, to wake Israel up from its spiritual deadness and lethargy, to provoke Israel to repentance and faith, to stop relying on other nations and deals and money like it always has. From another perspective though, this invasion from Gog and Magog offends God deeply. It arouses his justice to protect the weak and the vulnerable.