

Knowing the Times
Luke 12:49-59 (01-26-2020)
Ernie Godshall
Faith Bible Church
Evansville, IN

Jesus never apologized or toned down the message of judgment and wrath. He didn't come to condemn the world, because the world was already condemned (John 3:18). While there is great joy and gladness and marvelous mercy and grace in Christ, there is also gripping seriousness and heavy news. Jesus didn't come to assure the whole world we are okay, or better than we think, if only we would all start thinking more highly of ourselves. He didn't come to tickle our ears. He loved us too much for that.

Jesus came into a world of human hearts thick with evil and corruption and arrogance and pride and hatred and anger and jealousy and hardness. He didn't come to sugarcoat our rebellion against God. He came to do the shattering work of destroying the curse of sin.

The Bible warns us without apology or embarrassment that God's wrath is real and every soul outside of Christ will experience it forever. Romans 1:18 says the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness (opposition to God's authority over our lives) and unrighteousness (sinful deeds, words, attitudes, and motives). Mankind's sin and rebellion do not go unnoticed by God. We really are sinners in the hands of an angry God. John 3:36 says God's wrath abides on the unbeliever. Romans 2:5 says, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Ephesians 2:3 says we were all children of wrath, even as the rest.

Romans 9:22-24 says God is willing to show His wrath and power in judging sinners, but first He determined to show His mercy in saving sinners. There is only one reason He has saved us, and this is the good news. He saved us to magnify and exalt God's mercy and grace in saving sinners. Ephesians 2:7 says for all eternity He will show through His redeemed people His surpassing riches of grace in kindness toward us.

Our passage in Luke 12:49-59 is deadly serious. Jesus is talking about coming wrath. Many people, even churches, have decided God doesn't have wrath against sin. You can tell yourself that red hot burner will not burn your fingers, but that doesn't change the fact that if you lay your fingers on it, they will burn. Just declaring God is not a God of wrath doesn't make it so. There is something deadly serious about Christ's teaching before us.

Jesus came to earth for a fiery judgment – vv. 49-53

Luke 12:49 *"I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!"*

The New Living Translation says, "I have come to set the world on fire, and I wish it was already burning." Now what does that mean? Fire is the focus in that statement. When the Greeks wanted to emphasize something in a sentence, they put it up front in the sentence. We might say, "Food! Let's go get some." So the emphasis here is fire. Fire speaks of judgment. John the Baptist preached a fiery judgment in Luke 3:17, "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Did you notice that word unquenchable? God's wrath will burn His enemies with everlasting fire. Thomas Watson says, "Oh, that word 'ever' breaks the heart." This is deadly serious. If there was the slightest pinhole of light after millions of years in hell, that would be heaven in hell. But no, there will be unquenchable, everlasting fire.

So when Jesus came, He was fully aware of the horrors and evils and corruptions of the human heart. He lived among us as the holy Son of God, knowing the evils of mankind who would experience a fiery

judgment. He says here, "I wish it were already kindled." God hates sin and the wicked He will judge. Imagine being the God-Man and knowing all the violence of mankind, all the slaughtering of human beings in wars, all the genocides, the shootings in cold blood, the deep hatreds between groups of people. Imagine His awareness of all the vile immorality and perversions practiced throughout the world as Romans 1 describes, "Men with men doing abominable deeds." Jesus was not ignorant of what was in man. He wasn't ignorant of all the mistreatment and cruelty in marriages and families, all the sex trafficking, all the slavery and horrible abuse of human beings by others, all the murdering of millions of unborn babies. He sees mankind cursing the true God and declaring, "Let us cast their cords, their holy standards of truth and holiness and righteousness, let's cast them away. We don't want this God to rule over us." (See Psalm 2)

Jesus laments every second sin and evil continue unpunished. No wonder He says here, "Fire! I have come to cast it upon earth, and I am ready for the fiery judgment to fall!" This is deadly serious. John Piper in his book *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* describes statements like this as "The Tough Side" of Jesus and we all need to hear it. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 He is coming in flaming fire to judge all unbelievers. Peter warns us about the judgment in 2 Peter 3 when he says the fire of wrath is going to fall on this godless world. Jesus is ready to burn up all human evil. Like Jesus, neither Paul nor Peter apologizes about it. In Revelation 6:16-17 John describes the coming wrath like this, "And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'"

Luke 12:5, "*But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!*"

But verse 50 says there's a fire before the fire to be kindled on the earth. It's the baptism of fire. Before Jesus comes back in that flaming judgment, He has the fire of God's wrath to endure on the cross. That's what he means by this baptism. In just a little time God will crush His Son on that cross with His holy wrath, a fiery wrath poured over His spirit, His spirit immersed in the awful spiritual agony of sin's judgment. This comes first. First He Himself takes the wrath His people deserved in their sin. (See Isaiah 53:10-11).

The way we mistreated Him before the cross was horrible. The way we cursed Him and mocked Him and spit on Him and beat Him and thrashed Him to a bloody pulp was unspeakable. But that didn't satisfy the wrath of God. It was when He was made sin for us. It was when He made propitiation for the sins of His people, satisfying God's holy demands against our sin, screaming, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." That's when the fiery wrath of God was baptizing His pure, sinless spirit for us. This is all so deadly serious. This is why He said, "How distressed I am until it is accomplished." Jesus lived a constant Gethsemane. Every day He lived on earth He knew it was coming. And it was all because of our sin. This is the price of redemption. This is the work of God reconciling us to Himself. This is the basis for our justification by faith alone. Christianity is deadly serious, isn't it?

There are those claiming to be Christian who deny all this. There is no wrath, they say. God didn't kill His Son on the cross. They are calling that child abuse, and God would never do that. There's no hell, either. Everybody is saved. The philosophy of Perennialism says all religions have one common truth - God. And the world of mankind hates the whole notion that the only way to God is through Jesus Christ. Several years ago senator Bernie Sanders grilled an appointee to a public office, "You have written that Muslims are under God's condemnation. Do you believe that?" Russell Vought replied over and over, "I am a Christian. Jesus is the only way to God." Sanders described this as hateful, an insult, indefensible for a public official. The exclusivity of Christ is a horrendous thought to our sophisticated, educated, biblically ignorant society. "Only one way to God? Horrors! That simply can't be!"

Jesus came as the great divider of all mankind.

Luke 12:51-53 "*Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather*"

division; 52 for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. 53 "They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Then Jesus declares, "You think I came to bring peace on earth? No! (emphatic) I'm telling you, but (strong contrast) division." Do you see again how deadly serious this all is? Of course, His saving work does bring the believer into peace with God and even the peace of God. But there is no peace with unbelief and disobedience, no peace without the truth of the Gospel. Here Jesus wakes us up with the bracing reality that His work of salvation divides people. The word "division" means disunion and dissension. Charles Spurgeon experienced this keenly in the Downgrade Controversy when he was fighting for the truth of Scripture against unbelief coming into the Baptist Union. Even his own students from his pastor's college and his own brother turned against him in a final vote. Christ divides, but the issue is not just being contrary. The edge that divides is the truth of the gospel. The gospel divides the wheat from the chaff. The gospel separates people, even in the closest, family relationships.

John Lennon sang that enchanting melody with its hellish lyrics, "Imagine there's no heaven, no hell, no religion; we'd all just be one." The ecumenical movement tries to reduce what everybody believes down to the lowest common denominator, say, "There is a god." Then we can all join together and sing kumbaya. There is never peace at the price of truth. This battle has taken place since the early centuries. Families and marriages have experienced the sharp edge of this dividing work of Christ. A wife comes to Christ and the husband reacts in madness at his wife's new faith. Parents who want the best for their kids sometimes react in hurt pride when their children come to Christ. "Why can't you just be a nice boy? Why all this Jesus stuff?"

Christ divides people in the closest human relationships. Peter urges wives with unbelieving husbands to do the best they can to honor them (1 Peter 3:1-2). Some unbelieving spouses won't put up with it. Plus, you have in this division all the horrible persecutions down through the centuries. The church has truly sailed through bloody seas. Don't expect to go to heaven from this world on flowery beds of ease. Just last week Boko-Haram beheaded a Nigerian pastor for refusing to deny Christ.

And yet, this is what Jesus alerted His people to in these very verses – "I came to bring division." Even in the family. He'll add, unless you love Me more than your flesh and blood, you can't be My disciple. In fact, He even says in Luke 14:26, "unless you hate your own flesh and blood, including yourself, you can't be My disciple." In other words, your loyalty to Christ must be paramount. He is your God and Savior! If others will not follow, still you must follow Christ, even if it causes division.

You need to discern the times we live in from God's perspective – vv. 54-57

Luke 12:54-56 And He was also saying to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming,' and so it turns out. 55 "And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, 'It will be a hot day,' and it turns out that way. 56 "You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time?"

Jesus adds something here to His warning about the fire, baptism, and dividing people. We're responsible to understand the times. The Jews of His day were great weathermen, whether it's forecasting rain coming in from the Mediterranean Sea or a heat wave blowing up from the southern desert. They are so shrewd, smart, and knowledgeable. They take pride in their climatological brilliance. We take pride in our technology, too. Amazing how smart phones work. We are shrewd, brilliant. We know how to make atomic bombs. We know how to build skyscrapers. We're developing Artificial Intelligence. We've put people on the moon. We can even change a person's gender, sort of. There seems no end to our smartness.

The Jews knew the seed of David was coming, their Messiah. Here He was, right in front of them, doing miracles, healing people, raising people from the dead, casting out demons, but they refused to discern what was happening right before their eyes. They were hypocrites. In Romans 1 Paul says sinners know the truth but they suppress the truth in unrighteousness

What about us? Do you discern the times? Do you see where we are headed? Do you think mankind is growing nearer and nearer to God? If you stop and analyze the present time, this epoch in which we live, you certainly see we are on a fast track deeper into rebellion against God, flouting His rules, mocking His character. The world is increasingly as one, but it's very superficial. You can see the growing apostasy, the preparation for the Anti-Christ and the global economy, where only those who swear allegiance to the Anti-Christ can buy and sell. We are living in those difficult last days that Paul told Timothy would come in 2 Timothy 3:1ff. Men will be self lovers, money lovers, pleasure lovers and worse.

This is the time to resist any drifting away from the faith of the Scriptures. The recent documentary "American Gospel, Christ Crucified" exposes the drift into unbelief among so-called Progressive Christianity. God's wrath, eternal judgment, and Christ bearing God's wrath on the cross are all denied. The Presbyterian Church USA took the song, "In Christ Alone" out of their hymnal. Why? Because of the line, "The wrath of God was satisfied." One PCUSA pastor said, "The cross was not an instrument of God's wrath." The Methodist Church is probably headed toward a divide over the LGBTQ and same sex marriage issues.

Discern the times. Jesus wants you and me to be very aware of what is happening in our world and in the Christian world. Jesus asks, "Why do you not analyze this present time?" They should have understood He was the Messiah. Biblical Christianity is deadly serious!

You need to quickly settle your spiritual account with your Judge.

Luke 12:57-59 "And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right? 58 "For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. 59 "I say to you, you will not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent."

Jesus uses a typical legal scenario to urge us to spiritual action. A person who is being taken to court is wise when he does what he can to settle out of court. In the same way be quick to settle your account with your God, the one Judge who finally counts. Repent of your sin, submit to Him, trust Him, do it now. Today is the day of salvation. Don't put it off. Jonathan Edwards preached that sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" to move the people to deal immediately with their God. And I am really saying the same thing today. Flee the wrath to come, and it is coming. The only escape is to hide in the cross of Jesus who was baptized fully into the wrath of God that you and I deserve. Don't put it off. Right now settle with him. You don't want the officer to throw you into prison because while it's possible a debtor might finally after a long while pay the very last cent, no one will pay off the debt he owes for his sin to God.

Biblical Christianity is serious. Jesus never apologized or toned down the message of divine wrath. He loved us too much for that. He didn't tickle our ears with a feel-good message we'd like in our natural sinful condition. We all do well to listen and respond, either in repentance and faith in Christ, or as believers, in the deepest thankfulness that He showed mercy to us instead of making us endure His everlasting wrath for our own sins. Truly, through the cross "the wrath of God was satisfied."