

The Gospel According to Luke
Luke 12:49-59
Reading: Luke 12:49-59

Sermon #57
November 10, 2019

Jesus Divides

Not Peace But Division

Jesus spoke to us last week about the motivation for one to seek the Kingdom of God was to be watchful for the Master's return. Jesus was teaching vigilance in the face of eschatological crisis; had the Messiah truly come? What was God doing in history as understood from the Old Testament? What was God's plan for the future? Coming judgment or reward are tied to how one believes in Christ, their living by faith which can be partly observed in one's obedience to the Master especially in the realm of serving those in the church. Our consistent behavior shows who and what we love and trust. To be clear, Jesus certainly was not teaching salvation by works, but by grace alone. We observe the outward signs of faith; love of Christ, considering others more worthy than oneself, having a servant's heart and holding fast to the Word of God, but only God can know a person's true heart.

Prior to teaching about his second coming, he taught that the world is not the true home for believers, we are sojourners. Therefore, we are to live with daily anticipation of Jesus' return, he pointed out that believers are to seek the Kingdom and not earthly needs because our lives are more than food and clothing. Seeking the Kingdom is the focus of a healthy Christian. A Christian will seek the Kingdom because the Kingdom of God is where they long to lay up treasure. Along the way, God meets our spiritual and physical needs and even more - he grows us spiritually.

A few weeks ago, Jesus warned believers against the fear of man. We are not to fear or be anxious about how people may persecute or attack, but believers are to fear or have profound reverence and awe for God. We are not to be afraid of mankind because our allegiance is to God and we trust Him with our lives and even our death. For by God's grace we are given faith to believe in Jesus as the Christ and we are forgiven and reconciled back to God and our place in heaven is guaranteed. Daily through study of God's Word and prayer we are to separate from the world and come into unity with God – seeking his kingdom.

Jesus now moves us a step further in His teaching. To seek righteousness, to be a faithful servant and to fear God will result in division between people. Standing up for truth in this world of diverse subjectivism, a world that does not believe in absolute truth will not make one popular or accepted, but an object of persecution. Jesus was clear when he said, **“This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”** (John 3:19) Paul taught the church and believers are God's light in the world. He asked the church in Corinth, **“What fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?”** (2 Corinthians 6:14b-15) The world teaches one is to be willing to accept all and any ideas as valid; every idea, it seems, is as good as any other – except – except the idea that there is one right idea, except there is one right eternal truth. For the world everything is a shade of gray, but for God things are forever clear and black and white; there is absolute truth. There is good and evil. God calls his children not to compromise and live in the light of eternal truth. We are to be light that exposes evil, a light that shows a better way, a light that warms people's souls with the love of Christ.

Earlier in Chapter 12, Jesus taught His disciples that they will be persecuted by the authorities and that they will be given the words to say when they need them, just as God did for Stephen. The disciples learned that they will be attacked by society and its leaders who live in darkness. Persecution often strengthens and unites the church and believers in their resolve. When Joyce and I lived overseas as missionaries the evil and spiritual attacks were clear and this made it easier to see the battle lines and stand strong, but here in America some things that are evil are very clear, however, there is a great deal of evil within our society that is not so obvious and is more like a slow growing cancer that creeps into believer's lives and by the time they realize what has truly happened; they are being consumed and in the need of radical surgery. This morning's teaching is concerned with this very problem; some obvious and some stealthy evil that attacks from within and causes division within the church and families and marriages.

Fire Brings Division

Jesus begins these last 11 verses of chapter 12 speaking of cleansing fire. Reading verses 49 and 50, Jesus says, **“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!”** Jesus brought God's truth back to the people of earth. What man had corrupted for centuries, Jesus now set straight – his truth burned away the corruption and exposed evil and his teaching and preaching brought division. The people had listened so long to the corruption of the Pharisees that they believed them to be true. Jesus says to those spiritually blind and deaf, **“Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?”** (Matthew 8:18) Jesus was breaking through the fog, the grayness, that the devil uses to hide evil and call it truth. Some saw the light and believed and fell at Jesus' feet and worshipped God the Father and God the Son and took truth into

their hearts. But some heard the same words of truth and would not accept the truth for they loved evil and they thought they could silence truth by killing Jesus. It is the same today. When the truth of Scripture is presented it divides. It always has and it always will. Nations are divided, communities are divided and even families are divided.

The bloodiest war in American history was not doubt the Civil War – it divided an entire county. The American casualties of all the wars beginning with the American Revolution to the Iraqi/Afghanistan conflicts is about 1,400,000 over half of this total, approximately 750,000 died in the American Civil War. In this war the enemy was not a different nationality and was not easily distinguished. Here, families were divided. Union Senators had sons go to fight for the Confederacy. Brothers were found on both sides. Mothers had to pray and write to sons who were fighting against each other, all this over the issue of politics, slavery and economics. The evil of slavery brought division and conflict. The truth of Christ is the most important issue before mankind; one would naïve to think that Christ will not bring conflict and division. Jesus brought division the first time he walked this earth. He brought the fire that burned men’s souls with the truth and this brought division. His ministry created division from the broken and evil way the people had become use to and he brought the cleansing fire of truth and the division and disorder grew until evil people crucified him.

People were questioning; why has God let Israel be punished, when will the promised Messiah come, what is right and what is wrong? John the Baptist “answered them all, saying, ‘I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’” (Luke 3:16) For those who hungered for truth, for those who were seeking God, for those who were prepared - they would see all

the future and truth in Jesus. They would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and their hearts would burn bright with the fire of God's truth and at the same time God's truth would be a fire that consumed and brought disorder and division. This is why the writer of Hebrews wrote to believers, "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28-29) When Christ walked the earth as both man and God his presence brought holiness and a refiner's fire that either refined people into gold or burned them away as dross. It is the same today; for those who reject Jesus this fire is a fire of judgement, but for those who love Christ and he is their Lord and Savior the fire of God is refining and part of the sanctification process whereby we grow ever closer to God.

Preaching the Word of God has power and no one preached the Word of God with more power than Jesus the Christ and as he preached the fire of God's truth was ignited. Today it is the same, it is the Word of God that has power and ignites a fire of refining or consuming. Jesus knew that his coming would create division and disorder and unrest throughout history until his return and the thought of people perishing and burning in the Lake of Fire for eternity distressed him. This is why Jesus said in verse 50 of Luke 12, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" Jesus knew God's Word and plan of redemption would mean he would have to suffer and be crucified and that would accomplish phase one of God's plan for redemption – Jesus gave the "baptism to be baptized with" and it is only believing in Jesus as the Christ that saves. I believe Jesus distress continues as history moves toward its climax with his return because people continue to reject the Word of God and suffer eternally.

As we take in the Word of God it acts like a fire in the sense of burning away all impurities contained within us. The more we read and study God's Word and spend time with him in prayer, the more we know what is right and the more we desire to accomplish God's truth in our lives. God's Word consumes the impurities or sins within us and refines us into pure gold. Does this not lay upon your heart and mind, that you, as a child of the eternal God, need to be purposeful in sharing the saving Gospel brought by Jesus the Christ with the lost!

I was raised in an unbelieving family, a hardworking family and a family with concern for the less fortunate. I grew up with a sense of right and wrong as long as it served my goals and I did not cross a line that would bring consequences. I thought my life was good, but the truth was - it was a train wreck – I just had not derailed. When Jesus came, he derailed me and saved me and with salvation came fire. The burning was painful as the fire of God burned away my sins and impurities, but then the Holy Spirit was like suave to my soul. If I had not responded, if I had not surrendered - God's fire would have destroyed me. However, Jesus used it to refine me and as the dross burned away it was replaced with his peace. It also brought division for I no longer saw the world the way my family did. I began to share with my family but they could not see past who I had been, for they were blind to the truth. I continued to love my siblings and parents in a greater and deeper love but my greatest love was for Jesus. I grew to understand what Jesus meant when he said, beginning in verse 52, **“For from now on in one house there will be five 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 her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”** For Joyce and I, our love Christ created division with our families, friends and those I worked with and for and

those who worked for me. It also brought unity and love that Joyce and I had never experienced. It is not so much Jesus Himself but it is His Words and teaching that divides. Many can tolerate a Jesus who just heals and loves and blesses. Introduce them to the real Jesus and they very quickly change their demeanor. As Lucy asked concerning Aslan, **“Is he safe?” “Safe?”** said Mr. Beaver; **“don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”** C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Jesus the Lion of Judah is not safe, but he is good, He is King. Jesus brings division because his fire either refines believers or consumes unbelievers. What will we do when the Lord and eternal truth comes between friends or even family? Will we stay true to Christ, the Lion of Judah?

At our Lord’s birth we read that the angels declared, **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”** (Luke 2:14) Those whom God is pleased with are those who place their faith in His Son. Jesus says for believers, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”** (John 14:27) The division that Jesus and the gospel brings does not take away from the peace found within for a Christian – for the Holy Spirit lives within. In our passage this morning Jesus says he did not come to bring peace but division. How can Jesus be both peace and division? This is what we have been exploring.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace as Isaiah tells us, **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace here will be no end.”** (Isaiah 9:6-7) In this passage the prophet of God spoke of the future birth of Jesus and of the time when Jesus would rule at his second coming. Jesus gives peace to believers

now and at his second coming and at his coming the wrath of God will be poured out on the unbelieving world and then there will be eternal peace. The prophet later again spoke of the time when Jesus would return to reign forever, “The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD.” (Isaiah 65:25) At that time strife will end and the fierce Lion of Judah, who is also the Lamb of God reconciles peace and division and at this point Jesus will have separated the sheep from the goats and peace shall reign. That is in the future, but for now Jesus brings division among mankind.

However, we need to understand Jesus really is not the cause of division. Mankind’s evil heart is the guilty party. Understand, Jesus has told the truth to all people. It is a sinful world that rebels against Christ and His followers. Jesus is not the lawbreaker, but mankind is the lawbreaker. Jesus’ truth is right and good and is what all humanity should be living. The division comes when truth is presented and evil mankind rebels. We must always remember when there is doubt or conflict or confusion the truth is found in God the Father, God the Son who is the Living Word and God’s written Word. It is easy, if one objectively observes, to see the falseness and corruption in societies and other religions throughout the world when one is anchored in the truth of God.

During His earthly ministry Jesus would have brought peace to the broken and fallen world, but His people rejected Him. The result was only those who follow Jesus have peace and the rest of the world receives judgment. Peace on earth is conditional on acceptance of the Savior. The day is coming when there will be peace on earth, but unfortunately this peace follows the pouring out of God’s wrath.

For us, we must consider, am I willing to love Christ and stand for what He stood for even if the result is family division? What happens when we believe the truth of Christ and others in our families do not? What happens when we live out our Christian faith and in so doing others are offended? What happens if our obedience to Christ brings separation, condemnation and suffering? Will we hold fast to God's truth?

J C Ryle, pastor and bishop of the 19th century offers us very good counsel here, "Let us never be moved by those who charge the gospel with being the cause of strife and divisions upon earth ... it is not the Gospel which is to blame, but the corrupt heart of man. ... So long as some men and women will not repent and believe, and some will, there needs be division. To be surprised at it is the height of folly. The very existence of division is one proof of Christ's foresight, and of the truth of Christianity." Jesus said it would be and so it is and we must accept this division and not let it affect our peace in Christ.

Truth Brings Division

Jesus continues by confronting the people with the truth of the lack of spiritual knowledge. Reading beginning at verse 54 of Luke chapter 12, "*Jesus also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming.' And so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat,' and it happens. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"*

The people could predict the weather by what they observed. The people understood the cloud off the Mediterranean Sea meant rain or a south wind would bring arid heat. However, when it came to the signs of spiritual things, they we

oblivious. They had no spiritual discernment. What Jesus had been teaching them was right, but they could not see. They heard Him over and over again and even declared that they had never heard anyone teach with such authority. Yet, they failed to discern truth from error or the truth of God from the half-truths of the evil one.

If they can see a cloud or feel the wind and predict the weather, they should have been able to see the signs of the times. The signs that Jesus was the Messiah were plain – let me share a few with you. In Luke chapter 4 Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out of the man. Simon's mother-in-law was seriously ill, Jesus rebuked the illness and she was healed. In chapter 5 Jesus has Simon put out into the deep when that had fished all night and caught nothing but by his word their nets were breaking because they caught so many fish. When they came to shore and entered the nearby city they came upon a leper and Jesus touched him and he was healed. Likewise, he heals the paralytic. In chapter 6 Jesus heals the man's withered hand on the Sabbath. Then the scriptures say Jesus healed a great multitude from their sicknesses and diseases. Chapter 7 begins with Jesus healing the Centurion's servant and continues with the raising of the widow's son from the dead. In chapter 8 Jesus commands the storm to be still and it obeys and the sea is calm and then he heals another man with a demon. Jesus continues by healing Jairus daughter and the woman who had a discharge for many years. These miracles had been observed by individuals and groups of people, but we also know many, many people saw the miracles of Jesus, for example he fed 5,000 men plus women and children. Chapter 9 contains for more healings and then Jesus begins warning those who do not believe and telling them to be aware of the falseness of the Pharisees. We know the New Testament records only some of the miracles Jesus did, so the people saw many miracles and still did not believe.

They saw things and heard things only God could do and say. If the people had spiritual eyes to see, they would understand that the Son of God was in their midst. However, their eyes did not see and their ears did not hear because their hearts were hard towards God and they preferred evil over goodness. They should have bowed and served Him, but because they loved their sin, they remained separated from God. They saw all the signs that Jesus was the promised Messiah and still they rejected Him. They would rather listen to the corrupt Pharisees, who said Jesus did these miracles by the power of Satan. Jesus called them to see with their eyes and spirit and draw their own conclusions, but they were blind. The same is still true of people today.

The questions to ask ourselves today are these. “Do we see God’s truth in Jesus? If so, is Jesus worth serving at all costs?” I believe God gave people enough evidence to know the Messiahship of Jesus is irrefutable. Jesus was and is who He claims to be. Jesus is the Son of God who has come into the world to save sinners. If you believe these things to be true, the question now is, “Will you trust and serve Him no matter the cost? Or will you compromise when serving Christ becomes unpopular with your friends, family or job?”

Jesus ends by saying we should settle with our accusers if we sin and cause lost to someone. However, if we are being accused because of the truth of the gospel – then hold fast and prepare for whatever the world will persecute us with.

I close with the instruction of the Apostle Peter, “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. Peter continues by quoting Psalm 34, ¹⁰ For ‘Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue

from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:8-12) My beloved, you must decide for yourself; pursue a life of faith and obedience to Jesus as your Lord and Savior or a life in the fallen world. You cannot have 1 foot in the kingdom and the other in the world. You are either all in or you are out. It is up to you – you must decide. I have decided as Joshua challenged the people, “serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve ... for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15) I pray this is your choice also. Amen.