

## 34. The Signs of the Times

Luke 12:49-59

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

We are studying Jesus' talk to a crowd of many thousands outside the home of a Pharisee who had invited Christ to lunch. This talk lasts from the beginning of chapter twelve through to chapter thirteen, verse 9. In our previous study in verses 35-47, Jesus had been talking about His return to Earth, advising His people always to be ready for His arrival. He then went on to remind them, and us, that, when He comes, all will be held accountable to Him for our actions and the light we have received (12:47-48). The knowledge of God is a sacred trust, and many of us have been "entrusted with much," He says (v. 48). It is in the context of His second coming that Jesus then goes on to say:

<sup>49</sup>"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup>But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! <sup>51</sup>Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. <sup>52</sup>From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup>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."

### Fire on Earth

How do we interpret verse 49? What is this fire that He has said He will bring? Whatever it is, the longing of our Lord Jesus is that the time of this fire should come soon, and He wishes that it were already kindled. There are two interpretations that are the most plausible.

1) The first interpretation is that Jesus is speaking of a time that is still yet in the future where He will come for His people, but at the same time, He will bring the fire of His judgment on the Earth.

Many people have a perception that Jesus is meek, mild, loving, kind, and compassionate to all, and that He would not hurt a fly, but the truth of Scripture says that "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). Most of the time, when people think of Jesus, their first thought is of Him being born in a stable or, maybe, of His dying on a cross for the sins of the world. Somehow, we do not have a perception of a Christ with a whip, overturning tables and being angry against sin and injustice. The thought of an angry Jesus does not compute in our minds. Fire was a symbol of judgment in a number of places, e.g. the sacrifices in the temple were offered by fire.

The time will come when He will come for His people and, at the same time, bring the fire of His judgment and justice to Earth. Peter the Apostle writes about this time when he speaks about what will happen on the Day of the Lord: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10 KJV). Jesus is longing for His bride. This is why He is desirous that the fire would be kindled already. The wrongs will be righted. The vindication that many have longed for will come.

This will happen when the **Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire** with his powerful angels. <sup>8</sup>He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup>They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

When God first began dealing with me as to my eternal destiny, i.e. where I would go when I die, I had a picture of the coming of the Lord Jesus in my mind; perhaps, it could be thought of as a vision. It was of Jesus coming in the sky and on a white horse with the angels and with me cowering in fear on the Earth and seeking for somewhere to hide. You bet I was terrified that I may be found to be on the wrong side when He comes to judge the Earth and those that know not God!

Zephaniah the prophet also tells us about what that fiery event will be like. To those who have spurned Messiah's offer of the free gift of a complete pardon, the Lord will gather the nations and pour out His fierce anger:

<sup>8</sup>"Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD, "for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger. **The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger**" (Zephaniah 3:8).

Jesus will appear in blazing fire with His powerful angels, dishing out vengeance against those who do not know God. My perception of Jesus changed after coming across those words. The Lord gave me a fear of Him that moved me to seek His salvation before judgment would find me. In actual fact, after I became a Christian and thought about the truth of the Word of God, I realized that He had been working in my life for several years, but I had not been listening. Rather than my finding Him, He was the One Who had found me! It took me several years to wake up to the fact that **"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day"** (John 6:44). You that are reading these words, is it coincidence that you have come across these studies, or is it because God has been drawing you to Himself? There are no coincidences with God.

His coming will be preceded by the catching up of all those who have called upon Him for salvation. Jesus is clear that these two events will happen the same day, i.e. the catching up of the saints and the fire of judgement on the same day (Luke 17:26-29). Zephaniah the prophet continues by telling us that His delight will be upon those who have called upon the Lord. In fact, the Lord will sing over His bride:

**The LORD your God is with you; he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing"** (Zephaniah 3:17).

Coming in the fire of His jealousy, Jesus will bring about a separation between sheep and goats (saints and the unsaved) as mentioned in Matthew 25:31-46. He is longing for the time when His people shall see His face and the City of the New Jerusalem will be as Eden with God walking

with man in the cool of the evening: “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Revelation 22:4). What a day that will be!

2) The second interpretation is that of the fire that would fall on the Day of Pentecost, i.e. fifty days after Passover, the day Jesus was crucified. At the time Jesus spoke these words, the Day of Pentecost was still a few months away, and the Lord was still on His way to Jerusalem. Before Christ came on the scene, John the Baptist had spoken about His appearing in this way: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Luke 3:16). This was what was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost:

<sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:1-4).

The fire speaks of the cleansing agency of the Holy Spirit. Fire burns the dross from our lives, while at the same time brands us and seals us with the Holy Spirit. When we come to Christ and receive the gift of new life, we are sanctified, i.e. set apart from this world to live for Christ alone. Fire speaks of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The divine Silversmith wants to burn the dross of sin from our lives until He can see His own image in the silver, and then He is pleased with His workmanship: “For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). The longing of the Lord Jesus was for that fire to be already kindled. His longing is for intimacy and oneness with His bride (John 17:22), the Body of Christ. On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God came, and just as Eve was born out of the side of Adam, so Christ's bride would be born out of the side of the suffering of Christ. The Roman spear that pierced His side brought forth the blood of the eternal covenant that would be the redemption price for His bride. Both interpretations are valid.

Jesus then goes on to speak of a baptism through which He must pass:

<sup>50</sup>But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!

Question 1) Jesus says that He has a baptism to undergo (v. 50). Hadn't He already been baptized at the start of His ministry? What do you think He meant? What was distressing Him until it was completed?

As the Lamb of God, Jesus knew that He was sent to be the sacrificial Lamb of God. Jesus said that He had a baptism to undergo, and how distressed He was until it was over. For His people to be made right before God, someone had to pay the price of the judgment, and only the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ could cleanse from sin. As the Judge of all the Earth, he could not excuse a guilty man, such as you and me. The only remedy was that Christ would take our place; the judgment would fall on Him.

## A Baptism into Suffering

The word “baptism” is translated from the Greek word *baptisma*. It means to dip or immerse completely. It was used in the common Greek language of a cloth being dyed by dipping in a bath until it was saturated with the dye. This isn’t talking about water baptism; which Jesus had experienced nearly three years earlier. The baptism about which he was talking was an immersion in the sufferings of the cross. He was not only to taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:9), but also He was going to be dipped, saturated, and soaked in sin, to the point where the Scripture tells us that He would become sin: “**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God**” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The baptism in the Spirit could not come for His people until His baptism in the cross, which brought reconciliation between God and man. Jesus went on to say how distressed he was until it was completed. The word distressed is the Greek word, *sunechomai*, and it means to hold fast, to press together, to be seized, affected, and afflicted. The thought is of how the cross loomed over Jesus. How affected He was by how the cross would set free His people from Satan’s stranglehold on their lives. He was seized by a continual focus on the cross.

### **Not Peace but Division**

**Question 2) Have you personally experienced any division or opposition in your family or friends because of your interest or focus on the Lord Jesus Christ?**

There is a spiritual dynamic that goes along with the name and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have never yet heard a person say the name “Buddha” in vain when an accident occurs. Nor has the name “Mohammed” been spoken in vain when a drink is knocked over on a table. Among those who do not yet know Christ, the name of Christ is often spoken in vain. Yet, it is avoided in interviews on television. Scarcely on television is there someone or something that speaks honorably of the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems more acceptable to use the name “God,” very rarely the name of Christ. It is because there is power in the name of Jesus. Jesus is a name with authority behind it. It carries a weighty spiritual dynamic whenever the name is spoken by a believer. The person of Christ brings a division in relationships. This is seen when a Muslim, or a Hindu, or a Jew, as well as other religions, become baptized into Christianity. All hell breaks loose. One can be interested in witchcraft, Eastern religions, séances and many weird cults, but as soon as one is baptized in the name of Christ, often the parents will cut them out of their will and have a funeral for the one who believes. Much of what is done to the believer in a family is not understood by the one dishing out the bad behavior. True Bible-believing Christianity will bring a spiritual division.

**Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, “He is a good man.” Others replied, “No, he deceives the people” (John 7:12).**

**Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him (John 7:43-44).**

When I baptized my sister, my stepmother found out about the baptism due to it being in the local newspaper, and she exploded in anger. Her anger was very unnatural and quite an eye-opener to me. It was a wonderful joy for me to baptize my sister, and it should have been a joy to my stepmother; instead, it brought great anger. Be encouraged, those of you who are enduring

division in your family because of your stand for Christ, for you are not alone. The Spirit of God is called alongside to help you and will stand close to you at such times. Paul, the Apostle, tells of a time when he stood before his accusers and no one was with him. He said, “**But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength**” (2 Timothy 4:17). It may seem as if everyone has left you and that you are alone, but the Lord is by your side.

### **The Signs of the Times**

<sup>54</sup>He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. <sup>55</sup>And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. <sup>56</sup>Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? <sup>57</sup>"Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? <sup>58</sup>As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. <sup>59</sup>I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny" (Luke 12:49-59).

My early life as a commercial fisherman enabled me to learn to see weather patterns before they would get to me. A Northeast wind would bring greater visibility. I don't know why, although I suspect that it was due to lack of pollutants in the air. A Northeast wind blew clear across the North Sea (off the east coast of England). A Southeast wind would cause us to roll a lot more due to the wind's being on our beam (the side of our fishing boat), and the Westerly wind would often bring rain. It rains a lot of the time in England. Jesus was saying to them that, if they knew how to see natural phenomena and how to interpret the signs before they happened, then why did they not seek to look ahead to interpret spiritual signs?

**Question 3) What are some signs that you see that concern you about the future? What can we do to prepare for the things we see that may befall our nation, our world, our church, or our family?**

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us all in this way: “**Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts**” (Hebrews 3:15). This passage speaks of having soft, pliable hearts to hear and be diligent to be guided by the Spirit for the days ahead. It is clear that we are entering dangerous waters where the Master needs to be at the helm of our lives, and not we ourselves. We must be sensitive to His voice in these days. Many years ago, I remember reading the book, “*The Happiest People on Earth*” by Demos Shakarian. Demos was from Armenia, a part of the country of Turkey, that went through severe persecution of Christianity. More than a million people were massacred in the early part of the twentieth century. Before it happened, the Spirit had been urging Demos to leave Armenia and emigrate to the United States. It was illogical for him to leave completely his country and social network. Some Christians heard a powerful prophetic word to leave, but many did not obey the Spirit and were caught in the massacre. Demos heard and left, and his family was spared from the slaughter that ensued.

**Question 4) If the Spirit urged you to do something similar, do you feel that you would be able to hear Him and respond to His prompting?**

We must grow in our sensitivity and learn to interpret the times in which we are living. Our very lives may be at stake!

Some years ago in China, the majority of a certain town worked in the local coal mine. Due to its being a local fault area for earthquakes, the only warning they had was a woman near the mine who watched over a seismograph with an alarm system that rang through the mine. The seismograph was attended by a Christian woman that had a sensitive heart to God. It happened that one day the Spirit of God prompted her to ring the alarm bell even though she saw nothing on the seismograph. At first, she argued with the Lord, but the promptings of the Lord became more urgent. When she sounded the alarm, many hundreds of people came up from the mine. When they saw that there was nothing unusual on the seismograph, they were very angry with the woman for wasting their time. Just at that time, a powerful earthquake struck. The whole town realized that their lives were saved by the God that the lady served. The whole town came to Christ as a result of the woman's sensitivity to the Spirit.

### **Be Reconciled to God**

<sup>57</sup>Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? <sup>58</sup>As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. <sup>59</sup>I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny (Luke 12:57-59).

Until we come to Christ, the Bible says that we are enemies: “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior” (Colossians 1:21). Some would say that it is the devil that is the adversary, and in a sense, that might be the intent. However, I don't see that we are ever to agree with Satan, our adversary. It is more logical that Jesus is speaking to the crowd of listeners that are not yet disciples. To those who oppose His salvation message, God is the adversary, walking along the road with them, trying to break through to the sinner. The sad reality of life is that life is a journey to judgment. He does not want to be our judge, but our Savior. We are to agree with Him to the fact that we have broken His law and to receive His gift of a full pardon before we reach the end of the road. If not, you will never get out of the prison of your sins, for there is no other payment for sin.

Many people are closed-minded to the Gospel because it is so simple. Some refuse to be reconciled to God on the way, even those in our own families. God uses the difficulties and the pain of the way to implore us to plead for mercy. He uses preachers and teachers, the radio and television, and even the Internet to call to those who are still not right with Him. For those people walking along the road of life without Christ, the further along the road they travel, the quieter the voice becomes for those who resist the call of grace. This is why Matthew's Gospel records that we are to agree with Him quickly: “Settle matters **quickly** with your adversary who is taking you to court” (Matthew 5:25).

It is not that God gives up on you, but our hearts get harder, unbending, and set in our ways. Now is the time. Today is the day! The death of Christ has no value to you until you believe. The Gospel is so simple that even a child can believe and be saved. Christ has already won the free

gift of eternal life for you, and He offers it freely. His death on the cross was for you and in place of you. It was a substitutionary death. He took your place. The penalty of sin is death, not only physical death but also separation from God. Christ came and willingly bore that penalty Himself.

**For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).**

Believing in the New Testament use of the word is not a mental assent to these facts, but a belief that brings about a change in your life. As I am writing, I am sitting in a chair. I have a mental assent that this chair will support me if I sit on it, I assent to the fact that it will hold me up, but mentally believing something is not the biblical act of faith. Bible believing faith is the act of resting your weight on it! It is the act of sitting down in it and resting my weight on the chair. Have you ever taken the step of resting your soul in Christ? Ask Him right now to forgive your sin. Specify particular sins that have been weighing on your soul. Talk to Him about them. Cast yourself on Jesus! Plead with him while you are on the way to forgive you your debt of sin. He has promised He will forgive you! The above Scripture proclaims that He will.

Receive His gift of eternal life. On Christmas Day, my grandson will still get a Christmas gift even though he may have done something wrong on Christmas Eve. Why? Because a gift is given not on the basis of what a person has done but on the heart and goodness of the giver! Paul the Apostle wrote: **“The gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23)**. Receive the gift of God as a child receives a gift at Christmas.

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