

Luke 12:49-53. ⁴⁹ "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. ⁵² From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, 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."

Why Would Jesus Ever Say Such a Thing?

- 1. To prepare us for his return.**
- 2. To equip us against the devil's schemes.**

There is a general rule that a person ought not to discuss politics or religion even among family because such topics are too divisive. One might expect that Jesus would speak clearly against such divisiveness especially in regard to religion. After all, God's Word speaks about the unity that we have within the body of Christ, the bond of the Spirit, how we are all created by the same Almighty God. And while God's Word does speak of such unity within the family of believers, as we take a closer look at God's Word the reminder is consistently there that there will always be division especially between believer and unbeliever and that division will even impact our families. In his words today Jesus does confirm that there will be division because of him, but he doesn't want believers to avoid the topic of following him, but he wants us to stand firm in him despite the pressures of those around us.

It would be much easier to talk about Jesus in a way that is appealing to all the masses and thus to the entire family so that we can avoid those awkward moments of religious tensions within the family. Because of the desire to avoid such confrontation within the family, along with other reasons, there will always be an appeal within our culture to mold Jesus into whatever we would like him to be. And so it is that people often strip away that which offends or bothers them about Jesus and his teachings and make him out to be the all-inclusive and user friendly Savior; as one who accommodates tirelessly to our ideas and our beliefs, and bends and molds to our needs. But this depiction falls far short of correctly portraying what God has told us about himself in his Word. In his word God describes himself as the potter and his people are the clay. (***Isaiah 64, Jeremiah 18***). We are not to mold and change who he is and what he wants us to believe, rather he molds and shapes us through his eternal truths.

And so in these verses along with a number of other places in Scriptures Jesus warns those who would paint God with such blurred lines and then he points out one coming reality that is one of those things that people often prefer to sweep under the rug. Jesus speaks here of judgment and the distinct division of believer and unbeliever. He warns his listeners that line will be so real and so striking that it will divide even the closest bonds of the human experience, piercing even the bonds of family.

That's difficult to think about? Why would Jesus say such a thing? As we look at the difficult words of Jesus we must first be aware of the context. Read through the surrounding verses and you will see that Jesus is talking to those who think everything is just fine between themselves and God or those who don't really concern themselves with such matters at all. In the verses just prior to our lesson Jesus lays down a hefty warning. ⁴⁷ ***"That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows."*** ⁴⁸ ***But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.***

This is the context of his warning in our lesson for today. These words of Jesus are a wake-up call to those who are careless or indifferent or even ignorant to the consequences and condemnation that sin and unbelief brings.

And so these words cannot be dismissed as something that is merely out of character for Jesus nor can they be brushed aside as "he didn't really mean it that way". No, these are words that his audience needs to hear. He is speaking to sinners who are setting themselves up for an eternity of destruction and so he speaks of the judgment that *is* to come.

Yes, these words seem to stand in such contrast to the familiar and gentle words of Jesus that we quickly memorize and take to heart as favorite passages. However, as we hear these words we must remember: this is not a different Jesus. This is the same Jesus speaking to an audience who needs a different tone. To those who are broken by sin, who are contrite in heart and who tremble before God, Jesus speaks with the appropriate tender words of comfort. ***A bruised reed he will not break a smoldering wick he will not snuff out (Isaiah 42:3).*** And yet it is from the same heart of love from that the Savior speaks the appropriate and loving words of rebuke to the stubborn. To those who hearts are not broken but are instead hardened by the lies that the lazy flesh loves to grab onto he chastises and warns. To those who insist, *I'm fine. I don't need to change. God needs to adjust to me and he will because he is love.* To such an audience Jesus speaks the necessary words of reproach. Jesus hurls fire under their chin to get them to wake up and to stand with proper reverence so that they realize they will one day stand and face the Almighty God. No, this is not even a different side of Jesus but this is the same Jesus who consistently acts and speaks in love. In love Jesus throws down fire before those who through their spiritual indifference and ignorance are in danger of spiritually sleep walking off an eternal cliff that leads to condemnation.

So what do we do with this warning that stands out as shockingly different to the soothing passages of comfort that we so readily associate with our Savior? As the Scripture says. ***He who has ears let him hear (Matthew 11:15).*** These words are meant for you and me and everyone to hear. We shouldn't disregard this passage as something that Jesus would never really say, or that it is not meant for us, because it doesn't seem like *the Jesus I know*. No, the Jesus we know did speak these words, he did mean what he says here, and this is an important truth that is recorded in Scripture for us to hear. He speaks to those stubborn in our nature and in the way we carry out our lives and even in the way that approach our God and that includes you and me. We see so many around us mold and shape Jesus into the God they want him to be, there is strong pull for us to do the same especially when we are uncomfortable with the message he brings to us. These words of warning, of woe, are needed as they serve to remind us that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is also the coming Judge. The one who was wrapped up in

swaddling clothes, who came to speak words of comfort and peace, also comes to throw fire down before us.

Jesus' words of warning equip us so that we won't give into the habits of our over-accepting culture and our misguided sinful preferences. His warnings make us ready and prepared so we don't fall into the dangerous tendency of imagining for ourselves a God who is only warm and fuzzy and who is undiscerning of our beliefs and actions. Instead at the direction of our Savior and his Word we will take in the absolute high definition brilliance of who our God is as defined by Scripture. We are to take these truths of Scripture to heart and then teach these truths properly to next generation. Jesus is the holy God. He is holier, wiser and higher than our most intelligent and rational thoughts. He is perfectly holy and just and will punish those who do not believe yet he is still also our gracious and compassionate Savior who will spare believers from the punishment we deserve. Our sins led him to the cross and therefore should not be tolerated and brushed aside as inconsequential, but should be considered as something that incurs the wrath of God and could drag us into the fires of hell. Sin and unbelief can keep sinners from the unending purity of the new heavens and the new earth. And yet our holy God who will come as Judge is the same one who took on flesh to suffer as one of us. Let us fix our eyes on the fullness of God in Christ Jesus. Take in the richness of who our God and is and then teach these truths to the next generation. Teach your children about heaven and hell, about sin and grace, about death and life. Learn about and then teach the next generations about their Savior Jesus who is truly their friend in the sense that he cares about us so much that he doesn't just tell us what we want to hear, but what we need to hear. Learn and take to heart and then teach your children and grandchildren that Jesus is the ultimate friend who loves us so much that he was willing to lay down his life for us undeserving sinners.

As Jesus speaks these words of warning and woe he knows with increasing awareness and focus what his mission and purpose is as the Christ. With a longing voice he looks to the time when he can gather believers to himself for all eternity as he speaks the words, ⁴⁹ ***"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!*** Why would our loving Savior say such a thing? As the God-man looks ahead to the ultimate purpose of his first coming he also pears over the agony of the cross to his second coming. He looks to the great sorting of souls. He looks to the purification of this world of sin by fire and the new heavens and new earth that will emerge from the cleansing fires of Judgment Day. He looks ahead to the Last Day of this earth when he will gather all those who believe in him body and soul to the eternal peace of heaven.

But first, before that day of final purification, the day of his suffering is near at hand. And so he says, ⁵⁰ ***But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed.*** Jesus knew he would have to submerge beneath the "waters" of suffering and death for he came to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all people. But not everyone would believe, and he knew that eternal judgment will be seen even in the temporal division of families. It will be a difficult and painful reality that family members will be divided in their beliefs, the intimate bond of family is often painfully perforated and ripped and torn by religious differences and by unbelief. It is the sinful and rebellious heart of human beings that makes this unfortunate truth a painful reality within our time here on earth. And then it is the devil who picks up this reality

and runs with it. It is the devil who may use this close bond of family to try to tear each one of us away from God and into eternal misery. While our Savior flashes the flames of judgment in front of us in warning and love, the devil in his deception waves the lack of household turmoil in front of our eyes as his cunning bait. He counts on the fact that we will be lured in by the promise of temporal peace and will be more willing to compromise the truths of God's Word, no matter the eternal consequence. He desires that we water down who God is and what God wants from us so that we can avoid the troubles and the tension and the trials of addressing family members and loved ones who do not believe in Jesus as their Savior or who live in defiance of God's Word. That great deceiver fashions family as our household god as he looks to drag us down into a denial of who our God and Savior truly is. And as he does this we must realize that he desires not just our family and friends, but he desires each one of us.

How are we to handle that temptation, those schemes of the devil? How can a Christian man or woman who has such strong human emotions put the eternal importance of God's Word above all other things, even above family? Trust in the LORD, look to his Word, pray for guidance, and know that God gives support to stand firm in Christ Jesus as he encourages you with portions of his Holy Scriptures like the section we just heard from Ephesians chapter 6. ***10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God... 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith... 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray...***

Look to Jesus, be equipped against the attacks of the devil, and pray. Our struggle is not merely against flesh and blood, it is not merely against an unbelieving family member whose influence pulls us away from God, but our struggle is against Satan himself. The great deceiver is so despicable and sly that he will use even members of your own family to try to pry you away from your God. But dear Christians stand firm in Christ Jesus for we are held up, equipped, and supported by God himself. He gives us the full armor of his Word so that we may be equipped to fend off all the attacks of the devil, no matter how personal those attacks may be. It may be difficult. It may be trying. It may be painful. But God gives us the strength and helps us to see past the temporal, to look to the day of judgment with eagerness knowing on that day the LORD Jesus, our Savior and our Judge will call all those who believe in him to our eternal home in heaven.

Why would Jesus ever say something like that? To warn us and make us ready. To prepare us and equip us with God's Holy Word, so that we may see and know who our God truly is no matter what lies and trials are thrown at us. In love Christ's warns, prepares, and equips us so that we may be gathered and kept within the family of believers for all eternity. Amen.