

He came to bring enmity, not peace

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into Luke 12:49-59, exploring the challenging concepts Jesus presents about division, judgment, and the end times. Jesus speaks of sending fire on the earth, symbolizing judgment and purification. He also discusses the baptism of suffering he must undergo, emphasizing the deep emotional and spiritual turmoil he will face. Furthermore, Jesus addresses the inevitable division his message will bring, even within families, highlighting the separation between truth and error. The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining relationships with unbelievers while standing firm in the truth, reflecting Jesus' love and compassion.

Scripture: Luke 12:49, Luke 12:50, Luke 12:51, Matthew 20:22, Micah 7:6

Description

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Transcript

And we're in Luke chapter 12 still, Luke chapter 12, and we're going to read 49 to 59. So Luke chapter 12 verses 49 through 59. Luke 12 49, I came to send fire on the earth and how I wish it were already kindled.

But I have a baptism to be baptized with and how distressed I am till it is accomplished. Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided and three against two and two against three.

Father will be divided 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 her mother-in-law. Then he said, then he also said to the multitudes, whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say a shower is coming, and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say there will be hot weather, and there is.

Hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time? Yes, and why even of yourselves do you not judge what is right? When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, make every effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge delivered you to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you shall not depart from there until you have paid the very last mite. So, I'm going to try and deal with verses 49 through 53 this morning, a very difficult passage, because of trying to understand exactly what Jesus is talking about.

You see, here's one of the problems we have, is when we just read through the Bible and we just skim through it, we don't ask the questions, what is he talking about? What is this about? And in fact, he is dealing here with two concepts that are difficult to understand, and then there is a third concept which is not that difficult to understand, but difficult to accept. So, this is difficult at a number of levels. The first verse begins, or verse 49 begins, I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.

Now, that looks pretty simple, and as I said, if you just read through it, you say, well, that's what he says, but exactly what is Jesus talking about? And the difficulty of this is evidenced by the many different opinions by theologians and commentators as to exactly what Jesus is talking about. And as usual, I'm not going to tell you what they all say. I'm going to tell you what I believe Jesus is talking about.

But one of the ideas is that he's talking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. You remember that on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down in the form of flames of fire on the heads of those that were speaking. But that's a long stretch.

It's very difficult to make that connection with this connection. Notice what he is saying, and he says, I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled. So, he's talking about a consuming fire.

He's not talking about flames. He's talking about a big fire. And the connection is pretty obvious if you remember where we began in the book of Luke.

If you go back to Luke chapter 3, verse 17, John the Baptist was speaking and prophesying, and John says, his winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor, and gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. So, what John is talking about, or predicting, is that Jesus will judge. The winnowing fan and the cleaning of the threshing floor clearly is something that has to do with a judgment.

Jesus tells a parable, and he speaks about the wheats and the tares, and then the tares are gathered, and they're thrown into the fire. So, he is speaking about judgment. He's speaking about fire as a cleansing and a purging thing, not just in the sense of a cleansing within each one of us individually, but a cleansing of the earth.

Now, when you look at the whole of this passage that we read from 49 through 59, if you look at it all together, he is speaking about the end times. He's speaking about the latter days. And so, the connection then between the fire is with judgment, and not just judgment as such, but the purging and the cleansing that comes with judgment.

And so, when he says, I came to send fire on the earth, and that's what John said at the beginning. He had come to do, he will gather the wheat in the barn, but the chaff will be burnt with unquenchable fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand.

He's going to throw it up in the air. The wind is going to blow away the chaff. The wheat will be separated.

So, he's talking about a separation. Now, remember the context again, the broader context. Jesus is on his way to the cross.

This is the last year of his earthly ministry. He is revealing to his disciples the cross, and they're beginning to understand some of it, but they don't really get it. And we're going to see in the next statement, he deals more specifically with the cross.

But he is also dealing with that which is beyond. But at the same time, opposition is rising against him. And so, he was very popular at this point, up to this point.

People were following him by the thousands. And we know that eventually, the people would turn against him. Others would just fall away, and he would be left with a handful, maybe 120 in the upper room, another 500 in Galilee.

That seems to be what he is left with at the end. And so, there is an urgency in the statement, and what he is saying is, I wish that everything was over. Now, what do I mean by that? I mean that he is facing this mixture in Israel.

A small minority believe him, believe the gospel. The majority don't. The majority are not just against him, but are against God, because they're engrossed in their own religion, in their own nationalism, and all the stuff that they have filled their lives with, but they're not really interested in God, or in the Lord Jesus, or in the salvation that he has to offer.

And he understands that in the end, they will be damned. They will be lost. And so, he's really, as I understand this verse, saying, I wish it was all over.

And I wish that that which was to be consumed would be consumed, that that which is pure and holy might be brought forth, and that the new heaven and the new earth may, in fact, continue. There's a longing, I believe, in every true child of God for justice, for justice on the earth, for an end and a cessation of hostilities, and of war, and of the hatred, and of the sin, and the evil, and the wickedness that's going on. But what's going to stop it? Well, we have all sorts of ideas, but nothing is going to stop it except the ultimate judgment, when he separates the chaff from the wheat, when he separates the evil and the wicked from those who are righteous.

Only then will everything stop. Until that day, there will be a constant conflict between truth and error, between light and darkness, and there will not be peace. I'm going to come back to that idea in a moment.

And so, there's a desire to see the pure result of his work at the end of the day, the same way as a blacksmith would take a piece of steel and puts it in the fire, and it's all black, and dirty, and scaly, and he beats it, and he forges it out into the shape that he wants it. But it doesn't look good until the work is finished, and all of the nonsense and the dirt has been—the trash has been burnt off, and the thing is cleaned up, and it comes out as a beautiful implement or whatever it is that he has made. And so, Jesus, I believe, is longing not for the judgment.

He's not longing to see the wicked consumed. He's not longing to see the earth consumed, and we know that that's going to happen. But I believe what he is longing for is for a cleansing, and a purging, and for us to be done with the sin, for us to be done with the evil, and with the wickedness, and the injustice, and all

the stuff that we're seeing going on around us in the world today.

I believe that that's what he is crying for, and he is saying, I wish it was all done. It was all cleansed and purified, and the sin and the evil and wickedness was gone. Now, the next statement is just as difficult, and he says, I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished.

The problem with the word baptism, of course, is the moment we see that word, we think about what a baptism, because that's the way the word is used generally. But remember that that's not the only form of baptism found in the New Testament. The New Testament also speaks about being baptized into his body, which is not what a baptism.

You find that in Romans chapter 6. It also speaks about being baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire. But this is something different, because Jesus is saying there is a baptism with which I still need to be baptized. So, this is something in the future.

It's not something that has been done. So, if we say then that the New Testament speaks of three baptisms, the baptism into Christ, was he baptized into Christ? Well, he is Christ. He can't be baptized into himself.

Was he baptized with the Holy Spirit? Yes, he was. Well, in two senses. In the one sense that because he is God, he is forever filled with the Holy Spirit.

He's always part of the Holy Spirit in the sense of the Trinity. But also, in John's baptism, remember, the Holy Spirit descends upon him in the form of a dove. So, he's not saying, I wish I was baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Was he baptized in water? Yes, John baptized him. Now, John's baptism is not the same as our baptism exactly, but it suffices. He was baptized.

So, he's not looking at that. So, he's looking at a baptism that is different to the ones that he had already experienced. So, what is that all about? Well, we have to then go to the book of Matthew, and in Matthew 20, verse 22, Jesus answers and said, You do not know what you ask.

The disciples were arguing about who was going to be greatest in the kingdom. Who's going to sit on the left? Who's going to sit on the right? And he says, You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I'm about to drink and be baptized with a baptism that I am baptized with? And they said, We are able.

Remember, Peter probably was the spokesman here, as usual, and Peter says, Of course, Lord, don't ask me stupid questions. Oh, you know, of course. He doesn't even think about what Jesus is saying.

And then he said to them, You will indeed drink my cup and be baptized with the baptism that I'm baptized with. But to sit on my right hand or my left hand is not mine to give, but it's for those for whom it is prepared by my Father. Jesus is speaking about his crucifixion in Matthew.

The Matthew is easy because where it is placed in Matthew is close to the crucifixion. Where it is placed in Luke is further away, and so the connection is not that obvious. So Jesus is saying there are two things that he has to do.

He has to drink the cup, and he has to be baptized with a baptism, which he doesn't know that they will be able to be baptized, and then he says they will, in fact, be baptized with that baptism. Now I'm not going to get into the details of the cup, but you remember that in Gethsemane he says, Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. And he's looking at the cross, and that's the part that I don't want to get distracted in in terms of what aspect of the cross was the cup.

But then he speaks about a baptism in the same sense, the cross. And so obviously when he then says the disciples, in verse 23, the disciples will be baptized, and be baptized with the baptism that I... but so you will be baptized with a baptism that I will be baptized with. Does that then mean that this baptism is the cross? No, because not all the disciples would die on the cross.

Some of them would, but most of them would not. And yet Jesus says, what I am experiencing, or will experience, you will experience. So when you put that together, he's clearly not meaning the cross, but he is meaning the suffering that is associated with the cross.

Remember the previous verse speaks about a fire, and he's speaking about that in a eschatological sense, in the sense of a future event. But I believe that there is a connection between the fire that he has to pass through at the cross. And remember when we speak about the cross, we're not just meaning the cross in this sense.

When you speak about his sufferings, it begins, well, way back, but really begins in Gethsemane, and goes through to the judgment before Pilate and before the others, and the whipping, and then ultimately the cross. All of that makes up his suffering. And so that is the baptism of fire that he is to be baptized with, the baptism in suffering.

Remember the word baptism means to immerse. We lose the meaning because we use this fancy word baptism, which has become a religious word. But remember that the Greeks didn't use that religious word.

They simply used the word for immerse. That's what the word baptism means, to dip or to immerse. And Jesus is saying, we go back to verse 50 of Luke 12, I have a immersion with which I need to be immersed with.

And when we say that that is his suffering, he would be immersed in the suffering. In other words, this is not just a little bit of pain. But this is pain and suffering, and it's not just physical.

Remember that his suffering is, while the physical suffering is real, the emotional and spiritual suffering far exceeds the physical suffering. That he who knew no sin became sin for us. He who knew no separation from the Father is separated from the Father, and the Father turns his back on his son as his son became sin for us.

Those things far exceeded his physical suffering. And it is a suffering that would overwhelm him almost. And if you read the Psalms, and you read the Psalms where David cries out, and Jesus quotes those words, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And so he is put through suffering to an extent that it almost overwhelms him.

And David speaks about the suffering that's like a flood that would seem to want to overwhelm. So Jesus is saying, I'm going to be immersed in suffering, if we just apply that then. And he says, how distressed I am till it is accomplished.

The same idea as in the previous verse, I wish the fire had already been kindled. And he is saying, I wish it was over. I wish the cross was passed.

Of course he knew the end of the conversation. Of course he knew that he would be raised on the third day. He himself said that he would be raised on the third day.

He knew he would be glorified to be seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high again. For the joy, Hebrews says, that was set before him, he endured the cross, despised the shame, and he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And so Jesus knew the end, but he also knew the way he would have to walk before he got there.

And he's saying, I wish it was over. Now obviously his disciples don't have a clue what he is talking about, and unfortunately most Christians don't have a clue either when they read this passage. But I trust by God's grace you go home and read the passage again, read it carefully with all of these verses together in Luke, and you'll see what he is talking about.

Now he's going to turn to a third point, which is just as difficult. Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you not at all, but rather division. Now this is difficult, first of all because it seems to contradict what the angels said.

Remember when Jesus was born, the angels announced his birth to the shepherds, and what did they say? Peace on earth, and goodwill to man. So Jesus is contradicting the angels, and he's saying, I haven't come to bring peace, I've come to bring division, or as Matthew says, a sword. So maybe the angels were wrong, or maybe Jesus is wrong, or maybe there's another explanation.

And of course we don't believe the angels were wrong because it's included in scripture. And of course we understand so much of the New Testament speaks about the peace that he had come to bring. And the book of Ephesians, a lot of Ephesians is devoted to expressing that peace that he's come to bring, peace within us, peace between brother and brother, peace between Jew and Gentile, but above all, peace between man and God.

Of course that's what he has come to do, but in the process there is still a separation. Remember we began in the first verse in the section, verse 49, and he speaks about a fire, and the fire speaks of purging and of division. Here we have exactly the same idea.

Now I'm going to read the other verses and then comment because they all hang together. Verse 52, For from now on five in one house will be divided, three against two, two against three. Father will be divided against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

For son—all right. Now these verses that speak about five, three against two, two against three, and then divides up the whole family, I don't believe that these should be interpreted to try and put some kind of meaning to mother-in-law and son and all of those kinds of details. And some people do try and put all sorts of meaning to it, but I don't believe that that's there.

I believe the reason he is going into these details is simply to say this division will go right down to family level, and will separate the most intimate of relationships within the context of family. In other words, this division is not a cosmic division only between good and evil, or a division between Jew and Gentile, or a division between saved and unsaved, or between light and darkness. Of course those things are there,

and those things are real.

But he is saying that that big level of division will filter down even into families, even into families. And that's all this whole section that speaks about all the members of the family is saying. So how do we put this together? Now I also have Micah chapter 7 verse 6, because this is what he is quoting.

Son dishonors father, daughter rises against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Remember, this is not about in-laws. This is not about having a difficult mother-in-law.

Not at all. This is far more than that. A man's enemies are the men, or the people, of his own household.

This is the verse that Jesus is indirectly quoting. So what is this division that he is talking about? Well, it's division because of the truths, and because of the gospel. Light and darkness do not have fellowship.

It's just a fact. Oil and water do not mix. You can try and put oil and water together in a bottle, and you can shake it up, and very soon the two will separate.

Those who belong to him, and those who belong to the truth, have no fellowship with darkness. Now let me make this very clear. These verses do not encourage Christians to have a bad relationship with their family.

This is what cults build all of their nonsense on, when they encourage, and they tell people, and they encourage, they force people to break from their families. There is a cult called the exclusive brethren. They have a meeting hall in Shadow Hills, just below Henry's house.

If the husband turns against the faith, not becomes an unbeliever, but sees the error of what they teach, they will force the wife to divorce the husband, and they will banish him, and he will never be allowed to see his children or his wife ever again. And they do that across the world, and they do that right here in our own city. This is not what the gospel is about.

The gospel is not about dividing families, separating husbands and wives, separating parents and children. But the unfortunate truth is that the gospel does divide. You say, well, you're contradicting yourself.

No, I'm not. The issue is that those who hold on to the error will invariably separate from those who hold the truth. There is enmity between truth and error.

There is enmity between light and darkness, and you can never remove that. But that does not excuse the Christian from doing everything that he possibly can to maintain family relationships, to maintain relationships with your colleagues at work, with your neighbors where you live, and with other people that you know. We must maintain those relationships as best as we can.

Live at peace with all men as much as is in you, within you. In other words, the division must not come from us. The division must come from them.

And if they will not divide from us, and I'm talking about unsaved family, unsaved friends, if they will not divide from us, we should not divide from them. I want to make this very clear. If your unsaved friends and family are happy to continue a relationship with you, you must foster and develop that relationship.

Christians have no right to put aside fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and family members and husbands and wives simply because they're unsaved. That's not the gospel. In fact, that was exactly the problem they had with Jesus.

He's a friend of sinners. But the Pharisees, they wouldn't even speak to anyone who wasn't of their kind. We're not Pharisees.

We're followers of Jesus. But at the same time, if those who are unsaved choose to separate from us, there's nothing we can do. We cannot compromise the truth.

And when I say compromise the truth, I'm not, again, I'm not suggesting that we be obnoxious, that we be rude, that we be uncivil, unmannered, harsh, angry in the way we present the gospel. We present the gospel with love. We don't present it in a judgmental way.

Oh, you know, I'm saved. You're going to hell. God loves me.

He doesn't love you. Look, it's so easy to fall into that trap. No, we love them.

But if they say we can't live with you anymore, and I'm not meaning necessarily just in the home, but in terms of a relationship, there's nothing we can do. In fact, remember, Paul deals with this in the context of marriage, in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. And he's speaking about a situation where two people are married, and one gets saved. And he says, if the unbeliever then wants to go, because they can't live with you because you're a Christian, well, then you have to let them go.

Notice he does not say that if one gets saved—and this is how easily we twist the Scriptures—if one gets saved, and the other one is not saved, then the saved one must leave the one who's unsaved. If you are married or in any relationship with an unbeliever—I'm not talking about a illicit relationship, but in a relationship, friends or workmates or colleagues or even partners in a business, whatever it may be—and you were both unsaved, one is now saved, you're now saved, you have no excuse to say, I'm out of this relationship. The Bible does not give you that permission.

And not only does it not give you permission, it doesn't give you that command. But if the unbeliever chooses to go, let the unbeliever go, because the truth separates. That is just the issue.

But we need to be sure that it is truth that is separating, and not my attitude that is separating. That it is truth that is separating, and not arrogance or anything else that is man-made or human. And so, this is difficult.

Sometimes it's difficult to get on with people who are part of family, who believe differently to what we believe. It's not easy, but we're called to live in peace with them, as long as they're willing to live in peace with us. And remember that the purpose or the goal of the whole thing at the end of the day why was Jesus a friend with publicans and sinners? Because he enjoyed their company? I can't imagine Jesus enjoying the company of these sinners, prostitutes, drunkards, tax collectors.

No, he was a friend to them because he wanted them to come to the truth. He wanted them to believe the gospel, and that's the reason we maintain those relationships. Folks, let me, since we've gotten practical, obviously if there are relationships that are pulling us back into the world, then those are not good relationships, and they are relationships we have to break.

Not because we are superior, but if you have a friend who is constantly drawing you to go drinking with him or whatever it is, that is not helpful, and evil communications corrupt good manners. And so, you have to separate for your own spiritual health's sake. But if the relationship is not dragging you down, and there's a chance that you're able to pull that person to faith, then maintain those relationships.

You see, because what happens is that Christians get saved. Well, they're not Christians when they get saved, but people get saved. And they have many unsaved friends.

But as time goes on, those friends disappear. Some of the friends break off the relationship, but sometimes we just neglect those relationships. And then after a few years, you find that the church is made up of people who have no contacts with unbelievers whatsoever.

How are we going to evangelize? How are we going to reach the unbelievers if we don't even know them, if we don't even have a relationship with them? But our mission must be clear. It's not because we are more comfortable in those relationships than we are in the church. It's because it's a mission.

And the purpose that Jesus had friends in the world was simply to bring them to Christ, to bring them to himself, to bring them to the gospel. And that has to be the goal. I belong to two clubs made up of unbelievers.

The only reason I'm a member of those clubs is to let my light shine and to preach the gospel. Some of these guys are really rough, really rough, but they relate to me, and I relate to them. They know my testimony.

And when they have a need, they know where to turn. Look, if we don't have friends in the world, how will we ever be able to minister to them? In the times when they are open to the gospel, in the times of sickness and bereavement and of struggle, that's the times when people are open to the gospel. But if we're not there, then how are they going to hear the gospel? Paul says, how will they hear without a preacher? And he's not talking about a preacher like someone who stands up here.

He's talking about each one of us being a preacher. So I trust that by God's grace we can get this clear. So when friends turn against us, when family turns against us, when workmates turn against us, don't be surprised.

Jesus said this will happen. This is inevitable. But until they do so, we have a responsibility to be friends to them as Jesus was friends to the unbelievers.

Father, we pray that you'd help us to understand. Lord, these are difficult things because they seem to be contradictory. And Lord, it's easy for us to just go to one extreme or the other, but I pray, Lord, that you'd give us grace to understand our relationships with those who are not born again.

Lord, I pray above all, and Lord, there's probably not one family here who don't have members of their family that are not saved. Lord, I pray that you would help us to have the right attitude and the right spirit towards them. Lord, not a spirit of superiority or of preaching to them, but an attitude of love and of grace and of care and of compassion, as Jesus had compassion on those who were lost and going astray.

Lord, that we may remember that we also at one time were where they are. And Lord, I pray that you would help us to be able to show to them the love of the Lord Jesus. But Lord, we also know that there are families maybe—there are families represented here this morning that are divided because of the gospel

and because of truth.

Lord, I pray for those who are hurting because of this division that has come. I pray, Lord, that you would help each one of us to understand that we can't change people. We can't change people's minds.

And at the same time, we cannot compromise the truth for the sake of friendship. But Lord, I pray that even in those things, that we may be those who reflect the Lord Jesus. And even in division, even at times of separation, there may be no harshness or bitterness or anger on our part, but simply love.

Lord, we pray that you'd help us to be like Jesus, who on the cross prayed for those who abused him. Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing. Lord, it's so easy to get angry.

It's so easy to be bitter and maybe even to despair. But Lord, I pray that you'd help us understand that our relationship is with you, our fellowship is with you and the Father. And you said you will never leave us nor forsake us.

And Lord, that even though everyone in this world may turn against us, as they did against Jesus, that you will stick closer than a brother. Lord, I pray that this may be an encouragement to us, that you would encourage us. Lord, you'd help us to maintain a right relationship with you and a right relationship with those around us.

Help us, Lord, to understand. Help us, Lord, above all, to live this because it's one thing to understand. It's a very difficult thing, Lord, when those that we love turn against us, when those that we love refuse to acknowledge the truth.

So we pray for your help in Jesus' name. I pray that you'd go with us now, Lord, keep us, protect us, and bring us together again safely on Sunday, on Thursday, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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