

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.”

Jesus brings fire!

We've been looking at the hard sayings of Jesus during this month of September. When Jesus says in our text that he comes to bring fire on earth, a fire that causes division, that's hard for us to hear. It's hard to hear because it runs against everything our culture says is good. We want a uniter and not a divider. We don't want wars. We don't want wars between nations. We don't want wars between cultures. We don't want wars between religions. Why are you telling us this, Jesus? It hurts our ears!

And doesn't it even run against everything we love to sing about at Christmas time? "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled." Don't we want peace on earth? Isn't that what Christmas specials on television are all about? Soldiers on opposite sides of a war find peace in a farmhouse on Christmas Eve. A family long separated by conflict comes together on Christmas. Isn't that what Christmas is all about?

We wish it were that way. Sometimes those Christmas television specials hit a cord in our hearts because we wish it were that way in our family, in our country, in our world. The sad truth, though, is that it isn't. Did Jesus come to bring peace or fire? The answer to that question can be found in our text for this morning. He talks about a fire that brings us peace, but a fire that also causes division.

1. The fire that brings us peace

Listen to what Jesus says about the fire he brings. **“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!”** He's talking about a "baptism of fire." We sometimes use that expression. If a third string rookie quarterback has to make his first start against the most awesome defensive in the NFL, we might say he's going to experience a "baptism of fire." He'll find out what it's like to have three-hundred pound linemen in his face and slamming him to the ground. He'll find out what it's like to get picked off for six by expert cornerbacks. He might dream of victory, but more than likely he will first experience the agony of defeat. As that rookie quarterback thinks about the game he's going to play, he might say to himself, "Let's just get it over with. I want to have this done."

So what is Jesus talking about? He's talking about his suffering and death. He's talking about the punishment of hell in his body while he hung on the cross. He's talking about enduring the fires of physical torture and eternal torment so great that we can't even begin to imagine it. He's talking about

feeling in his conscience the shame for the most heinous crimes every committed, even if those who committed those crimes felt no shame.

Remember the story in the news about a month ago about the man who kidnapped a five year old girl, sexually abused her and then killed her? Did this man feel no shame? Or how about the man who abducted and killed Jacob Wetterling? All those years, did he feel no shame? Perhaps not – but Jesus did. He endured even their shame on the cross.

And what of the sins which you commit every day? In a moment of anger, you can let loose with a string of profanity that would make sailor blush. Where is your shame? You can look at dirty pictures and then put it aside and go about your business. Don't you feel the shame of it? You can cheat on your exam at school and get a good grade. Doesn't that bother your conscience? You can complain about your life even though God has blessed you with good health and many other things besides. Where is your shame for walking away from God with a thankless heart?

Make no mistake about it, Jesus felt your shame on the cross. He endured the fire of your shame in his body and in his spirit until he finally cried out in a loud voice, "It is finished. It is completed." And that, dear friends, is the only thing that can bring peace to our hearts. We can dull our conscience. We can ignore our shame. We can bury our guilt somewhere deep – but in the end, it must come out. The only thing that can really give us peace is this wonderful thing that Jesus did for us. Isaiah 53: 4-5: **"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."**

Are you ashamed of the sinful things you have done in your life? You should be. *But you don't have to carry that shame to the grave with you. You will not have to shoulder the blame for your sins when you stand before God in heaven and give an answer for your sins.* Don't you see? You have peace with God. You have been reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus, and God doesn't count your sins against you anymore.

I know that you know this here, in your head. But do you feel this in your heart? Do you feel God's peace? The world is always telling you to follow your heart. The world says that your heart should speak to your head. In this matter of the gospel, you have to let your head talk to your heart. When your heart condemns you and accuses you and shames you before God, then tell your heart to be at peace. Your sins are forgiven in Jesus.

So Jesus' fire brings peace to our hearts. But what is strange is that same fire also brings division.

2. The fire that causes division

I am not trying to ruin Christmas for you this year by telling you that you cannot expect peace on earth. But you have to understand the story of Christmas and the peace of Christmas properly. If Jesus came to bring peace, then why did Herod get so mad? Why did he kill all the babies in Bethlehem to try to kill Jesus?

Will there never be peace on earth? Yes, there will. There will be peace on earth when Jesus comes again and restores all things. You will see people of every nation and language and people and race standing shoulder to shoulder before Jesus. There won't be any racism. There won't be class wars, or the distinction between the 1% and 99%. There won't be any politics. There won't be any wars or

rumors of wars. There won't even be any denominations in this Christian church, because the church militant will become the church triumphant. There will be perfect peace!

It just won't happen until after Jesus comes again! Even though we want it so badly, even though we work at it incessantly, there will be no peace until Jesus comes again. Jesus is very explicit about this in our text. Listen: **"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."** He talks about wars and rumors of wars in Matthew 24. Here he says that his fire will bring division even in the family – sons, daughter, fathers, mothers and in-law.

What causes these divisions? There will always be divisions between those who believe and those who do not believe. If you say that Jesus is the only way to heaven, as Pastor Nass pointed out in the sermon last week, people will hate you for saying that. You are being intolerant. You are being exclusive. You are being a bigot. The world was so angry with Jesus for insisting that he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that they nailed him to the cross for what he taught! Do you expect the world to treat you any differently? Jesus did not tell us to take up our pillows and follow him, but to take up our crosses and follow him. The world will hate you for the same reasons that it hated Jesus.

What else causes such divisions? If we hold to the teachings of Jesus and we confess them and teach them, you will surely run into conflict with the world. If in Christian love you point out someone's sin and call them to repentance, some will thank you and some will spit in your eye. "How dare you judge me?" they will say. They may even pull out their favorite Bible passage that says, "Judge not lest he be judged." Never mind that it's being pulled out of context. Never mind that other passages in scripture say that sometimes we must judge. It's convenient to say, "Don't judge me."

We live in a world which has no regard for what the Bible teaches. If you believe that God created the world, you will run into conflict. If you believe that marriage should be between a man and a woman, you will be headed for an argument. If you teach that we should share the same faith before we commune together, people will be angry with you for not permitting them to join you at this table. The teaching of God's Word and the teaching of the world will always cause divisions. That's why Jesus said he did not come to bring peace, but division.

Do you have a dog in your house? If you have a dog and you've fed your dog a bone, have you ever tried to take it away from him? Even if you are his friend, you will probably get a growl at best and maybe worse. The people of this world hold on to their convictions just as firmly – maybe more so – as we do. Should we expect that there will be peace when we try to lead them to the truth?

If there is unity in your family or in your extended family because of what you believe about Jesus, then thank God for that unity. It is truly a wonderful blessing. Psalm 133 says, **"How good it is when brothers live together in unity!"** If you share a strong commitment to the truths of God's Word with other members of your family, then thank God for that strong commitment. It is a beautiful blessing. Not all families have such blessings. Some endure division over Jesus and his Word.

If that is the case in your family, what will you do? Your natural reaction is just to "leave sleeping dogs lie." Don't wake up the beast. Just be quiet. Don't make waves. Don't say anything to upset. Maybe there will come a time when you must endure such divisions in your family with quiet silence and then pray your heart out every day. But for the sake of a soul that is lost, you have to try. For the sake

of a loved one who is sliding down a slippery slope away from Jesus, you have to try. For the sake of Jesus, who alone can bring peace to our hearts and bring peace to this world, you have to say something.

And can we be very practical here? When we must speak to loved ones or even strangers about these things, come to them with peace and love in your heart. Set the tone for that discussion. Don't raise your voice. Don't argue. Plead your case the way a mother would plead for her child before a court of law. Be passionate and gentle at the same time. Be loving and respectful. Don't argue your point of view. Just teach them what God says in his Word.

It's not easy, is it? I think that's why Jesus has shared these hard words with us today. He wants us to know above all that there is peace between us and God through his fiery death on the cross. And there is no one in this world that wants to live in peace more than a child of God, who knows the peace that only Jesus can give. But until Jesus comes and makes everything right, there will be divisions in this world for the sake of the gospel. Brothers and sisters, may the peace of Jesus be with you and guide you in all that you say and do. Amen.