

Luke 12 (Part 3): 49-59 • Division and Discernment

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The 49th verse, we're going to read through the end, so follow along with me please as I read verse 49 and following Jesus is speaking here.

“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! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 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.”

⁵⁴ He 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? ⁵⁷ “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸ As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. ⁵⁹ I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.” (ESV)

Let's stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word here this morning. As we dig into these verses, Lord, we pray that You would help us to gain a heart of understanding. It is our desire, Lord, to not just lay hold of the Word in a sense of intellectual understanding, but Lord, to apply it to our lives. For that, Lord, we need strength and courage and wisdom. We pray for those things today. Fill our hearts, we ask, in Jesus' precious name, amen.

As you look through the final verses of Luke chapter 12, you're going to notice that there's really basically four topics that Jesus goes through and talks about in

these passages, and I like to outline things so here's a bullet point outline of what we're looking at here in these last verses.

- The distress of Jesus prior to His sacrifice on the cross
- Division resulting from believing or not believing in Jesus
- Unwillingness of the people to interpret the signs of the times
- Exhortation to settle issues with “the Judge”

First of all, Jesus speaks of His distress prior to His sacrifice on the cross. He then makes a reference to divisions occurring in various homes resulting from believing or not believing in who He is. He then speaks of people's unwillingness to interpret the signs of the times. And then, finally He talks about issues regarding settling things with the judge before coming before Him in a court case.

And we'll talk about what that means. That's not legal advice, by the way. Yeah, well, it might be, if the shoe fits, but He's talking about something much larger on an eternal scale.

We'll deal with that here in a bit. But the first, Jesus talks about “*a baptism.*” Did you notice that? He says in verse 50, “*I have a baptism to be baptized with,*” and He talks about His distress until that is accomplished when He uses the word baptism here. Remember that the Greek word for baptism means, to be immersed. To be dunked, literally, into something and that's why we believe in water baptism by immersion because the word means to be immersed. But here He's not talking about water baptism; He's talking about the immersion of suffering.

He's saying, I'm about to be immersed into suffering, and so He's speaking of that which is to come, and concerning that suffering He says, “*how great is my distress.*” And I read those words, “*how great is my distress*” and I thought about them for a long time, I'll just tell you. And I pondered that statement, thinking, I need to bring something out of that that is really helpful. And so, I thought, well, okay. I wasn't getting anything. So, I thought, okay, I'm going to look up some of these words, key words in the Greek, see what they mean. I look up, particularly, distressed.

And frankly, that wasn't terribly helpful either. And the more I thought about this statement by Jesus, “*how great is my distress until it is accomplished.*” The more I realized that there's something here when we're thinking about what Jesus went through and the distress leading up to His sacrifice on the cross that

just eludes us. And I just felt like when we're thinking about the suffering of our Savior, it's probably best that we sit and recognize that suffering in a hushed sense of silence concerning what took place there.

When I think about the crucifixion and those hours that Jesus hung on the cross, you guys know that there was a period of time when darkness came over the whole land and there was no explanation for that darkness. It was like the middle of the morning and there was no eclipse, and it wasn't cloudy, and just darkness just came over the land. The sun just stopped shining for about three hours while Jesus suffered there on the cross. And it was almost like the Father was making a statement about what we're dealing with right here and just how it just goes beyond our ability to really lay hold of it.

And we recognize when we think about His suffering on our behalf, that we're treading on holy ground. We've wandered into a holy place as we think about it. What we DO know about His suffering is that's what He came for. It dominated his thoughts. It dominated his statements. Jesus talked about it all the time, which of course tells us that His suffering on the cross wasn't an accident or a tragedy. It was His purpose.

In fact, He made a statement in the Gospel of Matthew that I want to show you on the screen. It's from Matthew 20:28, where he said,

Mathew 20:28 (ESV)

"...the Son of Man came...to give his life as a ransom for many."

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This is one of the many comments that Jesus made throughout the Gospel accounts where we realize that the shadow of the cross was always there. It was never absent. But we also know it carried Him to the cross, and certainly there was a determination on His part to walk in obedience to the Father. But do you know that there was also, the Bible tells us, joy? That one blows me away a little bit because when I'm in distress, about the last thing I feel is joy. But the Bible tells us that there was a joy that attended His determination to reach the cross. Let me show you. The writer of Hebrews tells us this in chapter 12, verse 2, he says,

Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

looking to Jesus...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...

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That blows me away. Jesus didn't falter. He didn't turn back. He, instead, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross. Joy in what? Joy in suffering? Heavens no. Suffering is never a joyful experience, right? It's always a pretty harsh experience. Listen, the joy that Jesus had, related to the cross, was the knowledge that what He would do and what He would accomplish on that cross would be for you, and that you and I would be able, by the means of that sacrifice, to enter into life eternal with the forgiveness of sins completely intact.

What a mind blower, truly. For the joy set before Him. The joy of having you in the family of God. Isn't that something? For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame. Moving on, verse 51. This is an interesting statement, because Jesus says, "*Do you think that I've come to give peace on the earth?*"

What's interesting about this is that we're getting, I hate to say it, we're getting kind of close to Christmas. I didn't think that until I went to Costco yesterday. They got their Christmas trees up for heaven's sakes! We haven't even eaten the turkey yet, and they have the Christmas trees. Blew me away. I was, Christmas trees all over the place.

Anyway, I guess we're not that far. But every time, at Christmas, you get cards in the mail that have the declaration made by the angels to the shepherds, peace on earth, goodwill to men, and stuff like that and it's just what we think about as it relates to Christmas. It's like peace on earth, peace on earth. And of course, Jesus came to bring peace between God and man if we accept His work on the cross, but other than that, there's not a whole lot of peace related to what Jesus came to do and came to bring on the earth and that's what He says here.

He says, "*do you think I came to bring peace?*" Actually no. He says I'm bringing rather division. And then He begins to talk about how it's even going to be worked into the fabric of individual households to the point where He says, if there's five people in the house, there's going to be three people, for, and two against, or two for, and three against, or whatever the situation may be. And He's talking about the natural division of people predicated upon their understanding and either acceptance, or lack of acceptance, for what Jesus did on the cross.

It creates division. I just this last week I got a painful email from a young woman. I assume she's a young woman. She told me she and her husband had

not had any children yet, but she is from India. And she wrote to tell me how she's in an unequally yoked marriage, meaning that she's a believer and her husband is not. And I don't know that much about the culture in India. I've never been there. My wife has been there, but I have not. But apparently there is a strong social expectation in India that you're going to attend certain social gatherings that are put on by various different religious persuasions.

And if you're polite, if you're part of polite society you're going to attend those sorts of social gatherings, and just put up with whatever the belief system may be that's attached to it. And as a believer, this woman was writing to me to tell me how grieved she was because as a born again Christian, she felt like that was a compromise of her personal faith in Jesus Christ to go and participate in these pagan rituals, and celebrations, and observances, and that sort of thing, but yet she's married to an unbelieving husband who is putting a great deal of pressure on her to do just that.

And she's just stuck. I mean, just really stuck, and she was writing to ask me what to do, as if I knew. I don't know exactly. I mean, I can pray for her, and I can give her some advice along those lines, but this is what Jesus is talking about when He says, hey, don't think that I've come to bring peace. Actually, my presence is going to bring disunity because you're going to have situations in the intimacy of your own household where you're going to have believers and unbelievers and that will cause, division. And what's interesting to me is that Jesus doesn't apologize for it. He just says, that's the way it is.

But the division that He's talking about happens because of the existence of something the Bible calls truth. Truth. Truth, by its very nature, divides. You with me? Truth, by its very nature, divides. Because there's always going to be some people who are going to embrace it, and there's going to be some people who are going to reject it, for whatever reason that may be. And it always happens. And there's an interesting conversation that is given to us in the Scripture about truth, between Jesus and Pontius Pilate. Do you remember that? Just in case to refresh your memory, let me put it up on the screen for you. It's located in John's Gospel, chapter 18.

John 18:36-38 (ESV)

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

Jesus answered, (saying) "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. (Look at that. And then this.) Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (and Pilate's only response to that was) Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

And of course, Pilate's question and his attending attitude, highlights our human ability to look at truth square in the face and refused to acknowledge it. I mean, here's Jesus. Here is Jesus who is the personification of truth. Do you remember Jesus said, I am the way and the Truth and the life. I am not a truth. I am the Truth.

Here's Truth standing in front of you and Pilate looks Him in the eye and goes, "What is truth?" Now Jesus could have said, you're looking at it buddy. But see, Pilate wasn't really interested in the answer. He asked the question, but he wasn't really interested in the answer and that's why Jesus didn't give him one.

And that's kind of the attitude that we have in the world today. What is truth anyway? People will tell you truth is relative, right? What's true for you might not be true for me, and you tell people about Jesus and what He's done in your life, and you go, and they say things like, well, I'm really glad that works for you. Isn't that precious? It's true for you, but it's not true for me. Which is about the dumbest thing you've ever heard in your life, and they want to convince you that truth is relative, but yet they don't even believe it.

When they need to make decisions in their life, truth is very objective. And what you're hearing here in Pilate in that little conversation that we read up on the screen isn't the voice of the student, it's the voice of the skeptic. What is truth anyway? Because you see there's some things we just don't want to accept as true and so therefore truth always divides. It always has and it always will.

Now if you happen to be living in a home where the existence of truth has brought division and you're wondering how to handle that division.

Well, we'll pray for you. Hey, listen, one thing I do know is that the answer is not to cave in and to compromise your faith in Jesus. But neither is the answer to be unloving and pushy and brash and stinky about it either. So, if there is division in your home because of the existence of truth and the unwillingness to accept it, or division in your extended family or whatever the case might be, I believe that more than anything, we need to be led by the Holy Spirit when we address that division, we respond to that division, because you can get angry if you want to, but that's not going to help, is it?

Have you ever noticed when you've gotten together with family and you're talking about things and they say something stupid or dumb or untrue and you're just itching to say something and just say, you know what, that's really dumb. But that doesn't really help, does it? You've got to just really be led by the Spirit. You've got to approach the situation with love. The Bible tells you and I to speak the truth in love. That's hard, isn't it? Sometimes we speak the truth with, rawr! But we've got to, we need to speak the truth in love. It's very challenging.

Very challenging to deal with people who have the truth right in front of them and refuse to see it, or to embrace it. And that's what Jesus talks about in these following verses when in verse 54 and following, you'll notice that He begins to talk to them about the fact that they are quite adept at recognizing the signs of changing weather, but they seem to refuse to accept the signs that are all around them, and what He means by that is, first of all, about the weather He says, you guys, when you see clouds coming in over the, from the Mediterranean you say, well, it's probably going to rain, and it does.

And then when the wind begins to blow, you say, it's going to be a scorcher today, and He says, yeah, you guys have that all dialed in, even without Idaho's chief meteorologist. I don't know how that's even possible. But somehow, they did it. They figured it out, but He says you're actually hypocrites because you can interpret the signs of the weather related to your day and stuff, but you refuse to interpret the signs of the times. What is He talking about there? Listen, God bent over backwards to prepare the Jews for the coming of Messiah.

He spoke through the prophets profusely about the things that they were to look for. Where He would be born, the things that He would do, the miracles, the giving of sight to the blind and all those things, and yet Jesus did all of those things, and was from where God said the Messiah was going to be from, and

they just refused. They refused to acknowledge the truth. But if they had recognized the day, and who it was who stood before them, they could have escaped the wrath of God.

And there are even signs today. We believe, and it's a fairly universal belief that everything is in place for the Lord to return soon. He's coming back again, by the way. He came the first time. We celebrate that at Christmas. He's coming back again, and the Bible makes it very clear He's coming back again. We don't know when. The Bible says it, no man knows the day or the hour. If somebody tells you they know, then that just proves they don't know. But we know He's coming. When? Yeah.

But here's the deal. The signs are there. The signs are there. The stage is set. The signs of the times are ripe to recognize what's going on. And that is what the final verses of this chapter are about.

Look at verse 58 in your Bible. This is where He says, *“as you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge.”* And of course, we call this settling out of court, and they probably did back then as well.

Basically, what Jesus is doing is He says, listen, if there's a court case against you, and you can see that this thing is against you, and it's not going to go well, you're always better off to settle out of court lest you go into the court, be found guilty, and you have to pay the price, and so forth.

Again, He's not giving legal advice here. He's talking and warning them about the fact that here He is, the Mediator that is sent from God who is standing now right before them, and He's saying, listen, deal with the issues that you need to deal with now before you go and stand before the judge.

Because there is a judgment that is coming related to the second coming of Jesus Christ, and that judgment is going to go against anyone who has not gone and settled out of court. How do you settle out of court? You accept Jesus today as your Savior. Jesus Christ died on the cross bearing your punishment, okay? Have you accepted it? By doing that, you're settling out of court and saying, you know what? I don't want to stand before the judge for my sin, so I'm going to accept the fact that Jesus stood before the judge already on my behalf.

He was judged for me. He died suffering my punishment and I'm going to accept that and I'm going to settle with God. And now the issue is settled for you. For those of you who have accepted Christ, the issue is settled. You've

settled out of court, and there is no impending judgment for you. *“There is, therefore,”* Paul says, *“no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* No condemnation of sin. Isn't that a good deal? Best deal I've had all day. All life. Right? I'll take it. Thank you. Thank you, Lord. I'll take it.

I do not want to stand before God and answer for my sin because you know what? I got a lot to answer for. I mean, I got a lifetime of garbage to answer for, and I know that if I refused what Jesus did, and I said, no I'm going to take my chances with the judge and jury, I know the case would go against me badly. And the same is true for you. And so, Jesus is encouraging here for those who are listening to settle out of court, to make a right judgment about the fact that what God's Word has said all along is true.

I'm a sinner. I need Jesus to be my Savior, and I accept him as such. And by the way, that idea of making a right judgment is a key element in verse 57. Would you look there with me? In verse 57, He says, *“And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?”*

Now, some people might be a little bit surprised to hear Jesus saying that, because there's a lot of people who think that we're not supposed to judge anything. In fact, when you do, they'll even say things like, The Bible says don't judge or you'll be judged. And the fact of the matter is the Bible does say that, but they're quoting it out of context.

We are not to judge others hypocritically. And incidentally, when you judge other people, it's almost always hypocritical. But that doesn't mean you aren't supposed to make right judgments about life. You have to do that all the time.

In fact, you do all the time. We make judgments all the time. I've mentioned to you, how many times have I talked to you about, you can see it when people are picking out food at the grocery store. They go into the produce section; they pick up an apple or a watermelon or grapes or a tomato or something like that.

What do they do? I watch people in the grocery store. They pick it up, they feel it, they want to feel to see if there's any soft spots, smell it sometimes, and decide whether or not it's worth buying, whether it's worth the money. Well, that's making a judgment, you guys. Can you imagine if the grocery store put up a sign, thou shall not judge our fruit or vegetables. I mean, ridiculous. You do it all the time, right? We need to make judgments about life, too. You have to make judgments.

Look what Jesus said in John chapter 7, verse 24. He says,

John 7:24 (ESV)

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

And people, the way you and I judge with the right judgment is when we judge according to the truth of God's Word, and not according to the world. And believe me, the world is mixed up and confused. Good grief, especially with young people today. They don't even know what gender they are today. What are you, a male or a female? I'm not sure. Seriously? Make a right judgment. But see, but they're confused. Their minds have become confused. You and I, when we were young, it was like, hey, you're male or female.

That's all there is to it. Today, they're not so sure. They're not sure about that at all because we've been convinced not to make a right judgment about things and truth then we're exposed to it, and we don't know how to deal with it. We don't know how to think critically anymore. Critical thinking is no longer considered to be something that is highly esteemed. We desperately need critical thinkers to think through, to consider the options, to look at this thing, understandably, and to apply the Word of God.

It is so vitally important because the world isn't going to stop changing their mind about things. And truth is an ever-evolving sort of a thing within the context of the world. And you and I aren't going to be able to keep up with it unless we stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment. I truly believe that if we will commit to praying and asking God to help us walk in discernment, His discernment and wisdom, that He'll answer that prayer. You know what I mean?

I really do. I really believe that in the midst of all of the confusion if we'll just ask God, Lord, help me to make a right decision, help me to make a right judgment. He'll do that. He'll do that. So, challenging words by our Lord. That's where we're going to stop for today. Let's go ahead and stand and we'll get ready to close in prayer.

Somebody tells you, thou shalt not judge. Just say, well, it's true. Not supposed to make hypocritical judgments about other people, but I have to judge every single day to make good decisions and I'm going to base those judgments on the Word of God.

Not that I'm going to be condemning in my judgments but I'm going to judge what is right and what is wrong based on the Word of God. Right? It doesn't

make you close minded and narrow minded to do it that way. It makes you smart. We're going to have some people down here to pray with you after the service so, if you need prayer come on down. Let's pray.

Father, thank you so much. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for truth. Lord thank you for objective truth. Thank you for the Word that just fills our lives with everything good that teaches us Lord to rely on You. To trust You. To put our hope in You.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit and give us a heart of discernment that we can see through the muddled understanding of life that is presented to us every day in the world, and to begin to see things clearly as they are lined out in the Scriptures.

Thank you for your goodness. Thank you for your grace. We commit these things into your hands through the name of Jesus Christ, amen.