

Jesus Teaches His Disciples

Lesson #4 – Jesus’ Coming Brings Division or Repentance

Luke 12:49-59 – 13:1-9

Jesus continues His discourse to the disciples with the great crowd listening. Using illustrations and parables, truths of nature, and even current events, He will skillfully convey important information concerning His present ministry, the disciples’ responsibilities, and the need for the crowds to come to Him before it is too late!

Let’s review the last three lessons Jesus taught in this discourse: After the dinner that didn’t happen at the Pharisee’s home, Jesus and the disciples went out and found what Bible teachers believe was the largest crowd ever assembled during Jesus’ ministry.

Lesson #1: We find that He turned to His disciples and debriefed them concerning the tense moments of teaching and discussion by saying, “Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is **hypocrisy**.” (Luke 12:1) Jesus went on and encouraged them to a life of sincere service and faith.

Lesson #2: Covetousness was the next major subject in this teaching because a man interrupted Jesus to ask Him to help resolve an inheritance dispute with his brother. Jesus, knowing this man’s heart, said to the crowd, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness” (Luke 12:15) and went on to encourage them instead to lay up treasures in heaven. The disciples we also addressed, but in the light of not being concerned about daily needs, but to live in faith and dependence on their generous Father!

Lesson #3: This lesson found Jesus talking about leaving and then returning! Since a believer’s treasure is to be in heaven, and since he is not to be living in concern or fear about daily needs, he should **be waiting and faithfully working** until Christ’s return because “the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” (Luke 12:40)

But now, Jesus will give the stark realities of following Him, the crowd's desperate need to come to repentance, and believe in Him as their Messiah!

I. Jesus’ Coming as it Relates to Himself

“I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be (“how I wish it were”) already kindled?⁵⁰ But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened (Lit. - distressed) till it be accomplished!” Luke 12:49-50

“I have come to send fire on the earth” – On occasion, a Bible teacher runs on to a passage that seems difficult to interpret. And for me – tears! But when it starts the lesson, that’s even worse, because it’s so hard to know where to begin! This is such a passage for me. The problem found in verse 49 is the meaning of the word “fire.” There are several popular interpretations, but we must be careful that the interpretation of the word fits the context of Jesus’ teaching.

Some believe “fire” means:

- judgment – but doesn’t fit with Jesus’ desire that it had already come
- Holy Spirit – but doesn’t fit well with the upcoming context of the divisions because of belief in Jesus
- excitement of the Gospel – ok with the context, but used as “fire” is not seen elsewhere in Scripture
- trouble, trials – these are described by the word fire, throughout the Old and New Testaments (Is. 43:2; 1 Peter 4:12).

Good Bible teachers teach all of these, but I like the idea of “fire” being trouble and trials because of the Gospel and belief in Jesus. Jesus’ desire to see it “already kindled” fits the greater context, too.

Why, because...

- 1) Acceptance of Jesus always brings new difficulties and troubles within relationships with unbelievers
- 2) Wickedness of unbelieving hearts always fight against the truth of the Gospel
- 3) Beneficial growth comes to believers through suffering because of the Gospel
- 4) Context connection with verse 51 – not “peace” but division

So, why would Jesus “wish it were already kindled?” Because it would show the moving, working, and acceptance of the Gospel in lives. And that Gospel moving was a great desire of Jesus! But first comes His death on the cross....

“I have a baptism to be baptized with” – There is no question here, Jesus is speaking of His upcoming crucifixion. This is a word picture of His death, burial, and resurrection used throughout the New Testament. In Mark 10, James and John asked Jesus if they could sit on either side of Him in the coming Kingdom. Jesus’ answer was found in verse 38, “...Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” This is clearly speaking of His upcoming death. Later in the Epistles, Col. 2:12 says this about the act of believers’ baptism, “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” In Greek, the phrase from verse 49, “I am come,” is connected to both “send fire” and “have a baptism.” They are part of His Father’s purpose – be baptized with the atoning death, and victorious resurrection, and to send this fire of division and trial. His “face” was steadfast to accomplish it. (Luke 9:51) The phrase, “how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” had the thought that Jesus was already carrying the distressing weight of the separation from His Father because of His bearing our sins! Please realize that it did not begin when He passed through the gate of the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion; this great sorrow had already been a part of Jesus’ life!

II. Jesus’ Coming as it Relates to the Disciples

“Suppose (Lit. – Do you think) ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay (Lit. – Not at all); but rather division : ⁵²For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided , three against two, and two against three. ⁵³The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” Luke 12:51-53

Result in Following Jesus is Division with your Closest Relationships. Jesus had not come to reign in peace and prosperity, a popular concept of Jewish teaching at the time of Jesus concerning their coming Messiah. But instead, **Jesus came as the great divider of humanity**. Yes, He brings wonderful spiritual peace to those who trust in Him as their Savior. In the upper room, Jesus will describe it this way, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you...” (John 14:27) Later, Paul wrote the Philippian church and told them this peace “passeth all understanding!” (Phil. 4:7) Jesus’ peace is a full, complete, boundless covering of peace **with God!** But to those close to those peaceful believers, those who are not followers of Jesus, comes in this new conflict. Great conflicts, misunderstandings, and disappointments, which ultimately lead to great division! Suddenly, the new believer has different priorities, enjoys different activities, has a different circle of friends, and new different loyalties. These new believers talk differently, sing differently, think differently, live so differently, and with all these differences comes a great new division with those close to them! With a confession of Jesus as one's Savior and Lord comes commitment, and with that comes division with those closest. But this is nothing new. A close, committed relationship with God has always

brought division between close human ties. Read **Micah 7:2, 5-7**: Jesus teaches that as we wait, watch, and work, we will not have an easy time; we must remember that we live in enemy territory! The Apostle Paul described the reality of these conflicts by using the idea of a yoke between two animals, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness... Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord... and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 Within these conflicts, remember, God is your Father!

III. Jesus’ Coming as it Relates to the Crowd Here, Jesus turns to the crowds and continues His call to discern who He is, their Messiah!

“And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway (Lit. – immediately) ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. ⁵⁵And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. ⁵⁶Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:54-56

- Spiritual Blindness to His Person – “how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Here, Jesus uses a simple illustration of discernment, predicting the weather! Any one of them could look at the weather patterns around them and know what the coming days would be – rain, or hot scorching winds! Kinda like the old saying, “Red in the morning sailors' warning; red at night sailors' delight!” But just as plain as these weather signs were the evidence of the person of Jesus – **His words, works, character, fulfillment of prophecies, preaching of John the Baptist!** Within this series of discourses, Jesus told them, “...no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.” (Luke 11:20) Yet they were blind to it! The people of Israel didn’t recognize Jesus as the Christ, or the seriousness of rejecting Him. Jesus had said these exact statements about weather prediction and their unbelief to the Pharisees earlier in Matthew 16:3, but now He looks at the people and exclaims, “How is it that ye do not discern this time?”

As Jesus continues, He gives a second illustration of the need for diligence in spiritual repentance.

“Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right ? ⁵⁸When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate (Lit. – a judge), as thou art in the way, give diligence (Lit. - make every effort) that thou mayest be delivered (Lit. – resolved with) from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. ⁵⁹I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.” Luke 12:57-59

- Call to Repent Before it is too Late – “Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?” Have you or someone you love ever been involved in a legal dispute that needed to be resolved in a court? I have known people who went through the legal system. I have watched the roller coaster of delayed appearances, meetings with lawyers, phone calls, papers to sign, uncertainties, and fears. All along the way, they were reminded by attorneys and judges that, if possible, the two parties should try to resolve outside of the courtroom. They were told that a better outcome was more likely. It would be on their terms, rather than dictated by a judge! And this is exactly what Jesus is referring to. Judgment was coming, and Jesus was telling the people, “make every effort” to make things right before that day! They needed to repent and be restored to Him!

Here's the rest of the story: They didn't repent, and Jesus' prophecy in **Luke 19:43-44** took place when, in 70 AD, Titus, the Roman General, destroyed Jerusalem, and the entire Jewish culture known at the time of Christ was destroyed!

- Interruption – Current Event Illustration - “some that told him...blood Pilate had mingled”

“There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above (Lit. – worse than) all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? ³I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Luke 13:1-3: Jesus was on a teaching roll. He was giving very clear thoughts on the need for the people to realize their spiritual blindness, their rejection of God and His ways, and to repent, or severe judgment was coming! **And then we find He was interrupted!** “Some” told Jesus about a current event that had happened in Jerusalem. Ancient history tells us that Pilate was a harsh and cruel ruler of the Jews. He was not diplomatic when dealing with their intense religious practices, and by the time of Jesus' trial, he was on “probation” by the Roman hierarchs! This incident was probably related to an incident that Pilate ordered, which greatly angered the Jews. Fanatical nationalists had traveled from Galilee to worship in the temple, and instead of waiting and arresting them outside of the temple walls, Pilate had them rushed and killed while offering their sacrifices! **But why is Jesus being told this during His teaching?** Perhaps to trap Him or get Him off the subject. Jesus had been saying some pretty strong statements. If He had sided with the Galilean men who were killed, Jesus could also be counted as a rebel, but if He had sided with Rome, Jesus would have been rejected by most Jews. Instead, knowing their minds, Jesus avoided the politics and Pilate and went right to sin and repentance, “I tell you, except you all repent, ye shall all likewise face a similar doom,” or death by Roman sword!

Then Jesus gives a current-event illustration of His own...

- Current Event Illustration – “tower in Siloam fell, and slew them”

“Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Luke 13:4-5 Again, this event is recorded in ancient history. According to Edersheim, an aqueduct was built in Jerusalem by Pilate. The great controversy was that he had confiscated Temple money to build it, and later Jewish craftsmen were hired to build it. During construction, a tower gave way and killed a good number of workers. Most Jews saw this whole project as a travesty and would have seen the hired men as traitors. Yet, Jesus took this hot topic and used it as another call to repentance toward God, “I charge you, except ye repent, ye shall all have huge building stones crush you the very same way!” And because they never turned to God in repentance, many perished some 40 years later beneath the falling walls of Jerusalem and their precious temple.

Finally, Jesus concludes His teaching on repentance and judgment with a beautiful parable. But first, let's get a better understanding of agriculture and fruit tree growing in ancient Israel!

IV. Jesus' Application in Parable Form

Jewish agriculture and fig tree growing at the time of Jesus:

- Fig trees are not developed and reach full, consistent production until around their 3rd or 4th year.
- The best land was reserved for vineyards. They needed the riches and the best watered land.
- A hired expert, “the dresser” was employed to oversee the growing of crops

- Basic techniques for growth were used, aerating the ground to allow water to penetrate, and manure was used for fertilization.

Now, Jesus' parable uses all these thoughts, and He wanted the listeners to connect them as they considered their wonderful, patient God!

“He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard ; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. ⁷Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? ⁸And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: ⁹And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” Luke 13:6-9

“a fig tree was planted in his vineyard” – This statement would fly right over our heads if we didn't know that this landowner was giving up prime growing space for this fruit tree. God is pictured as the landowner, and Israel the tree planted in a premium location, for Israel was His special nation. In **Deut. 7:6-9** we find Moses' encouragements to Israel before they entered the Promised Land. Listen to how special they are to God!

“three years I...find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” – After the allowed time for maturity, the tree had no fruit. It had plenty of time to develop and especially good soil, but no fruit! The objective of all fruit trees is fruit! Our oldest son, Luke, is very frugal. Several years ago, in mid-June, he was shopping at the local Fleet Farm store when he noticed about 20 straggly apple trees. He made a deal with the manager to buy all of them for less than half price, but if they died, he would get his money back. So, Luke took them home and started babying his apple tree nursery. He ended up losing about half of them, but he did get his money back on the others. But today, he is the very proud owner of a lovely little apple orchard and is looking forward to harvesting some nice apple sauce, pies, and crisps! Why? Because you plant fruit trees for fruit! For Israel, fruit meant being obedient to God's commands, loving Him solely, loyal to His desires, serving His will, and being a testament to the world of the greatness of their God! But there was no fruit!

“let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it” – But there was the patient dresser of the vineyard, who desired extra time for this specially placed tree. Time to give it extra care and extra manure! Because all good gardeners know there is nothing better than natural fertilizer straight from the barn! Jesus Himself is this vineyard dresser. He's patient and willing to work to see fruit come. For it was Jesus who left heaven's glories and for over three years, “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own” people. But Israel “received him not.” (John 1:10-11)

“if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down” – Jesus finishes the parable with this very open-ended statement. No real conclusion, no big invitation; just the truth that if fruit came that was “well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” Here is just the stern warning that if you are worthy of judgment, in time, the patient God will judge.

Just before Jesus began His public ministry, John the Baptist had preached a very similar message to this parable. **Matthew 3:7-10**

If you are unsure of your salvation, if you haven't committed your life by faith to Jesus, please know, “Behold, now is the accepted time: behold now is the day of salvation.” Also, “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden

your hearts.” Because “For whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” 2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:15; Rom. 10:13

This same scenario of fruitlessness is very true for believers today. Without fruit bearing in our lives: the fruit of obedience to God’s commands, loving Him solely, being loyal to His desires, serving His will, and being a testament to the world of the greatness of their God! If we live in sin and produce very little fruit, we too will be judged. Let’s live committed to bear fruit to the glory of God.

I want to finish with a familiar passage spoken by Jesus in the Upper Room. Go to John 15. **Read John 15:1-8**