

The Character of Christ's Ministry

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Bible Text: Luke 12:49-59

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Appreciate Brother Mark Tucker helping us out. Brother Tom is without voice so Mark pitched in and Jason was over on the piano because Miss Pam is home with the flu. So, we are a toxic staff, I guess, this time, but I feel good.

Luke 12. If you would turn there with me. We're preaching through the gospel of Luke. We've come to Luke 12 and we'll look at verses 49-59 as the Lord, again, brings some piercing sobering statements to this mass, this crowd that has gathered around him and to one degree or another, claims to be his followers or his supporters. But he's about to lose a bunch of them if he keeps teaching like this. Luke 12:49, Jesus says,

“49 I have come to cast fire upon 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 accomplished! 51 Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; 52 for from now on five members in one household will be 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 daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.' 54 And He was also saying to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, “A shower is coming,” and so it turns out. 55 And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, “It will be a hot day,” and it turns out that way. 56 You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time? 57 And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right? 58 For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. 59 I say to you, you will not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent.”

Here we see at least pertinent, essential aspects of our Lord's character. I've simply entitled this “The Character of Christ's Ministry.” The character of Christ's ministry. The

first word and this is the Lord's very word which characterizes what his ministry is about is the word "fire." 1. is fire and we see this in verses 49-50.

First of all he says in verse 49, "I have come to cast fire upon the earth." Again, remember this is a great mass of people. Earlier in the chapter there are so many people gathered around that the Scripture says they are stepping on each other and it's as if the Lord wants to startled them, as if the Lord wants to rattle them to a reality because at this point, they are very superficial and shallow and had very unsound subjective views of who Christ was and what he was about so he's going to clarify, he's going to try to get them understand the truth. Now, he says, "I've come to cast fire on the earth," and fire in the Scripture is a metaphor usually for two main things: 1. fire purifies or cleanses, 2. fire is viewed as a punishment or for destruction. Those two things: a cleansing, purifying effect or a punishing, destroying effect. Christ says, "I came to bring fire," because in reality he comes to bring both. He has a purifying ministry but he also has a crushing and destroying ministry. By the way, if you worship the true Christ, you hold in reverence both of those realities. No more of this liberally massaged understanding of Jesus Christ. Let's let him be who the Bible says he is and don't try to mold him into our progressive liberal view of what Christ would do or what Christ would be. Let's let the Scriptures speak clearly for him.

But let's note A. in our outline, first of all his gospel is a ministry of fire. There is gospel fire. We see that in verse 49 where he simply says, "I have come to bring fire upon the earth," literally cast a fire on the earth. John 3:16 is a good cross reference for this: "John answered and said to them all, As for me I baptize you with water but one who is coming is mightier than I and I am not fit to untie the thong of his sandals and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Piercing statement. This is John the Baptist saying Jesus is coming, the Savior is coming and he's got a ministry of fire. What we do know is that the gospel preached and accompanied by spiritual power is a converting, cleansing flame and its converting, cleansing flame comes in a man and ignites a passion in his heart for God and for the truth of God and nothing else can do that.

It's an illuminating flame because as the flame comes in, it illuminates your heart and you see your sin, you see your need for a Savior. It's a cleansing flame in that because of the merits of Christ on your behalf on the cross, he can cleanse you of all your sin and all your defilement. So, it's an illuminating flame, a cleansing flame. It's also a converting flame, the flaming work of the gospel accompanied by the power of the Spirit comes into the heart and creates a new man. Scripture calls it being born again, being quickened from the dead, being brought to life. It's a creating flame. Lastly, not only is it illuminating and cleansing and converting but it's a continuing flame. The new life wrought in the person by the power of the Spirit accompanying the gospel message never ever ends. If anyone falls out and becomes apostate and rejects Christ and rejects the faith, they never were one of God's to start with. The faith that fizzles at the finish was faulty at the first. It's a continuing flame. Philippians 1:6, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." He will do that. He will never stop the work he began. He's the perfect Savior.

So, we see here that this is a flame that's not fueled by man's might or man's provision but it is a flame that comes in by the infinite power of the Holy Spirit of God. There is a gospel fire. But secondly, a part of his ministry of fire is that he comes also with a judgment fire. A judgment fire. His coming judgment is going to be a ministry of fire. First of all, I want you to notice a clarifying flame that he will come with in judgment. In other words, nothing will be unexposed. Everything will be made bare and shown as it really is. His flaming judgment will expose all. Revelation 19:12, "His eyes are a flame of fire and on his head are many diadems and he has a name written on him which no one knows except himself." His eyes are a flame of fire: it means his discerning and his perception is absolutely perfect, nothing lays undisclosed to him. His eyes in judgment are a clarifying flame.

Also, it's a punishing flame. Revelation 20:15, "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Then Luke 16:23-24, "In Hades he lifted up his eyes," this is the rich man who was cast into hell, "and being in torment he saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue for I am in agony in this flame." The Bible says that all judgment has been handed over by the Father to the Son and he's coming in a flaming judgment.

A clarifying judgment flame, a punishing judgment flame but also dreadfully so, horrifyingly so, a never-ending or continual judgment flame. Mark 9:44 says there in hell "their worm does not die and the fire is never quenched."

Jesus said, "I have come to cast fire on the earth." Now, you can imagine, there is this great host of people all around Christ, they've heard the magnanimous stories of all that he can do and all the wonderful blessings and by the way, I think it was a joy to our Savior's heart to heal so many thousands and feed so many hungry and take care of so many people who were destitute and teach them marvelous things but they could not see the forest for the trees so he would stop and pause and bring this startling revelation to them about the true core of his ministry. "You guys aren't getting it," he'd say, "I came to cast fire on the earth not just to give you your best life now."

Notice the fiery passion of his ministry. Not only do we see a gospel flame and a judgment flame or fire, we also see his fiery passion. Look at verse 49, the last phrase. I'll just read it all, "I have come to cast fire upon the earth," here it is, "and how I wish it were already kindled." He says, "I wish we were already started." What does this mean? Here's what he means by this: he means the fullness of his gospel ministry and the fullness of his judgment ministry are yet in the future. This present ministry that he's involved in at this time was the setting of the stage. It was a preliminary ministry. It was something that was needed to prepare for the core work or the primary work he was yet to do. All of these healings he was doing and all of his feedings of the hungry and the overwhelming signs and wonders and miracles he was performing along with training his apostles, all of this was to the end that he might usher in what you might call his full gospel ministry and gospel preaching which he's just slowly getting to. As he progresses

towards Jerusalem, he increasingly pulls the people away from temporal earthly blessings that he was giving them to the core of his purpose and that is the spiritual salvation that he came to accomplish and to preach to them.

He says, "I wish it were already kindled on the earth." He's showing that he has a desire to leave this more earthly and physical ministry environment and launch the spiritual soul saving ministry which was his primary purpose. I had not been in the ministry more than a year or so when I went to the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference and a regular at the conference in those days was a black preacher, a man of very small stature but very strong in the pulpit I might add, and this man's name was Manuel Scott. I would like to look to see if I could find some old recordings of Manuel Scott preaching. I was at the conference that year, maybe only been converted a year and a half or so and he said something that I've never gotten away from. Isn't it interesting how you can hear a preacher or hear a presentation and you hear one line and it just forms a reference point in your heart in understanding of truth. Manuel Scott said this: the church is most truly the church when she is doing what no other collective entity even claims to be her job. The church is most truly the church when she's doing what no other group or organization even claims to be their job.

He says, for example, he had gone from a smaller church to a big church in Texas and it was kind of humorous because he told the story about when he went into that big church, they had a lot of money, his deacon sat him down and said, "Now, Pastor Scott, if you pastor here you've got to drive a big car. A big Cadillac or a big Lincoln Continental." I don't know what it was back in those days and I just went out and bought me a little Mercury just to aggravate them. But he said, "At my big church in Dallas," he said, "You know what? We have a food pantry and we feed the poor but," he said, "other folks are doing that. At my church we have a clothes closet and we like to clothe those who need clothing but," he said, "other folks are doing that. And we tutor young people who maybe don't have a mom and dad and help them get through school but," he said, "other folks are doing that but the church is most truly the church when she is doing what no other organization even claims to be their job – preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Christ said, "I am wishing that the fire of gospel preaching was already kindled and out there in the land because I didn't come primarily to meet your temporal earthly needs, I came primarily to save your eternal souls." You see this stirring in Christ, "I wish it was already kindled on the earth." Now, he was obedient to his Father's perfect redemptive plans. There is a progression in revelation. You start from Genesis and go chronologically through the Old Testament writers and through the New Testament and you'll see revelation progressing to a full collectivity toward the end of the book. So, he's progressing in his earthly ministry toward Jerusalem, he's increasingly telling the people what he is, who he is and what he's about and trying to shake them from their dullness and their earth-bound temporal thinking to spiritual and eternal thinking.

He continues with this fiery passion that he has for his ministry. Verse 50, he says, "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!" That's an interesting phrase: he uses the idea of a baptism to undergo. It's figurative language, he's

not talking about what we would view as believer's baptism but the word "baptizo" means "to dip or immerse." And he says, "I am called by my Father to be immersed in the ministry of redemption of men's souls. I am to be immersed in the ministry of reconciling sinners back to a holy God and I'm going to place myself under the weight of the sins of my children and also the weight of the divine judgment for those sins. After satisfying the wrath of God, I'm going to rise from the dead, securing the children's justification and this is the baptism I must undergo and I am distressed until I get it done."

He says, "I wish the gospel fire was already kindled! I am under distress wishing that this baptism of redemption's work was already at hand!" I don't know, I'm bringing something into the text perhaps that's not clear but I believe the spirit of the text brings this out: Christ was frustrated with the carnal, earthly, over-focused on temporal stuff in men's hearts and minds and wanted to shake them to the eternal things of men's souls.

The word "distressed" here, he says, "I'm distressed." It means "to cease" or "to hold." It means that this thing has grabbed me and I am distressed about it until I get it accomplished. In other words, no one and no thing will deter or deny him for his commitment to carrying out the task of redeeming the souls of men. Aren't you glad you have a Savior like that? If you and I would have been there, we'd say, "Hey, we've got 10,000 people. This thing is working. Forget the cross, let's keep this going." Amen. A lot of evangelical pastors are right there, they are de-emphasizing what matters because it might not bring the crowds and they're trying to keep temporal carnal men excited about church. I'm glad we passed that mountain a long time ago here. If you're hungry for the truth, you'll like it here. If you want games and fads and gimmicks, you may need to go look somewhere else. Christ said, "All the other stuff I'm about is preliminary or secondary." He may or may not heal someone's diseases, he may or may not feed a physically hungry man bread but he will absolutely not fail at the plan of God to go to the cross to redeem the souls of his children. He says, "I am distressed until I get it done."

So, he has a ministry of fire and I see three things there: gospel fire, judgment fire and the fiery passion of his commitment to do redemption's work. 2. The second word that characterizes his ministry is division. Division. First of all, a. truth divides. It always has. It always will. He says in verse 51, "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on the earth? I tell you, no, but rather division." You say, "But Christ's ministry is one of peace." Yes, and may I note that Jesus Christ is the greatest unifier of all men of all the ages. The great testament of the power of God is that in local churches all over the world are gathered together people in a godly love/care relationship that could not have happened if God's gospel hadn't changed them. Amen? That's why I hate these notions in church work today about we're going to have this kind of service and that kind of service and this kind of service that likes this music and that kind of service that likes that. You mean the power of God hasn't changed you enough that you can get along with each other with different music tastes? Come on. That's piddling baby nursery junk. The gospel changes men so that they get over the stuff that doesn't matter and love each other in unity. That shows the power of God to the world. Not that we have to make the church

like a nursery where everybody's flavor is served. Am I getting off track here this morning? Are you all okay? Have you been offended, bless your heart?

Listen, no doubt the truth is Jesus is the great unifier of the age but equally so, he's the greatest divider of all history. His dividing caused more enmity, separation even many divorces of more people than any person in human history. Both are true. That's what you're going to get from this pulpit: all the truth. Not one side or the other, all of it. But now in this context because of where these people were, he's emphasizing the division aspect because they needed to get this because it's about to start happening. He's getting closer to Jerusalem. His teaching is going to be far more directed at their wickedness, their sinfulness and his plan of redemption and this happy church bunch is going to fall off so they need to start learning that division is coming, separation is coming.

It is true he is the Prince of Peace, Luke 2:14. It's true, Isaiah 2:4 it says, "In his coming earthly kingdom men will beat their spears into plowshares." Yes, but it is a true peace that he brings that he said is enduring and lasting even for eternity. Only true peace lasts forever. Well, what is true peace? It's the peace based on Jesus Christ because he is the truth. Matthew 22:16, "You are truthful," they said, "and teach the way of God in truth." John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life." So, remember that true peace first must disrupt all false peace. Did you get that? True peace must disrupt all false peace. You may have a family of 5 or 6 that are just basically carnal, pretty good folks from the world's perspective and one of them hear the gospel and be gloriously converted. They come back into the home and trouble erupts everywhere. I've heard it and seen it over and over again. All of a sudden, they're no wanting to do the sinful things the family used to enjoy doing and it's a mess. Now they're all divided. It's a problem, if you will. Why? Because one found the truth and he came back home and the truth he or she brings with them disrupts the false peace that they were clinging to because the false peace isn't a lasting peace, it was only temporal.

You see, because of the perversity and the corrupt nature of men, the Prince of Peace kindles a flame of discord in men's hearts. Did you hear that? He brings division and discord because men are perverse and evil and he brings the truth and the light of truth to bear on their dark, selfish, sinful ways. None of this is the fault of Christ or the gospel, it's simply the consequence of our wickedness coming in contact with pure truth. But here's a note for you: the more resolute you are when you're tempted by the divisions following Christ may cause, the more resolute you are to follow Jesus Christ, the better chance you're going to have winning your friends and loved ones to Christ. If you being to waffle and to "compromise" to win them, you're on the wrong track. Now listen to me: I'm not talking about a haughty spirit or a judgmental tone, I'm talking about a sweet and humble tone and spirit but do not waver from devotion to Jesus Christ. You might say, "Well, I'm leaving if you're going to do that." I love you, I'll be here but there's the door. I cannot deny my Lord no matter what it means. No matter what division or separation may occur in my life, I must stay with Christ.

You see, constant perseverance is often the way to win the bitterest foe. I remember one of the little statements that stick with you: when D. L. Moody was such a flaming

evangelist across Europe and across America, an atheist was going to hear him preach one day. A man stopped and said, "But you're an atheist. Do you believe what D. L. Moody preaches?" He said, "No, but D. L. Moody believes it." That's what the unbelievers need to see in you: an unswerving resoluteness about your faith.

Jesus said there's going to be division. "I didn't come to bring peace, I came to bring a sword." A sword cuts and divides. The truth of Christ clarifies what is evil and then cuts off evil and all those clinging to evil. You find real quickly in a church if you bring the true message of Christ and the true message of the gospel to bear on the church that's been carnal, you bring a sword into that congregation. You start cutting and dividing. And you'll find out there will be divisions and factions everywhere. Been there, done that and don't want the t-shirt. Seen it all. Walked on those paths and had to repent a lot myself and grew a lot from it.

So, peace as far as Christ and Christians are concerned must be a true peace, a peace based on Christ and on his truth. Now, here's a key aspect here, don't miss this: James 3:17, "But the wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable." Now, you've got to get that. A lot of people say, "Now, wait a minute. It's just be loving and let's get along." Wait a minute: to love and get along, does that mean I have to accommodate, celebrate or affirm what the Bible defines as clear sin or impure doctrine or practice? Then I can't go along with it even if it disrupts the unity or the so-called unity. Remember, every aspect of peace or unity that compromises truth is a lie. It's not true peace and it's not true unity. What most churches call unity of the spirit is not unity of the spirit at all, it's toleration of flesh. Therefore, here's the key: it doesn't show the world God because only God gives spiritual unity and it's something the world can't have because they don't have the Spirit and so it makes us able to show something of God to the world when we have a true biblical spiritual unity. By the way, Grace Life Church has a bunch of that. It's been a long time getting there, though, hasn't it? Amen. It's been a tough road to get there but we've got a huge good dose of that in this body and that's why I love it so much and praise God for it so much. It's first pure, then peaceable, James says. Never sacrifice doctrinal purity or moral purity "to keep the peace."

So, the context here, the Lord is teaching these people, I think at this point it's likely his instructions are more directly to the apostles but also that great mass that's there. But at this point, it's clear these apostles even thought Christ and his message were going to unite all of Israel. I mean, the numbers were going well. They were seemingly great but the problem was these apostles did not understand his primary and true ministry yet. It was not primarily healings and feedings and signs and wonders and miracles. His primary ministry was the message of the sinfulness of man, the wrath of God that justly stands against man and his vicarious substitutionary atonement that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. And when he got to that, the great number of these people are going to split off. Even the apostles wavered and waffled and struggled. True believers can struggle, you understand that. They just land right at the end.

So, truth divides. Secondly, I want you to see that truth defines by dividing. Truth defines by dividing. In other words, when God's truth, when it's coming from the lips of Christ

2,000 years ago walking the earth with these great masses around him, at least at this point or 2,000 years later from any pulpit in the land, when God's truth goes forth, God begins to define who's on his side and who is not. Look at 52 and 53, "for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. 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." Here's what he's saying: you're going to see who really loves and follows God and the division will clarify which one is which.

Let me give you some observations on this statement the Lord has made. 1. The most endearing and intimate bond in the natural realm must never rival loyalty to Christ period. Now, get the whole balance of Scripture: if you're converted and your spouse is not, the Bible tells you to humble yourself and do everything you can to save that marriage but you will not deny Christ to save that marriage. You're not going to leave a sound biblical church and go to something that's compromising and in error "to save that marriage." You're going to stay with Jesus. Do everything you can other than violating God's truth to keep it going but Jesus' point is, if necessary, divisions in the most intimate bond known in the natural realm must occur rather than denying your loyalty to me.

2. All Christians will be called to carry this cross at times. You cannot walk faithfully with Christ and not have a family member or a dear friend or a dear work associate somewhere along the line part ways with you because they don't want to go forward with Jesus. That's hard in the Bible belt when everybody is a Christian and everybody has Bible talk and everybody knows Jesus and everybody is a Christian. I know it's hard but you just keep always humbly, never arrogantly or judgmentally but you just keep walking with Jesus and pretty soon issue after issue will come up and they're going to do what's convenient and advantageous for the temporal life and they'll start going this way and you'll just keep going on with Jesus, imperfectly but you'll keep going on with Jesus and the division occurs. What God is saying is, "I'm defining who's with who."

Not only can even the most endearing and intimate bonds in the natural realm must never rival our loyalty to Christ, not only will all Christians be called to carry this cross at times but thirdly, it will occur among those who esteem themselves Christians. It will occur among those who esteem themselves Christians. Look folks, everybody hearing this message would have said they support Jesus. Everybody hearing this teaching on this day would have said they were in one sense or another, Christian. They loved what he was doing. They were committed to follow. They were all about it. They just didn't know what it was about yet. But Jesus is saying, "As it gets clear what it means to know me, there is going to be a defining by division. We're going to define who's really with me and who's really not with me."

These folks were followers of Jesus but the great majority of them only in an earthly and superficial manner. By the way, the great majority of professing evangelicals are not true born again Christians. "Pastor, how can you say that?" Fruit. Fruit. It's not there. That's the opinion of Billy Graham. That's the opinion of Dr. Gray Allison the President of Mid-America Seminary. That's the opinion of Dr. Paige Patterson the President of

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. That's the opinion of all known men who have looked at the church. Billy Graham used to say that 80% are unconverted, the best he could discern, looking at their lives. So, the division as you truly walk with God is going to be a defining clarifying of who is with who.

A fourth thing, not only is it going to occur among those who esteem themselves Christians but when loved ones turn away, stay meek, stay humble but stay unswayed in your devotion to Jesus Christ.

So now, pulling all of this together: Jesus is speaking to the apostles and this great crowd of people, they didn't understand anything yet and he was saying to them in effect, "You think we're presently doing real well. You think it's going great because we're so popular. It all looks good to you. You feel like we're just going to get bigger and better. Bigger is going to get better and better." And Jesus in effect says, "It is going to get better but not in your definition of better." It's going to get better because God, the work of his Son is going to redeem for himself a people but a whole lot of the folks who claim that they're going to be a part of those people are not going to be. They're going to be divided off. I think he's just telling these apostles, "Get ready. It's going to happen. Don't let it freak you out. Don't let it bring too much anxiety into your soul."

I don't have this in my notes but I meditated on this during the week and this is so very true, I'm 100% sure this is true: the great painful divisions and factions happen in immature carnal settings which is where these people are right now. Immature, carnal, just a bunch of folks. As God matures a body of believers, you will always have some division but it becomes a small inconsequential thing as the body matures. And as the pastor, I say to that, "Praise God." It's a difficult thing to go through. And I think that's why, for the most part, overwhelmingly so for many years now, when there are issues at Grace Life Church it's just a small thing because spiritual minded men and spiritual minded women resolve it biblically and we just go on and love each other. Amen. A mature body doesn't have to go through this. But these folks aren't there yet. They're just beginning to learn. They're just flocking around because it's exciting and healings and feedings and signs and wonders and miracles and it's just exciting and they're going to have some big, big issues coming up. Immaturity always breeds that.

Well, we know in John 7, Jesus said that, the Scripture records that even Jesus' brothers were not believing in him so he, himself, experienced a division within his own family. Some of his brothers were pulling away thinking he was off track in this Messiah claim. We do know later they were present in the upper room and so we see that the Lord saved them eventually but for a time he was divided from them.

I've got to hurry on urgently. Jesus tells them that standing before God is not something to be put off. First of all he rebukes them for their blindness. The Bible says in verse 54, "And He was also saying to the crowds," which means at this point he was likely turning his attention off primarily the apostles and just everybody in general and he begins this strong warning, this strong rebuke. He knows he has before him a contemporary Baptist congregation: fickle, fragile, fleeting and fleshly. And so he rebukes them for their

shallowness and their spiritual blindness. He says in verse 56 that they are hypocrites. The hypocrite is one who plays the part but he doesn't have the reality. They play the part of one who knows and loves God but they don't get it, they don't have it at all. That's what he rebukes them about.

Let me hurry on here. Look at the illustrations he uses right quick. Look at verse 54, he says, "And He was also saying to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, "A shower is coming," and so it turns out.'" Verse 55, "And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, 'It will be a hot day,' and it turns out that way.'" He says, "You guys look at the physical realm and when clouds are coming in the west you say, We're going to have rain today and sure enough, you have rain. And you feel warm air coming up out of the south early in the morning and you say, It's going to be a hot day and hey, it's hot." He says, "You hypocrites. You can discern the physical realm but have no discernment at all to the spiritual realm and the state of your own soul before a holy God." He rebukes them for that.

Look at verse 57, "And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?" In other words, you should have that capacity but your sinful selfish indulgence has dulled and dimmed your capacity to judge rightly and this is a self-imposed darkness. Did you hear that? He gives them, he puts on them the responsibility for their spiritual blindness. What an indictment. Isaiah 5:20 says, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." That's the land we live in today. We live in a country where vile, wicked perversity is stated, embraced and celebrated from the President on down. "Woe to those," God says, "who call good evil and evil good."

And this spiritual blindness is rebuked by our Lord. He said, "You should know what is right. Judge for yourselves what is right." His point is: I'm the only true right one. I'm the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. You should know that I am the right one. I am the one sent from God. I am the one come to save you and you should rightfully judge yourselves. You should see that you are a sinner, that you are depraved, that you are presently the enemy of God. You're characterized as the ungodly before him. You are radically contrary to his very nature and his very wrath is against you even this moment and you are helpless. You must have me. Can you not judge that? Can you not discern that? And he's rebuking them for it.

So, he uses the human analogy here again, to close this out, in verse 58, "For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison." This is the debtor's court because in verse 59 he says, "I say to you, you will not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent." In the old days, they had a debtor's jail and if you didn't pay your debts they locked you in prison in that jail and you didn't get out until it was paid. He said, "You understand that. If somebody were about to take you to court, you'd do everything you could to settle the case before they got to court." He said, "You blind hypocrites. You would do that for your physical wellbeing but you don't see the priceless

infinitely more important value of your soul. You can't see what's right before you. You can't see the need you have. You can discern the weather but you can't discern the things of God.”

So, he rebukes them for this blindness. You see, as he uses this analogy of a man going to debtor's prison for his debt, he wants them to understand that they have a debt to God and they needed to see their debt to God. Listen, you have an obedience debt to God. You have a requirement to obey his law 100% perfectly every day of your life from your heart and if you fail the obedience debt, then you have a punishment debt for transgressing his law. He said, “Why wouldn't you see and be urgent? Urgent about settling this with God?” So, he gives them a rebuke for their blindness about spiritual things.

Where are you today? It's 2014, it's a new year. What are you caught up in? Is there any urgency in your soul about the state of your children's spiritual destiny? Is there any urgency in your soul about the lost man across the road or the lost classmate at school? Is there any urgency about the things that really matter?

Well, I think it's here but he ends and I'm going to end with a ransom. He didn't just rebuke, he throws out the ransom message because he says in verse 58 if someone were taking you to the debtor's court, all the way there you would make every effort to settle the case so that he might not drag you before the judge. Here's what he's saying: there's a way, there's something you can do to be ransomed from your indebtedness and I'm that way. I am that provision. Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.” 1 Timothy 2:5-6, “For there is only one God and one mediator also between God and man, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at a proper time.”

“You can't pay your debt,” Jesus is saying, “but if you can only discern and see who it was here with you, I can, I can be the ransom payment.” Now, this concept of ransom invariably comes from the practice of the slave trade of the day. It was known that people would go to the slave market and maybe they had a dear loved one that for some reason was sold into slavery years ago. Again, if you couldn't pay your debt, that was one of the ways you could absolve yourself is to become the slave of another. Then often they'd put you on the slave market and sell you off to someone else but if relatives sometimes would show up and be the highest bidder and buy you back and pay the ransom and have you set free from your slavery. We were in God's debtor prison, bound in transgressions and sins and awaiting our final place of incarceration, eternal hell, but Jesus came and he paid the price on the cross and satisfied the debt of divine judgment and having bought us with the price, he redeems us into the eternal joys of being a child of God.

So, Jesus says to this crowd, “You're like the man who owes the debt and he's been dragged into debtor's prison and cruel men are going to take him and cast him into the prison.” He'll stay there until the debt is paid, but if you turn to Christ, believingly look to Jesus Christ when this life ends, not cruel men but holy angels will come and take you away. Not take you to a prison but to paradise. So he throws out the message of ransom that he came to provide. The character of our Lord's ministry: fire, division, urgency.

Friend, turn to him today. This moment. I implore you. Don't wait to feel like it. Turn to him. If you realize your sinfulness, turn to him and believe on him today. Just came in this morning, talking with the staff, a staff member told me about meeting with an adult man that came to his office weeping and broken over his sins. We've seen a lot of that in the last few weeks. What about you? Listen to this: whosoever will may come. If you will, he'll save you. Never failed to. "Pastor, what about sovereign election?" Believe in it 100%. It includes whosoever will may come. He'll save you if you'll turn to him. And all of God's people said, Amen.