

July 7, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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CONFLICTS BECAUSE OF JESUS Luke 12:49-59

To hear the strong opinions of many people, God, the Bible, Jesus Christ, and the religion that flows from these teaching (called Christianity in a very broad sense) is bad. We often hear questions like, “If there is a loving God, why does He allow bad stuff to happen?” Or people wonder about the violent behaviors so-called Christians in generations past demonstrated. Like how could the “Christian” Pope Urban II or King Richard I, the good Catholic, send their crusaders into the Middle Eastern countries to destroy people of a different religion (Muslims)? Or how could the so-called “Christians” in 15th and 16th century Spain, England, Italy, Germany and France kill other professing Christians who disagreed with their theology?

Why can’t religions just get along in the 21st century? Why can’t we have peaceful coexistence? Why can’t Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and all the other 4,200 different religions in the world get along? Why must there be conflicts between us?

When people stumble over these sad realities, it is a clear indication that they do not discern the reason for the conflicts. The root reason for this religious conflict is the over-arching reason for the conflicts. It is a conflict between truth and error. I hold to the truth, and all the other religions embrace and propagate error. And the person who dares to state that opinion is not only laughed to scorn, but persecuted and sometimes executed.

Be that as it may, the root to the conflict is (as it always has been) the evil of Satan attacking the righteousness of Christ. Jesus of Nazareth brought the perfect righteousness of God in heaven into the fallen world that is thoroughly saturated with Satan’s sin. How can

there not be conflict when these two diametrically opposed ideologies meet head on?

That is the story of our text. Jesus was steadfastly determined to go to Jerusalem to finish the divine and eternal task for which the triune Godhead sent Him. He came to pay the price required to forgive sin. He was determined to go to the cross to purchase sinners’ redemption with His blood. And as He drew closer and closer to the cross, Satan stirred up greater and greater conflict against Him. The saddest part of the story is that the people who were moved by Satan into conflict with Jesus were not able to discern that their opportunities to be right with God through a relationship with Jesus Christ were passing by the day.

This same sad scenario is repeated over and over in our circles of influence. We all experience conflicts between righteousness and sin. These are real conflicts with real people in real circumstances. And still the sad reality is that the people who despise us, resist us, or maybe even hate us cannot understand that the problem is not personality differences. The problem is their propensity to do evil in conflict with our desires to do right. The problem is their residence in Satan’s camp of sin in conflict with our residence in Christ. If they could discern the real problem, they could confess their rebellion against God, embrace Jesus’ work of atonement by faith, and be made righteous through Him. But they cannot see the opportunity unless God intervenes with His saving grace.

Unavoidable Division (vv.49-53).

The words in the opening verse of our text – fire, baptism, and distress – do not portend much positiveness. Yet those are the words Jesus used in explaining why the Christ came to earth. Of course He came to declare the truth. In one conversation, Jesus said that He came to do the Father’s will (John 6:38). He said that He came to tell the truth about God and His will (John 17:8). He came to call sinners to His righteousness (Matthew 9:13). He came to preach the Good News of salvation (Mark 1:38). He came to offer abundant life (John 10:10). He came to bring the requirements of the law to completion (Matthew 5:17).

But because the Christ came to earth to declare the eternal truths from God the Father in heaven, He also had to come to earth to act as Judge. That is what Jesus tried to explain to His adversaries who were confronting Him. He said, *“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!”* (v.49). Throughout the Bible, fire is a symbol of judgment as well as purging. It is interesting that the same fire of God’s judgment that purges sins out of the saint’s life will also punish unrepentant sinners forever. To that end Jesus warned, *“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind”* (John 9:39).

But sinners do not have to wait until the Lord’s Day to experience this judgment. Christ draws the division between righteousness and sin right now. He will pass eternal judgment on the sinners in the future. In that process, He confessed that He longed for the time when all sin will be destroyed. That fire that ultimately destroys sin and sinners was kindled on the cross and through the resurrection. That same fire kindled on the cross also purges out the sins that plague His people. Do we also long for the purging fire to be kindled in our own hearts?

Again we might ask from the second verse in our text, “What was Christ’s baptism?” He said, *“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!”* (v.50). The general idea of baptism is not just a matter of getting wet. At its root, baptism is identification. In Jesus’ day, some Gentile people were baptized when they became proselytes to the Jewish religion. The same public rite demonstrated identification with confession of sin against God in John the Baptist’s ministry. Ultimately, when we, like others described in the New Testament, are baptized, we are publicly declaring identification with Jesus Christ’s atonement to cover our sins.

So, here, Jesus was immersed, baptized, with the Father’s judgment against sin. That is the heart of the gospel, the Good News. Isaiah promised that God the Father would lay on God the Son *the iniquity of us all*. (Isaiah 53:6). Paul wrote, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was baptized with our sins that we might be baptized with His righteousness. Peter explained about Jesus’ torture on the cross, *He himself bore our sins*

in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24).

Jesus understood that baptism was in the near future. Nevertheless, He was ready, driven to finish the task of salvation. Luke 9:51 marks a significant division in the book as Jesus set His face to move toward Jerusalem and the crucifixion and resurrection. Luke 12:1 marks another significant division, because from this point on in Luke’s account the religious leaders, as well as many of the people, were firmly opposed to Jesus.

By the end of Luke 12, Jesus is clearly pushing to finish the job. Hear our Lord as He expresses His desire: *“And how great is my distress until it is accomplished!”* (v.50b). Oh, but Jesus shouldn’t be distressed, should He? He never sinned, did He? He was tempted in every way like us. Distress is temptation. The Greek word translated *distress* (*su-ech’o*) can refer to unfavorable circumstances that seize, attack, or cause distress to someone.

To be attacked by unfavorable circumstances is not sin. To respond with fear, doubt, anger, revenge, and such is sin. Jesus felt the distress but responded by committing Himself to the Father’s will.

In light of Jesus’ teaching that He came to cast fire on the earth, that He came to be the Judge, we can understand why He would also explain that He did not bring peace but division. And yet, that very idea flies in the face of Scripture’s teaching. Didn’t the prophets promise a “peaceful” Messiah? Yes, it is true that the prophets promised that He would bring peace. Isaiah promised that Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Ezekiel promised that Jesus will make a covenant of peace with Israel (Ezekiel 37:26). John’s father Zacharias promised that the Christ will lead the individuals and, therefore, the nation in a path of peace (Luke 1:79).

Therefore, Jesus taught that He came to bring peace to the conflict between the Creator God and the rebellious sinners. He offers a unique peace that the world cannot offer (John 16:33). He offers peace to those of us who by nature are far from God (Ephesians 2:17). But the only way to offer that peace was through His sacrifice on the cross (Colossians 1:20) and that was not a peaceful experience.

If Jesus came to offer peace on earth, why did Christ promise division? Christ’s righteousness, which is the foundation of the peace that He brings, must also create division. *“Do you think that I have*

come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five 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 her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (vv.51-53).

Jesus came and offered peace through His sacrifice. But He also judges people who reject Him and reject His payment for sin. That does not refer to only a future, eternal judgment. Jesus’ judgment between righteousness and sin is already in force. The fire that Christ casts on the earth is the judgment of sin. Some are destroyed by the fire Christ brings. Some are refined by that same fire.

Paul explained this paradox by writing, *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).* We read about this same paradox each month at our communion service. *But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world (1 Corinthians 11:32).*

That fire of the Lord’s judgment will cause divisions. For example, often family members are not too perturbed when their child or relative gets religion. It is when the people desire to live like Christ that the family reacts negatively. That conflict arises because the righteousness of Christ condemns the sinner’s sin. Not many people sit by placidly when another person points out their unrighteousness and failure. And often this revealing is accomplished with mere lifestyle, not spoken words. The conflict reveals Jesus’ judgment against sin.

Right Judgment (vv.54-59).

The conflict between Jesus’ righteousness and sin is obvious in life. That Jesus is judging sin is also obvious. What should people do about it? Jesus offered two illustrations to teach the people why they needed to respond to conflict with discernment or right judgment.

In the first illustration, Jesus taught the hypocrite’s inability to discern time. Hear the illustration. *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. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens” (vv.54-55).

The people, and especially the religious leaders, prided themselves in their ability to discern. This pride was especially obvious when it came to “discerning” how God’s law applied to life. Paul described their attitude well when he wrote, *You are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth (Romans 2:19-20).*

Of course this illustration was about very simple, practical discernment. Clouds rising in the west pretty much promised rain, just like they sometimes do in Greenville. A warm south wind blowing from the Arabian desert generally meant it would be a hot summer day.

But how did Jesus apply the simple illustration? He said, *“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?” (v.56).* “Hypocrites” is not a rare word for Jesus. He often exposed the religious people’s hypocrisy. The word “hypocrites” means to make believe. We know from our own experiences that the hypocrite indicates that certain things are true about him, but in reality the truth is something quite different.

Jesus applied the word to the religious people of His day by pointing out that they pretended to know so much about God’s law, but in reality they didn’t know God or His law at all. The people demonstrated the ability to judge weather patterns on far less evidence than Jesus presented regarding the truth that He is the Son of God. They drew conclusions based on clouds and wind and at the same time ignored the evidence of Jesus’ teaching, Jesus’ miracles, Jesus’ perfect life.

Those ancient hypocrites were very much like the folks we refer to as “cultural Christians.” Cultural Christians grow up in a “Christian” culture and adhere to the acceptable standards of that culture. For example, a Christian culture believes that there is a God and He is the Creator. It believes that the Bible is true, that Jesus is God’s Son, who died on the cross and rose from the grave. The

Christian culture believes that people who believe these things about Jesus ought to go to church somewhat regularly, ought to love Mom and Grandma, ought not to get drunk very often, ought to stand up when the national anthem is played, and ought to pray before the football game.

However, a cultural Christian does not experience that Holy Spirit miracle of the new birth, does not have a genuine, personal relationship with Christ, and does not have a desire to apply the principles of righteousness to life. A cultural Christian does not see the need to read his or her Bible, and does not sense the need to pray frequently throughout the day. The cultural Christian views God as something like a fire extinguisher. He is nice to have available in case of an emergency.

Jesus' warning is that cultural Christians and religious hypocrites cannot discern the present time. He questioned His peers, *"But why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"* (v.56b). The phrase, *the present time* refers to that time when Jesus, God the Son, was in their presence. It was the time when He was here to fulfill the requirements of the law the hypocrites claimed to know so well. The people failed to discern that they really could not keep the law about which they made so many conclusions and formed so many opinions. The people could not judge accurately that the purpose of the law was to render them guilty, thus needing a Savior from their sin, which Savior was standing in their very presence at the moment!

Therefore, in the time of opportunity to discern, they failed and rejected the Lord to their own destruction. Jesus expressed their rejection in some of the saddest words recorded in the Bible. *And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation"* (Luke 19:41-44).

Do you know the time of your visitation? Can you discern opportunity?

In the second illustration, Jesus expressed the hypocrites' inability to discern what is right. He posed that critical question: *"And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?"* (v.57). Notice that Jesus addressed this question, not just to the group, but to the individual – "for yourselves." His question was ultimately, "Why can you not discern for yourself that you are guilty before God?"

At issue was the same problem the disciples on the road to Emmaus experienced when Jesus met them along the way. After the two disciples explained all the stuff that caused them to be discouraged and frustrated, Jesus pointed out the real problem. Jesus explained that their *lack of faith caused their eyes not to be open* (Luke 24:16). He explained that they did not believe all that the Scripture said about the Christ – with whom they had been for three years! *And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself* (Luke 24:25-27).

Hypocrites in every age think they know, think they understand, but in reality they refuse to believe God's Word. They think they can see spiritually and they think they can hear spiritually, but they cannot. Jesus described them like this: *"Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them'"* (Matthew 13:14-15).

In closing, consider the brief illustration Jesus gave to teach the danger of not being able to discern the day of opportunity. He said, *"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. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny"* (vv.58-59).

This is the picture of every sinner on his or her way to the Great White Throne judgment. Once they arrive at the judgment seat, there is no chance to *settle*. John wrote, *Then I saw a great white throne*

and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

That is reality. That is going to happen. Dear Sinner, discern the time, the opportunity to embrace Christ now. Pay close attention to the division Christ brings to this world of sin. Because sin and righteousness are diametrically opposed, perfectly righteous Christ must cause division. Does it not seem logical that people who are truly followers of Christ would be divided out – distinct from – the character of a sinful system, and the people who make up that system? How odd that professing Christians spend so much time, effort, and money attempting to make the people on the other side of the divide, that righteous Jesus erects, think that there really is no divide between sin and righteousness. That kind of life is just not right!

There must be a conflict between righteousness and sin. That conflict should be like a flashing light and blaring siren telling sinners that now is the acceptable time to get on the right side of the conflict. Now is the time to confess sin and embrace the righteousness of Christ.