

Luke 12: 49-53; II Peter 3:1-13; The Unexpected Purpose of Christ's Coming I. A Fire Kindled II. A Division Made

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, popular Christianity seeks to make Jesus into a kinder, gentler savior.

One that is rich on grace but has no justice! Even this past month we have heard often of Jesus as the one who brings peace on earth. But what kind of peace will Jesus bring? The fact is, we like to focus on the benefits and blessings of Jesus work, we tend to skip over the difficult or demanding aspects of our lives.

For example, we like to receive cards that say- Peace on Earth- but what about a Christmas card that quoted Jesus saying- I did not come to bring peace, but to kindle a fire and make a separation. This really doesn't fit with our kinder, gentler Jesus does it! Well, today we see that Jesus Christ is doing a great work of division and purification today. We know from last week that His return is certain and soon- but what should we expect of His work as we wait? We know we are supposed to be diligent and faithful- busy with the Master's work while He is away- but what will others think of us? So today we see that Jesus Christ reveals an unexpected purpose and result of His ministry. Unexpected by us- but at the heart of His work!

I. A Fire Kindled

In our first unexpected work, we find that a fire is going to be kindled. As v. 49 opens, I came to cast fire on the earth- to kindle a flame and stoke a fire that will burn. In fact- Jesus desired that fire to already be started! Now throughout Scripture, fire is usually portraying the need for purity and also judgement. For the precious metals like gold and silver, fire will purify and cleanse- burning up the dross and removing the impurities. For wicked and worthless things- fire will consume and destroy. So when Jesus says that He desires to kindle a fire- to stoke a flame- He is speaking to a specific work that He was soon going to perform. The first thing we think of is the church- as the context here speaks the need for holy service within the household of God. Jesus Christ, after His death, is going to be pouring out His Holy Spirit. This Spirit will purify- sanctify and cleanse Gods' people so that their works would begin to reflect the holy life that Christ was currently living. But the context is also speaking about the end of time- His return on the

last day to judge the works of all men. In this light, the fire that Jesus desires to kindle is the fire of judgment! As we read earlier in II Peter 3, our world- the current heaven and earth- are being stored up for fire and being kept until the day of Judgement and the destruction of the ungodly. When the day of the Lord comes- like a thief Peter says which is also a phrase found earlier in this chapter- when that day arrives the heaven and earth will be burned up and dissolved- everything being exposed. One needs only think of what happened at Sodom and Gomorrah- the fire of God fell down and tested the works of those living in that city- their words were exposed as wicked and the city along with its residents were consumed. Jesus Christ is a just judge- currently He is purifying His people and one day He will purify this world as a whole. Those who do not believe in Him will be consumed in this fire. And Jesus desires for that day to come! Jesus strongly desires for the day of judgement to come to expose all things! He continues in v. 50 by speaking of another desire- that He has a great distress for- that He longs for Himself to be baptized. Now what is this baptism that Jesus so eagerly desires- that He want to begin? It cannot be the baptism of John- for that was over. Rather, it is the baptism of fire which is His suffering which will culminate in His death on the cross. Baptism and death were often used together. Jesus longed for the suffering to come- so that His work as propitiation would be completed! He longed for the cross to come so that He might go beyond the cross to the resurrection and the life. He was eager for this- not because He delighted in pain- but because He knew that the only way to save His servants was to go through the fire on their behalf. So say this another way, the only way in which we will be spared from the fire of judgment on the last day is if Jesus was baptized with this fire Himself in our place! Yes, Jesus was coming to bring peace- peace between sinful man and a holy God. But the only way that peace would be had is if He suffered the baptism of suffering and death! Only after our sins are put on Christ and consumed in judgement, can we find true and lasting peace with God! So Jesus desires these fires to start- that the work of purifying and judgement might begin! And the application for us is found back in II Peter 3- knowing that the fires have been kindled and the day of judgement is coming- what sort of people ought you to be? Knowing that the master of the

house will return to test your works- should we not live our lives in holiness and godliness- waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God!

II. A Division Made

So Jesus begins by stating that He did not come to bring peace on earth- rather His coming will usher in a fire and cleansing on earth. But as He continues in v. 51- He came also to bring division. We live in society that seeks peace at all costs. Everyone and everything are acceptable. But the fact is, some things are more important than peace! Sometimes peace cannot be had! In reality, the message of the gospel and ministry of Jesus are divisive matters! So Jesus says that He came to bring division- the word is "Diakrismon." This word means separation- like cutting a piece of meat into two parts. It also means division- dividing into two, opposing sections- one against the other. Jesus is the great divider of humanity. Jesus did not come to bring peace between nation and nation- peace on earth does not mean that everyone will just get along. Neither did Jesus come to bring peace within the family structure. The church is called to live within the world- while not being of the world. We are called out of the lost humanity as a whole- and for those who do not embrace the truth- their response will often be anger and hatred! But this division can be seen in the home as well. As v. 52 clarifies- there is a consequence in the home when some believe in Christ and others do not. Although God has worked along family lines- the covenant includes promises and blessings for the household under godly leadership. That does not mean that all within that covenant household will always believe. The basic family unit can be set on edge. Some will believe, others will refuse and rebel. So we find marriages where one spouse is unrepentant after sin. We find a son or daughter who looks at the church with disdain- or a father or mother who belittles or despises our faith. As some of you know- this is a hard truth! But as Jesus said in Mt. 10- I came to bring a sword and to set brother against brother- enemies will be found in your own house! Jesus is warning us- telling us what to expect! From now on- v. 52 says- there will be division! Why should we expect hostility in the home when some believe and others do not? Because those of the household of faith belong to a new family! You have new brothers and sisters-

which gives you more in a common bond with your church than your own siblings! Your first priority is no longer your biological clan but your spiritual heritage! Who is Jesus' mother or brothers? Those who do the will of His Father in heaven! Now to be clear, we are to seek to live at peace with all men- as much as depends on us and is in our ability as Rom. 12 says. But sometimes, our allegiance to Christ- our unwillingness to bend on critical issues- is going to make people angry! We are going to have enemies- that a fact of the Christian life! When people hate you, malign your name- Jesus says- don't be surprised! If no one was our enemy, how could we show love to our enemies? This is part of what it means to live in a mixed world! The division and hostility is a constant reminder, we are not there yet! This is still a mission field! This world is still in its current state of sin and humanity is still in a state of rebellion against the true King! This does not mean that we become hostile, angry or aggressive in return. No, we content ourselves with humble obedience- busying ourselves with our master's work- and when people strike us on the cheek, we turn the other to them. When people despise, hate and insult- you are blessed Jesus said in Luke 6- because people are treating you as they treated me! If our enemy is in our own family, we have greater opportunity for loving service! Remember that Jesus is the great divider of humanity. On that last day, it is Jesus who will separate the sheep from the goats. He is no respecter of men. He will not take into account which family you came from- to which tribe you belong. Only those who have feared and love Him below- believed, repented and obeyed- these will hear the words- Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you. Jesus will make evident on that day who belongs to him- and who will be cast out into the fire kindled for the devil and the workers of iniquity.

To conclude, today we have considered what is perhaps a surprising or unexpected aspect of His work. Kindling fires and making divisions is not what we tend to think of- but this is a necessary part of His work as mediator. Only after the fire will there be true and lasting peace on earth! Jesus came to bring peace between God and man- by way of His baptism of fire and death. Only after this kindled fire cleanses this whole earth, will we be able to dwell with God in eternal peace!