

Preaching Through The Bible Michael Eaton

Luke's Gospel

Part 55 An Age of Conflict (12:49-59)

• Towards Jerusalem – teachings, exhortations and warnings

1. Jesus corrects the idea that the gospel is designed to make life easier for us

• 'I have come...' sayings

• Fire brings about purification and utter extermination

• Baptism of suffering – nothing to do with water!

• Jesus did not come to solve family disputes and make our lives more comfortable

• Jesus comes to destroy sin in fiery judgement

• The cross – his immersion into suffering

Jesus is on a journey to Jerusalem; Luke is telling us of the things that happen as Jesus travels in a roundabout manner towards Jerusalem. On this journey He urges the disciples to constantly maintain a fearless acknowledgement that they belong to Him¹. He talks of the Holy Spirit² and warns against greed³, urging them to be watchful⁴. He warns about division in households⁵, and speaks of interpreting the times⁶ and making agreement with one's accuser⁷.

1. **Jesus corrects the idea that the gospel is designed to make life easier for us.** It seems that what is happening here still goes back to the incident in Luke 12:13. Jesus used the incident when His preaching was interrupted to talk about wealth and greed, and to encourage His disciples to avoid anxiety and to be ever ready in God's work. But His comment in 12:14 also needs development. Jesus has said what He did **not** come to do, but what did He come to do? Luke 12:49 answers the question. Jesus says, '*I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled*'¹.

There are a number of sayings of Jesus that begin with the words 'I have come'. These sayings are very helpful because they tell us the purpose of Jesus' coming to this world.

But what does this saying mean? What is the fire? What does fire do? It exterminates and it purifies! It consumes rubbish. Luke has already told us about this. John the Baptist came warning of God's exterminating fire. Fire is often used as a picture of judgement. Luke's references to fire are in 3:9, 16, 17; 9:54; 12:49; 17:29; 22:55. Fire exterminates, wipes out of existence. Rubbish is thrown into fire¹. God's fire cannot be put out; it is 'unquenchable'². It exterminates rubbish. So it 'cleanses'² by wiping out of existence the dirt²; it 'burns up'. Every reference to 'burning up' in the New Testament³ has the idea of utter extermination. What is burned up eventually 'passes away'⁴. Jesus comes to bring an end to the reign and rule of sin.

The next saying is: '*I have a baptism to be baptised with...*'. What sort of 'baptism' is this? It is a baptism of suffering. It has nothing to do with water baptism! We must get rid of the idea that whenever we see the word 'baptism' it is a reference to a ceremony with water!

Jesus is still following up the incident mentioned in 12:13. Jesus did not come to be a social welfare-worker solving disputes about money in families that cannot agree. Jesus came to cast fire upon the earth – to bring in the burning, purifying acts of the kingdom of God! How often people want to use 'religion' – even Christian 'religion' – to make their life easy and help pay the rent! Or to get God's help in solving family finances or in dealing with a greedy brother. But God's kingdom is much more than our little squabbles and anxieties. Jesus comes to destroy sin in a fiery judgement.

Jesus' fiery judgement comes by way of His death upon the cross. He has set His face steadily in the direction of Jerusalem where He knows He will die and be raised again. It is there that He will face His 'baptism', His immersion into suffering.

1 12:2-9
2 12:10-12
3 12:13-34
4 12:35-48
5 12:49-53
6 12:54-56
7 12:57-59

1 12:49

1 3:9
2 3:17
3 Matthew 3:12, 13:30, 40; Luke 3:17; Acts 19:19; 1 Corinthians 3:15; Hebrews 13:11; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 8:7, 17:16, 18:8
4 2 Peter 3:10

2. Jesus is eager to accomplish His life's work

3. Jesus is more likely to intensify family conflicts than to settle them

• Rewards mixed with trials in this life

4. Jesus asks the crowd to note the signs of the age in which they live

• This is an age of conflict and division!

• Jesus is bringing a new epoch in world history

2. **Jesus is eager to accomplish His life's work.** 'How I am troubled until it is accomplished!' ¹. Jesus is not focusing on getting His own life comfortable. He is eager to accomplish something for God.

3. **Jesus is more likely to intensify family conflicts than to settle them.** The man back in Luke 12:13 had wanted Jesus to settle a family dispute and make life easier for him. But Jesus corrects the idea that the gospel is designed to make life easier for us. Has Jesus come simply to help us get money out of our family? No! There are rewards in being saved, but the best of them are after this life. The rewards God gives us in this life are mixed in with hardships and trials. One hardship that might be our destiny is the pain of being separated from people with whom you want to be close. Jesus speaks of 'a family divided against each other'. Maybe in one particular family some are saved; others are not. It creates a division. We wish that division were not there but it is! It does not often happen that an entire family come to salvation. The picture is of a family of five: mother, father, son, daughter, daughter-in-law. But the family is not united since some are supporters of God's kingdom; others are against it.

4. **Jesus asks the crowd to note the signs of the age in which they live.** This age in which we live is an age where divisions of this nature are bound to happen. It is not a time for seeking comfort or defeating a member of our earthly family in some dispute about family wealth.

This age is an age of conflict. Jesus is casting fire upon the earth already! People can interpret the weather¹, but they are hypocrites and are unable to interpret the time in which they live². They are unwilling to see this as an age in which God is acting through Jesus. It is an age of division – created by Jesus. It is an age beginning with the suffering and resurrection of Jesus. Why can they not discern that Jesus is bringing in a new epoch in the history of the world? Luke 12:57–59 means 'get right with your fellow men and women before God's judgement falls'³. Jesus still has the situation of 12:13 in mind.

¹ 12:50

¹ 12:54-55

² 12:56

³ 12:57-59



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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