

# Fire on the Earth

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 23 July 2023

Preacher: Tedd Tripp

[ 0 : 00 ] I would ask you to turn with me to Luke chapter 12, and I'm going to read several verses there in a moment. If you ask the average person on the street, what did Jesus stand for?

What did Jesus teach? Can you summarize his message? People would probably tell you Jesus taught about peace, love, forgiveness, kindness, graciousness toward others, turning the other cheek.

Those are the kinds of things people think of when they think of the message of Christ. And, of course, all those things are true, but they probably would not identify this passage as a passage of teaching about the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to read just several verses, beginning with verse 49. I came to cast fire on earth, and would that it were already kindled.

I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great my distress is until it is accomplished. Do not think that I've come, excuse me, do you think I've come to give peace on earth?

[ 1 : 15 ] No, I tell you, but rather division. 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 her mother-in-law.

Let's pray and ask God to open this passage up to us tonight. Lord, we come to you acknowledging our need of you, acknowledging our need of your grace, acknowledging our need of the illumination of your spirit to give light to our eyes and to enable us to see Christ in this passage, and to even have our hearts prepared to partake of the table as we contemplate this passage.

We pray that you would do these things for us so that Christ might be exalted both in this place and also in our hearts, and that we might be drawn to love him and to serve him with greater fervor and greater joy.

We pray this for Christ's glory. Amen. Well, I want you to think about this saying of Christ. Christ says, I've come to bring fire to the world.

In fact, I wish that it was burning right now. I haven't come to bring peace. I've come to bring division and even powerful division, painful division, division that would separate people in their own household.

[ 2 : 45 ] And, of course, the question for us is what does it mean? What is this passage teaching us? What are we to carry away with us? Isn't he the prince of peace?

This doesn't sound very peaceful. What should we carry away from this passage? So I have three words for you as we look at the passage.

We want to look at the word division and baptism and fire. In the middle of this section that I read to you is the word division.

Jesus says, I didn't come to bring peace, but I came to create division, a painful, difficult division, division that even separates family members.

I'll produce that kind of division. And what I want for us to see as we look at this passage together tonight is that Christ is one of the most polarizing figures of human history.

[ 3 : 41 ] It's not possible to take his teachings seriously and remain neutral about him. Now, think of his claims. I want to just remind you of some of the claims of Christ, and I'll quote him in his own words from a number of passages.

But Christ claimed a sinless life. He could look at the crowd of people who were angry at his claim that he shared the nature of God, that he was like God.

And one of his comments to them was, which of you can point to anything wrong in me, any sin in me? Even more amazing, he says in John chapter 8, can any of you prove me guilty of any sin?

I tell you the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to my Father, excuse me, to God, hears what God says. The reason you don't hear is that you do not belong to God.

Jesus claimed to be the only way to God. Not just to be a way or one of several ways or one that points to the way, but he claimed that he himself was the way.

[ 4 : 51 ] John 14, he says, I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. Or Matthew 11, 27, no one knows the Father but the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Jesus claimed that he had the capacity to forgive men's sins. It's one of the reasons the leaders were so angry at him is because they clearly understood that sins were against God.

And if sin is against God, then God alone can extend forgiveness. And in saying that he could extend forgiveness, he was claiming to be God, and it made them angry.

And remember when the man is dropped through the roof into the crowded house where Jesus is teaching, when Jesus saw their faith, he said, friends, your sins are forgiven.

And the Pharisees and teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, who is this fellow that speaks such blasphemy? Who can forgive sin but God alone?

[ 6 : 00 ] Christ claimed to be the giver of eternal life. He doesn't just point to people to how they can find eternal life or how they can deepen their life experience, but he claims actually to be life himself.

In John 6, in that Bread of Life discourse, he said, For it is my Father's will that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

Or John 6, 47, later in that same discourse, I tell you the truth, whoever believes in me has everlasting life. Or in John 10, he says, I give to my followers, I give them eternal life.

They shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of the Father's hand. I am the Father.

I am the Father. I am the Father. And the Father am one. Or remember John 11, with Lazarus' tomb, he says, I am the resurrection and the life.

[ 7 : 10 ] He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Jesus claimed that he would die and come back to life, be raised again.

In John 10, he says, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, I lay down my life for the sheep. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down and to take it up for this command I've received from my Father.

I remember how in Luke 18, he takes the 12 aside, and he says, we're going into Jerusalem. Everything written about me and the law and the prophets is going to be fulfilled.

The Son of Man will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him, and on the third day, he will rise again.

He claimed to have shared glory with God in heaven before his incarnation. Remember his words in his high priestly prayer in John chapter 17.

[ 8 : 16 ] Father, glorify me in your presence with that glory I had with you before the world began. He claimed to be the heavenly king, the king of glory.

In John 18, he said, my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight for me. And to prevent my arrest by the Jews, but my kingdom is from another place.

Remember he was saying that in his defense before Pilate. And Pilate said, you are a king then?

And Jesus said, you are right in saying I am a king. For in fact, for this reason, I was born, and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth, and everyone on the side of truth listens to me.

He claimed that he would return again, and judge the whole earth. Remember in Matthew chapter 24, so as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

At that time, excuse me, at that time, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming in clouds of the sky with power and great glory.

[ 9 : 28 ] And then in the next chapter, in chapter 25, he says, when the Son of Man comes in his glory with his holy angels with him, he will sit on his throne in his heavenly glory, and all the nations of the earth will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Jesus made these audacious claims. C.S. Lewis, in his book, *Mere Christianity*, makes a statement about this that is very powerful, I think.

He said, I'm trying to prevent anyone from really saying the foolish things people often say about him. I'm ready, and he's quoting people, I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I do not accept his claim to be God.

This is C.S. Lewis speaking again. That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said these sorts of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic or on the level of a man who says he's a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You can make your choice. Either way, this man was and is the Son of God or else a madman or something worse.

[10:48] You can shut him up for a fool or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let's not come with any patronizing nonsense about him being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.

He did not intend to. I think it's clear these are very polarizing claims that Christ made, because if you see Jesus for who he is, and if you understand him to be the divine human person, the only way to God, the ultimate judge of the whole world, the one who has the right to demand our total allegiance, the one before whom every knee will bow, the one who is the rightful object of worship, and the one to organize every aspect of our life around, if you see him in that way, you cannot be neutral.

Your religion will not be a private affair where you'll not say to others, well, this is what I believe, but I respect your beliefs to be valid as well.

You'll be saying, this is the truth. He is the truth, and he's the truth for all people at all times, in all places. Everyone on earth must believe these things, and if we truly believe those things, we will be those broken-hearted evangelists we've been talking about in Sunday school.

We'll go to the ends of the earth to try in every lawful way to compel people to believe that Jesus is the only Savior. If we truly believe his claims about himself, they are polarizing claims.

[12:29] They create division. They separate us from all who do not believe. It's not very politically correct, to truly believe what Christ has taught of himself.

People will be offended. They will say, who do you think you are? Or mothers will cry and say, what happened to you? You were such a nice boy, or you must be part of a cult.

Or your father might get mad at you and yell, and then go off and sit in his chair and sulk. But mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, will be divided from each other over these truths.

It's an inevitable result of saying that Jesus Christ is Lord. And some of us have experienced that. We've experienced that in our own lives or in various seasons of life.

And you see what Jesus meant. Jesus said, I have come to create division. And on that last and great day, there will be division as he separates all of humanity into these two categories, sheep and goats, the lost and the saved, those who have believed and those who have rejected, those who have been transformed by him.

[13:41] And his power and his grace will go into glory, and the goats will go into everlasting hell and everlasting destruction. So we can't be neutral about him.

He doesn't want us to be neutral. If we take seriously his claims, we recognize that he has come to produce division, to create this separation between the saved and the damned, the lost, the sheep and the goats.

C.S. Lewis was right. You have to make your choice. Either this man was the son of God or a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool or you can fall at his feet, but let's not come with any patronizing nonsense about him being just a great human teacher.

He hasn't left that way open to us. Now I want to talk next about the word baptism that is used in this passage, and we'll also talk about fire, and I want to try to separate those from each other, but they'll bleed over a little bit and the outline will unravel for us.

But Jesus says here in this passage, I've come to bring fire on the earth, and I wish that it was burning right now. But first, I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed.

[15:02] It's an interesting word. The word is translated distressed. It's the word that is used to describe the terror that a person would feel who's part of a walled city.

You can imagine a walled city under siege, and your enemy is surrounded the city, and they're out there building siege works, and they're ready to come into the city, and before long, they're going to pour over their walls with their swords drawn, and they're going to slaughter every man and woman and boy and girl in the city.

And you can imagine the stress of living with the realization they're out there, and they're going to come over the walls, and it's just a matter of time. It's inevitable. You'd have this sense of incredible fear and foreboding and overwhelming sense of the painful inevitability of the enemy coming over the wall to destroy you.

And Jesus lived with that kind of foreboding every day of his life. That's what he's saying here. As he did his teaching, as he ministered to people, as he healed their diseases, as he counseled them, as he taught them, as he loved them, there was this overwhelming sense of foreboding, of the inevitability of the baptism that he was going to undergo.

And he says, how distressed I am about this baptism. What baptism? What is he talking about as the baptism?

[16:32] It's not John's baptism. By this time in his ministry, he has already undergone John's baptism. That took place at the beginning of his ministry, long before these words that we are looking at tonight.

So what was the baptism? What was it that filled him with such dread and such fear? It was always on his radar. This overwhelming sense of dread over something he was distressed by that was inevitable and would be painful and difficult.

Well, to answer that question, we have to look at the third word I want to look at with you tonight, the word fire. And of course, my points kind of unravel here and you'll have to forgive me for that. But Jesus says, I have come to set the world on fire. What is this fire? Because fire is used various ways, as you know, in the Bible. I mean, in Acts 2, for example, fire is used to be a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles and little flames of fire were seen above their heads. It was symbolic of the Spirit coming to them.

[17:47] But in the Old Testament, fire is a frequently used metaphor for judgment. Think of passages like Isaiah 66, 15. See, the Lord is coming with fire and his chariots are like a whirlwind and he will bring down his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire.

For with fire and his sword, the Lord will execute judgment on all the people and many will be slain by the Lord. Or think of those well-known words from Malachi 3 that we remember from the Messiah.

Who can endure the day of his coming? Who will stand when he appears? For he will be like the refiner's fire. Or maybe you remember the passage in 2 Thessalonians 1 where Jesus says he will be revealed in blazing fire with his holy angels with him to punish all who do not believe the gospel and do not obey Jesus Christ.

Perhaps one of the places where we get the most help for understanding what he's talking about is in our earlier section of Luke in chapter 3, 16. John answered them saying, I baptize you with water but one is coming who is more powerful than I am the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire his winnowing fork is in his hand to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into the barn but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

So at first we might think this passage is talking about Pentecost I will baptize you with fire with the Holy Spirit but verse 17 makes it clear it's not a reference to Pentecost it's a reference to judgment and the metaphor here is harvesters in Christ's time would gather the grain crops the grass crops that had a head of grain at the top of wheat oats barley rye they would gather those crops together and they would cut those grasses down they would take them to the threshing floor and they would trample on them or have oxen trample over them until they loosened the seeds from the chaff from the stalk from the grassy part of the grain and then the harvester would come in with his fork almost like you can imagine a pitchfork and kind of shaking the grass and the seeds which were heavier and smaller would fall out through the grass onto the threshing floor and then the grass that was left behind would be thrown into the fire and burned and that's the metaphor here

[20:34] Christ's ministry is ultimately a ministry of judgment that's what John is warning about there's judgment to come Jesus will cast out cast all the worthless stuff into the fire where it'll be devoured and burned the same sort of analogy is used in chapter 15 of John the branches that are

not fruitful and are cut off from the vine and are cast into the fire and are burned if you think about fire fire cleanses fire is the ultimate cleansing agent if you take a lump of ore silver gold some precious metal in ore form and you get it hot enough it'll burn away all the impurities and only leave the pure gold silver the pure metal behind it's cleansed by the fire they're purified with fire and the same fire that consumes the perishable things will cleanse the imperishable things and so the gold that is valuable is preserved even though the impurities that are part of the gold are all burned away and what

Jesus is telling us here is that he has come to bring the fires of cleansing to the earth he says I wish that the fire was already here and what he means by that is I long to see the day when the earth is cleansed so that everything ugly everything that is destructive everything that is bad is utterly consumed and one day the cleansing fire of God's judgment will be poured out on all wickedness and all decay abuse sorrow evil in every form oppression hatred cruelty vileness badness wrongdoing villainy depravity all the workers of those things will be burned up with the fire of judgment so only what is pure and holy will remain so Jesus is speaking here of the judgment that is going to be poured out on the whole earth one day when the world will be destroyed and only and true peace and holiness and righteousness will remain the judgment will be severe and it will be marvelous and Jesus says I wish that it was coming right now

I wish right now all that is evil could be cleansed away and done away and you might think that's a strange thing to wish for the fires of destruction but if you think about it we all have those kinds of longings sometimes we long to see wickedness and evil and what is vile and destructive destroyed you might remember 10 or 12 years ago when the cash for kids scandal took place in our community and people would speak of those judges who had who had taken money to incarcerate for extended periods of time young people who had done relatively minor things people would say things like I hope he burns in hell if there's any justice that man should go to hell why do people say such things they say such things because there's a sense of a longing for justice a longing to see wickedness destroyed and we know that if there's not ultimate justice then there is no justice in the universe at all because we all know that people get away with things in this life and we see injustices and we see suffering and we see ugliness but we know that ultimately

God will bring about righteous judgment and will right every wrong that has ever been done and one day every score will be settled and eternal justice will be established and you can't face life without believing that evil will one day be punished and the righteous will be vindicated you remember that passage in Revelation chapter 6 about the John says I saw under the altar the souls of those who were slain for the word of God and for the testimony that they held remember that and remember what those people are doing they're crying out with a loud voice how long oh Lord holy and true until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth those righteous people who have been slain for their righteousness are crying out for God to bring about that ultimate justice that ultimate judgment on the wicked there's a yearning in the human spirit for that kind of righteous judgment and we feel that you know what it's like to watch a movie where in the movie there's been some horrible injustice at the beginning of the movie and it establishes the dramatic tension of the movie and some wicked person has done something terrible and they've strutted about and they've brought destruction on others and you're waiting for the day when they get their comeuppance and you're kept spellbound by the movies you see the story progress to the time when that person gets his due you know if there is no eternity if there is no life after death if there is no judge of all the earth who will bring about righteous judgment and ultimate justice then life is truly absurd and it's meaningless

Huxley the atheist said this is not a direct quote but he wrote I had to get rid of the idea of God in order to have the political and libertine freedom that I craved and then later he wrote the price I paid for getting rid of God was getting rid of the ultimate meaning of life if there is no ultimate judgment then what hope is there for the world I mean one of the things that gives us hope even in the brokenness of our own situation is we know God is enthroned and one day he will right all wrongs and everything will be good and so we long for that but if there is ultimate justice then what hope is there for me and you because we too have broken

[ 27 : 31 ] God's law and our demand for judgment recoils on us because we stand judged we stand condemned and the fires of judgment if there's no fire of judgment then there's no hope for the world but if there is fire of judgment then there's no hope for us but there is another alternative and that's what this passage is talking about so if we go back to the idea of baptism this baptism that

Jesus was full of distress as he lived under the shadow of it his entire life Mark 10 I think cracks this open for us remember when James and John came to Jesus and they said in your kingdom Lord we want to be the vice president and the secretary of state we want to sit on your right hand and on your left hand we want to have places of honor and prestige and importance could we have those places of honor and do you remember what Jesus says he says you don't even know what you're asking for can you drink the cup

I'm going to drink can you be baptized with a baptism I'm going to undergo well what is that cup what is that baptism what is the baptism that that that that was so overwhelming that even the thought of it filled Christ with with distress that he endured every day of his ministry Jesus is saying in this passage I have come to bring fire to the earth I wish it was already burning away everything that was wicked and purifying the entire earth but before I can bring that fire to earth I have this baptism I have to bear a baptism that fills me with distress and foreboding but before I can bring fire to the earth in the form of divine judgment justice must fall on me remember his agony in the garden what was the cause of that great sorrow what was the cause of that great agony sweating great drops of blood leaving him so exhausted and overwhelmed that he had to have angels come and minister to him in order for him to regain his strength and be able to go on his way to the cross it was the taste of this cup it was the baptism he knew he was going to die he predicted his death many times he set his face like a flint toward

Jerusalem knowing that he would be delivered up he'd even talked to Moses and Elijah about his decease in Jerusalem but it wasn't the revelation that he had to drink this cup of woe that so amazed and burdened him it was this divinely given realization that this cup of suffering was what had to be and it was the suffering of losing the father on the cross and made him feel the agony that he felt Jonathan Edwards writes of his agony in the garden he says the sorrow and distress that his soul suffered rose from that lively full and immediate view which he had given to him of that cup of wrath the thing that Christ's mind was so full of at that time without a doubt the dread which his feeble nature had of that dreadful cup which was vastly more terrible than

Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace he had a near view of the furnace of wrath into which he was to be cast and he was brought to the mouth of the furnace so that he might look into it and stand and view its raging flames and see the glowing of its heat so that he might know where he was going and what he was about to suffer this was the thing that filled his soul with sorrow and darkness and the terrible sight overwhelmed him for what was that human nature of Christ to such a mighty wrath as this it was but a feeble worm of dust a thing to be crushed before the moth none of God's children ever had such a cup set before them and this as this first being of all creation had the father came to Christ and said drink this cup endure this baptism of fire that I have for you and you'll be destroyed by it but if you don't drink this cup they will be destroyed and Jesus said I will drink the cup

I will be baptized with this baptism these are ultimate realities that we have set before us in this passage it's why he divided it's the meaning of the fire and the baptism the dread that he endured for everyone that would ever trust him and believe and if you come to him if we come to him tonight we come to him at his table tonight and we can avoid the fire because he's taken the fire for us but all for all who do not come to him he will they will experience this fire this is the message of the bible and it's why it divides and it's why it both slays us and makes us alive let's pray together father we pray that you would overwhelm us with what christ has endured for us that he has taken this baptism of fire in our behalf so that he may offer to us this is my body which is broken for you this is my blood which is shed for you we thank you that he endured the fire of your divine judgment and wrath we know that he hung on the cross not as an object lesson but he bore the wrath of god for us in order that he might extend to us the grace and mercy of the cross we thank you in his name amen and have a for you a question in head