

# **LUKE**

## Part 51: “The Demands of Discipleship”

Luke 12:49-59

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Sunday, February 17, 2019 (Epiphany Season)

### **Scripture Reading**

<sup>49</sup> “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup> I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! <sup>51</sup> Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. <sup>52</sup> For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup> 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.”

<sup>54</sup> 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. <sup>55</sup> And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. <sup>56</sup> 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?

<sup>57</sup> “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? <sup>58</sup> 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. <sup>59</sup> I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”<sup>1</sup>

*Almighty God, thank you for the gift of your word. Thank you that your word comforts us when we need comfort, challenges us when we need to be challenged, but that it never fails to lead us to truth and life. May your Holy Spirit give us eyes to behold Jesus your Son as the rightful Lord and king of our life. We pray this in Jesus’s mighty name, AMEN.*

### **Introduction**

Today, we are in Luke chapter 12. Jesus, the rabbi from Galilee, is now a nationally known figure. As he travels with his disciples on his final journey to Jerusalem, virtually everyone in the country has come to see him preach and teach and perform miracles.

However, outside of his disciples, there has been a disturbing trend that has begun to emerge in the way people perceive Jesus. People tend to view Jesus not for who he is, but for who they want him to be. The Pharisees want him to be seen as a scapegoat for all that wrong. They want Jesus to be rejected as a troublemaker. The crowds are just interested in what Jesus can do for them; how he can entertain them, heal them, or even

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 12:49–59.

help them out in personal matters (cf. Lk. 12:13). In this way, Jesus has been sensationalized, trivialized, scrutinized, and even demonized all at once.

I find it fascinating that although so much has changed from the culture of the first century Palestine to twenty-first century America, humans of all ages tend to do the same thing with Jesus. *We tend to look to Jesus not as he is but as we would prefer him to be.*

If we are struggling with believing in a tamed-down, Americanized version of Jesus, a passage like the one we read today helps blow that notion apart. Admittedly, this is not one of Jesus's well-known teachings. In fact, our text today is a part of what some refer to as the hard sayings of Jesus. You will not see a lot of verses from this passage printed on Christian coffee cups or posted for inspiration on social media. You will not hear a whole lot of sermons on today's passage unless you are doing what we are doing right now, which is walking through the gospel of Luke, line by line, verse by verse.

And when we see today's passage from the wide-angle view of the rest of Luke, we find Jesus is growing more fierce and focused as he nears Jerusalem to complete his mission of redemption. So we can expect to hear more so-called hard sayings of Jesus, as he gets closer to the cross.

But Jesus is not giving these hard teachings because he is getting irritable or grumpy. As his earthly ministry draws to a close, *Jesus intentionally wants to disturb the comfort and complacency of his hearers, and he wants to instruct his disciples with a sense of urgency about what it really means to follow him.*

To be a disciple is not a task for the half-hearted. To be a disciple involves certain demands on our life. As we delve deeper into this text, I want to show us *what Jesus is teaching about the demands of discipleship and what those demands tell us about the nature of Jesus himself.*

## **Exposition**

### **1.) Jesus demands loyalty.**

- The American Civil War includes stories of brothers fighting brothers.
- These stories are tragic and terrible.
- Why then is Jesus talking about fire and division?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Fire" is an emphatic position (literally *Fire I have come to bring*) and can be interpreted either negatively as a reference to the coming judgment or positively as a reference to the coming of the Spirit (Acts 2:3). Elsewhere in Luke it is clearly a negative metaphor. This, plus the fact that the immediate context (12:51–53) is negative, indicates that it should be interpreted negatively here. The judgment that this fire brings can also be viewed in two ways. First, it can refer to the final judgment at the end of history. The preceding passage (12:35–48) favors this reading. Second, fire can refer to how the coming of God's kingdom divides people into two camps. The latter interpretation is demanded by the context (12:51–53). This theme of division is also found elsewhere in Luke. Robert H. Stein, [Luke](#), vol. 24, The

- Take a look back at our text: *“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! 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”* (Luke 12:49–53, ESV).
- Didn’t Jesus come to bring peace (Lk.2:14)?
- Yes, Jesus came to bring peace, but his peace is one of reclamation and restoration and revolution.
- Jesus has come to bring his kingdom of light that shines into the kingdom of darkness.
- The peace Jesus brings is not merely an uneasy absence of conflict, which can often be a veneer of false peace.
- Jesus has come to redeem creation and make all things new.
- That means Jesus necessarily disturbs the false peace of the status quo.
- Thus, Jesus by the very nature of his mission creates a moment of division.
- There will be a division between those who choose to accept Jesus and those who reject Jesus.<sup>3</sup>
- There will be a division between those who choose allegiance to Jesus, and those who still have the allegiance in their heart set on the things of this world.
- There will be a division between those who set aside their idols to follow Jesus and those who refuse to lay down their idols.
- What is an idol? An idol is a substitute messiah. Something that we feel we can’t live without. It is what we hope for most. It is what would devastate us if we lose. An idol can be a bad thing, but an idol can be a good thing that we turn into a God thing. The human heart is a factory of idols. And as Jesus demands absolute loyalty, he demands that we give up our idols to worship him.
- There are people who may at some level give lip service to Jesus, but as soon as you tell them they need to lay down their idols and truly follow Jesus, they grow hostile.
- There are people who will get mad if you choose to not worship their idols along with them.
- If you want to enrage someone, poke his or her idols and see what happens.
- The nicest person can turn into a rage machine when the idol of control or comfort or pride is contested as they are driving down the highway.
- The wisest person can fly off the handle if you challenge his or her political views.

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New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 364.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896), 333–334.

- The lamb-like mother can turn into a bear when someone else is mean to her kids.
- In general, you know you have hit an idol when we respond with uncharacteristic fear, irrationality, and anger when it is challenged.
- And why is family called out in this passage? Family is where we find our closest relationships typically, and it is in the context of close relationships that one another idols are most clearly revealed.
- Jesus is saying when someone we love is choosing an idol over Jesus, our loyalty and allegiance to God must be absolute – even when we are talking about family.
- There is a parallel teaching in Matthew: *“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me”* (Matthew 10:37, ESV).
- This is not an anti-family teaching, but a teaching on priority.
- *Have there ever been times in your life where faithfulness to Jesus has been costly in your close relationships?*
- In such situations, the most faithful thing we can do is be loyal to Jesus.
- The most loving thing we can do for people is to be loyal to Jesus.
- How can we lovingly refuse to worship the idols of those we love only from a motive of being loyal to Jesus?
- We should reject the temptations of compromise and cruelty.
- We should handle such situations with grace and truth, knowing we cannot control people’s response, but we can make sure we are healthy in our approach to conflict.
- Here is something Pastor Tim Keller said, *“It is not enough to be truthful....Because our words must be life-giving, we must never use truth as a weapon.... When you tell the truth, you should always have a ‘ministry motive.’ You should only confront to help another person achieve illumination and understanding or to remove distance and barriers between you and the other person.”*<sup>4</sup>
- We speak the truth in love and always leave the door open for reconciliation.
- Like Jesus, our eyes must be on the cross and the hope of the resurrection.
- Knowing that the gospel is the only hope for true relationship, reconciliation, and redemption for those that we love.

## **2.) Jesus demands attention.**

- Since my wife, Kate, was a child she has been an amateur meteorologist. I never check the weather. I just ask Kate. I’ve outsourced that responsibility. Many of us have a similar fascination as my wife.

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Keller with Kathy Keller. *God’s Wisdom for Navigating Life: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Book of Proverbs*. (New York: Viking, 2017), 184.

- We want to know about the weather, so we pay attention to forecasts. Jesus knows this and he uses it to confront his hearers
- Look back at our text: *“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. 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?”* (Luke 12:54–56, ESV).
- Jesus lived in an agrarian society that depended greatly on the weather. And they could not ask Siri was going to happen. They had to look for signs that indicated what was about to happen. They had to pay close attention.
- In ancient Palestine, “clouds rolling in from the Mediterranean [meant] rain, and a wind from the hot and dusty Negev [meant] sultry weather.”<sup>5</sup>
- As Robert Stein observes, “Jesus contrasted the crowd’s ability to interpret various meteorological signs with their culpable inability to recognize either the fact or the meaning of the spiritual signs happening right in front of them.”<sup>6</sup>
- He even goes so far as to call them “hypocrites” (Lk. 12:56).
- How are we hypocrites in this area? Jesus is saying we already have the skill set to carefully discern, evaluate, and interpret our environment and season, but that we have failed to use that skill when it comes to things of spiritual and eternal importance.
- The word used for “interpret” in verse 56 is the word “dokimadzo” (δοκιμάζω). It means “to make a critical examination of something to determine genuineness, *put to the test, examine.*”<sup>7</sup>
- Its the same word used in 1 Cor. 11 when Paul says, *“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself”* (1 Corinthians 11:28–29, ESV).
- What have the crowds failed to dokimadzo? Look at verse 56 again: the “present time.” The “present time” Jesus refers is the time of the visitation of the Messiah and the coming of the kingdom of God.
- We too need to discern that the most important thing happening right now is the coming of the kingdom of God.
- So ask your self: *What are the things that occupy your fascination that have no eternal consequence? What are you truly paying attention to? What does it look like to truly examine what God is doing in you life on a daily basis (that’s how often we check the weather right)?*

<sup>5</sup> Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 159.

<sup>6</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 366.

<sup>7</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 255.

- Jesus is demanding our attention.
- As I was praying through this passage this week, I was reminded of what Psalm 123 says, “Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he has mercy upon us” (Psalm 123:2, ESV).
- Commenting on this verse Eugene Peterson says: “God is over us. He is above us. The person of faith looks up to God, not at him or down on him. The servant assumes a certain posture, a stance.”<sup>8</sup>
- We truly know Jesus only in a posture of service and obedience.
- Theologian John Frame once wrote that all human knowledge of God is necessarily servant-knowledge, wherein we think God’s thoughts after him.<sup>9</sup>
- We cannot truly know Jesus outside of the posture of an attentive servant.
- We cannot put him under a microscope to study him. We cannot contain or control him within the bounds of our ability to comprehend. Rather, we can only come before him with humility and the willingness to serve him.

### 3.) Jesus demands justice.

- Let’s look briefly at our final paragraph: “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? 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” (Luke 12:57–59, ESV).
- Jesus expects his people to act with integrity, justice, and mercy with each other and with people who are not disciples.
- There is practical wisdom in this. You never want to go to court unless you absolutely have to. But there is more to it than just that.
- There is a parallel teaching given in Matthew 18:21–35 that I think sheds light on this teaching in Luke.
- In this parable, there is a king who had a servant with an absurdly large debt of about 10 million dollars. Keep in mind that the average daily wage would be about 17 cents for the average worker in first century Palestine. At this rate, it would have taken that worker about 200 thousand years to work off such a debt. It was un-payable. However, the king forgives his servant of the debt. But what does the servant do? He turns around and demand that a much smaller loan he gave away to a poor man be paid immediately. And when that man failed to pay him, the servant through the poor man in jail. When the king heard about this, he rightfully was enraged and through the servant in prison forever.
- So too it is when we have been forgiven of an eternally un-payable debt, but nevertheless, refuse to forgive one another.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene H. Peterson. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1980, 2000), 61.

<sup>9</sup> John M. Frame. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987), 45.

- The parable of the unjust steward teaches us that those who have received grace are required to give grace.
- Part of our vertical worship to God involves our just and gracious dealings with one another.
- Jesus isn't just saying this is a good idea. He is demanding this of his disciples.

## **Conclusion**

- So absolute loyalty, careful attention, and justice in our dealings with one another. This is what Jesus is demanding.
- But let's take a step back. Who in the world could make such demands of people?
- Who says can say, "I am one who before whom all humanity is divided!"<sup>10</sup>
- If a teacher, a pastor, or a politician were to make such demands, we would rightly think they were a psychopath.
- *The only person who could rightfully make such demands is the sovereign Lord and the rightful king.*
- *And that is exactly who Jesus is!*
- As C.S. Lewis once famously wrote: *"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."<sup>11</sup>*
- Yes, Jesus came as one who is meek and mild and merciful.
- Yes, he is the lamb who was slain.
- But Jesus is also the lion of Judah.
- He is the rightful and sovereign king of the universe.
- He is the one before whom all men will one day kneel as he judges the living and the dead.
- He is the suffering servant who will one day return as the conquering king.
- Last week, Andrew taught about the apocalypse; how that word literally means to reveal or unveil.
- The book of Revelation is not a book of revelations about the future. It is about the revelation of Jesus.
- John, the author of Revelation, knew and loved Jesus as a friend. He ate meals with him and heard him speak. But he also saw Jesus and worshipped Jesus for who he really was.

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<sup>10</sup> Stein, 366.

<sup>11</sup> C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 40-41.

- This is his vision of Jesus in Revelation 1: *“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”* (Revelation 1:12–18, ESV)
- This is the revelation of Jesus Christ. This is Jesus unveiled.
- If this is the real Jesus, this Jesus must not be demonized, scrutinized, or trivialized.
- He is our lord and king. He must be worshipped.
- He doesn’t just demand loyalty, attention, and justice. He is worthy of it. AMEN.

### **Community Group Discussion Starters**

1.) *Luke 12:49-59 is a difficult passage, as many scholars of the New Testament have noted. Read this passage and put some of the big ideas that Jesus is teaching into your own words.*

2.) *Luke 12:49-53 is very similar to a passage in Matthew 10:34-39. Both passages show that Jesus demands that his disciples are absolutely loyal to him. Have there ever been times in your life where faithfulness to Jesus has been costly in your close relationships? How should we seek to handle such situations with both grace and truth?*

3.) *Luke 12:54-56 discusses the ways that we can often pay close attention things like the weather while at the same time neglect what God is doing around us. What does it look like to pay attention to what God is doing in our lives?*

4.) *How should Luke 12:57-59 challenge us to forgive one another? Why is forgiveness such an important issue to Jesus?*

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