

Luke Chapter 12 v 49 - 59

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[0 : 00] Music Morning. Good to see you. Welcome, all of you. Particularly good to see several visitors and folks from, well, who are here in Whitby. I have to apologise on behalf of the Whitby weather. It's nearly always sunny. It's never cold. It never rains. So I'm sorry that the weather isn't quite to your liking, but welcome anyway. We're not here because of the weather.

We're here because of the faithfulness, the goodness, the loving kindness of our God. When Moses met with the Lord on Mount Sinai, he was given a wonderful insight into the very character and nature of God, and this is what he heard. The Lord passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

Yet, he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation. Moses bowed the ground at once and worshipped. If you're wondering about that passage, then we thought about it last Sunday night when we were looking at numbers and particularly that whole aspect of God's just punishment.

Well, in our first hymn, we sing those words, slow to wrath, but rich in tender mercy. And our first hymn reminds us not only is God all the things that we've heard and read there, but he is also our maker, our creator.

[2 : 16] So let's stand and sing 625. Oh, my soul, arise and bless your maker, for he's your master and your friend. Let's sing the praises and worship God as Moses did.

What a day we'll be when we will be with Christ in heaven, but wonderfully we can draw near to him and seek his face and pray and share with him even now.

So let's pray together. Let us pray. Oh, Lord, our God, we come to you again with our hearts thrilled at the thought and the prospect and the hope and the joy of being in your presence in eternity in heaven.

Lord, there's nothing that compares on this earth. There's nothing that comes close to what that day will bring when every barrier, every sorrow, every grief, every tear will be removed and we shall be with you forever, forever with the Lord, which is so much better than anything we could imagine or think or hope for.

Oh, Lord, we thank you that everything in all that you have done since the creation of the world has been to that wonderful end, that wonderful purpose that men and women may dwell with God, that we may enjoy your fellowship, that we might be with you, that we might know you and be known by you.

[3 : 49] We thank you for that very reason you created the world. With Adam and Eve, you fellowshiped with them and they enjoyed your company, enjoyed walking with you in the garden, enjoyed speaking and sharing with you.

And, Lord, when sin came in, when they chose sin over you, when they chose their own selfish desires above yours, they brought in that break, that corruption, that poison into the world, which is sin.

We see it all around us. We see it in our own hearts and lives. We see it in the broken relationships. We see it, Lord, on the news. Wherever we turn, we see this world is not the world you created.

The world that you created was good and very good. But we thank you that throughout history and time and even to this day, you are at work preparing, in one sense, this world, preparing this world, Lord, for that day when there will be a new heavens and a new earth, when there will be a restoration of all that was lost and much more besides.

We thank you, O Lord, that in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his coming into the world, Lord, you have begun that restoration in the hearts and lives of every single one who turns from their sins

and puts their faith in him.

[5 : 01] Lord, the very reason he came, the reason he suffered and died, the reason he rose again was to transform and change broken lives and broken hearts and bring healing and wholeness and joy and peace with God.

And yet, Lord, we confess and acknowledge, Lord, we're still people who choose our own way. We're still people who are selfish and thoughtless of others and thoughtless of you. We still are those, O Lord, who break other lives and are broken by other lives. We're still people, Lord, who need your special help and touch. And so that's why we're here this morning. We're here, yes, to worship and praise you for all that you are, but we're here because we need you.

Lord, we need you, for you are the one who alone can speak comfort to the distressed heart. You're the one who alone can speak peace. You're the one who alone can speak wholeness. You're the one who alone can lift up the downcast. You're the one who alone can save men and women from their sin. And so, Lord, we come. We come with praise and thanksgiving because we know, Lord, that as we seek your face, you will not reject us or turn us away, but because Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, we can come and we do come in his name.

[6 : 16] Amen. We come, O Lord, to seek you and to draw near to you, for we know, Lord, you will draw near to us, and you will speak with us, and you'll minister to us, and you'll help us, and you'll strengthen us, Lord, if we are willing.

And so we pray, Lord, make us willing. If we're here, Lord, because we think we don't need you and we can manage on our own and we're tough, then, Lord, show us just how weak and foolish and helpless we are.

O Lord, bring us close to you. Bring us near, we pray, and do us good, that we might sing your praises not just today or tomorrow, but throughout all our lives, and live those lives that declare the glory and the honor and the praise belongs to God.

For we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son. Amen. Amen. Let's turn together in our Bibles, and we're in the Gospel of Luke and Chapter 12.

We've been studying Luke in the mornings, and studying the book of Numbers in the evening. So we're coming to the last section of Chapter 12 of Luke.

[7 : 26] It's been a long chapter. The chapter so far has really been greatly to deal with treasure and riches and God's provision, but especially the closing verses we looked at last week are to do with being ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, return of the Master.

Are we ready, prepared for his coming? We're going to read then from verse 49, Luke Chapter 12, verse 49. If you've got one of the red church Bibles, that's page 1046.

Page 1046. We're going to read from verse 49 then to the end of the chapter. Here is Jesus continuing his teaching, particularly to the disciples.

I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled. But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I'm under until it is completed.

Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No. I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family, divided against each other.

[8 : 45] 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 daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. He said to the crowd, when you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, it's going to rain.

And it does. When the south wind blows, you say, it's going to be hot. And it is. Hypocrites. You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky.

How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way, or your adversary may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison.

I tell you, you will not get out until you've paid the last penny. Please, would you turn once more to Luke and chapter 12.

[10 : 03] Luke and chapter 12, and those verses 49 to the end of the chapter 59. Amen. Amen. Everybody that you talk to wants to talk about the weather.

Don't want to talk about Brexit. We want to talk about the weather. And you might think that's very much a British or even an English sort of peculiarity, that even if you don't know anybody, you'll know nothing about them, you can have quite a good conversation with them just about the weather.

And particularly, of course, we like to speculate about the weather. What will happen tomorrow? Will it rain? Will it stay dry? Will it get colder? And so on.

And, of course, we watch the weather forecast religiously to see, even up to the hour, will it change? What will it do? And we plan our lives around that prediction of the weather, especially our weekends, which we want to be a good weather for us.

Well, it may surprise you to know that it isn't just an English phenomenon or peculiarity, because here, as Jesus speaks to the crowd in Luke and chapter 12, he mentions how they talk about the weather.

[11 : 31] There in verse 54, when you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, it's going to rain. Now, of course, where Jesus was there in Israel, the west was the Atlantic, the Mediterranean Sea.

And like us in the UK, the weather came often from the west. And if it came from the west, it brought rain from the Mediterranean with us. It brings rain from the Atlantic.

And then he said this, when the south wind blows, you say it's going to be hot. And it is. Beneath Israel was the Sinai Desert, thousands and millions, probably, of square miles, of hot desert.

When the wind came from the south, it would inevitably bring hot weather and hot air. And we know as well, when the wind comes from the south, we get the warm air off the continent, perhaps from Spain or France too.

Then immediately Jesus says, hypocrites. He rebukes them. Hypocrites. He rebukes them as hypocrites because he says to them, you know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky.

[12 : 43] How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? They, like us, had eyes to judge the weather, to predict what would happen in the world around about them, whether it be a hot day or a wet day or whatever.

But they failed to see what God was doing in that time. That time when the Messiah, Jesus, came. And Jesus had not been hiding in a corner, had he?

He'd been very public in the way that he'd preached and taught, the miracles he'd performed. He'd gone through the whole country almost, from north to south, showing the people, demonstrating to the people that God was calling them, calling them to think seriously about their relationship with him.

Why, he says in verse 57, don't you judge for yourselves what is right? They could see natural things, but they failed to see the supernatural things.

The judgment of God was about to come upon that nation of Israel. They had very little time, in fact, probably less than 40 years from when Jesus spoke those words to make their peace with God before Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed and overrun by the Roman Empire.

[14 : 04] And the people were scattered for thousands of years. Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right?

And then he gives this parable, really this illustration as well, and pointing to somebody who's on their way to court, somebody who has been convicted or will be convicted of a crime.

They know they're guilty. And they're on the way to court, and as they're on the way to court, they had this brief time to put things right with their adversary, the person who was bringing the charge against them.

And if they didn't use that time rightly, if they didn't get things right, then when they got to the court, they would be judged by the judge and were told they're turned over to the officer and thrown into prison where they would remain until every single part of their debt was paid off.

every one of us, dear friends, needs to recognize the time that we are living in. We are living in a time which is leading up to judgment.

[15 : 12] We've seen that particularly when we looked last week at Jesus' teaching on his return. No matter who we are, we cannot afford to waste this valuable time that you and I have simply discussing the weather or anything else which is to do with the trivial matters of life and death, but rather we are to do all that we can to put things right before we face the judge of all the earth.

In Hebrews in chapter 27, we're told that all people are destined to die once and then to face judgment. We are living in a period of time between Christ's first coming and his second coming. And last week, as I say, we stressed and saw how Jesus stresses the importance of being ready for his second coming. He said to the disciples, you also must be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

He gives two very clear illustrations of people who were either prepared or unprepared for Jesus' return. One received good things.

One received punishment. To be unprepared for the second coming of the Lord Jesus is only to lead to eternal strife, sorrow, grief.

[16:46] We are living, dear friends, today, you and I and all people, in a very unique and unparalleled time. The reason I say that is because of what Jesus says immediately before his illustration concerning the weather and the judge.

Now, I've done it a little bit back to front, perhaps you might think, but this is how I can best understand it. Jesus said in verse 52, from now on, from now on.

In other words, from the moment of Christ's life, from the time when Christ was alive until the time when he comes again, there is a particular time, a time when things are open to us, a time when there is opportunity.

And he speaks about his mission. He speaks about the reason he came in the first place, purpose, in coming into the world, is something quite shocking.

There in Luke 12, verse 49, he says, I have come to bring fire on the earth. The coming of the Lord Jesus was to bring fire on the earth, and from this time forward, as we shall see, there is fire on the earth until the day Christ comes again.

[18:03] fire, of course, can have many purposes, and though we are more electric nowadays than we were in Jesus' day, we still have purposes for fire, and we know what fire is for.

As we're getting closer to winter, perhaps even already, if you have one, you've lit the fire in the hearth, or in your log burner, or wherever it may be, or in your auger.

fire, and of course, a fire in the hearth in the middle of winter is comforting, isn't it? It's warm. We sing that song, chestnuts roasting on an open fire, make us all feel good inside.

But if you heard somebody shouting, fire, fire, that's just to wake you up if you're dozing off, then you'd know that that was not a comforting fire, that was not a nice, safe fire, that was a fire that is dangerous, it's destructive, you've got to get away from it and run from it.

It's a fire that has to be extinguished as soon as possible and kept and put under control. There's another fire as well, and those of you visitors may not know about it or see it, but those who live in Whitby and on the moors, there's a fire that we see, or certainly smoke we see every winter as gamekeepers burn patches and areas of the heather.

[19:28] They do it deliberately, because they're doing an important job, they're clearing away the old, as it were, woody and stubbly heather so that new shoots and growth can take place, which feed the pheasants and the grouse and the sheep as well.

And so even perhaps as you drove over you saw patches, large patches of area where there was ground burnt, but next to living heather growing.

fire. The fire of which Jesus speaks here, the fire that his coming was to kindle, to begin, is not a comforting fire and neither is it an out of control fire, but it is a very much a productive fire, a fire that has a purpose, a fire that does a work, a fire that, well as we shall see, separates.

But Jesus says, how I wish it were already kindled, but I have a baptism to undergo and I'm under constraint until it's completed.

This fire hadn't started, Jesus had come to start the fire, but it hadn't happened yet because he tells us something else must happen first. I have a baptism to undergo, something has to happen in my life.

[20:45] I cannot begin this work of sending the fire through the world and onto the earth until everything has been made ready. He describes it as a baptism.

Clearly he's not talking about baptism with water. We know that right back in chapter 3 Jesus was baptized with water by John the Baptist. No, he's talking about his death.

This baptism he's talking about is the suffering on the cross. We know this because in other places he talks about this baptism. Back in Mark and chapter 10 two of Jesus' disciples came up to him and said Lord, when you're on your throne, when you come into your kingdom, can we have a seat

either side of you on your left and your right?

And Jesus replied to them in this way in Mark chapter 10 and verse 28. Can you drink the cup or be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with?

that cup he was to drink, that baptism he was to undergo was one and the same thing. It was to be his suffering. And so when Jesus himself was in the garden of Gethsemane just a little while later, as he prayed and spoke to his father, he said to him, my father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will.

[22 : 11] And then he went and spoke to his disciples and came back and prayed again a second time, my father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.

The cup and the baptism are the same thing. They are the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. This baptism that Jesus underwent was when he felt upon himself the pouring out of God's wrath against sin.

When he was treated by God as a sinner on the cross and paid the price for sin. In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes, God made him Jesus who had no sin to be sin for us.

The awful pain that Jesus endured physically is something which we cannot comprehend, but it was not that which he pleaded to be taken from him.

It was not that which was the baptism. it was not that which was the bitter cup he had to drink. It was that he himself suffered hell on earth as no human has ever done.

[23 : 20] He himself felt the very wrath and anger of God against sin on our behalf. Peter, writing in his letter in chapter 2, says, he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.

God's, that innocent, the sinless, the perfect son of God, suffered hell, died a death for sin.

And this is what Jesus was struggling with even as he speaks to the disciples here in Luke in chapter 12. I have a baptism to undergo and what constraint I'm under, what distress I'm under, what sense of oppression is upon me until that work is completed.

He had appointment to keep with death, an appointment to keep which he longed to come quickly.

We have two responses, don't we, to unpleasant appointments.

One is that we can say, I just want to push it off, I don't want to think about it, I don't want it to come, I just want to keep putting it out of my mind. The other one is that we just long for it to happen quickly, we long for that unpleasant thing, that distressing thing, whatever it may be, to happen right now.

[24 : 44] And between now and then we're sort of agitated by it, so Jesus was. And yet his death, his coming and dying and suffering God's wrath for our sin, for yours and mine, was but the beginning of lighting the touch paper of the fire that was to ignite upon the whole earth.

And this fire that Jesus came to bring on the earth is the mighty work of God, which would set alight the hearts of men and women and would spread throughout the world.

As soon as Jesus was raised from the dead, this fire began to spread, began to burn in the lives of people. If you remember in Luke 24, two of Jesus' disciples are walking to Emmaus from Jerusalem and talking.

Jesus comes unknown to them and begins to speak with them and talk with them. After Jesus had left them, they said to one another, were not our hearts burning within us? Well, he talked with us on the road.

And as we get into the book of Acts, that's exactly what happens. The fire that begins of Jesus' gospel on Pentecost begins to spread. So by the time we get to Acts 13, we're told the word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

[26 : 06] This fire, which is the work of God, is like that fire that I described on the moors. It burns up the old and makes way for the new. And so Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5, if anyone is in Christ, if anyone becomes a Christian, the new creation has come, the old has gone, the new has come.

This fire is a judgment in one sense because it judges the hearts of men and women. It shows us what we're really like. And it burns up that sin, makes way for the new life of God.

And it brings division. It brings division. Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? That's the Christmas card Christianity, isn't it?

I'm sure many of us will send out cards and there's nothing wrong with that because the angels came and said to the shepherds, peace on earth, good will to men. But it isn't that sort of peace that the world thinks of that Jesus came to bring.

The peace he came to bring is completely different to the peace that men and women of his day were looking for, that peace that men and women are looking for in our own day. He says, I haven't come to bring that sort of peace, that peace that makes all your troubles go away, that peace that sorts out all your problems, that peace that stops war.

[27 : 37] No, I've come to bring division. In Matthew's reflection upon this elsewhere, Jesus says, I've come to bring a sword to separate and to divide.

you see, there are some people when they have a sense of the fire of the gospel coming close to them, are warmed by it and are drawn to it.

But there's other people when they see the fire of Christ's gospel getting near, run away from it and fear it. The fire of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a refining fire that tests our hearts before God.

We can either be refined by it and changed by it and cleansed by it in that sense or we can hate it and flee from it.

From now on, says Jesus, this is what's going to happen. This is what has happened, in fact, all through the history of the church. From now on, there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.

[28 : 54] This fire divides families. This gospel divides families. Not because that's what God intended, if I can put it that way, it's not because God is a divisive God, but rather because men and women who hate the fire, hate the fire not only when they hear it, but hate the fire that they see in the lives of others, even those of their own families.

They reject the family member along with the fire. They will be divided father against son, son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother.

And this division from now on, Jesus says, this division that divides men and women on the earth, even in their families, is a fire that is not going to be extinguished. It's a fire that's not going to stop. That division is going to carry on throughout the history of the world and into eternity as well. A fire that will never go out. And so throughout the world, even today, sadly, we see men and women who are thrown into prison, arrested, killed, shopped, as it were, by their own family because they are believers.

And let me say this to you, dear friends, and I say it with the greatest seriousness, but with the greatest sadness. If you are in a family today and you are not a Christian, but members of your family are Christians, then unless you sort out that division, unless you sort out your life with God, then you will spend eternity separated from your family members.

[30 : 42] Don't say that lightly. but this division goes into eternity, goes into beyond this life. Either the fire burns our hearts and burns up the stubble and the sin of our lives, the fire either changes us now so that we become part of the family of God, the family of Christ, or that fire of judgment must come upon us when we die.

glory. And it will not then come to refine us or to cleanse us or to bring forth new life, but it will come to destroy us for eternity. And if you are not in Christ, if you are not part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, if you have not been cleansed by the fire of Christ and members of your family have, then you will be separated from them and you will never see them or experience their closeness again.

We're living in a time which is short. You and I only have a matter of a few years. Some of us perhaps we don't know, maybe only a few months.

before we are called by God to stand before his court. If we don't recognize the time is short and do something about it, dear friends, then it will be too late.

If we don't recognize that this is a time of God's wonderful provision and love and grace before judgment comes, then it will be too late. Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth and he says to them, now is the time of God's favor.

[32 : 39] Now is the day of salvation. If you are thinking seriously about your soul and eternity, let me say to you, do not put it off to tomorrow. Do not say, I've got time to get right with God.

I've got time to sort these things out. I've got time to heal the divisions in my family. You haven't got time. Now is the time. Today is the day. You aren't guaranteed tomorrow.

You aren't guaranteed next week. You aren't guaranteed another year. Please, for your own sake and for the sake of your loved ones, now is the time.

You see, Jesus has endured the fire of judgment himself so that you need not. judgment. You don't have to go to judgment. You don't have to go to eternity of separation and division.

You don't have to. It is only your own stubbornness. It is only your own determination. That's why Jesus says to these people, hypocrites. You see what's going on in the world around you.

[33 : 45] You see what's happening, but you do not see and you will not recognize what God is doing and you will not submit to him. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

In Africa, during the summer months, there are wildfires across the grasslands. The story is told of one occasion when a group of people had left their farm and had gone into the grass, as it were, gone into the plains, but as they were there, they were caught as a fire raced towards them. Immediately, the order was given to light the grass behind the people.

The fire was blowing towards them with the wind and they gave the order, light the grass behind us and burn the grass and one of the children in the group says, what on earth are you doing? Why are you setting fire?

We've already got fire coming towards us. It's fire. Now you're setting the grass behind us on fire. But they were given this answer to comfort them.

[34 : 55] If we burn the fire behind us, by the time the wildfire reaches us, that ground will be safe because it's already experienced the fire.

The fire will have moved on and there'll be no fuel for the fire. We will not be hurt. We'll be safe because the fire has already burnt in that place. Dear friends, when we come to faith in Christ Jesus, we stand upon safe ground where Jesus has already experienced the very fires and heat of God's judgment on our behalf so that that fire may not harm us ever.

Where are you standing? What do you see? What will you do?

Will you open your heart heart to Christ and his fire, his gospel? Say, Lord Jesus, come and enter in. Burn up that sinful heart of mine.

Take it away. That sin which has led me so far from you, that sin which has divided me, that sin that has spoiled everything in this world and make me a new creation.

[36 : 12] because he'll do that gladly, willingly. And he'll bring you into a place of unity and oneness and safety.

Let's pray together. we began by reading, O Lord, the truth that you are the God who is slow to anger, patient and compassionate.

And for that very reason, we are alive today and here. Because you have been compassionate and patient with us.

Especially those of us who, in our hearts, have never trusted or turned to you, but have constantly rejected you. Lord, you could have taken us in death at any time in the past years of our lives, but you didn't.

You spared us because you are long-suffering, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. And so, Lord, we thank you. We thank you that you've given us this time, this opportunity in our lives to put things right with you, to settle the matters.

[37 : 45] Lord, we know only too well that if we were to be called to stand before your court today, then we would be guilty.

Because our hearts are not, and our lives are not, righteous or good or holy or sinless. And, Lord, you've given us time to put things right, and you've made the way for us to put things right.

Because you've put things right through Jesus, your Son, who suffered that awful baptism, suffered that awful agony in our place for our sake.

If it was possible for anybody to be right with God without the cross, you never would have put your Son through it. Surely the only reason you did was because there was no other way, no other way for men and women to be forgiven, no other way for us to be saved, no other way for us to be spared the judgment to come, except that you judged your own Son in our behalf, and he willingly, of his own accord, laid down his life for us.

Help us, Lord, we pray, not to treat his death with reproach. Help us, Lord, to receive the forgiveness that he brings and the wholeness that he gives.

[39 : 21] Oh, Lord, come and speak and make yourself known to each and every heart and life, we pray. Let none of us, please let none of us loose back into the world as we are with that sword of judgment hanging over our heads.

But, Lord, we pray, set us free to follow you. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. And as we sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his presence in glory, without fault and with exceedingly great joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour, be

glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, before all of time, today,
tomorrow and forevermore.
Amen.