

Theme: A Divisive Saviour (17/8/25)

Text: Hebrews 11: 29-12: 12-2; Luke 12:49-59

Dr F.F Bruce was one of the most distinguished British New Testament scholars. He wrote a book in 1983 entitled, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*. In his list of 70 hard sayings of Jesus, three of them from our passage for today in Luke 12:49-59. By saying this, I am hoping to warn and encourage us to be prepared to face the challenge of hearing some of Jesus hard sayings in the Gospels. I was tempted to avoid this text from Luke, but I decided to preach on it as our Bible study groups are coming toward the end of Luke's gospel. However, I encourage us to take the challenge and read more and dig deeper into those passages because they are also part of God's Word.

If you look at the previous section (35-48) which is titled 'Watchfulness' (in the pew Bible), it is a warning. Jesus says to His disciples, He will be coming back so that they should be ready. And the today's passage – Luke 12:49-59, He warns them to be prepared for conflict and division as the effect of His coming. Think about going on holiday overseas soon – it is important to remind yourself you need to get ready. Perhaps to check your passport, what vaccinations are required, what kind of weather to pack for and so on. Jesus tells His disciples why did He come? What's the nature of His coming, and what would be the effect of His coming? Then He warned them to be ready. This leads us to our first point.

1. Fire and division on earth (49-53)

⁴⁹*I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!* Why on earth Jesus is going to bring fire? To bring love, peace and joy, yes, it does make sense. It matches His characters we know – 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.' What does He mean to bring fire? This saying is hard because it does not link directly with the context where it comes. So, look with me to the Baptism story (3:15-17), John said to the people at the Jordan, "I baptise you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." John the Baptist talks about Jesus who is mightier and more powerful than himself. Someone who is closely associated with the Holy Spirit – 3:17, 'His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his fleshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

This is what the fire Jesus is talking about and what it would do; it will do the separation of the chaff from the wheat; it will do the cleansing of the impure from the pure grain. Then Jesus goes on to say, *'how I wish it were already kindled,'* already done on the day of His baptism at the Jordan by the Holy Spirit.

This is an expression of Jesus' longing for the coming of the Holy Spirit He had experienced at His baptism and temptation in the wilderness. The point is clear that although the fire is on the earth already in Jesus' ministry, but the earth is not yet caught until the Holy Spirit comes. Perhaps this is what we all long for, the Spirit of God not just to be learned and understood, but to be experienced her cleansing power in the life and ministry of our church. Friends, we have the privilege of knowing all this in full measure from this side of the cross. But Jesus is talking about this knowing that He had to die before it will take place.

Read on with me the next verse, ⁵⁰*But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!* Undoubtedly, Jesus is talking about His coming death. This is confirmed in His reply to the sons of Zebedee (James and John) when they asked of the two positions of honour in His Kingdom – one at His right and the other on His left. Jesus replied, “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with (Mark 10:38)?” He meant simply – “Are you able to share my suffering and death?” Obviously, it was not at least in His crucifixion. Jesus links His baptism at the Jordan here with His coming death on the cross in Jerusalem. He identified Himself with the people who came to be baptised with by John for the repentance of sin though He was sinless. But they did it for the fulfilment of what God required (Mat 3:15).

⁵¹***Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.*** This would be shocking words for all who celebrated the joyful news of the angels at Christmas: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men’ (Luke 2:14). Did Jesus contradict Himself here as the Prince of peace? Or His instructions for the disciples to shake the dust of their feet peacefully when people do not welcome them? Or when He said to them, ‘Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called sons/daughters of God’ (Mat 5:9)?

No, Jesus didn’t contradict Himself. What He meant in bringing ‘divisions not peace,’ Jesus acknowledges that His coming and His message will cause divisions. This is not an endorsement of conflict and strife, but a recognition that receiving and embracing the gospel message may lead to conflict with those who reject and turn their back on from Christ. Apparently, this is not a rejection of peace or promotion of conflict and violence, but rather a recognition that Jesus’ message

would inevitably cause conflict and divisions. Jesus specifically mentions that His teachings would bring division even within families.

Look with me to the next verse, ⁵²*From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.* ⁵³*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.* Jesus' word may recall His personal experience at His household for none of His siblings became follower during His lifetime, and even in His hometown in Nazareth. But His words came true in the life of the early Christians and many in the mission field. Many were constantly receiving opposition because of following Jesus. But how do we prepare ourselves for this opposition? Even from people close to us and those we love?

I was told of a young Christian who determined that he will never join the military to hurt or kill people. He was prepared to face the consequence of his decision even jail or death. His father joined the military and it took him to Vietnam war, and he expected his son to serve his country in the same manner. The guy said, "I loved my father dearly, and I loved my nation, but I could not follow their demands and violate the teaching of Jesus my Saviour."

Friends, this is really a hard saying and deeply confronting especially when our religion and church culture teaches us to be tolerating – the best way to be unifying force. But how would we respond? We had been through this together as a congregation in the decision we made on the same gender marriage. And again, this saying of Jesus is a reminder of the inevitable conflict we need to stay alert and be ready for in our Christian journey.

How do we prepare to face the conflict and divisions? Where shall we turn for answers? On the one hand, it is true that Jesus has come to call people together to Him in His Kingdom. The vision of the New Creation (Rev 21:22) is a world united under Jesus. God is not interested in unity for unity's sake – in just being nice to everyone, but unity under the rightful rule of His Son who had been enthroned over all things. And on the other hand, for those who reject His rule will inevitably be separated both in the end of time on the Judgment Day, and in some extent even here and now.

Friends, Jesus is truly a loving Saviour, but for those who refuse to accept His salvation will see Him as a divisive Saviour instead. So, the call for you and I in this regard, is to be prepared to endure a divided world around us which is filled

with opposition while remaining faithful to Jesus our Saviour and King. But what about those who are not yet disciples of Jesus? How would they also be ready for His return? This leads us to our final point.

2. Discerning the Times (54-59)

After speaking to His disciples to be ready, Jesus now turns to the crowd and challenge them to make up their minds, ⁵⁴*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. 55 And when the south wind blows, you say, ‘It’s going to be hot,’ and it is.* Jesus says to the crowd, people can tell the future – they are able to analyse the weather forecast especially from relevant signs like the cloud and the wind. But they ignore the signs of the times, namely the Messiah right in their midst which is shown in His life and current ministry.

⁵⁶*Hypocrites! [he said] 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 with him on the way, or he 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 have paid the last penny.*

Jesus is saying, it is so clear from what He is doing – teaching, healing, performing miracles and so on, that He is a person of divine significance, who will one day judge the earth. Friends, this is also a call for any of us who is not sure who Jesus is and what He can offer – settle your heavy debt of sin with Him now without delay to avoid judgment. In other words, they must do what they need to do to get right with God before it’s too late. Friends, this reminds us of the urgency of the gospel to reach out to places and people who have not yet come to faith in the Saviour. We can be part of the solution in this matter to make positive impact on our family members and friends who are not yet Christians. Pray hard for them and establish solid relationships with them, so that they may come to know that Jesus is not a divisive Saviour, but a loving and merciful Saviour who is able to cleanse our sins and make us pure. This is our prayer in the words of Charles Wesley’s hymn we are going to sing next:

*Jesus, lover of my soul...
Plenteous grace with thee is found,
grace to cover all my sin;
let the healing streams abound,
make and keep me pure within. Amen.*