

“Into the Fire?”—Luke 12:49-50

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Into the Fire?”, is Luke 12:49-50 → Jesus said: *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!* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

It’s interesting how many clichés about life reference the word “fire.” Let’s try a few:

- In an argument someone might say, “Quit adding what? to the fire.” {fuel}
- When describing a difficult learning experience in life someone might say he experienced “what? by fire.” {trial}
- In the midst of conflict someone may feel justified to “fight what? with fire.” {fire}
- In the midst of a uncomfortable situation one might say he is in “the what? of the fire.” {thick or heat}
- Some people may even strive to avoid conflict situations in advance. After all, “where there’s what?, there’s fire.” {smoke}
- Someone might describe a zealous person as one who is “out to what?”

the world on fire.” {set}

- People may describe their busy lives as having “too many what? in the fire.” {irons}
- Many of us have been warned by others about dabbling in dangerous behaviors in life with the words: “If you play in the fire you’ll get what?.” {burned}
- Many describe life in general as jumping “out of the what? and into the fire.” {frying pan}

Although most of these clichés use the word fire to describe the dynamics of life in a negative manner, fire has both positive and negative qualities even when used as a description of life. Scripture frequently uses fire to describe the actions of the LORD in our lives, especially His action of judgment upon sin and its affect on us. The struggle in the presence of sin can make us feel like we’ve been thrown “out of the frying pan and into the fire” of life. Oh that we could be “fireproof,” living comfortable, struggle-free lives . . . which is exactly that for which people are striving!

On His way to Jerusalem, where He would experience intense suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus said in verse 49 of our text that He came to *cast fire on the earth, and wished that it were already kindled!* Jesus came to set the world on fire? How? In terms of judgment and the proclaiming of the

Gospel of His Kingdom.

In Scriptures fire is symbolic of judgment, especially making a distinction between the believer and the unbeliever. In Matthew 25:41 Jesus described unbelievers as those who will *depart . . . into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*. Jesus even described hell as a place *where . . . the fire is not quenched*. (cf. Mark 9:48) The earth and everything in it will be destroyed by fire before the restoration of all creation on the Last Day when believers will live forever in *new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*. (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-13; Malachi 4:1)

Even though the distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous will ultimately be revealed on Judgment Day, this distinction actually started with Jesus' public earthly ministry. He came to bring about judgment upon the devil and sin in His Person & Work once and for all. (cf. John 12:31; 16:11; Hebrews 2:14) John the Baptizer connected the coming of Christ in His earthly ministry to immediate judgment upon people as Jesus revealed their sinful hearts. He pictured it as a *tree . . . that does not bear good fruit being cut down and thrown into the fire*. (cf. Matthew 3:10) Fire is connected with suffering **because of the consequences of sin and God's judgment upon sinners**.

Such suffering in connection with the judgment upon sin was that to which Jesus referred in verse 50 of our text: *I have a baptism to be baptized with,*

and how great is My distress until it is accomplished! Jesus' baptism began His public ministry to bring about God's judgment upon sin in our lives and to *fulfill all righteousness for us!* (cf. Matthew 3:15) It set the course for His whole ministry and, aside from His *distress* when encountering people who refused to trust in Him for the forgiveness of their sins, He experienced your eternal suffering in hell while on the cross when His Father forsook Him. (cf. Matthew 27:46) Knowing this impending suffering distressed Him as expressed in His struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane. (cf. Matthew 26:38) Because He suffered your hell you will not have to suffer the *eternal fire* as you trust in Him!

The suffering connected with this *fire* which Jesus *cast . . . on the earth* is the struggle with the presence of sin and the devil which the followers of Jesus will encounter this side of heaven. The preaching of God's Law upon sinful hearts will produce either a reaction or a response from people because *the word of God is living and active . . . discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* (cf. Hebrews 4:12) When the sin of your heart is revealed by God's Word do you react by rejecting Christ's perfect sacrifice for that sin and refusing to repent? Such rejection is evident by actions ranging from self-justification and self-righteousness to outright unbelief and even violent behavior. It can even cause divisions in the most intimate of relationship as described by Jesus in Matthew 10:21 → *Brother will deliver brother over to*

death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. Under such rejection even the preaching of the saving Gospel provides an occasion for hostility and division! It's ironic that the very thing which brings God's greatest blessing to mankind—Jesus Christ and His accomplished work of our salvation—has the potential of the greatest heartaches here on earth, hitting the very core of our most intimate devotions in families.

Thus, this *fire* which Jesus *cast . . . on the earth* takes on another Scriptural meaning for those who **respond** to the Gospel by repenting of their sins and believing in Jesus Christ for forgiveness. Fire is also used symbolically in the Scriptures to describe the LORD's "refining process" in the lives of His people through suffering. The idea is that He will refine them, cleansing them of the "dross" of the sin in their lives. For Christians this suffering of persecution becomes the test of faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Who said in Matthew 10:22 → *You will be hated by all for My name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.* You endure to the end not by making an account your own suffering and sacrifice for Jesus. Rather, you endure to the end by continuing to trust in the "refining" suffering of Jesus for you!

Actually, Christians do "jump into the fire" in the daily vocations of their

lives. They are willing to state what is right and wrong **according to God's written Word** which will “burn” in the hearts of people with conviction of sin. They see their “fireproof” status not in the avoidance of the fires—the conflicts, struggles and persecutions which they may face “in the line of fire.” In fact, Jesus sends us into the “fires” and we need to be in them because the Holy Spirit can work through His Word we share in those “fires” to bring others to the refining work of Jesus for them as well! How are those who don't recognize sin going to know what it is unless those who do reveal it to them? How are those who don't know how to deal with sin going to know about Jesus' dealing with it for them unless those who are forgiven reveal it to them?

In the midst of such “fires” look to Jesus at all times. He “took the heat” of the *eternal fire* **for you!** He endured the suffering, the spiritual battle with satan, the judgment of hell, defeating sin's power **for you!** All the fires of hell for you were “put out” because He completed His *baptism* and finished what needed to be done for your salvation! Not only does He know exactly what being in the fire was all about but He won for you the final victory over its eternal “burn!”

Jesus did not promise us a life of worldly joy, peace and happiness with no struggles. Neither will you feel “fireproof” in the challenges of remaining faithful to Christ in the midst of the spiritual battles. However, you are “fireproof” in the

sense that you can come to Jesus with your sin of unfaithfulness, repent and experience anew His forgiveness and Holy Spirit's power as you "jump from the frying pan" of His grace "into the fire" of the world's struggles. Empowered by the Holy Spirit to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in the midst of the fires you endure in this sinful world which rejects Christ could cause someone to describe you as being "on fire for Jesus." Amen.

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God

and to the steadfastness of Christ.

(2 Thessalonians 3:5)

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