

Group Study Outline

Luke 12:49-53

Theme Sentence

In this world, between the death of Jesus and the final judgement of Jesus, Christians will experience not peace but division.

Launching Question

What do you make of the following quotation (from Rob Bell's Love Wins)?

People have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better. It's been clearly communicated to many that this belief is a central truth of the Christian faith and to reject it is, in essence, to reject Jesus. This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world desperately needs to hear.

READ Luke 12:22-34

Questions

What kinds of things do the nations of the world seek after?

What kinds of things cause us worry, according to this passage?

What is Jesus' answer to that worry?

Thinking it through

Where is the Christian's treasure ... and why?

In the next section of Luke (12:35-48 = last week's sermon), Jesus says that we must 'be ready' for his coming ... for that is when he will reveal that future kingdom/world-to-come, where our treasure is. And now in our passage, Jesus draws out an implication of what we've just been thinking about ...

READ Luke 12:49-53

The 'fire' of 49 is probably the fire of the Day of Judgement (= the day of Jesus' coming). The 'baptism' of 50 is the Day of his Death.

Questions

What does Jesus say (and feel) about those two days that lie in his future?

Why does he long for judgement day?

And how does that fit with 12:22-34?

And how does that fit with 12:35-48?

Do we long for judgement day in the way that Jesus does? why/why not?

How is Jesus' experience in this world similar to the Christian's experience?

Why is 'division' our (and his) experience?

Don't we (and Rob Bell) all believe exactly the opposite of what verse 51 says?!

Thinking it through

What is our experience of this kind of 'division' (in 52-53)? Why is it so painful?

What is Jesus' explanation for this division?

What is Jesus' antidote for this kind of division? (refer back to 12:22-34)

What is Jesus saying about this world, and about the world-to-come?

How does this passage help to manage my expectations for this world?

How does this passage help to raise my expectations for the world-to-come?

Why is it important to do both of these things?

How do I do the opposite of those two things (ie expect more now, & less then)?

What should we pray for one another in our CG as we struggle with 'division'?

Luke 12:49-53



Where are we in *Luke*?

From Jesus' baptism to 9:50, Luke's focus is on how Jesus reveals himself though **what he did**. We learn what he came to do and the response he sought. At 9:51, there's a change as Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem, his death and the rescue he came to achieve: Luke's focus is more on **what he taught**.

But the main theme of his teaching is similar to his self-revelation in 3:21-9:50 ... how a person inherits eternal life (which is, of course, what Jesus came to rescue God's people for). In particular, he has taught that:

- eternal life comes through Jesus alone, and rejection of him leads to condemnation (10:13-42).
- we must ask God for that eternal life (11:2-13). We respond to him by hearing and obeying what he says (11:28) and trusting/acknowledging him (12:5-10), even though this will cost us everything (9:57-62).
- obtaining eternal life in this way is in stark contrast to the Jews' focus on religion (11:37-52).

The section that began at 12:13 has a single theme: **the life Jesus has come to give God's people is primarily life in the next world**. Life in this world is transient, so we should not be concerned about it. And actually, in this world, we will experience hardship and painful divisions. That's why, instead, our focus, desire and efforts should be directed towards the next world, for that is where our treasure is. We should wait patiently for Jesus' coming by repenting-to-obtain-eternal-life, and by faithfully doing what he wants us to.

12:13-34 the theme introduced

12:35-13:9 three implications of the theme (12:35-48; 12:49-53; 12:54-13:9).

[NS]

Theme Sentence

In this world, between the death of Jesus and the final judgement of Jesus, Christians will experience not peace but division.

Application

- Jesus longed for Judgement Day. Do we want it to come? why/why not?
- Jesus experienced 'great distress' as he faced his death. It's my sin that caused him to feel that distress, so I should be horrified at it/what it caused.
- If I expect 'peace' because I'm a Christian, I have fundamentally misunderstood God's timetable. I should expect 'division', and it will be very painful (especially as it's likely to affect my most precious relationships).

Commentary

Implication 1

Luke 12:35-48

be ready for the coming of the Master (35-40)

- what if I am ready when he comes? (37-38)
- what if I am not ready when he comes? (39)

(and in the meantime) do what the Master has set us to do (42-48)

- what if I do do what he set us to do? (42-44)
- what if I don't do what he set us to do? (45-48)

Peter asks: who is this teaching intended for - disciples or outsiders? (41)

Jesus' answer: the more you know, the more will be expected of you (48)

Listen again to sermon: http://www.emmanuelonline.org.uk/luke-kingdom-come/?sermon_id=404

Implication 2

Luke 12:49-53

- 49 The *fire* that Jesus is referring to is probably the final judgement of the world (cf Luke 3:9, 17; 9:54; 17:29-30).

Jesus wants that final judgement to begin soon. Presumably because this is the point at which *the kingdom* will be revealed. Jesus has been teaching (cf 12:22-34) that this world is likely to take all the attention of his disciples: *all the nations of the world* seek after things in this world (like food, drink, clothes, how long our life will last, etc), and the seeking after these things causes lots of worry. But the Christian's focus is instead to be on *the kingdom*, and this has to do with *life that is more than* these things that cause worry ... it's about *treasure in the heavens that does not fail* (33). The security of that world-to-come, *where no thief approaches and no moth destroys*, is so wonderful and so important that Jesus cannot wait to see it be revealed.

In the context, it may even be that 49 shows how much Jesus is certainly longing for the coming of the Master (to extend the analogy of 35-48). Of course, he *is* the Master, so it is his own coming that he longs for, when he will bring the blessing and the punishments of 12:37-39 and 43-48. We too should be longing for it to come.

- 50 The baptism that Jesus is referring to is his own death. He uses that same idea in (eg) Mark 10:38-39.

'Baptism' or 'being overwhelmed with water' is a Bible image of God's wrath (cf Gen 6:13, 17; Ex 14:24-28; Ps 42:7-10), of the judgement from which he saves us (cf Gen 7:1 [cf 1 Pet 3:20-21; 2 Pet 2:5]; Ex 14:29, 30 [cf 1 Cor 10:1-2]; Is 43:2; 54:9; Jonah 2:3-6; in Ps 69:2, 15, the Davidic king himself calls out to God to save him from the water).

Jesus knows that this *baptism* must be *accomplished*. 'Accomplished' is the same theologically-rich word that is translated 'finished' in John 19:28, 30. By his death, Jesus' sin-bearing work would be completed.

As Jesus looks ahead to the future, he knows that the next event in the diary is his own death, already casting its dark shadow over his life and ministry. This verse is a taster of his Gethsemane agony (cf Heb 5:7-9).

- 49-50 So, Jesus can see these two events in the diary:

- the death of Jesus (50)
- the judgement of Jesus (49).

Before 49 can happen, 50 must happen. Before the universal acclamation when everyone must and will acknowledge the King of kings and Lord of lords ... there comes the universal humiliation of the cross when people will reject their Saviour. All Christians live between 50 and 49. It could be said that this timeline explains our Christian experience. The patient waiting/enduring/serving of 12:35-48 ... the family division of 12:51-53 ... such things are these as they are because both 50 and 49 are true. And because these two events have been stretched apart on history's timeline. By his death, Jesus will call out a people of God who do not belong on earth, but belong in the new heaven and the new earth that his judgement will bring into being. But before then, that same people of God have to live uncomfortably in this fallen world until his fire of judgement brings it to an end.

- 51 This is one of the most extraordinary statements in the gospels.

But pause a moment: why is it that we find it so extraordinary? Jesus is clear that his coming divides people (Matt 5:21-27; John 3:19-21), and that the majority will not choose the salvation he offers (Matt 6:13-14). Although there were 'many who followed him' (Mark 2:15), there were many, even from amongst his own disciples, who wouldn't (John 6:60, 66). One of the main causes why people reject him is that we love this life more eternal life (Mark 8:35-38) and we love people more than we love him (Matt 10:37-39). He is clear this antagonism would arise (eg John 1:11; Mark 12:6-8), and therefore that we must expect the world to hate us no less (John 15:18-25; Matt 10:16-23; 2 Timothy 3:12).

The reason we find the statement extraordinary is that we assume we know the kind of things that the Bible teaches: we think Jesus brings peace. And the reason we think this is because our prayers, songs, warm-encouraging-thoughts to one another (!) tend to reinforce the idea. But it is directly the opposite of what Jesus clearly said.

It is worth looking again at the places where Jesus does indeed promise us 'peace' (eg John 14:27, 16:33). Note that two experiences coexist: *in me* (Jesus) there *is* peace; but *in this world* it is still *trouble/tribulation*!

Jesus is saying that 51 is the experience of the disciple between the event of 50 and the event of 49. His experience in this world, in this present age, is a very distressing *baptism*. It will be our experience too.

- 51-53 The *five divided* are father, mother, son, daughter and the son's wife (who has been brought into the family home). By bringing this division so close to home - right into the home! - Jesus exposes how painful this division will feel (as many in our congregation know all too well). How much we should long for the un-divided life of the world to come.