

The Coming Storm

Luke 12:49-59

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Stephen Davey

Every day of our lives, we make lists of priorities. We may make them on paper, or only in our heads, but we are constantly listing the tasks we must do and sorting them by priority. Some are urgent and must be dealt with immediately, others we can afford to put off until later. When it comes to eternal salvation, we can be tempted to put it off. After all, the decision doesn't have to be made until we die. But no one knows the day or the hour of their death. That's why our eternal security must always be at the top of our priority list.

There's an often-repeated legend in Christian circles. The word legend is appropriate because it probably didn't happen exactly as it is often told, but the principle is certainly true.

It's the legend of Satan calling a council of demons, following the resurrection of Christ. And the council was convened to determine the best strategy for keeping people from believing the truth of the gospel.

They worked on it a long time. Finally, one group of demons presented their case that what they should do is simply deceive people into believing none of it was true, that Jesus isn't God, and the gospel isn't true. And Satan said, "That'll definitely work among many people." And it has.

Another group of demons disagreed with that strategy and presented their case that what they needed to do was tell people that Christianity is true, but other religions are equally true as well. Even though they knew some people would figure out that many roads actually led to many different gods, but still, they knew that approach would work on many others.

Finally, a third group said, "No, what would work universally among all of humanity is to tell them that it's true—that Jesus is in fact the Son of God, that there is a heaven and a hell,

that they need to believe the gospel—we'll tell them all of that, but we will convince them that there is plenty of time.

We'll distract them through life and deceive them along the way so that their appointment with God is always sometime out there in the future. Convince them there's plenty of time to settle with God.

And Satan said, "That strategy will work best of all."

As the Lord Jesus has been ministering to the multitudes here in the Gospel of Luke, as people by the thousands, we've been told, have literally swarmed around Him, He periodically stops and warns them of the coming judgment of God.

He urgently warns them of the coming storm of God's wrath and He effectively invites them to settle with God and wait no longer.

The demons would counsel "What's the rush? You can take care of that tomorrow!" But the Spirit of God counsels, "***Now is the day of salvation***" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Now Jesus isn't trying to scare these people into the kingdom; He isn't trying to be a prophet of doom. He's simply telling the people then—and us today—the truth.

It is appointed unto man, once to die, and after that the judgment.

Hebrews 9:27

So once again, Jesus effectively stops and reminds this audience of unbelievers of that coming storm.

We're in the Gospel by Luke. As chapter 12 comes to a close, the Lord stops and delivers what would have been a rather shocking message. For our study today, I'll categorize his closing comments under four statements.

First:

Jesus is going to remind them of something that's been promised.

He says to them here in verse 49:

"I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!"

Luke 12:49

Wait, what? "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!"

That doesn't sound like the golden rule. That doesn't sound like the average person on the street who thinks Jesus only talked about love, so "those of you who follow Jesus should

know better than to judge anybody for how they live or what they do, because Jesus only talked about love.”

Anyone who says that to you has clearly never read the New Testament to see what Jesus actually said.

Jesus is speaking here. Listen to Him: He’s warning this massive audience of a coming fire storm of judgment, and He’s even saying that He’s behind the fire storm.

“I have come to cast fire on the earth!”

Now there are some who take this to be a reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit who with tongues like fire descended on the apostolic community and empowered them to speak in languages they’d never studied before; I would love to have experienced that miracle before my Spanish exam!

That’s an interesting interpretation, but **fire**, in the Gospel of Luke, is a negative image, and the immediate context here is not the creation of the church on the day of Pentecost, but the coming of God’s wrath in judgment.

Adapted from David E. Garland, [Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2011), p. 530

This opening phrase here, “**I came**” or, “**I have come**” is a technical term used by the Lord to refer to the entirety of His mission.

John MacArthur, [Luke 11-17](#) (Moody Publishers, 2013), p. 170

For instance:

- Jesus said in Matthew 9:13, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”
- Jesus will tell Pilate when He stands trial, “I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth (John 18:37).
- So Jesus says here in Luke 12 “I came. I have come; this is a part of my entire mission. I have come to cast fire on the earth.”

This is the other side of Jesus that the world out there doesn’t want to hear about, they don’t want to hear about the coming storm of judgement.

And Jesus says that He will be directly involved in this judgment.

Jesus said in **John 5:27** that God the Father appointed Him the authority **to execute all judgment; verse 29** says this is judgement to eternal **damnation**. Which means, the Judge sitting on that final bench—described later in Revelation chapter 20 as the Great White Throne—is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Just prior to this final judgment of all unbelievers, fire will have consumed the universe, the earth, the planets, and stars. This massive white throne, representing the purity of God's holy judgment, is described as sitting upon nothing, as it were, no earth or universe. It will literally be suspended in space, with every unbeliever of all time standing before Him.

So, Jesus is alluding to this final judgment upon mankind and the entire universe where everything will be destroyed by fire and then, at this judgment, the unbelieving world will be cast into eternal fire, a place called hell.

Following this judgment, Revelation 21—the next chapter—begins to describe the creation of a new earth and a new universe, which will last for all eternity.

Now is any of this really going to happen? Well, the world at large won't believe it, but:

The apostle Peter writes about this final judgment 2 Peter 3:

Scoffers will come in the last days. ... They will say "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were."

2 Peter 3:3-4

In other words, Jesus hasn't shown up yet, it's been thousands of years. We don't think He'll ever come back, so what's the rush? He's not coming back to judge anybody. ***But Peter goes on to write:***

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and ... the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

2 Peter 3:5-7

Jesus says in Luke chapter 12 "And I would that it were already kindled."

In other words, "I wish the fire of judgment would have already taken place so we can enjoy eternity forever in the new creation, with all the redeemed." That fire of judgment hasn't been kindled yet, but Jesus promises it will arrive.

So, the Lord reminds them of something that's been promised.

Secondly:

The Lord informs them of something He wants to get past.

Back in Luke chapter 12, the Lord says here in verse 50:

“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!”

Luke 12:50

Let me tell you, this is an unusually transparent revelation of how the Lord is feeling, as He draws closer to His crucifixion.

How great is my distress until it is accomplished!

Luke is the only gospel writer to include this moment where Jesus literally, surprisingly, bares his soul.

He’s referring to the baptism of His coming crucifixion where He will be baptized—immersed—in our sin:

- bearing in His body all our sin (***1 Peter 2:24***);
- having all our iniquity placed upon Him (***Isaiah 53:6***);
- being saturated with the sins of the whole world (***1 John 2:2***).
- separated from fellowship with God the Father for the first time since eternity past (***Matthew 27:46***).

Jesus says, “I can’t wait to get that over with!”

One author writes, “This word for distressed carries the idea of impatient misery that drenches His soul.”

R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: Volume Two](#) (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 69

The apostle Paul used it when he told the church in Phillipi that he was ***hard-pressed*** between wanting to stay with them or go on to heaven (***Philippians 1:23***).

It carries the idea of being pressured or mentally torn over what’s taking place.

You could translate the word to mean, literally, “holding it together”.

Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 345

Kent Hughes writes here, “Jesus literally wants to get it over with.”

He's holding it together as He anticipates the crushing immersion of sin.

By the way, with this statement, the Lord destroys the false spirituality of Christians who think it's a sin to admit discouragement or pressure or impatience with any ordeal they're facing.

If you ask the average Christian how they're doing, if they have the pretense of spirituality, they will never say, "Let me tell you, I'm going through something really distressing right now and I can't wait to get past it."

"I'm right in the middle of God's will and I'm holding it together." He needs to be put on the prayer list; maybe they need a little more faith.

Frankly, none of us can even imagine what Jesus is going to go through on our behalf. And why he wants so badly to get past it. Because He is fully God, He knows what's ahead; but because He is fully man, the thought of it is tearing at Him, and in fact, He will struggle over it in the Garden of Gethsemane with such intensity that capillaries underneath His skin will burst and His **sweat will be mixed with blood (Luke 22:44)**.

He's looking forward to getting past this. Just like you, perhaps, are under pressure; you're torn, you're distressed, and if you're honest with yourself and others you would admit, "I can't wait to put this in the past."

Now with that – thirdly:

The Lord warns them of something that will soon take place.

The believer in fact, is about to feel pressure like they've never felt it before; **verse 51:**

"Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."

Luke 12:51

Wait a second: I thought the angels sang to the shepherds, **"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace (Luke 2:14)**; I thought the Messiah was going to guide their feet on the path of peace **(Luke 1:78)**; Luke told us that Jesus sent out His disciples with the instruction to say, **"Peace to this house"** when they found a listening audience **(Luke 10:5)**.

But now Jesus is saying, “Yes, we have the message of how to have peace with God; you need to expound on that message. But what you expound will be different from what you experience.”

Notice verse 52:

“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 12:52-53

Now this isn't a game of charades at Thanksgiving where the family pairs up for some pretty serious competition.

This isn't like the upcoming Super Bowl where half the family are cheering for the Kansas City Chiefs and the other half are cheering for the losing team!

This isn't a game at all; this is real life.

In fact, we know from history that early on, the Roman Empire would despise Christianity because it divided families; it created incredible family turmoil.

William Barclay, [The Gospel of Luke](#) (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 170

It was one thing to choose a god or goddess and get along with everybody else, but it was different to say there was only one God and everything else was false.

In the city of Athens, historians tell us, there were more than 70,000 statues to gods and goddesses.

During the first century, all the working classes belonged to unions, or guilds, and each guild had chosen a patron god.

Whether you worked in textiles, leather, pottery, stone, wood, whatever it was you did, there was a community of artisans and tradesmen who depended on their gods to help them succeed.

And every year there would be annual feasts where they would all toast to the god and pray to the god of their guild for future success.

All of a sudden, the Christian realizes he can't do that anymore. And so, he just sits there. He'll be noticed; he becomes a problem, any downturn in business will be attributed to him. In fact, he's now a risk to the guild.

It isn't long before his customers abandon him, his friends avoid him, and he's dismissed from the guild, which had been the center of his social life and business life.

He has to go home and tell his unbelieving wife that his job is finished; her social status is over; their children's prospects for university education are gone.

And the family is offended; embarrassed; infuriated. You mean to tell us your Jesus cost us money? Employment? Education? Status?

Are you out of your mind?!

It's only a matter of time before Christianity brings division, and don't miss this here: Jesus isn't saying that you will lose your job or status or some good friends, He's saying here that you will lose your family. The most heart wrenching division of all.

Today, in many countries around the world, becoming a Christian is illegal, and in some countries, family members conspire with the government to expose a new believer, and that becomes—for the Christian—a death sentence. For you it might not mean a death sentence, but it might mean your family's disapproval.

Adapted from Bruce B. Barton, [Life Application Bible: Luke](#) (Tyndale, 1997), p. 333

We must stop selling Christianity with, "Come to Jesus and everything will work out." When you come to Jesus, everything might come apart.

There's a storm coming in more ways than one.

Finally, the Lord not only:

- reminds them of something that's been promised (judgment).
- and informs them of something He wants to get past (crucifixion).
- and warns them of something that will soon take place (division).

Now, fourthly,

The Lord rebukes them for their failure with something in the present.

Notice verse 54:

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

Those clouds coming in from the west, from the Mediterranean Sea, meant a rain storm was coming; that south wind, blowing in from the Arabian desert, would bring hot weather.

Barton, p. 334

And everybody would get ready for it.

In every generation, people want to know the weather. Today it's on television every fifteen minutes; it's on your smartphone; doppler radar updates the movement of the clouds. And at just the mention of the *possibility* of freezing rain or snow, everything closes.

There's not a gallon of milk anywhere – there's not a loaf of bread in Wake County; and what's frustrating is that all those people got there before I did. That's just not right!

People have always wanted to know the weather and then get prepared for what's coming.

What Jesus is rebuking them for is the fact that they're more interested in physical things than spiritual things.

They're more alert to the weather; they can predict a storm but they aren't giving any thought to the coming storm of God's judgment.

Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13* (Victor, 1998), p. 144

It's true to this day; mankind has learned so much that they can predict the movements of planets; they can split atoms; they can circle the globe with satellites; they can put men on the moon; they can track a hurricane; they can send telescopes millions of miles into space; they can even see the stars.

But they have no desire to recognize the Savior.

Ibid

Jesus continues rebuking them here in verse 57:

“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

In other words, you've got a bad case, you're heading for debtor's prison. So, wake up to that! You don't want to end up in court; the best thing you can do is settle out of court!

Jesus is effectively telling His audience to wake up to the fact that they never want to appear in court before God. That Great White Throne, the final judgment of all unbelieving mankind before God, there's no pardon there.

This final judgment is only that moment when the judge delivers the guilty verdict and the sentence.

Your only hope is to prevent your case from going before the judge, so settle out of court.

Settle the debt you owe! And this relates to settling your debt of sin with God through Christ so that you never have to stand before the Judge of the universe.

The demons, and your unbelieving culture around you, and your own deceived heart will whisper: "Your court date is years ahead of you. Your death, and your appointment with God is nothing to worry about now. Don't panic; take your time; don't rush."

Jesus says, "Wake up! You can see the west winds blowing in a rainstorm and a south wind bringing heat, can you not discern there's a debt you need to **settle** now, before it's forever too late?"

The word for **settle**, which Luke uses here, can be translated, "to be set free!"

Swindoll, p. 347

How do you settle your debt of sin with God? How can you be set free of sin's debt you can never pay back?

The answer is provided throughout the New Testament: it is by faith in the cross of Christ—the work Christ accomplished for you there in paying your sin debt in full.

But the Lord hinted ahead of time here in the conversation with this crowd.

When Jesus hung on the cross, just before He died, He said, "**It is finished**" (John 19:30)

That word **finished** means, "paid in full." It was a word used in the court system for a criminal who paid the penalty for his crimes.

Jesus effectively says on the cross, "I've paid for the sins—the crimes—of humanity; it's now paid in full."

And with that, the Lord Jesus died.

Jesus uses that same word, in verb form, here in **verse 50**:

"I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished."

Luke 12:50

That's the word He will announce from the cross, not in defeat, but in victory. "It is finished! The sin debt—down to the last penny—has been paid in full!"

So, you can now settle your debt out of court. The punishment of your crimes has been paid for by Christ.

You will never stand before Him at that Great White Throne, if you have come to Him on that old rugged cross.

There's a storm coming—the storm of God's judgment against all who refuse Him.

The demons of hell would whisper "That's true, but why rush it? There's plenty of time," and there is, until that one moment of time when it becomes too late.

I read recently about the crash of the Concorde on July 25, 2000. One hundred passengers, nine crew, and four people on the ground were killed when the Concorde's engine burst into flame and the plane went into a stall, plunged to the ground, and exploded on impact in a fireball.

They finally were able to put the pieces together in the investigation; the cause of the crash was a small strip of metal the size of a yardstick; it had flattened the aircraft as it raced down the runway; the debris from the blowout of the tire ruptured a fuel tank in the aircraft's wing and it caught on fire. The pilot couldn't stop the take-off, so he tried to keep it in the air long enough to make an emergency landing at an airport one minute away.

As investigators listened to the tape of the pilot's conversations with the control tower, his last words as he fought to save his stricken craft were, "Too late."

Owen Bourgaize, Guernsey, United Kingdom

If you had two lives you might risk one of them; but you only have one. And there's a storm coming.

Settle with God before it is eternally too late.

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