

Jesus the Cause of Division
(Mt 10.34—39)

⁴⁹ “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵² From now on five in one household will be divided, 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 her daughter-in-law
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Interpreting the Time
(Mt 16.1—4)

⁵⁴ He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. ⁵⁶ 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?¹

How many clocks do you have in your house? How many watches have you owned in your lifetime? I know that I have the remains of numerous timepieces in my jewelry box. I am assuming I am not the only one. There are whole companies built and operating to make sure we know the exact time of day. But isn’t it interesting that most of our children and grandchildren don’t use or own a watch. They rely on their cell phones to tell them to time.

Another thing that we spend a great deal of time thinking about, discussing and planning our day around is the weather. There are now television stations devoted to keeping us informed of the weather in various communities around the state, nation, and world.

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Lk 12:49-56

And then, there are our relationships, especially those intimate family relationships that we value to make life meaningful. These are the three things discussed around the office water cooler.

In our scripture today, these are the exact subjects that Jesus talks about when he addresses his disciples and the crowd that followed him. But his conversation is very different from what we sometime experience. Jesus often made shocking statements that made his follower think and consider, and which make us consider the cost of following Jesus.

In our scripture last week Jesus has been teaching his disciples and the people who are following him about how to put our earthly possessions into perspective. What is the place of our money and things in our relationship to God? And how do we use our money to serve God? Remember that this all started when a man in the crowd asked Jesus to tell his brother to divide the family inheritance with him. Jesus then told a story about a wealthy farmer who had an abundant crop, but gave no thought to the people around him or his situation after this life. Jesus called the man a rich fool, because it happened that the man died and everything that he was saving went to others anyway. Jesus went on to tell his disciples that they are not to worry about the things of this earth, but be faithful in serving God.

Then Jesus taught that the disciples should be ready because the Son of Man will come at a time when they will not be expecting Him. If the servants are watching and ready, their master will reward them. Jesus' coming will be like that of a thief: unannounced and unexpected. We must be ready!²

In our scripture today, Jesus tells his disciple that they might be misunderstood even by one's own family. As they waited, watched, and worked, they would not have an easy time. They were like aliens in enemy territory. Ultimately His

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:238

ministry would bring not peace . . . but division because some would accept what He was saying and others would reject it. From now on in one house there will be five people 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 her mother-in-law.”

To those who were learning to regard Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed one of God, these words came as a shock. They regarded the Messiah as conqueror and king, and the Messianic age as a golden time with no earthly problems. But Jesus’ ministry would be like a fire which devours. Jesus knew the purpose of his life and ministry and he longed for the purpose to be accomplished. His life and death would be the basis for His judging Israel. That judgment, like fire, would purify the nation, not destroy it. The baptism He spoke of referred to His death on the cross for our sins, which He was indeed faithful to complete. How different from the Jewish idea of God’s King! Jesus came, not with avenging armies and flying banners, but to give his life a ransom for many. A poem goes:

There was a Knight of Bethlehem,
Whose wealth was tears and sorrows,
His men-at-arms were little lambs,
His trumpeters were sparrows.
His castle was a wooden Cross
On which he hung so high;
His helmet was a crown of thorns,
Whose crest did touch the sky.

Jesus warned his disciples beforehand that his mission actually would result in the kind of family divisions of which He spoke in these verses. Families have been divided and loyalties broken. Jewish believers are still ostracized from their families and friends. However, to be a disciple one must be willing to undergo such problems. Jesus’ coming did and does inevitably mean division. That was

one of the great reasons why the Romans hated Christianity—it tore families in two. Over and over again a man had to decide whether he loved his family or Christ. The essence of Christianity is that loyalty to Christ has to take precedence over the dearest loyalties of this earth. A person must be prepared to count all things loss for the excellence of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that Luke opened his book announcing “peace on earth,” but now he has Jesus seemingly contradicting this promise. Jesus does give peace to those who trust Him according to Romans 5:1, but often our confession of faith becomes a declaration of war among our family and friends. Jesus becomes a cause of division. But even if there is not “peace on earth,” there is “peace in heaven” because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

In Jewish thought fire is almost always the symbol of *judgment*. So, then, Jesus regarded the coming of his kingdom as a time of judgment. The Jews firmly believed that God would judge other nations by one standard and themselves by another; that the very fact that a man was a Jew would be enough to absolve him. However much we may wish to eliminate the element of judgment from the message of Jesus it remains stubbornly and unalterably there for those that reject his message and sacrifice.

After Jesus spoke directly to His disciples, He turned His attention to the multitudes. Jesus taught the crowds that they needed to be sensitive to interpret the things they were seeing. Though they had been observing His ministry they were not able to understand that He was truly the Messiah. He made the point that they, with no trouble, could interpret natural signs. They knew about western clouds and south winds—the appearance of the earth and the sky. The Jews of Palestine were weather-wise. When they saw the clouds forming in the west, over the Mediterranean Sea, they knew rain was on the way. When the south wind blew from the desert they knew the sirocco-like wind was coming. But those who were

so wise to read the signs of the sky could not, or would not, read the signs of the times. If they had, they would have seen that the kingdom of God was on the way. But they could not understand spiritual signs. Jesus said they should understand what was going on right in front of them. Jesus was offering the kingdom and they were not responding properly to His offer.³

The crowd could predict a storm, but it could not foresee the coming judgment. It knew that the temperature was about to change, but it could not interpret the “signs of the times.” The Jewish nation had the prophetic Scriptures for centuries and should have known what God was doing, but their religious leaders led them astray.

How tragic it is today that humans can predict the movements of the heavenly bodies, split atoms, and even put men on the moon; but we are blind to what God is doing in the world. We know how to get to the stars, but we do not know how to get to heaven! Our educated world possesses a great deal of scientific knowledge but not much spiritual wisdom.

We must apply these truths of scripture to our own lives personally. If we knew a storm was coming, we would prepare for it. The storm of God’s wrath is coming, and the Judge is already standing before the door. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”⁴ Jesus used a series of illustrations to remind us that the world is rushing toward judgment day. Jesus and all his great servants have always been obsessed with the urgency of time. Andrew Marvell spoke of ever hearing “time’s winged chariot hurrying near.” There are some things a person cannot afford to put off; above all, making his or her peace with God. To be ready, believers must serve God actively—and

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:239

⁴Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 12:35

unbelievers must make peace with God before it's too late.⁵ I pray that we hear the instructions from God's Word and obey them.

⁵Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 663