

*Mondovi: Our Savior's, Gilmanton & Montana: Salem United Methodist Churches*  
8.17.2025, 0th Sunday after Pentecost, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.

## Christ Who Casts Fire on the Earth

Luke 12:49-56

Let us pray: O God, who is fire, by the fire of Your Word today burn away and purify all that is unnecessary within us. Fill us with the Spirit and life of Christ. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's Scripture may seem puzzling and difficult to understand when first reading it. Once we grasp it, though, we find that it is truly a gospel filled with grace. All of God's Word is like that.

Jesus says that He came to cast fire on the earth. Fire carries many meanings. Since Jesus came to save us, this fire is closely tied to salvation. It is the fire that consumes and purifies old sins and unbelief—the fire of redemption, the burning fire of life, the gospel itself, love itself, and everything that flows from being in Christ. As Deuteronomy 4:24 and Hebrews 12:29 declare, God Himself is a consuming fire; and yet, when Moses encountered God in the burning bush, He appeared as fire that did not consume. He is a fire that burns selectively.

The word "earth" here, first of all, refers to people. Just as in the Lord's Prayer we say, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," the "earth" primarily means each one of us.

When Jesus says, "Would that it were already kindled!" His burning desire is that God's fire would come upon each of us—just as the fire came upon the thorn bush without consuming it.

Luke 12:50 says, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" What is the baptism that Jesus speaks of here? The Greek word *baptisma* does not simply mean a ritual but rather a life immersed and saturated. Ordinarily, this baptism is understood as the baptism of blood on the cross, but it carries an even deeper meaning. What "river" is Jesus longing to be plunged into? It is that He will pass through the baptism of the cross—its suffering and death, followed by the baptism of resurrection and ascension—thereby accomplishing complete redemption. In addition to that, He longs for the moment when, by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon believers, He Himself comes to dwell in them in union.

When the disciples are filled with the Spirit, streams of living water flow from within them, and those streams join into a mighty river of the Spirit in which Christ Himself is immersed. This is the baptism He longs for. He desires that our church be filled with such a river of the Spirit, so that He Himself may be immersed in it.

Ultimately, at the very end, He will be immersed with us in the sea of glass. The baptism that Christ receives as man is one that He receives by including us in Himself—so that it is truly our baptism as well. His cross, His resurrection, the coming of the Spirit, and even the passing into the great sea of glass before entering the New Jerusalem—these are all baptisms that we share in together with Him.

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Verse 51 says, “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” Here again the word “earth” refers to each of us. Jesus did not come to give peace while leaving us as we were. He first came to divide. For when we are born, we belong to the old creation, the old earth. Christ does not simply bring peace into that old earth. Instead, He separates us from the old in order to receive Him, the new earth, and in Him we ourselves become new. Only then can true peace come.

To use a computer analogy: the old file must first be deleted, and then the new file must be downloaded. In this sense, the “division” Jesus speaks of is the separation of the new from the old.

In verse 52, Jesus illustrates this separation with the image of five members of one household divided against each other. There are many possible interpretations, but if we first understand the “house” as representing a human being, then we may say that within a person there are five elements living together. When Christ, the fire, comes into this house, He does not bring peace but division among those five. He says that three will be divided against two, and two against three. This is the work that the Lord does within us.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus repeatedly warns against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. When Christ comes, the renewed “I” becomes God’s house. Then, together with Him, the two of us stand against three enemies: the world, Satan, and religion that has no spiritual reality—religion like that of the Pharisees. We can see it another way as well, that within the house, the “new creation me,” united with Christ through the cross, stands as two against three—sin, the law, and the flesh.

From yet another perspective, when the fire of Christ comes, separation takes place within my heart, my emotions, my spirit, and my body. My lips, eyes, and ears can be separated from the sorrow of my heart and the despair of my body. When I place God’s Word in my lips, my eyes, and my ears, I no longer live according to emotions but according to faith, just as it is written: “The righteous shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17).

Hebrews 4:12 says, “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow.” Since the Word is the Spirit of Christ Himself, when we are filled with the Word, our spirit is not dragged along by the soul or the body, with their thoughts, emotions, and desires. Instead, they are separated under the spirit’s rule, and we are increasingly able to live a life led by the Holy Spirit.

In verse 53, Jesus speaks of division between father and son, mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. If we understand the “mother” and the “mother-in-law” as the same person, then together with the father, son, daughter, and daughter-in-law, these five are the same as the five mentioned in verse 52. This generational division likewise points to the separation that comes through the fire of Christ—the break from the old and the birth of the new.

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The father's generation represents the law, while the son's generation points to life. The mother's generation represents the temple and the old Jerusalem, for from there the people of Israel were born. But the new "daughter generation," born through Christ—the disciples—represents the New Jerusalem. In the book of Acts, we see the Jews of the old Jerusalem persecuting the disciples, who belong to the New Jerusalem, and a separation takes place between them.

From another perspective, in the conflict between father and son, the father may symbolize Satan. Jesus once said to those who opposed Him, "You are of your father the devil" (John 8:44). Thus, Satan resists both the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and those who, having escaped his grip, have become children of God. In this way, the son of faith stands opposed to the old Adam and to the devil, the old father. The division between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law points to the conflict between a faith bound to the literal law and self-righteousness, and a faith that follows the life of Christ.

Unless Christ, the fire, comes into us, no fundamental change can take place. The things we once relied on as parents—whether the world, Satan, an earthly father, our own morality, or religion itself—must all be left behind. When Christ comes, we are separated from those old masters and united with Him, entering into a new life in Christ.

From yet another angle, if we understand "father" and "mother" as actual parents, then the unbelief, misfortune, folly, debts, depression, sins, and weaknesses of the parent generation being passed down to the children is certainly not a blessing. For the next generation to be separated from such things, the fire of Christ must come. Only in Christ can there be a separation from curses. When our parent generation lives in anxiety and despair, should we not long for our children to be separated from that despair and to live by faith?

Verse 54 states, *"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.'"* Here the west points to the place of Christ's cross. From there rises the cloud of Christ's love, who bore all our sins, and from that cloud the rain of the Spirit is poured out. We are called to recognize that Christ has come like the cloud rising from the west.

Jesus says in verse 55, *"And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat,' and it happens."* If the north wind is the harsh wind of the law, then the south wind is the warm wind of God's life and gracious love. The time has come when Christ comes with the burning love of God to give you His fire—so recognize it!

Verse 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?"* Jesus is telling us that just as we can read the weather in this world, so we should recognize what is happening in God's spiritual world. The "time" here is *kairos*—God's appointed time. Jesus is saying that now is not the time of the law, but the time of Christ—the favorable time of grace, the time to receive life. The fire of Christ has come. The time has

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arrived to experience the grace of separation through His fire, so He urges us to expect and to receive this fire.

Since we are living in this favorable time of grace, even when we simply open the Bible that is right within our reach and read it with a desire to know Him, we encounter Christ, who is fire. If we do so, we cannot help but receive the refreshing rain of the Spirit, like a shower from the western cloud, and the burning grace of God's love, like the south wind. Jesus says in John 6:63, "My words are spirit and life." Therefore, when we put God's Word in our lips, our ears, and our eyes, the Spirit and life enter into us, move us, and bring His Word to fulfillment in us. Our spirit grows stronger than our soul and body, and we begin to live according to the very purpose for which we are called on this earth.

I once heard the testimony of a Korean pastor who ministered in a secret shelter in China for North Korean defectors. Having escaped from North Korea for various reasons, they were hiding in these secret shelters in China with nothing to do. The missionaries there had them read the Bible every day, all day long. They had never once seen a Bible, and never even heard about Jesus. Out of gratitude to the missionaries who provided them food, shelter, and protection, they kept reading. As they read the Bible fifty times, a hundred times, they were astounded at the changes happening within themselves. Of course, all of this was supported by the prayers of the missionaries.

What I want to emphasize is this: the Word itself carries the power of life. It separates us from the old self and draws us into deep union with Christ. Even if we cannot read all day like they did, if we devote just one hour a day, we could read 13 or 14 chapters, and in 90 days complete the entire Bible. In Jesus' name, I bless you to read the Word, and to experience the grace of separation that comes through the fire of Christ. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord of life, You are the One who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit and fire. Immerse us fully and continually in that baptism. Separate our old self, and divide our spirit, soul, and body, so that we may truly know what it is to live as one new man united with Christ in the Holy Spirit. Help us to draw near to Your Word, that we may receive the fire of Your blessing. And let all who meet us also receive this fire. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.