

Bible Study Guide: Week of 8-8-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Luke 12:49-56

[Jesus said] “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵²From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³they 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.”

⁵⁴He 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. ⁵⁵And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. ⁵⁶You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

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In Greek, the word order of v. 49 begins with the word fire: “Fire I came to cast upon the earth...” The focal point here is indeed fire. This calls to mind Luke 3:16—John the Baptist’s promise that Jesus would “baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.” It also calls to mind various other biblical stories—the flaming sword in Eden, the burning bush in the wilderness, the presence of God leading the Israelites as a pillar of fire by night, the flaming chariot of Elijah, and so on. Fire is a symbol throughout scripture of the action, judgment, and power of God. Jesus knows that his ministry will indeed bring fire—fire of judgment, purification, and illumination. We may think of later in the Luke-Acts sequence (Acts 2) where the Spirit descends upon the disciples at Pentecost with fiery tongues. Yet Jesus is not just speaking of literal fire, but also metaphorical. He knows that his presence and mission will inevitably flare up in various ways and places as the story of the Gospel unfolds.

When Jesus refers to his “baptism” he is referring to his passion, death, and resurrection. See, for instance, Mark 10:38. Jesus is totally consumed by and focused on his mission. Remember in Luke 9:51 Jesus “set his face toward Jerusalem.” He is resolute in carrying out the mission at hand.

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How do we reconcile Jesus’ words here (“I came not to bring peace, but division”) with the words in Luke 2: (“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”)? Moreover, how do we reconcile these words with Jesus’ blessing upon peacemakers in the Beatitudes? Although division and peace may seem to be polar opposites, Jesus knows that the mission of peace he is embarking on will inevitably lead to conflict. This is necessarily the case because the work of reconciliation that Jesus is carrying out demands a response from people. People can choose to be reconciled or to remain hostile. Jesus knows that in the days to come—both for himself on the cross and for his disciples in the early church—families will be divided and loyalties will be tested. In Luke 8:21 Jesus redefines the concept of family, saying, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word

of God and do it.” In John 1:12, John says that “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” And Jesus himself in John 20:17 refers to the disciples as his own brothers (rather than merely his servants or his friends as he called them earlier in the gospel). The point here is that the gospel message redefines family units as a kinship based not on blood or lineage, but rather rooted in faith in Jesus Christ. As wonderful as our Christian family is, Jesus knows that painful divisions will happen as a result of this reforming of family units.

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Jesus’ charge of the hypocrisy of the crowds comes as a bit of a shock given the gentle and everyday imagery that precedes it. Yet his argument is essentially this: “Y’all pay such close attention to the weather that you can tell what is going to happen just by looking at clouds or feeling wind. But instead you ought to be focused on what God is up to here and now among you.” The question for the crowds is how to be more attuned to matters of the coming kingdom. Jesus certainly pulls no punches in this passage. He clearly lays out a vision that includes a sharp divide between those who are attuned to the gospel and those who are not; between those who recognize the power and mercy of God in his suffering and death and those who do not.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Do you think Jesus came primarily to bring peace or division or both? How do we balance the two?**
- 2. How does Jesus’ “baptism” that he mentions here differ from our own idea of baptism as we know it? How is it similar?**
- 3. Jesus claims the crowds are hypocrites because they pay more attention to weather patterns than to God’s activity. What claims your attention more fully than God’s kingdom?**