

Fire on the Earth

Luke 12:49–59

When Following Jesus Complicates Life

We tend to believe a quiet assumption about faith: “If I follow Jesus, life should get easier. Relationships should get smoother. Things should fall into place.”

In fact, in many churches, that is the exact message preached...(work on fleshing out the rest/play distortion)

But if you’ve walked with Christ for any length of time, you’ve probably discovered something else entirely:

Sometimes following Jesus makes things harder. Conversations can get tense. Relationships may feel strained. Decisions become costly. And that raises a question. If Jesus is alive and if the resurrection is real, then why does following Him sometimes create conflict instead of removing it?

In Luke 12, Jesus answers that question directly and boldly.

He says: “I came to cast fire on the earth, and I wish that it were already kindled.” That’s not sentimental. That’s not safe.

That’s urgent, disruptive, and decisive. There is a core Christian truth underlying this passage. The Resurrection does not eliminate conflict. It clarifies allegiance.

I. Conflict Concerning Truth (vv. 49–53)

Jesus begins with a startling statement. “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!”

A. What Is This Fire?

In Scripture, fire carries weight. We see in the OT that fire judges what is evil. When the prophet Elijah squares off against the 450 prophets of Baal, God’s fire consumes the false prophets.

Fire purifies what is impure. In Isaiah 6, the prophet's lips are purified with a coal from the altar, symbolizing the purging of the prophet's iniquity and the atonement of his sin.

Fire reveals what is hidden. In Malachi 3 and Zechariah 13, God is described as a refiner of silver and gold, using his holy fire to burn away what doesn't belong, bringing out the true quality and value.

Jesus is saying that his coming will expose hearts. It will refine lives. It will force decisions. This isn't accidental. It's His mission.

B. The Cost Before the Fire

Then Jesus says, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" He's talking about the cross.

Before the fire spreads outward, He must endure the fire Himself.

Before He calls others to decide, He will suffer to make salvation possible.

The resurrection we celebrate doesn't bypass suffering. It comes through it. There is a cost.

In the late 18th century, an English poet named William Cowper wrestled deeply with mental anguish, so much so that he spent time in an institution. It was there, in the depths of his struggle, that he surrendered his life to Christ. God, in His grace, not only saved him but also gave him a remarkable gift for poetry. That gift led to a close friendship and ministry partnership with John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*.

Cowper wrote lines that have echoed through generations. He first wrote phrases like, "*I am the king of all I survey*," "*God moves in a mysterious way*" and "*Variety is the spice of life*." Yet despite his talent and the success he found, his internal battles did not simply disappear. He continued to struggle, often walking through deep valleys of sorrow and doubt.

But it was precisely in that place of pain that Cowper began to see the cross more clearly. He identified with the broken, repentant thief hanging beside Jesus. Helpless, needy, and dependent on mercy alone.

Reflecting on passages like Zechariah 13 and the cost of Christ's sacrifice, Cowper wrote perhaps the most vivid and powerful words in any songbook:

*“There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel’s veins;
and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.”*

Cowper understood something we often try to avoid. Before there is cleansing, there is cost. Before the fire spreads, the Savior must suffer. The hope we celebrate in the resurrection was purchased through the agony of the cross.

C. The Division That Follows

Then comes the part we don't expect: “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No... but rather division.”

And He describes families divided. Father against son. Mother against daughter. Teenagers against everyone. Why?

Because when truth is revealed, people respond differently. Some surrender. Some resist.

And that difference creates division, even in the closest relationships.

Jesus doesn't create hostility, but He exposes what we truly love most.

Because Jesus is alive, His truth still confronts. His Word still cuts. His authority still demands response. You cannot remain neutral about a risen Christ. You either bow or you push back.

II. Call to Consider the Times (vv. 54–56)

Jesus shifts from conflict to awareness.

“When you see a cloud... you say, ‘Rain is coming.’ And so it happens.”

In other words: You're good at reading the weather. (40% chance of rain)

But then He says: “How is it that you do not know how to interpret the present time?”

A. The Problem: Spiritual Blindness

They could read the sky but not the Savior.

They could interpret clouds but not Christ. They were informed but not transformed. It is possible to be intellectually sharp and spiritually blind.

B. The Expectation: Discernment

Jesus expected them to recognize that the miracles, the teaching, and His authority all pointed to one reality: God is at work right in front of you.

And they were missing it.

C. The Warning: Hypocrisy

Jesus calls them hypocrites not because they lacked information, but because they ignored what they already knew.

They didn't need more evidence. They needed to be honest and to respond.

We live on the other side of the resurrection. The crowd Jesus spoke to had his miracles, teaching and His presence. We have the empty tomb, the gospel message, the witness of the Church, and the work of the Spirit.

So, the question before us. If they were accountable then before the resurrection, how much more are we now? This is not a time for indifference. This is a time for decision.

III. Correction Concerning Trespasses (vv. 57–59)

Jesus now makes it intensely personal. “Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?” In other words, “Stop looking around. Start looking within.”

A. Personal Responsibility

No more deflection. No more delay. You must decide: Where do I stand with God?

B. The Courtroom Picture

Jesus then gives an illustration: If you're on the way to court with your accuser, settle the matter before you arrive. Because once you stand before the judge, it's too late.

C. The Urgency of Reconciliation

This is not just legal advice it's spiritual reality. There is a judgment coming. And Jesus is saying: Don't wait until that day to get right with God.

The resurrection means that Jesus is not only Savior, He is also Judge. History is moving toward a final reckoning. And that means to delay is dangerous. Every day you put it off, your heart grows harder.

Jesus's counsel is to settle now. Every person will have their spiritual day in court, standing before Jesus our Judge. The Lord's advice? Settle out of court by asking Jesus to be Lord and Savior of your life right now!

IV. The Thread: Jesus Forces a Decision

Across this entire passage, one truth rises to the surface. Fire demands a response. Signs demand recognition. Judgment demands preparation. There is no neutral ground.

What Resurrection-Shaped Living Looks Like

1. Expect Conflict

If you follow Jesus fully not everyone will understand. Not everyone will agree. Some relationships may strain. But that conflict clarifies what matters most.

2. Cultivate Discernment

Don't just observe life, interpret it through Christ. Ask yourself, "Where is God at work? What is He calling me to do?"

3. Act with Urgency

Don't delay repentance. Don't postpone obedience. Don't assume there is some tomorrow for the most important decision anyone can ever make. The time to respond is now.

The fire Jesus brings will do one of two things. It will either purify you if you trust Him or it will judge you if you reject Him.

At the cross, Jesus took the fire of judgment for sinners. At the resurrection God declared that sacrifice accepted.

So now the question is not, "Has Jesus done enough?"

The question is, “How will I respond?”

We’re left with a choice.

Jesus says the fire is coming. The moment is now. The decision cannot be delayed. And maybe some of you feel the weight of that. Not just intellectually, but personally.

Because if you’re honest, your life doesn’t feel neat and put together. It feels complicated. Conflicted. Maybe even broken. That’s why the story of William Cowper matters.

Here was a man who believed in Christ, who wrote about grace, who pointed others to truth and yet still walked through deep valleys of struggle. And it was *in that struggle* that he saw the cross most clearly.

He didn’t write about a distant Savior. He wrote about a suffering one.

“There is a fountain filled with blood...” Cowper understood something we must not miss: **The fire Jesus brings begins at the cross.**

Before it refines us, before it divides, before it calls us to choose, it falls on Him.

Which means the same fire that will judge sin is the fire Jesus stepped into *for sinners*.

So now the question isn’t “Will there be fire?”

The question is: **Will you run from it—or will you run to the One who stood in it for you?**

Because the resurrection declares that sacrifice was enough. That payment was accepted. That the door is still open. But not forever.

So don’t wait. Don’t delay. Don’t assume there will be another moment.

Come to Christ now not because your life is perfect, but because, like Cowper, you know you need mercy. And when you come, you’ll find this is still true: There is a fountain and sinners who come to Christ **lose all their guilty stains.**

Resurrection does not eliminate conflict, it clarifies allegiance.