



“Kingdom Divide”  
 Luke 12:49-59

**Idea:** Christ and His Kingdom are at odds with the world’s kingdom.

**Intro:** Great empires are made through the point of the spear. Napoleon, as a skillful military strategist and leader, understood this reality to be true. He said, “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I myself have founded great empires...But Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day, millions would die for Him. Jesus Christ was more than a man.” There is no doubt that Christ’s Kingdom was and is an upside-down kingdom. He never raised His hand to strike another person. He never gathered an army to wage war. And He never sought to garner political power. Jesus was truly a man of peace, yet He is a king with an ever-expanding kingdom.

Through the first eleven and a half chapters of Luke’s Gospel, this peaceful kingdom has been on full display. We have seen it in the King’s forerunner. John the Baptist through his preaching would “*turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God*” (Luke 1:16). We have seen it in the foretelling of the King’s incarnation. The angel Gabriel told Mary that Jesus “*will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end*” (Luke 1:32-33). We have seen this peaceful kingdom in the birth of Jesus as the heavens erupted with the “*good news of great joy*” that Christ had been born for all the people (Luke 2:10). We have also seen it in the calling of the disciples. The men that Jesus called to follow Him would expand His kingdom through the nets of His gospel (Luke 5:10). And we have seen this kingdom through the teaching ministry of Jesus and His disciples (Luke 4:43; 9:60). Men, women, boys, and girls were drawn into this upside-down kingdom through the preaching of the Word. Allegiances were changed through persuasion and conviction rather than the threat of sword or spear.

Toward the end of Luke 12, the tone of this Gospel changes. We see that as Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem the cross loomed larger and larger, so that it filled the Lord’s mental horizon. In fact, it caused Him to pause and reflect on the fiery realities the cross would unleash upon Him and His followers. Let’s read what He said.

Read Luke 12:49-59.

**Inquiry:** The Gospel of Luke opened with an announcement of peace (2:14), but now in these verses, it seems there might be a contradiction. Nothing could be further than the truth. The Apostle Paul explains in his letter to the church in Rome that sinful humanity in their rebellion against God has exchanged the truth about God for a lie and chosen to worship the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). In doing so, human beings have waged open war against God. Therefore, it would be completely understandable to read in his letter that God

has unleashed the full force of His Kingdom power against all who seek to overthrow His rule. Instead, we read of God's sacrificial gift in Jesus Christ. His death, burial, and resurrection grace those who would believe on Him by faith. Their sinful lives are justified and redeemed (Rom 3:24). Therefore, those who were once at war with God through Christ now enjoy peace with Him (Rom 5:1).

Believers and followers of Jesus Christ enjoy the riches of their new King and His Kingdom. Their change in allegiance, however, now puts them in rebellion against their former king and kingdom. Jesus' words remind us that there are only two kingdoms in this world. There is a heavenly kingdom and an earthly one. Here we see a kingdom divide. Christ and His Kingdom are at odds with the world's kingdom. As we work through this text, there are three appeals for us to see.

## 1. Achieving Peace through War

The words we read in verse 49 are disturbing. Jesus declares His intentions, which are *“to cast fire on the earth.”* Wielding a flamethrower over the face of the earth does not exactly sound peaceful. In fact, it sounds like outright war. It reminds us of America's war with Japan and Vietnam. How are we to understand these words of the Lord? We see two sides to this fire that comes with Jesus. First, John the Baptist explained to those who were coming to him for baptism that Jesus would baptize His followers *“with the Holy Spirit and fire”* (Luke 3:16). Through this baptism, all who believed would be regenerated, made to be children of God, and sealed with the Holy Spirit as a down payment for their salvation. Jesus longed for this baptism in its fullness to become a reality on earth.

He also yearned for judgment to fall on those who continued in their rebellion. This judgment is the other side of the fire image. Those meant for judgment will be gathered like the chaff during a wheat harvest. They will be burned *“with unquenchable fire”* (Luke 3:17). Every person who rejects God's rule and gift of grace will experience the lake of fire for all eternity, but there is more. Peter tells us that when the Lord returns His judgment will bring destruction to everything on earth through fire. The heavens and the earth will be burned up (2 Pet 3) in purification, paving the way for a new heaven and a new earth.

Jesus was distressed over this baptism. The daunting reality for the Lord was that He first had to be immersed in death before these things could take place. The one who knew no sin would first have to become sin so that the sinful might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). He had to bear in His body the sins of humanity and experience separation with the Father as the full wrath of God was exhausted upon sin on the cross. So, Jesus felt the full weight of this distress until it was accomplished. I. H. Marshall explains that in this statement the Lord was saying, “How I am totally governed by this until it be finally accomplished!”

Jesus distressed over the cross that awaited Him and the peace it would bring to His image-bearers. There was no other way to accomplish His desire. Humanity in their sin was at war with God. In Eden they had declared their independence from the Creator, bringing with it the full and just wrath of God against their rebellion. Even still, the Creator longed for their return and reconciliation. Justice and holiness prevented the overlooking of sin, so the only way for sinful men and women to be reunited with God was for Him to pay the penalty for sin Himself. God the Son accomplished this work on the cross of Calvary. God the Father achieved peace for humanity through war on His Son.

The peace that humans experience with God through Jesus Christ now puts them at odds with those who do not yet know Him. Verse 51 explains that Jesus did not come to make everything wonderful between people. He came and died on the cross in order to make everything wonderful between humanity and God. The reality is that when a person faiths into Jesus Christ, he or she will immediately be at odds with those who stand outside of God's Kingdom. Let us be aware of this today so that we are not surprised when rejection comes. The name of Jesus Christ always produces some type of painful

division, even in the most personal of relationships (vs. 53). If you endeavor to faithfully follow Jesus, then you will inevitably experience division. Therefore, let's rejoice and glory in the victory Jesus has won for us, granting us peace with God even while we strive to live at peace with others.

Today, if you have not yet achieved peace with God, please hear the Lord's appeal to you. He distresses over your soul today. Love for you compelled Him to go to the cross for you. Will you not receive His gift of peace? It is freely offered to you today, but it might not be available tomorrow, which leads us to the second appeal.

## 2. Recognizing the Situation

Read Luke 12:54-56.

The longer you live the more familiar you become with the weather patterns. I grew up in Arkansas, in fly-over country. The Natural State is a long way from the coast. In fact, the first time I ever saw the ocean was on my senior trip at the age of 17. So, when it came to the weather, predicting it was not terribly difficult. In Arkansas, weather systems always blow in from the west. They might come more from the northwest or the southwest, but I always knew to look west when assessing the day's weather forecast. Here in Virginia, it is different. While we usually get our weather from the west, there are times like this past week when the weather front comes in from the east or the south. The ocean influences our weather in Virginia. After nearly eight years in the state, I recognize these situations.

Jesus appeals to the crowds and to us today to recognize not just the day's weather pattern but also the sign of the times. The Prince of Peace stood before them, but many failed to recognize it. The Jews, especially the religious leaders, knew the written Word of God, but they misread the living Word of God. He explained that the people were able to recognize the coming of rain when they saw thunder clouds assembling in the west. Likewise, they knew the day was going to be extremely hot when the wind was blowing in from the south. Yet, they could not or would not correctly interpret the spiritual patterns of their day.

Can you and do you rightly recognize the situation of today? As you participate in the church on a regular basis, do you recognize Jesus for who He is and what He wants to do in your life? He died on the cross to provide salvation from sin. Have you received Him as your Lord and Savior? He is the great Judge, whom you will stand before and give an account. Have you prepared for that day? If not, then I want you to know there is a deal on the table today. This brings us to our third and final appeal.

## 3. Striking a Deal

Read Luke 12:57-59.

This miniparable assumes that all people are guilty and heading for judgment. The only sensible thing to do is try to settle out of court before the judgment, where the verdict can only be guilty. Those who are found guilty will have to pay the ultimate price.

Do you hear the gospel call in these verses? *"As you go with your accuser before the magistrate"* presupposes guilt. The Apostle Paul makes clear that we have all *"sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom 3:23). The return on that investment is separation from the life we were created to experience in God. Romans 6:23 tells us *"the wages of sin is death,"* but thankfully that is not the end of the story. The verse goes on to say, *"but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* In the gospel we see the glorious plea deal that Jesus entered with the Father on our behalf.

Read Romans 5:12-17.

Death came through the sin of the one man. It came through Adam, so also life has come through the death and resurrection of the one man Jesus Christ. His sacrifice pleaded down your case, meaning He became your substitute. God the Father never looks past your sin. His holiness and justice do not allow it. Through the cross, your sin is absorbed and covered by the blood of Christ. Therefore, if you will receive Jesus' deal, rather than seeing your sin, God the Father will see the righteousness of Christ over you instead of your sin. Thus, you will be freed from the death and separation that sin brings and given the life for which you were created to enjoy.

Have you struck this deal with God? What would keep you from striking a deal today?

**Conclusion:** Great empires are made through the point of the spear as one kingdom overthrows another by force. Next week, as Americans, we will celebrate our independence. On July 4, 1776, fifty-six leaders from across the colonies signed the Declaration of Independence, announcing their intentions to be free from Britain's rule. That document did not secure independence for American colonists; it simply clarified the division they sought. A war had to be fought and won to secure their freedom from tyranny. Thankfully, the war was waged and won. The nation's birthday next week will mark 247 years of freedom that was secured through the point of the spear. While we are grateful for the freedoms secured for us by our forefathers, we are even more thankful for the work of Jesus upon the cross. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, He has achieved peace through war on sin. Therefore, may we recognize the situation in our own lives and seek to strike a deal with Jesus through His gospel.