

The Lost Opportunity

Luke 12:49-59

Pastor John Miller

In Luke 12:1 all the way to Luke 13:9, Jesus has given one long discourse with many different topics. It makes teaching it such a challenge. He's warned us so far of four things. Number one, He warned us to beware of hypocrisy, in Luke 12:1: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

Number two, He warned us of the sin of covetousness, in verse 15: "Beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." And He gave us the parable of the foolish farmer.

Number three, He warned us to beware of worry, in verse 22: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on." Heathens or nonbelievers worry about those things. Verse 31, "But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."

And number four, He warned us to be ready for His coming, in verse 40: "You also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." We had the parables about the faithful stewards who knew the Lord was coming, so they got ready. When He came, they opened the door to receive Him. So we are to be ready servants, watching, waiting and working until the Lord comes.

Now we make a transition; Jesus wants to warn the disciples and the multitude that before His Messianic kingdom comes, there will be a delay, and the present age will be a time of conflict, strife and division. If you miss this, you miss the whole text we'll cover today.

He's been telling them He's coming back. Okay; that's good. That will be in His Second Advent, when He will come to sit on the throne of David for 1,000 years in what is known as "the kingdom age" or "the millennial reign." Christ will reign and there will be peace on earth. That will usher in the eternal state.

But before this happens, right now in the present church age, there will be a time of conflict, strife and division.

The key verse to our whole passage is Luke 12:51, which says, "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all..." which is emphatic in the Greek "...but rather division."

You ask, "What in the world is He talking about?! He didn't come to bring peace on earth?! He came to bring 'division'?!" Jesus is contrasting His Second Coming with His first coming. He didn't want people to misunderstand the idea. Yes; He is the Messiah and has come to sit on David's throne. Yes; there will be a kingdom age of peace when men "shall beat their swords

into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4). But until then, the church age will be marked by a time of conflict, strife and division.

So the first time Jesus came, He came not to bring peace, except in the hearts of those who believe in Him, who are born again. Rather He brought division the first time.

Jesus is the great divider; nothing divides more than His Cross. When you preach the Cross of Jesus Christ, there is division; they either believe it or reject it. You either are saved or not saved. You're either going to heaven or going to hell. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). So either you trust in Christ, you're going to heaven, you come to believe and trust in the Cross, or you have rejected that, and you're on your way to hell and separation for all eternity.

So these are very stern warnings or admonitions that Jesus gives in this text.

Now notice in verse 51 that Jesus said, "Do you suppose that I came...?" And in verse 49, He said, "I came...." Twice He used the same phrase. Jesus is telling us why He came. He said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). He said, in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). So this is one of the "I came" statements of Jesus.

So why did Jesus come? Not to bring peace on earth but division.

You say, "Well, what about when Jesus was born the angels proclaimed, 'On earth peace, goodwill toward men'? (Luke 2:14). Where is the peace on earth?"

It's interesting that when Jesus came the first time, it was proclaimed that He would bring peace on earth, but that peace on earth will not actually be happening on a national level for Israel or for the world until His Second Coming. In His first coming, He only brought peace in the sense that repentant sinners, who believe in Him, have peace with God. And when you have peace with God, which means you're saved and have the Holy Spirit, then—and only then—can you have the peace of God in your heart, so you will have peace with people. So there is a contrast between the two comings of Christ.

When John the Baptist began his ministry of being the forerunner of the Messiah, some asked him, "Are you the Messiah?" John said, "No." "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance....He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). I happen to believe that the "fire" was not only the baptism of the Spirit, which took place on the day of Pentecost forming the body of Christ, but it also has a future aspect. "Fire" in that case, and in our text, refers to judgment, because John goes on to say, "His winnowing fan is in his hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." So Jesus will also come to divide.

You need to understand the ministry of Jesus. He came the first time to bring peace in our hearts, peace with God through the Cross. He will come the second time to bring peace on earth when He reigns as the Prince of Peace, King of kings and Lord of lords. But He will also baptize with the Spirit now those who are saved and will later baptize with judgment those who are lost; like chaff He will gather them and they will be cast into the fire and burn.

In our text, Jesus issues three warnings or admonitions. First, there will be a cross. In the interim between the first coming and the Second Coming, there will be the Cross of Christ, which is the dividing line for all humanity, verses 49-50. "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!" These are two verses I wish I could rightfully, clearly, simply explain. It's a challenge to understand some of the meaning here.

Jesus basically is talking here about His death or Crucifixion on the Cross. Verse 49 shows His longing to fulfill why He came, which was to die on the Cross. In verse 50, we see His distress over being hemmed in, because He was burdened by this desire to accomplish His purpose and His mission of dying on the Cross for the sins of the world. So these verses are all about the Cross of Christ.

He had talked about being ready for His Second Coming, but before He comes the second time, He must wear the crown of thorns and die on the Cross. Before He sits on the throne of David, He will hang upon a Roman cross and die for the sins of the world.

I want to go through verses 49-50 phrase by phrase. Verse 49 says, "I came..." Jesus describes His mission "...to send fire on the earth." That is a hidden reference to His death on the Cross, where He becomes the substitution for man's sin. And more so, it references God's wrath poured out on Him in our place. These two verses are packed with theological, doctrinal, Biblical truths. I recommend you read a modern translation of these verses; it clarifies it a little bit.

If I were to paraphrase it, I would say that He has come to die on the Cross for man's sins, and He wants it to be accomplished or completed. In verse 50, He says that He has a baptism to be baptized with. He's not talking about His water baptism by John the Baptist; He's referring to a baptism of suffering and taking the sin of the world on Himself at the Cross. The word for "baptism" here is the word "baptizó," which is used many times for a baptism of sorrow, suffering and affliction. So, again, this is a reference to the Cross. This is God's divine plan.

Verse 50 says, "How distressed I am" or "How am I straitened" in the King James Bible. From the word "straitened," we get the word "strait jacket." It means to be "hemmed in, held tight, gripped by, controlled by, captured by." Jesus is hemmed in by His desire to go to the Cross—not because He wanted to suffer, but because He wanted to be faithful to His Father's plan of redemption.

Paul used the same word, in Philippians 1:23-24, where he said, "I am hard-pressed between

the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.” So Paul was locked in between these two desires; he wanted to go to heaven to be with Christ, but he knew he needed to stay here to minister to people.

We think about Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Being in agony over the coming of the Cross, “His sweat became like great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). The Gethsemane story is one of the most moving, powerful stories of Christ in the whole Bible.

But it wasn’t just those few hours in Gethsemane; His entire life was lived under the straitened burden or desire to be obedient to the Father by going to the Cross and suffer and die. And I wonder at what age did Jesus begin to be fully conscious and aware that He was born to die, that He was born to be the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Did you ever face something in the future you knew you had to do that was going to be very difficult? You dreaded it but you wanted to get it over with, to do what you needed to do.

Jesus lived His entire life with an awareness that He was going to be the substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the world! He was born to die. That’s pretty heavy. He lived under those restraints, under that pressure.

Then in verse 50, He used the word “accomplished”—“till it is accomplished.” So His mission was preordained and planned by God the Father before the foundation of the world.

I want to give you five, key words about the Cross of Christ that defines what Jesus did when He died on the Cross. The reason I’m doing this is because there is a popular movement today, which tries to minimize the death of Christ on the Cross. It tries to deny what is called “penal substitution.” There is a theologian named N.T. Wright, who is from Britain, who denies penal, substitutionary atonement. He is very popular among evangelicals today. But his teaching is heretical and false doctrine. He denies that Jesus died on the Cross and took the wrath of God the Father as punishment for sins. The Bible does not teach that.

The first word I want to give you about the Cross is “redemption.” Paul says in Ephesians 1:7, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” What’s conveyed in the word redemption is that we were slaves to sin and were bought back. The word “redeem” means “to buy back.” In Adam, we fell into sin, and now we’re being bought back by God out of the slave market of sin. So when Jesus died on the Cross, He died to redeem us. It implies the Fall and then the redemption, bringing us back to God by buying us.

When you purchase a slave, you buy them out of the slave market, you redeem them. They become your property, and you could set them free. So Jesus buys us and takes us out of the slave market of sin and sets us free. When the Israelites came out of Egypt in the Exodus, they were redeemed. It is a picture of what Jesus did on the Cross. He bought us.

The second word about the Cross is “reconciliation.” You don’t understand the Cross if you

don't understand reconciliation. In redemption, He buys us; in reconciliation, He brings us back to God or He reunites us with God. The Bible says that we were actually "enemies" of God (Romans 5:10) or hostile toward God (Romans 8:7) and actually are "separated" from God (Isaiah 59:2). So the Cross of Jesus Christ reconciled us to God.

A little, fine point, but it's important to know—we don't reconcile ourselves to God; He reconciles us; He is the reconciler; Jesus reconciles us to God. There is nothing I can do to reconcile myself to God. Romans 5:10 says, "When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son."

The third word is "propitiation." It is used in 1 John 2:2, which says, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." This concerns the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross toward God the Father. God is holy and righteous, His Law has been broken and the Law must be satisfied or paid. So "propitiation" means that Jesus was our sacrificial satisfaction; He paid the penalty for our sins, or He satisfied the demand of God's holy, righteous Law.

Word number four is "substitution." This is a very important word. It means when Jesus died on the Cross, He took our place. He died for me. Isaiah 53:5 says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities....and by His stripes we are healed." And in Hebrews 9:28, the writer of Hebrews tells us that "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many." And 1 Peter 2:24 says, "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree."

And word number five is "imputation." It means that God the Father took the righteousness of God the Son and put it to my account. He imputed that righteousness to me. I am spiritually bankrupt before a holy God, but when Jesus died on the Cross, Paul says, in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Jesus took my sin, paid its penalty in full by dying on the Cross, so that His righteousness can be put into my account. So this idea of imputation is that God takes the righteousness of Christ and imputes it to me. Now I stand before a holy God righteous and justified.

These words are redemption—He bought us; reconciliation—He brought us back to God; propitiation—He paid the penalty; substitution—He died in my place; and imputation—He gives me His righteousness. All of this is comprised in what Jesus did on the Cross for us.

Charles Erdman said, "The Cross of Christ is now the dividing of the world." The Cross is the dividing line between the saved and the unsaved, between the children of God and the children of the devil, between those who are going to heaven and those who are going to hell. The "narrow gate" leads to life, and the "wide gate" leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13).

So if you want to get to heaven, you cannot go around the Cross. You can't work your way there. You can't be righteous enough to get there. You must come to the Cross with open hands and receive the righteousness of Christ imputed to you.

So Jesus wanted them to know that before He comes to reign on the earth, there was going to be a cross.

The second warning Jesus gives us is in verses 51-53. There will be a cost. Number one, there will be a cross, and number two, there will be a cost. During this time, if you follow Jesus Christ and come to the Cross, there will be a cost to pay.

Jesus said, "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division." Then He describes it. "For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided 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."

If you come to the Cross, if you come to Jesus Christ, your husband or your wife may not like it. Your children may not like it. Your parents may not like it. Your daughter-in-law may not like you anymore. It may blow up your family. This is a very stern warning and admonition. There will be division if you follow Christ.

It's interesting that verses 52-53 are drawn from Micah 7:6, which says, "For son dishonors father, daughter rises against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own household." Micah used it by saying the younger generation would be against the older generation. And Jesus is alluding to these Micah verses in our text.

Some of you know this is true by experience. You came to Jesus Christ and your husband is not happy about it. You came to Jesus Christ and your wife's not very happy. You came to Jesus Christ and your kids aren't very happy. You came to Jesus Christ and your parents aren't happy about it.

I've seen parents who would rather have their kids on drugs rather than following Jesus Christ! They don't want them to read the Bible, to pray and they don't want them to become Christians. Sometimes they will even write them off; they don't even count them as their children anymore. This is the price you have to pay to follow Jesus Christ.

I want to read Matthew 10: 34-39. Jesus says the same thing with a little different angle on this subject. He said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." That's an amazing statement! "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

These are very stern words. You have to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). And it's sad that many times people are not willing to pay that price. I've seen it happen so many times. They're not

willing to have a sword come into their precious, family relationships. But we must never, ever reject Jesus Christ or not obey Jesus Christ or fail to follow Jesus Christ in order to gain peace in our relationships—even in our own families.

I'm not saying that it's okay to blow up our families. We should love them, pray for them and do the best we can. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). But your allegiance must be to God, and to God alone. You must love God supremely over every other individual. So there will be division as a result.

Does this mean there is no peace for the believer? No. There is a sense in which Jesus came to bring peace, and that is because of your salvation. Through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, by being regenerated and born again and by being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we have peace with God. You may not have peace in your home. You may not have peace with other people. But you have peace with God.

I grew up in a Christian home. My parents had been praying for me to become a Christian. They were elated that I chose to follow Christ. But all my "sin buddies," all my party friends were bummed out. "Did you hear what happened to John Miller? He became a Christian! What a bummer! It messed up his life!" They gradually drifted away from me.

But what a blessing for me! The peace of God filled my heart and soul. Then God gives you new friends and family. Actually Jesus said that if you forsake family and friends for Him, you'll receive a hundredfold in this life and in the life to come (Mark 10:29-30), or in eternity, you'll receive all the blessings of God. So you get the family of God, you get the body of Christ—all these brothers and sisters—and you get heaven too!

So never let your nearest and dearest relatives or family members get in the way of you being obedient to follow Christ, because if you repent and believe in Jesus, you can have peace with God and you can have the peace of God.

Verses 54-59 is the section showing a lost opportunity. There are two parts to verses 54-59. The first part is verses 54-57. "Then He also said to the multitudes...." There is a change here; He was speaking to His disciples, but now He's speaking to the people, to the general public, where there are unbelievers and half-hearted followers.

Jesus said, "Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming'; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, 'There will be hot weather'; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time? Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?" So this was an opportunity to be able to discern the times in which they lived.

He used the analogy that they could predict the weather. The landscape and topography of Israel is similar to that of California. We have a coast on the west side of our state, as does Israel. Storms form over the Pacific Ocean and bring us rain. The same for Israel; if they looked out over the Mediterranean Sea and saw a cloud, they could conclude that rain was

coming. So Jesus was talking about the fact that they had the ability to know the weather patterns.

When Elijah was praying for rain, he sent his servant to check for clouds over the Mediterranean. He reported back to Elijah that he saw a little cloud the size of a man's hand (1 Kings 18:44). So Elijah said that it was going to start raining.

And when we look out over the Pacific Ocean to the west, and we see clouds forming, the rain is coming. But here in the Temecula Valley it often goes right by us. However, sometimes it drops a little rain. So we can read the weather patterns too.

In verse 55, it says the people knew that when the wind came from the south, from the Saudi Arabian Peninsula, they would get hot weather. We have a similar situation in California when the Santa Ana winds blow from the desert to the coast. So we too can predict that.

Jesus is saying here that they could predict the weather, but they couldn't see the eternal issues, prophesies and the truth about Messiah. They were hypocrites; Jesus said they couldn't discern "this time."

What is "this time"? It is the time of the Messiah's first coming. Daniel spoke of it. When Jesus wept over Jerusalem, He said, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:42). God prophesied. They had the witness in Jesus Christ; they had His Word, His works and His life. But they were dull to spiritual reality. They were deceived, so they could not discern.

What Jesus said was deliberate, because the truth was obvious. It's pretty simple to predict the weather. How hard can that be? If you can predict the weather, you can predict that this was the time that the Messiah would come. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He was raised in Nazareth. When He went into the synagogue at Nazareth and read the Scriptures from Isaiah, He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor," and He went on to describe His ministry as the Messiah. And He said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:18,21).

They had all kinds of evidence, but they rejected Him, willfully and deliberately. So Jesus said He brought division, because they rejected Him. You can get some theological incite, in Romans 9-11, why the Jews rejected Jesus, their Messiah. It was all part of God's purpose, design and program that during this time, Gentiles would be saved and brought to faith. Then the Jews would be restored at the end of this age. Israel will be saved when Christ returns to establish His kingdom and reigns on the throne of David.

The Jews also failed to discern the threat. In verses 58-59, Jesus said, "When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, make every effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge, the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you shall not depart from there till you have paid the very last mite."

This is a miniparable. You think, "What in the world is He talking about?" He's painting a picture of owing someone money, but you didn't pay them what you were supposed to pay them. So they take you to court. You're on your way to court, you know you're guilty and when you stand before the Judge, you're going to be found guilty, because you are. You'll be put in prison.

What's a good idea? Settle out of court. Notice the process here. Your adversary brings you before the magistrate, he puts you before the judge, then the judge gives you to the officer, who throws you in prison. And you won't get out of prison until you've paid your full debt. In our case, we are bankrupt, so we'll never be able to pay; we're a hopeless case.

don't miss your opportunity now to get right with God. Don't wait until you stand before the Judge.

But people do this all the time. They say, "Oh, I'll wait until I die," "I'll figure it out" or "God knows my heart, so He'll take me to heaven." That's foolish! Why would you wait? You know you're guilty; you know you're going to be thrown into prison.

When Jesus comes back, He's coming back to be the Judge on the great white throne. He will judge all mankind. The wicked dead will be resurrected and stand before Him, the books will be opened. If your name is not in the Book of Life, you'll be cast into the lake of fire, which is eternal death (Revelation 20:11-15).

If you're smart, you'll get right with God now. You won't wait until it's too late. You won't miss your opportunity.

There are three things this passage has taught us. Jesus died for your sins on the Cross. Following Jesus Christ is going to cost you your whole life. God will save you from your sins and take you to heaven for all eternity.

But you must not miss your opportunity. Israel missed its opportunity. But you as an individual have this opportunity right now to get right with God, to receive Jesus Christ, to believe in Him, to have your sins forgiven and to go to heaven.

You say, "Well, I'll just think about it."

Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad" (Matthew 12:30). To procrastinate, to put it off, is a decision not to receive Jesus Christ. And a decision not to receive Christ means that your eternity is hanging in the balance.

Where are you with Christ today? Have you come to the Cross? Have you believed on Him? We are all guilty and on our way to the courtroom, where we will stand before the Judge, who will hand us over to the officer to be cast into prison.

So our passage basically is saying to us, "Don't miss this opportunity to get right with God!"

If God has spoken to you through this message today, and you're not sure you're a child of God—maybe you don't know that if you died today, you would go to heaven, you've never really trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—I would like to lead you in a prayer right now inviting Christ to come into your heart and to be your Savior.

So as I pray this prayer, I want you to repeat it out loud, right where you are, after me. Make it from your heart, inviting Christ to come in and be your Lord and Savior. Let's pray.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for my sin. I pray that You'll forgive me and come into my heart and make me Your child. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to live for you all the days of my life. I believe in You. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen.”

If you prayed that prayer and you meant it, God heard that prayer and God will and does forgive your sins.

We'd like to help you get started growing in your walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. God bless you.

If you just prayed with Pastor John to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, we are so excited for you, and we'd like to send you a Bible and some resources to get you started in your relationship with the Lord. Simply click on the Contact link at the top of the page and tell us something like, “I prayed to accept Christ.” We'll get your Bible and resources mailed out to you right away.

God bless you and welcome to the family of God.