

Luke 12:49-56  
August 15, '10

"SCARY JESUS"

ONE OF THE MOST MEANINGFUL COMPONENTS OF OUR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR THE PAST 15 YEARS OR SO HAS BEEN OUR BIBLE MEMORY CONTEST FOR CHILDREN.

EVERY YEAR, OUR CHILDREN & YOUTH LEARN BIBLE PASSAGES THAT THEY COMMIT TO MEMORY.

THE PASSAGES THEY LEARN INCREASE EVERY YEAR BUT THEY INCLUDE ONES THEY HAVE PREVIOUSLY LEARNED SO THAT, BY THE TIME THEY GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL, THEY HAVE RECITED SOME OF THOSE SAME PASSAGES EVERY YEAR THROUGHOUT THEIR TIME HERE.

IT'S HEARTWARMING TO SEE THE CHILDREN WORKING ON & THEN RECITING THOSE PASSAGES TO ADULT LISTENERS.

I KNOW PARENTS & TEACHERS WORK DILIGENTLY WITH THE CHILDREN TO HELP THEM IN THEIR LEARNING.

WE OCCASIONALLY ADD OR CHANGE SOME OF THOSE SECTIONS OF SCRIPTURE TO BE MEMORIZED.

CAN YOU IMAGINE THE SHOCK OF A PARENT IF THEIR CHILD WERE TO COME HOME SOME SUNDAY WITH A NEWLY-REVISED COLLECTION OF MEMORY VERSES AND SEE *THIS* PASSAGE ON THE LIST?

AND WHAT WOULD YOUR REACTION BE IF, ON THE DAY AWARDS WERE GIVEN OUT, WE HAD A SECOND-GRADER STAND BEFORE THE CONGREGATION & SHARE WHAT THEY HAD LEARNED BY SAYING: *"I CAME TO BRING FIRE TO THE EARTH...DO YOU THINK THAT I HAVE COME TO BRING PEACE...NO, BUT RATHER DIVISION...FATHER AGAINST SON & SON AGAINST FATHER...MOTHER AGAINST DAUGHTER & DAUGHTER AGAINST MOTHER..."*

WHY, YOU'D BE HORRIFIED, WOULDN'T YOU?

WE WANT OUR CHILDREN TO MEMORIZE PARTS OF THE BIBLE – BUT NOT *THOSE* PARTS!

WE WANT A HAPPY JESUS, A LOVING JESUS, A COMPASSIONATE JESUS, A HEALING JESUS, A TEACHING JESUS, A MIRACLE-WORKING JESUS.

BUT THIS!?

THIS IS A SCARY JESUS, ISN'T IT?

THIS IS A JESUS WHO SAYS THINGS WE'D RATHER NOT HEAR.

WE'D RATHER NOT HEAR THEM BECAUSE WE DON'T UNDERSTAND THEM & WE'RE AFRAID THAT IF WE *DID* UNDERSTAND THEM, WE'D BE EVEN *LESS* INCLINED TO HEAR THEM!

THESE ARE NOT WORDS THAT WE WOULD EXPECT TO FIND ON A GREETING CARD OR REFRIGERATOR MAGNET.

WE CAN'T IMAGINE THEM EMBLAZONED ACROSS A T-SHIRT OR IN THE CHORUS OF A SONG.

EVEN OUR BULLETIN COVER THIS MORNING AVOIDS THE MORE UNNERVING PARTS OF THIS PASSAGE.

THE WORDS WE FIND THERE ARE WORDS THAT TOUCH ON ONE OF THE MANY ELEMENTS OF THE PASSAGE ON WHICH WE MIGHT FOCUS OUR ATTENTION.

*"I HAVE A BAPTISM WITH WHICH TO BE BAPTIZED..."*

THAT'S ALL WELL & GOOD.

BAPTISM IS A GOOD THING – A HAPPY THING – AN ENTRYWAY INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD.

BUT WHAT *ISN'T* ON OUR BULLETIN COVER IS THE LAST HALF OF THAT VERSE – “*I HAVE A BAPTISM WITH WHICH TO BE BAPTIZED – AND WHAT STRESS I AM UNDER UNTIL IT IS COMPLETED!*”

WHAT IN THE WORD DOES *THAT* MEAN?!

JESUS WAS BAPTIZED BY JOHN IN THE JORDAN RIVER.

BUT THIS IS A DIFFERENT BAPTISM TO WHICH HE REFERS HERE.

HERE HE'S TALKING ABOUT HIS DEATH.

DO YOU RECALL WHAT JESUS SAID TO JAMES & JOHN WHEN THEY WERE CAMPAIGNING FOR POSITIONS OF POWER IN HIS KINGDOM?

HE ASKED THEM A PIERCING QUESTION – “*ARE YOU ABLE TO DRINK THE CUP THAT I DRINK, OR TO BE BAPTIZED WITH THE BAPTISM WITH WHICH I AM BAPTIZED?*”

HE'S ASKING THEM IF THEY'RE WILLING & ABLE TO PAY THE PRICE IT WILL COST TO FOLLOW HIM – REALLY FOLLOW HIM - ALL THE WAY TO THE CROSS.

HIS BAPTISM IN THE WATERS OF JORDAN WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING.

IT LED TO HIS BAPTISM OF BLOOD ON THE CROSS.

THIS TEACHING ABOUT BAPTISM IS ONE OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE PASSAGE ON WHICH WE MIGHT FOCUS.

ANOTHER IS THE VERY TROUBLING STATEMENT HE MAKES ABOUT DIVISIONS.

I THINK WHAT JESUS IS DOING HERE IS SIMPLY ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT HE SEES TAKING PLACE ALL AROUND HIM.

HIS MESSAGE IS A MESSAGE THAT DIVIDES PEOPLE.

THAT DOESN'T MEAN IT *HAS* TO.

IT DOESN'T MEAN IT *ALWAYS* WILL.

BUT WHAT JESUS IS SAYING IS THAT FOLLOWING HIM COMPLETELY MAY BRING ABOUT SOME VERY UNPLEASANT REACTIONS.

IT MAY RESULT IN THOSE WHO ARE CLOSEST TO US – EVEN MEMBERS OF OUR OWN FAMILY - REJECTING US BECAUSE OF OUR COMMITMENT.

YES, THE DIVISIONS OF WHICH JESUS SPEAKS MIGHT BE AN ELEMENT OF THIS PASSAGE ON WHICH WE MIGHT FOCUS.

THE FIRST HALF OF THESE VERSES CONTAIN WORDS THAT JESUS SPOKE TO THE DISCIPLES.

BUT NOW HE DIRECTS HIS WORDS TO THE CROWDS AROUND THEM & CHASTISES THEM FOR THEIR DETAILED ATTENTION TO TRIVIAL ISSUES TO THE UTTER NEGLECT OF THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER.

THE EXAMPLE HE USES IS ONE THAT IS PROBABLY THE MOST COMMON AREA OF PROGNOSTICATION EVEN IN OUR OWN TIME – THE WEATHER.

HASN'T IT BEEN NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE THIS SUMMER TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITHOUT SOME REFERENCE TO THE WEATHER?

I HEARD LOCAL WEATHERMAN RON RHODES TALKING ABOUT THE WEATHER LAST WEEK.

THAT'S NOT UNUSUAL.

MOST OF US HAVE PROBABLY HEARD RON RHODES OR WAYNE HART OR JEFF LYONS GIVE US THE GRUESOME FORECAST IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS.

BUT WHEN I HEARD RON RHODES TALKING ABOUT THE WEATHER LAST WEEK, IT WAS AT WALMART – AT ONE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING!

OKAY, NOW I KNOW THAT RAISES ALL KINDS OF QUESTIONS FOR YOU – WHAT WAS RON RHODES DOING AT WALMART AT ONE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING?

WHAT WAS I DOING AT WALMART – AT ANY TIME – LET ALONE ONE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING!?

WITHOUT GOING INTO EITHER ONE OF THOSE QUESTIONS, THE POINT IS, EVERYONE WANTED TO TALK TO RON RHODES ABOUT THE WEATHER!

HE COULDN'T GET OUT OF THE STORE WITHOUT BEING STOPPED BY EVERYONE WHO SAW HIM!

WE ALL WANT TO GUESS WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN WITH THE WEATHER TOMORROW.

OR MAYBE WE WANT TO GUESS WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN WITH THE ECONOMY & THAT ONE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANY MORE PROMISING THAN THE WEATHER, DOES IT?

JESUS IS TELLING US TO QUIT FOCUSING ON THINGS THAT DON'T HAVE ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE & LOOK AT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE WORLD RIGHT NOW.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING – OR NOT DOING – THAT MATTERS FOR ETERNITY?

HOW ARE YOU SERVING – OR NOT SERVING – AS CHRIST'S WITNESS IN THE LIFE OF ANOTHER PERSON?

THE HARSH WORDS OF CHRIST TO THE CROWD ABOUT FOCUSING ON THINGS THAT MATTER ARE ANOTHER ONE OF THE ELEMENTS OF THIS PASSAGE ON WHICH WE MIGHT FOCUS.

BUT THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE HE ADDRESSES HERE THAT I THINK DESERVES OUR ATTENTION EVEN MORE.

IT'S THE VERY FIRST SECTION OF THIS PASSAGE.

IN FACT, IN THE ORIGINAL GREEK, IT'S THE FIRST WORD OF THIS ENTIRE SECTION.

VERSE 49 LITERALLY READS – *“FIRE I CAME TO BRING TO THE EARTH & HOW I WISH IT WERE ALREADY KINDLED.”*

IF YOU WERE TO ASK 50 PEOPLE WHO SAID, *“I CAME TO BRING FIRE TO THE EARTH,”* I DOUBT VERY MANY – EVEN CHURCH FOLKS – WOULD GUESS THAT IT WAS JESUS.

IT JUST DOESN'T SOUND LIKE HIM, DOES IT?

IT'S A SCARY JESUS WHO SAYS SOMETHING LIKE THIS.

*“BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS?”*

NOW *THAT* SOUNDS MORE LIKE THE JESUS WE KNOW, DOESN'T IT?

*“DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO UNTO YOU?”*

YEAH, THAT’S THE JESUS WE COME TO CHURCH TO HEAR ABOUT.

BUT IT IS A SCARY JESUS WHO SAYS *“FIRE I BRING TO THE EARTH.”*

THERE’S A FUNNY THING ABOUT FIRE.

IT CAN BE EITHER GOOD OR BAD – BUT IT CAN’T BE IGNORED.

FIRE CAN COOK OUR FOOD – OR BURN IT BEYOND RECOGNITION.

FIRE CAN WARM A HOUSE – OR BURN IT TO THE GROUND.

FIRE CAN SERVE AS A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS – AND IT CAN ALSO DESTROY AN ENTIRE FOREST.

THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE WE FIND THE SAME THING.

THINK OF THE POSITIVE REFERENCES TO FIRE IN THE BIBLE.

IT WAS FIRE THAT ENABLED MOSES TO SEE GOD IN A BUSH IN THE DESERT.

IT WAS A PILLAR OF FIRE THAT LED THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS AT NIGHT.

IT WAS FIRE THAT TOUCHED THE LIPS OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH CALLING HIM TO PROCLAIM THE WORD OF GOD.

IT WAS FIRE THAT DANCED ON THE HEADS OF THE APOSTLES ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

BUT THERE ARE ALSO DOZENS OF PASSAGES IN BOTH THE OLD & NEW TESTAMENT THAT SPEAK OF THE FRIGHTENING & ANNIHILATING FORCE OF FIRE AS THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

IT’S *THAT* UNDERSTANDING OF THIS WORD ON THE LIPS OF JESUS THAT MAKE US THINK OF HIM AS SCARY.

IT’S SCARY TO THINK OF THAT CONSUMING FIRE FOR OUR WRONGDOING.

THAT’S WHAT SCARES US, ISN’T IT?

BUT I WONDER.

I WONDER IF THE POSITIVE USE OF THE WORD SHOULDN’T BE WHAT MAKES US REALLY TREMBLE WITH FEAR.

HEAR ME OUT ON THIS.

I THINK JESUS IS EVEN MORE SCARY WHEN WE CONSIDER THE “GOOD” OF FIRE BECAUSE THAT’S WHEN IT’S MOST CHALLENGING FOR US TO ACT – TO BE THE PERSON GOD INTENDS US TO BE.

WHAT’S THE MOST-FREQUENTLY -USED ADJECTIVE THAT PRECEDES THE WORD “PASSION?”

ISN’T IT “BURNING?”

WE TALK ABOUT SOMEONE WHO HAS A “BURNING PASSION” FOR SOMETHING.

MAYBE WHAT JESUS WANTS TO KINDLE IS THE FIRE INSIDE THE HEARTS OF HIS FOLLOWERS.

MAYBE HE’S CALLING US TO DEVELOP A “BURNING PASSION” TO REACH OUT IN COMPASSIONATE LOVE & MERCY TO THOSE IN NEED ALL AROUND US.

THAT IS, INDEED, SCARIER THAN A CONSUMING FIRE OF DESTRUCTION.

IT'S SCARY BECAUSE WE HAVE A TENDENCY TO BE APATHETIC & LETHARGIC WHEN IT COMES TO SERVING AS CHRIST SERVED.

CHURCH LEADER BILL EASUM ASKS A HAUNTING QUESTION OF PASTORS THAT I THINK CAN BE APPLIED TO MOST CHRISTIANS & EVEN TO ENTIRE CHURCHES – *“HOW CAN SO MANY BE BURNED OUT WHEN THEY’VE NEVER BEEN ON FIRE?”*

I DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT THE JESUS WHO CALLS ME TO ACCOUNT REGARDING MY BURNING PASSION FOR SERVING OTHERS AS HE DID, IS A VERY SCARY JESUS.

YOU & I & WE AS A CHURCH ARE CONFRONTED BY A SCARY JESUS WHO WANTS TO KNOW WHAT MATTERS TO US.

HE WANTS TO SEE IT EXHIBITED IN OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES & THE COLLECTIVE LIFE OF THIS CHURCH FAMILY.

THIS PASSAGE – AS DIFFICULT AS IT IS TO HEAR – IS A MAGNIFICENT & MARVELOUSLY CHALLENGING PASSAGE.

DOROTHY SAYERS, THE GREAT ENGLISH MYSTERY WRITER & CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL SAID THIS ABOUT THE CHALLENGE JESUS EXTENDS TO US: *“THE PEOPLE WHO HANGED CHRIST NEVER ACCUSED HIM OF BEING A BORE. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY THOUGHT HIM TOO DYNAMIC TO BE SAFE.*

*“IT HAS BEEN LEFT TO LATER GENERATIONS TO EFFICIENTLY PARE THE CLAWS OF THE LION OF JUDAH, TO CERTIFY HIM ‘MEEK & MILD’ AND RECOMMEND HIM AS A FITTING HOUSEHOLD PET FOR PALE CURATES & PIOUS OLD LADIES.*

*“TO THOSE WHO KNEW HIM, HOWEVER, HE IN NO WAY SUGGESTS A MILK-AND-WATER PERSON. THEY OBJECTED TO HIM AS A DANGEROUS FIREBRAND.”*

JESUS HAD, WITHIN HIM, A BURNING PASSION TO REACH OUT WITH THE HAND OF GOD & TOUCH THE UNTOUCHABLE & LOVE THE UNLOVABLE.

HIS WORDS OF CHALLENGE IN THIS PASSAGE ARE AN INVITATION TO US TO DO THE SAME.

IT’S A CHALLENGE TO BE COMMITTED TO CHRIST, BE COMMITTED TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST & BE COMMITTED TO THE MISSION OF CHRIST.

IT HAS TO BE ALL THREE, THOUGH.

IT’S NOT ENOUGH TO BE COMMITTED TO CHRIST.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO WANT TO BE COMMITTED TO A PERSONAL, PRIVATE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS.

THEY QUIETLY & PIOUSLY THINK TO THEMSELVES, *“IT’S JUST ME & JESUS. JUST THE TWO OF US. I READ THE BIBLE & I TALK TO JESUS. WE HAVE OUR SWEET TIME TOGETHER & THAT’S ALL I NEED.”*

THEN THERE ARE THOSE WHO SIMPLY WANT TO BE COMMITTED TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

THEY MINIMIZE THEIR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS & THEY MINIMIZE THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MISSION OF JESUS.

ALL THEY’RE CONCERNED ABOUT IS HOW IMPORTANT THE CHURCH IS IN THEIR PERSONAL LIFE.

THEY THINK TO THEMSELVES, *“I LOVE COMING TO CHURCH & SEEING ALL MY FRIENDS. I SEE THEM BEFORE & AFTER WORSHIP & THEN WE GO OUT TO LUNCH & HAVE A GREAT TIME. ISN'T THAT WHAT CHURCH IS? IT'S HAVING MY PERSONAL & SOCIAL NEEDS ALL MET AT THE SAME PLACE.”*

TO TRULY BE A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST – TO HAVE A BURNING PASSION WITHIN YOU – IS TO BE COMMITTED TO THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST & A WARM & COMFORTABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH ISN'T ENOUGH.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IS TO BE THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN ALL SITUATIONS OF LIFE.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IS TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S LOVE TO ALL PEOPLE.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IS TO BE THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD TODAY.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT JESUS SAID AT THE OUTSET OF HIS MINISTRY, WHEN HE ENTERED THE SYNAGOGUE & QUOTED FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH?

HE READ THESE WORDS:

*“THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE HAS ANOINTED ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO LET THE OPPRESSED GO FREE.”*

FROM THAT MOMENT ON, HIS LIFE WAS LIVED WITH A BURNING PASSION TO DO JUST THAT.

THE GREAT FRENCH PHILOSOPHER & THEOLOGIAN TEILHARD DE CHARDIN WROTE THESE MEMORABLE WORDS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE LAST CENTURY:

*“SOME DAY, AFTER WE HAVE MASTERED THE WINDS, THE WAVES, THE TIDES & GRAVITY, WE SHALL HARNESS FOR GOD THE ENERGIES OF LOVE.*

*“THEN, FOR THE SECOND TIME IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD, MAN WILL HAVE DISCOVERED FIRE.”*

IT'S A SCARY JESUS WHO CALLS YOU TO DISCOVER THE FIRE OF LOVE IN YOUR SOUL.

WHAT'S SCARY ABOUT IT IS THAT YOU KNOW – DEEP WITHIN YOU – THAT SERVING OTHERS IS WHAT REALLY GIVES YOU FULFILLMENT IN LIFE.

IT'S SCARY BECAUSE IT DEMANDS THAT YOU PUT ASIDE THE PETTY DIVISIONS & TRIVIAL PURSUITS OF YOUR LIFE & TURN YOUR ATTENTION TO THE PASSION THAT BURNS DEEP INSIDE YOUR SOUL.

YES, IT'S SCARY.

BUT WHAT'S EVEN MORE SCARY IS TO THINK OF LIVING THE REST YOUR LIFE WITHOUT ALLOWING THAT BURNING PASSION INSIDE TO BE KINDLED & CONSUME YOU. AMEN.

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