

The Gospel According to
Luke

“God’s AccuWeather Foresight”

Chapter 12:49-59

Introduction

Living in Southern California, in the foothills or just below them, I experienced firsthand a few major fires. The worst was the Panorama Fire which, in November of 1980, burned across almost twenty-four thousand acres in San Bernardino County, destroying three hundred twenty-five structures – mostly homes. The homes on either side of my brother were destroyed, as well as most of the rest of his neighborhood. We were forced to evacuate our home to my mom and dad’s – *which was also in danger!*

When you live in fire-prone areas, you understand that there are really five seasons in the year: Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall... and **Fire Season**. Fire Season typically begins on May 1st and runs through the end of October, but you can also have significant fires on either side of those dates. If you’ve been close to a big fire, you understand that they take on a life of their own, creating their own winds, becoming **firestorms**. One resource I checked claims that a firestorm can produce the same amount of energy in ten minutes as a nuclear explosion.

Fires, fire season, and firestorms, are the images Jesus used in our text. He first talked about the *fire season*, saying, **I came to send fire on the earth** (v49). The **fire** He spoke of is not yet **kindled**; but, when it is, it will be a *firestorm* of enormous magnitude.

Our planet is currently in the fire season Jesus foresaw; the firestorm is coming, and it is inevitable. You need to understand your relationship to the fire.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 If You Are A Christian You Can Not Avoid The Fire Season, and #2 If You Are Not A Christian You Can Still Avoid The Firestorm.

#1 If You Are A Christian
You Can Not Avoid The Fire Season
(v49-53)

Sometimes a wildfire is the result of a controlled burn that gets out of control. The fire Jesus described in these verses is a controlled burn that will remain under control. It is the fire of God's judgment upon the earth.

Fire is more than a metaphor; the world will literally be destroyed by fire. In Second Peter 3:12 you read,

2 Peter 3:12 ... the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat...

When the current universe is destroyed, and God creates a new heaven and a new earth, unbelievers will be judged with fire:

Revelation 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Jesus was looking and thinking ahead to the world's final judgment. You get a glimpse into His heart as you see He both *desired* final judgment, but was *distressed* by it.

He said He desired it in verse forty-nine:

Luke 12:49 "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"

Jesus came to save lost sinners; **and He came to send fire on the earth.** It's not a contradiction. If you are a Christian, you understand His desire. It's your desire, too. You want to see people saved before it is too late for them; but the world is so evil, so wicked, that you want the last person who is going to be saved to give their life to God so that the fire of judgment will purify things once and for all.

The **fire** is not yet **kindled**. It is future. That means you and I live in a kind of spiritual fire season.

Before describing one of the conditions that will exist during fire season, Jesus revealed that He was distressed:

Luke 12:50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!

Baptism is a word that sometimes confuses us, because we immediately think of the practice of water baptism. It can also refer to a total immersion and participation in something. Jesus was talking about His total immersion and participation in the sufferings of His crucifixion.

It caused Him to be **distressed**. **Of course it would!** The physical suffering alone would be enough to cause **distress**; but so would be the emotional suffering. Jesus would be so distressed that He would sweat drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. And then there was the spiritual suffering, as He would take upon Himself the sins of the whole world, to be our Substitute, our Sacrifice, our Savior.

Jesus went to the Cross; He **accomplished** the judgment of sin; He now offers salvation to all who will believe in Him.

Those who believe have their sins judged and forgiven once and for all at the Cross. Those who will not believe are headed for the fire of God's final judgment. This tension between believers and unbelievers is a characteristic of the fire season in which we live.

Jesus described what you could expect:

Luke 12:51 Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.

Luke 12:52 For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three.

Luke 12:53 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."

There can be no lasting **peace on earth** until Jesus returns. In every

household where there are believers and unbelievers, there will be some level of **division**.

You know this; you struggle with this. Your family and friends are headed for a fiery judgment, unless they accept Jesus Christ's sacrifice for their sins. With compassion, you present them the Good News; but they understand you are calling them sinners, and the result is confrontation.

Any day, Jesus will return to remove the Church from the earth so the firestorm can begin. In the mean time, you can not avoid fire season. We're in it right now.

In the remaining verses, Jesus turned His attention to *unbelievers*.

#2 If You Are Not A Christian You Can Still Avoid The Firestorm (v54-59)

We are fascinated by the weather. There is an entire television network dedicated to weather. And it is important, especially if you're livelihood might depend upon it – like a farmer, for example.

The gist of Jesus' comments in this section is that you ought to be more concerned with the coming firestorm of God's judgment than with any weather event.

Luke 12:54 Then He also said to the multitudes, "Whenever *you* see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming'; and so it is. **Luke 12:55** And when you see the south wind blow, you say, 'There will be hot weather'; and there is.

We joke about the weatherman always being wrong, but meteorologists have gotten pretty good at predicting certain weather events. Hurricane season is a good example, as they track the likely path and strength of the storms, saving many lives.

There are signs that weather is approaching – a **shower**, or a heat wave. It's great to be ready for rain or hot weather; but it's better to be ready spiritually for what is inevitably coming. Weathermen can only forecast the weather, making predictions. Jesus has foresight

into the future firestorm, making prophecies that are certain to occur just as He said.

Luke 12:56 Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how *is it* you do not discern this time?

A **hypocrite** was an actor who wore a mask. It's an interesting choice of word, indicating that unbelievers were acting as if they could not **discern** the signs of the times.

Jesus audience had plenty of signs:

1. Jesus had been born of a virgin, just as the Scripture had prophesied.
2. John the Baptist had come, preceding Jesus, just as the Scripture had prophesied.
3. Jesus had been performing the miracles, signs, and wonders that only the promised Messiah could perform.
4. In a short while, Jesus would make His triumphal entry into Jerusalem – on the very day prophesied centuries earlier by Daniel the prophet.
5. Even on the Cross, Jesus would be fulfilling very specific prophecies about the suffering of the Messiah.

They could have known Jesus was their Savior with more accuracy than they could have known the next day's weather.

What about us? Do we have any signs of the times? By far, the greatest sign we are living in the last days before the return of Jesus and the firestorm of God's judgment is the nation of Israel. Israel's *persecution* is a fulfilment of Bible prophecy; so is her *preservation*. Author and conference speaker, Dave Hunt, lists nine "major prophecies involving specific and historically verifiable details"¹ that have already been fulfilled:

1. God promised a land of clearly defined boundaries to Abraham. He renewed that promise to Abraham's son Isaac, to his grandson Jacob, and to their descendants after them forever.

¹A Cup of Trembling, page 99.

2. God brought these chosen people into their Promised Land as prophesied.
3. When the Jews entered the Promised Land, God warned them that if they practiced idolatry and immorality He would cast them out. All of this happened precisely as foretold.
4. God declared that His people would be scattered "among all the people, from one end of the earth even unto the other."² And so it happened as to no other people in history. The 'wandering Jew' is found literally everywhere.
5. God warned that wherever they wandered the Jews would be "an astonishment, a proverb, a byword...a curse and a reproach."³ This has been true of the Jews all down through history.
6. The prophets declared that the Jews would be persecuted and killed as no other peoples on the face of the earth had ever or would ever experience. History witnesses to this century after century.
7. In spite of such persecution, God promised to preserve the Jews as an identifiable ethnic, national group. Against all odds, and even their own common sense, the Jews remain today.
8. God promised to bring the Jews back into their land in the last days before the return of their Messiah. That prophecy and promise, so long awaited, was fulfilled in the rebirth of Israel as a nation in her Promised Land on May 14th, 1948.
9. God declared that in the last days, Jerusalem would become "a cup of trembling...a burdensome stone for all people."⁴

We could discuss many other signs:

1. The rise of the European Union, and the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, both have their place in Bible prophecy.
2. The amazing expansion of knowledge in just the past century was foreseen by Daniel.
3. The technology that now exists to bring the planet into a one-world economic system, by which you could literally have a 'mark' on your hand or forehead by which to buy and sell goods.

²Deuteronomy 28:64

³Deuteronomy 28:37; 2 Chronicles 7:20; Jeremiah 29:18

⁴Zechariah 12:2-3

Listen: It is obvious we are living in the last days before Jesus returns. The signs are more sure than any weather pattern. Trouble is: People tune in to the Weather Channel when they ought to tune in to the Bible!

Luke 12:57 “Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?”

Now, if you know it’s going to be snowing at the 3000’ level, and you’re headed to the Men’s Retreat, you carry chains. It doesn’t do you any good to know the weather and ignore it. Don’t ignore the signs of the times. If you do, you’re like the person described in the next illustration.

Luke 12:58 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.

Luke 12:59 I tell you, you shall not depart from there till you have paid the very last mite.”

A man who could not pay his debt was thrown into debtor’s prison. According to some research I did, one of the laws governing debtor’s prison was that the debtor was forbidden to pay the debt himself, even if he came into some money while in prison.

If you were in prison, and could not pay the debt for yourself, then how could you ever hope to **pay the last mite** owed and be released? **A relative had to come and pay the amount owed.** Once they did, they were given the right to walk back to your cell, open it, and escort you out of prison.

It’s a great picture of what Jesus does for sinners. Before Christ came, we were all in a sort of spiritual debtor's prison because of the sin of Adam. We could not pay the debt ourselves. A relative had to come and pay it for us. But all of our earthly relatives were also in prison with us! Who could pay the debt for us, **to the last mite?**

Jesus Christ became man, became our relative by blood, so as to pay our debt and free us from prison.

By the way: People hope there is opportunity after death to pay-off the debt of sin. You’ve heard of Purgatory? Purgatory is defined as

"a state of final purification after death and before entrance into heaven for those who died in God's friendship, but were only imperfectly purified; a final cleansing of human imperfection before one is able to enter the joy of heaven" (Catholic Website).

We'd like to believe there was such a purgatory... *But there is not!* You can never pay your debt; not on earth, not in eternity. No amount of your own suffering or punishment can pay in full what you owe. None of your surviving relatives can pay your debt. They can't pay it with money; or with prayers for the dead; or by being baptized for the dead. They are themselves in debt.

Only Jesus can pay your debt. He's done it, on the Cross at Calvary, so you can avoid the coming firestorm.

Applying the Word

If you are a Christian, you will not be involved at all in God's coming firestorm. You will either die physically, and be immediately in the presence of Jesus; or you will be Raptured with the Church. In either case, you will stand before the Lord, to have your life's work judged. There will be a fiery purging of anything that was done from the wrong motive; and a purifying of all that was done for Jesus.

You'd be smart to get all the kindling out of your life!

Not a believer? Why are you more concerned with the weather than you are with your soul? If you die, you will not be in the presence of Jesus. You will be in a place of suffering, a place of torment, until you stand before a final judgment for your sins and are cast alive into the Lake of Fire. If the Lord comes for His Church, and you are left behind, you will have to endure the global catastrophes and tragedies described in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. You will have to endure the Great Tribulation on earth – only to end up in Hell when it's over.

Your only hope is to ask Jesus to free you from your debt of sin by confessing your sin and accepting Him as your Savior.