

Great Expectations

- ✦ For Jesus: baptism by fire (vv.49,50)
- ✦ For families: facing division (vv.51-53)

In the name of Jesus, our Savior of **Great Expectations**, dearly redeemed fellow disciples:

For the past few weeks our best Friend Jesus has been focusing us on contentment rather than greed, on treasures of heaven rather than the passing pleasures of earth. Now our Gospel readings from Luke show our Lord in all His realistic grace, sharing with us *Hard Truth* – today about *Peace & Division*. Jesus always warned excited prospects of the personal price of following Him. Jesus paid with His own blood for our bliss in glory with God in heaven. But He does not want us to lose out on heavenly treasures which He gives by grace. After last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus is calling on all of us to Be Ready! (Luke 12:35-48 EHV) And if you've ever wondered why your life seems so challenging when other Christians seem to have it easy, this might be a reason. Jesus says, "***From everyone to whom much was given, much will be expected. From the one who was entrusted with much, much more will be asked.***" (Luke 12:48 EHV) And yet Jesus never asks more of His disciples than He is willing to give of Himself. Who has been entrusted with more than Jesus? God's **Great Expectations**...

✦ For Jesus: baptism by fire (vv.49,50)

Jesus opens up His heart here. As God's Son, alive from all eternity, without beginning and without end, all Jesus knew was the bliss and glory of heaven. As true God, all-knowing (omniscient), Jesus chose not to make full use of His divine knowledge during His State of Humiliation on earth. And yet He sees clearly the suffering that lies ahead. "***I came to throw fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already ignited. But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is finished!***" He will finally shout, "***It is finished!***" after He has suffered our hell on the cursed tree of the cross.

Contrary to what some scholars insist, Jesus did not accommodate Himself to falsehood of any kind. He set fire to cultural distortions. He torched the self-righteousness of church people. Burned down the empty traditions of His own Jewish elders by proclaiming God's truth. The world would never be the same after God's own Son set fire to false human opinions. Still today scientists disagree, and the medical community argues with itself. Jesus kindled a fire with God's truth that will never go out, while human knowledge is passing away forever. But in order to give us the eternal light of heaven and fulfill God's Word of truth, Jesus had to suffer the flood of anger from society, Jewish and Gentile, as well as the heat of God's wrath for our sins. Begging His disciples to watch and pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was figuratively "baptized," drowning in distress. ***He said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, even to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch."*** (Mark 14:34 EHV)

That overwhelming flood of pain and suffering was the **baptism by fire** Jesus anticipated more than we can know. And yet our Lord and Savior pressed on to live and die and live again in our place. He totally lived up to God's **Great Expectations** in order to bring us along with Him from grace in this life to glory in the next. When you're beside yourself with frustration that so much seems expected of you by friends and family and work, don't despair. Remember this helpful advice that never ceases to amaze me at its simplicity and power. From Isaiah 30:15 – "***In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength....***" The "fires" in your life God turns to blessing.

We learned about fire in Future Foresters of America in the state between wildfires of Washington and California. Oregon's controlled burns clear underbrush and most bugs from the Willamette Valley.

On the open prairie, terrifying grass fires can burn for days. A spark from tractor exhaust or a flash of lightning or even reflection from a broken piece of glass can ignite a grass fire that rages across the open country. But there is something farmers and ranchers can do to save lives. They start a backfire and burn a place out in the grass where you can safely stand as the range fire passes you by.

Now think of Judgment Day when this world will be destroyed by fire. God has provided us a place where we can safely stand, a place where he has already poured out His white-hot anger over our sin. That place is the cross of Jesus our Savior. God's own Son has already paid the punishment we deserve. Jesus Christ is our backfire. We stand in safety as the fire of God's wrath passes us by. When Jesus comes again on the Last Day, for us who have been given the gift of faith, He's not coming as our Judge to destroy us, but rather as our Savior, to welcome us into heaven.¹ This hope gives courage...

✠ For families: facing division (vv.51-53)

“Do you think that I came to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. Yes, from now on there will be five divided in one household: three against two, and two against three.” We want peace in our families, but God takes us higher into His **Great Expectations**. ***“They will be divided: father 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.”***

Family faith-challenges can feel most disheartening when folks fail to agree on God's Word. But honest discussions can be healthy as long as we keep refocusing on Jesus' loving kindness and tender mercy. Such incidents can serve as a *backfire* burning away the dry tinder that could make a giant inferno of family destruction. Discussing your faith before you get engaged is vital. Continuing to talk about your faith is most important for any personal relationship. Harmony in a family can grow out of these *backfires* as surely as a forest can spring up again in areas that were charred by fire.

Remember the divisions in Jesus' family? His own brothers did not believe in Him. Early in His ministry they were coming to take Him away, thinking, ***“He's out of his mind.”*** Jesus left his mother and brothers standing outside and told His hearers: ***“Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.”*** (Mark 3:21,35) Our Lord never asks us to endure what He has not already suffered. His faithfulness motivates and empowers us to faithfully follow Him to brighter days. Eventually, His brothers James and Jude did trust Him as their Savior and wrote two letters of the New Testament.

How have these divisions affected our society? Most of the time you only hear about it in the news. But sometimes fires of strife will ignite unexpectedly on vacation. As my wife and I were enjoying a beautiful evening in little town built in a field by a bay, another couple stopped and talked with us. We were so enjoying each other's company that they invited us over for a glass of wine. Sitting outside their hotel room, conversation continued until the man's wife told about the daughter she put up for adoption. She got increasingly angry, insisting it was her choice whether that baby lived or died. She could not give God credit for bringing the grown daughter back into her life. Her husband claimed to be an atheistic scientist, but also refused to believe the science. He said the baby is not a person until after it separates from the mother in birth. He said he would approve if his wife decided to abort their baby.

They wanted to keep veering off on political tangents. We kept trying to steer them back to God our gracious Creator. Finally I told him, “God wants you to live in heaven with Him someday, not suffer eternally in hell. So He sent His Son Jesus to be your Savior too.” We will always refer to them as “our friends” and pray for God's gift of repentance and faith before it's too late. **Great Expectations** from God prepare us for hatred and anger, divisions even in our families – all because Jesus was willing and able to suffer His own **baptism by fire**. In Christ alone we are free to love even those who prefer to be our enemies. God does not discriminate. May He bring us all to repentance and faith. Amen.

¹ Adapted from *Preach the Word*, Westendorf, James, ed. Vol. 4, No. 3, January/February 2001, p.3.