

How I am Straitened Until  
or  
Would That It were Already Kindled!  
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Perhaps we should take more care over what we stir up with our coffee than we are with what we stir into our coffee! Maybe we should visit Starbucks with a view to finding dinner guests, starting acquaintances around a refreshing cup and the casual-ist of meetings, in the most informal of places! Salt seasons when it is spread out and scattered, not while it remains in the cupboard, or in the saltshaker—within reach, yes, but unapplied! Evangelism starts with a smile, in encouraged with conversation and flourishes in hospitality. Now Jesus, in the mix of **an innumerable crowd** (Luke 12:1-12) issued a series of public warnings: **beware the leaven of the Pharisees**, their hypocrisy being their leaven; *hypocrisy is infectious!* It is contagious! Wear your masks! Practice social distancing from hypocrites! **Beware of things concealed, they will be exposed**, shown for what they are, and people for who they are (v. 2). And as for you, **whatever you have spoken in the dark** (in secret, in private?) **will be heard in the light**—what you have whispered (**in inner rooms**) will be **proclaimed from the rooftops** (v. 3). **My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do . . . rather fear God, who after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say, fear Him!** (v. 4) Amazing, **fear God**, not man . . . not even those who might want to kill you! Picture yourself, friends, in that innumerable crowd. What is happening to you as you hear these public service bulletins?! **Are not five sparrows sold for two valueless copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God . . . you are of more value than many sparrows!** (v. 6-7) What is happening to you is simple: you are being provoked to think! Think about hypocrisy, public exposure—secrets are time sensitive, they expire! Don't worry about being killed as if there is no eternity involved—don't worry about dying, concern yourself rather with your God who determines where you will live forever. Just worry about the really big, significant stuff. You know, consider your infinite worth compared to five, or to many sparrows! Some people haven't considered their infinite worth to God in a long, long time. They seek worth in wealth, and their value in what they do and whom they know. Of course, if knowing God is tossed into the mix—"who you know" obtains some ultimate significance. That's true.

I hesitate to declare that these declarations were "icebreakers," as we say, but they do seem to be very provocative. This is especially when Jesus takes the deep dive into, **I say unto you**, (which is a bold declaration of office, authority and person!) **whoever confesses Me** (that is freely, openly and boldly owns, serves Me as Lord and Savior—unashamedly, or **despairing the shame!**) **before men**, saying, **him the Son of Man will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men, will be denied before the angels of God.** (vv.8-9)

Jesus is not shy about who He is, the reality of angels, or the final flourishes of God at the end of time!

Matthew 7:23, **I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, I know you not, ye that work iniquity. . . . And, he shall say to them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting, fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,** Matthew 25:41.

We have to hear this in full knowledge that those who denied Him were actually in attendance at that moment—remember, **the leaven?! And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him that blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven.** Jesus draws back the curtain of heaven, and reveals some activity there which unfolds unseen, and unnoticed *but very much related to the Last Judgment*. Jesus then adds, a prophetic word, **When they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities** (to accuse you, for your public confession of who I am and who you are in relationship to Me)—note, it's **when**, not “if.” **Don't worry about how to answer, or what to say—the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour(!) what you ought to say.**

It would appear that Jesus was done speaking in public<sup>1</sup>. After a brief public address, He may have been moving on, having left us with the realization that our **confession** would lead to strife, contention and court appearances (i.e. persecution). Then he was requested to intervene in an inheritance dispute, a civil controversy: **Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.** (Luke 12:13-21) If we forget that people desired a word from God to settle their disputes, and that was how justice was implemented (by submission of both parties to the revealed will of God!) See Exodus 18. This will come across as a diversion, instead of an open acknowledgment of Jesus' divine authority as just affirmed. (**I say unto you** vv. 4,8)

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<sup>1</sup> I have argued that Jesus here was speaking to large crowd (Luke 12 v.1ff). This “event” follows the disclosure in Luke 11 that Jesus had rebuked the scribes, Pharisees and lawyers and that chapter ends on an ominous note: **And as he said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently** (blaspheming, anyone?), **and to cross-examine him about many things** (which, if carried on in public, appears to have been a hostile and insulting thing to do—if they really wanted to understand, they would consult the Teacher in private), **laying in wait for Him and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him.** (vv. 53-4) There is division, controversy and trouble in this! However, the last half of Luke 12:1 reads: **He began to say to His disciples *first of all*** (does this mean “prior to, or before” speaking publicly? This seems an apparent constriction of audience. One solution is to propose that Jesus, in the midst of this immense crowd, is closely surrounded by His disciples and that his first word, like giving stage directions, is a word for their ears only. We note, in support of this, that He does not preface these words (vv. 2-3) with **I say to you**—the dominical “introductory” which precedes vv. 4 and 8

**But He said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”** Is this a deflection? Or, perhaps, if we take it as a genuine question, Jesus could be affirming that by requesting His judgment, the man himself has made Him a **judge or arbitrator**. The man himself was submitting himself, and he situation, to divine arbitration. **And the word of the Lord that came forth in response to this request was: Take heed and beware of covetousness** (the substance of the tenth commandment!) **for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.** (v. 15) This is the judgment: if your controversy over the inheritance is rooted in *covetousness* you should take stock of yourself(!), of your sin. You can only live if you repent of your sin. Stop litigating this inheritance because **your lust** for things is unlawful, and lethal (see how it is killing you, your brother, and your filial relationship). The parable of the Rich Fool seems aimed at answering the man’s request: **Fool, This night your soul will be required of you, then whose will those things be by which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.**

There follows some pertinent teaching about Kingdom living. Its priorities and comforts as well as cautions against anxiety, or worry. **Seek the kingdom!** (12:11) God cares about all us, about all of His creatures and **it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.** (12:32) God is kind and His benevolence is towards us! So I wish to move beyond this introductory section, stepping past the call to be ready, and even the crucial parable of the faithful manager (which is our ordained role in Creation!) **Blessed is the servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will make him ruler over all he has, over all his possessions.** (vv.43-44) This parable also includes some notes on his opposite, the wicked, oppressive servant, who abuses and beats his fellow servants (like religious oppressors, the Pharisees, lawyers and scribes). Jesus even covers those who act wickedly in ignorance of God! (A word to the secularists!)—**they will be beaten with few stripes.** (12:48) We have heard enough to address our text, fairly, in its narrative setting.

**I have come to cast fire upon the earth and how I wish it were already kindled, or how I am straitened** (. . . 2. archaic : to restrict in freedom or scope : hamper. 3 : to subject to distress, privation, or deficiency in **straitened** circumstances. Merriam-Webster) **until it be accomplished.** (Luke 12:49-53) The whole passage reads:

**49 “I [a]have come to cast fire upon the earth; and [b]how I wish it were already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism [c]to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! 51 Do you think that I came to provide peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; 52 for from now on five *members* in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against**

mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

### Footnotes

- a. Luke 12:49 Or *came*
- b. Luke 12:49 Lit *what do I wish if...?*
- c. Luke 12:50 Lit with which *to be baptized*

Barnes' Notes has this astounding entry on the passage:

**I am, come . . .** The result of my coming will be that there will be divisions and contentions. He does not mean that he came for “that purpose,” or that he “sought,” or “desired” it; but that such was the state of the human heart, and such the opposition of people to the truth, that that would be the “effect” of his coming.

**Fire**, fire, here, is the emblem of discord and contention, and consequently of calamities. Thus it is used in Psalm 66:12 and Isaiah 43:2:

Verse 12: **You made men ride over our heads;**

**We went through fire and through water.**

**Yet You brought us out into a *place of abundance*.**

Verse 2: **When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;**

**And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.**

**When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,**

**Nor will the flame burn you.**

**And what will I . . .** This passage might be better expressed in this manner: “And, what would I, but that it were kindled.” Since it is “necessary” for the advancement of religion that such divisions *should take place; since the gospel cannot be established without conflicts, and strifes, and hatreds, I am even desirous that they should come.* Since the greatest blessing that mankind can receive must be attended with such unhappy divisions, I am willing, nay, desirous that they should come! He did not wish evil in itself; but, as it was the occasion of good, he was desirous, if it must take place, that it should take place soon. From this we learn:

1. That the promotion of religion may be expected to produce many contests and bitter feelings.
2. That the heart of man ***must be exceedingly wicked***, or it would not oppose a work like Christian religion.
3. That though God cannot look on evil with approbation (approval), yet, for the sake of the benefit which may grow out of it, he is willing to permit it, and suffer it to come into the world.

What was the good that came of the sufferings of Job? That he, in his defending of his integrity, defended the integrity of God—he demonstrated the moral character of this created order! That he humiliated Satan, defeating him in the great unseen conflict. Satan, misprizing/undervaluing Job entirely, by

devaluing both his faith and love of God, was proven wrong. That Job, in the end, regained an authentic and real relationship with God, a spiritual triumph—and something far more valuable than the doubling of his property and ten more children and the restoration of his wife/marriage. This came to him through his full and complete repentance. I guess that the answer to “Was it worth it?” can only be found in triumph of faith and recovery of relationship with God! Job passed through the refiner’s fire and it purified him and made his faith more resilient.

The contention, divisions and strife come from the exceeding wickedness of the human heart, the hardness and heartlessness of unredeemed mankind—not from the gospel, not from Christ. It comes from our need of refining, purification—we are the ones habituated to sin, we are the ones permeated with evil. We are the ones who need to turn from all that, *and turn to*, or return to God. But we will not suffer rebuke, or endure correction . . . at least, not without a fight. Despite the evidence of depravity, we insist that we are essentially good, that our environment, our socialization, our teachers and those in authority, they are the blame for whatever has gone wrong with us, with our lives. “They” messed things up, and if it weren’t for “systemic racism,” or “capitalism” or “sexism,” and all their lies, we would be perfectly fine! And, frankly, that is what most folks are stirring into their morning brew! They are seasoning their coffee with resentment, bitterness and hate—and then they wonder how the cup became so bitter!

The gospel spread like wildfire over the lands after Jesus was crucified, resurrected and after the Holy Spirit was poured out: **and there appeared to them divided tongues as of fire, and sat upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. The sound of a mighty rushing wind** was audible to all(!) and the **utterance** was clear, everyone heard **in his own language** which is to say, the miracle of Pentecost was, apparently, as much one of hearing, as it was of speaking. The **utterances** declared **the wonderful works of God**. What was heard was loud, open praise. Still, they were **amazed and perplexed**. They were not perplexed about what they heard; they were perplexed that they should be hearing God’s praise in the streets. The disciples were like the first flash mob!! **Whatever could this mean?** Peter’s explanation answers that question: this is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32, pertaining to the **last days** which we, presently and evidently, are now in. This *praise* is prophetic utterance by **all flesh, by sons and daughters**. ( as cited Acts 2:14-21) **Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!** Remember that.

Then Peter transitions to preaching Jesus, **a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know** (this was summed up in current events), Jesus crucified, buried and raised from the dead had triumphed over sin, death, evil, hatred, injustice and oppression. The end of racism which occurred on the cross had taken root.

**For, behold, the day comes, it burns as a furnace; and all the proud, and all who work wickedness, will be stubble** (without doubt, this is the consolation of Israel, the redemption of the nation by God's own Son, the long anticipated Messiah). **And the day that comes will burn them up, says the Lord of Hosts, that shall leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings. You will go out, and leap like calves of/from the stall.** (Malachi 4:1-2) When the crowd gathered responds to this message, **Brothers, what shall we do?"** Peter responds with, **Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** And with that, we shall see, the fire had been lit. Jesus' longing for fire had been satisfied. . . the day of salvation had arrived!

So, you are at Starbucks. You are stirring your coffee. And the topic of racism comes up. This is your moment, now you casually say, "Yes, racism is a problem . . . I am so glad that I became a post-racist" . . . or, " I am so relieved to hear that racism has been cancelled. That's a part of cancel culture that I can affirm!" Then, knowing that no one may have the time, and that the constraints of public space are limiting, and that this warrants further conversation, you connect with that person. So, having put "post-racism" out there, you invite further conversation about this vital topic. Maybe another coffee date? Maybe an invitation to dinner? Maybe the drawing in of another Christian to confirm the validity of your belief(s) that race has indeed been abolished, terminated on the cross. Yes, it's really over. If Jew and Gentile can be reconciled so can Hispanics, Blacks and Whites. . . all those whose differences are only skin deep! You know, the distinctions that used to mean so much but now take second place to the new man we have become in Christ!

Pray for patience. Take your time. Build trust, develop friendship and God may make you extremely productive as his evangelist. "Explore Christianity" is built on this model (coffee, dinner, conversation) and Explore Christianity is built on the model of Jesus' own ministry of invitation, food and discussion. Where shall we meet? Your place, or mine?

**Amen.**