

Conflicting Royalties Alexandria - Baptism

27 Feb 1983.

Luke 12:49-53 (Luke 12:49-51)

Mark 10:35-40

(Matt. 10:34-36)

Introduction: 1. My sincere gratitude to Rev Buti and Church Council for invitation to preach. The last time I was here was in Sept. 1977. Since my banning in Oct 1977 I was not able to attend any service in Alexandria, alth even after I became a member of Alexandria congr- gation in March 1980 - although I stand in the worship of the Parkhurst service on Sunday afternoons.

2. Within 2 days, on March 1, it will be exactly one year that Rev Fitzkie Comadie lost his life in a car accident. Although I was not allowed to attend his funeral I am very grateful to be with the congregation ^{to-day} when we call to mind after one year the message of his life and ministry to Alexandria congregation and Alexandria community. If ever there was a man who, for the sake of Christ, became all things to all men, it was Fitzkie Comadie. May the memory of his ministry remain alive amongst us all for many years!

The text upon which my sermon is based is Luke 12 vs 49-51. I have chosen this passage for 2 reasons:

1. Because it deals with a crucial pronouncement

ment made by Christ in the course of the ⁽²⁾
path of suffering that He was treading
to the cross

2. Because He was here referring to baptism - a very special form of baptism which ^{He} was agor- nizing about

This passage in Luke 12:49-53 is a very puzzling one - it contains 3 statements by Christ which could very easily be very seriously misunderstood. Christ says:

1. He has come to set fire to the earth
2. He has to undergo a baptism which is creating deep anguish for Him.
3. He has not come to bring peace on earth but division

(If Christ had been in SA. to-day and making this kind of statement he would undoubtedly have invited the attention of the state authorities!) What in fact is Christ trying to say? He is explaining to his disciples the real nature of his mission on earth and the inescapable effect that his life and witness was creating ^{giving rise to}. He wants his disciples to understand what it is all about to be a disciple of Christ so as to make out for themselves whether they ^{really} want to follow Him or not!

1. He speaks of fire: Fire always has a three ^{fold} effect: ① it destroys all ^{the} chaff.

the rat, the stuff which is going to burn anyway.
~~It~~ Fire is like a vulture, it is a scavenger,
it cleans up the decaying meat to prevent the
spread of sickness and infection

② Fire purifies - ^{also} through its heat it
separates the abiding from the temporal e.g. gold
from sand + stone, deavored from glass.

③ It gives light amidst darkness
And now Christ comes and says: I have come
to set fire to the earth: my message is like
fire - it consumes and destroys everything which
is bad, decaying, useless, rotten and it en-
sures that whatever is lasting will abide.
It burns away in it is a message of truth, life, purity,
fulfillment - it will continue to burn
and chase from generation to generation,
from nation to nation to bring out all
what is good and pure and true!

2. He speaks of baptism: Christ was already
baptized - by John in the river Jordan. In this
passage He does not say that He wishes to
have another physical baptism - but He refers
to the ordal of his suffering which He knew
He had to face ("Can you drink the cup that
I drink ~~or~~ be baptized with the baptism I
am baptized with?" - Mark 10: 38-39).

3. He speaks of division: In the parallel passage
of Matt. 10: 34-36 He states clearly: "I have
not come to bring peace but a sword" - and
then He immediately uses as illustration of this
division the most intimate of all relations:
the family (father vs son + vice versa; mother
vs daughter and vice versa etc.).

But isn't Jesus now contradicting Himself:
~~He~~ professed to be the Prince of Peace and
claiming: In Me you will have peace?

Answer: No, there is no contradiction in
His statement or attitude. Christ is trying to tell
his disciples (and us) that it is not He
that causes dissension and division - for He
offers love and peace and justice to all - but
the way in which some people react to his
life, his message, his witness ~~to~~. His life
and teaching will create controversy, division,
conflict and rejection not because He is seeking
it but because those who react ^{negatively} regard his
message to be a threat to their traditions, a
threat to their economic wealth, to their
political power, and therefore they react by
making even more oppressive laws ~~to~~
ensure their high income, their economic
wealth, their military might so that at
all times and for all time their position will
remain secure! And that's why Christ says:

I will create division and conflict in the struggle between light and darkness, truth and lies, justice and injustice, liberation and oppression. And the baptism of which He speaks refers to the agony, the tension, the uncertainty and the fear which He would go through for the sake of this testimony for truth, justice and liberation ("constraint")

And the "constraint" of which Christ speaks refers to the deep inner struggle of his soul and spirit in his eagerness to see the realization of all that is good and pure in man and society. But He also knows only too well that a long road of suffering, pain, death and resurrection lies ahead of Him ^{and will precede that goal} and for his followers the event of Pentecost would be followed by centuries of inner conflict and slow growth in understanding of what it is that God wants to achieve through the setting up of His kingdom on earth!

May I ~~close~~ ^{end} this sermon by again referring to our beloved pastor and friend, Frikke Louw who, perhaps without ever realizing it, was illustrating through his life what Christ had predicted in this passage:

1. There was a fire which burned in the depths of his being and which drove him to serve and help all in need and distress. It was the love of Christ for all men ^{in memory} which became the consuming passion of his life
2. There was the constraint for the kingdom of God and its realization which became the driving force of his life and ministry. It was the unflinching agony of the baptism of his spirit living between hope and despair
3. There was the painful division he had to face between him and members of the family, between him and some of his closest former colleagues ^{in the N.E.K} white friends who did not understand the motivation of his actions: obedience to Christ for the sake of all men a truthful witness to the whole world!

Thank God for many such men and women in the church who pave the way for the day

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when the fires will no longer need to burn, the cups will no longer need to be taken, the baptism will no longer need to be administered and the divisions will be healed and peace will reign!