

Within the Rocky Mountains, stretching from Montana, through Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico is something known as the Continental Divide, or sometimes the Great Divide. Through the entire length of the Rockies, all the rivers on the west side of this divide run toward the Pacific Ocean, and all the rivers on the east side of this divide run toward the Atlantic Ocean.

Some of you have seen it. Traveling out west, you've stopped your car at the signpost marking the exact spot where the continent is divided. That location is not on some grassy plain, but high up in the mountains. And it has to be. Were it not for the mountains, there would be nothing to separate the rivers, and our continent would not be divided.

There is an even greater divide that separates, not simply a continent, but our entire world. Not rivers, but peoples are separated by this great divide. The location of this divide is also not on some grassy plain, but up high on a mountain. And it has to be. Were it not for this mountain, there would be nothing to separate the peoples, and our world would not be divided.

That mountain is Mt. Calvary. Our Lord Jesus Christ hung from a cross on this mountain. And so it is that Christ Crucified divides our world, He divides nations, He divides, as He states in our text, even at times families.

When we travel to the location of this great divide in St. Luke's Gospel, we see how, not rivers, but people are separated by the cross of Jesus. St. Luke shows us three crosses on this mountain. Jesus on the cross in the middle, and two thieves on the crosses on either side of Him. And just like the rivers run in opposite directions at the continental divide, we see these two thieves running in directions opposite of each other. The one thief runs toward Jesus, clinging to Him by faith. The other thief runs away from Jesus, refusing to believe that He is dying for him as his precious Savior.

What we see with these two thieves, we see also throughout the world. Everyone, not some people, but everyone either runs toward Jesus or away from Him. There is no middle ground. A river up on a high mountain must run in one direction or the other. And so it is with Jesus. He is the Great Divider. There is no middle, neutral position with Him. We either receive Him or we oppose Him.

What is especially difficult is when members of the same family both receive and oppose Jesus. Some, like the one thief, clinging to Him in faith; others, like the other thief, wanting no part of Him.

But even as Jesus causes such painful division, He Himself endured the most painful division of all, being separated, while on the cross, from His Heavenly Father. This is the baptism He was dreading. The outpouring of the Father's wrath upon Him. The wrath and punishment you deserve, and I deserve, for our wretched sinfulness.

Jesus did come, as He says, to cast fire on the earth. But only because He suffered the fire of hell itself for all people; for people who cling to Him, and for people who oppose Him.

And thus, anyone who opposes Jesus, whose river runs in the direction away from Him and His cross, does this without cause, because Jesus opposes no one. Rather, He opens His arms to everyone. And by His sufferings, death, and resurrection, the Father in heaven has declared that everyone's wretched sins are forgiven, completely forgiven. And this means you. You, too, are one whom God has declared forgiven for Jesus' sake.

And so, consider where your river is running. Are your daily habits in life taking you toward Jesus or away from Him? Remember your baptism. Jesus was baptized with fire so that your baptism is of pure grace. This is the water that runs in your river. How, therefore, could you run in any other direction than toward Jesus? Amen.