

Understanding the Times

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[0 : 00] Please keep your Bibles open to Luke 12. We're going to continue our series through the Gospel of Luke. We're looking at Luke 12 and the beginning of Luke 13.

I wonder if you've ever said this sentence before. If only I had known about dot, dot, dot, I would have dot, dot, dot. But I remember when I was 19, my grandpa called me and said, I need to talk to you about something.

Please come over. I was too lazy. And I said, I'll come over in the afternoon after your nap. And little did I know that he wasn't going to wake up from that nap ever.

And until today, I still say to myself, if only I had known that, I would have gone there. And, yeah, I still don't know what he was going to say to me.

To know what was going to happen in the future would be helpful, wouldn't it? It would be nice if God were to warn us about things before they happen.

[1 : 12] Well, God does that when it comes to the most important things about the future. And last week, we were warned that everyone should be ready for Jesus to come to judge the living and the dead.

But we also heard the good news that when he first came to earth, Jesus came to undergo the baptism of the cross, to pay for our sins if we repent so that we don't need to be punished when he comes to judge the living and the dead.

So hearing that, Jesus' audience heard that, what should they have done? Well, they should have been both be warned because the judge was already there, and so they should have repented.

But if we read the Gospel of Luke, over and over again, Jesus warns them that the people fail to repent. Because, as Jesus says here in our passage, they are spiritually ignorant, and they don't know what's going on, even after Jesus warning them.

And so in verse 54 to 56, we read, Jesus said to the crowd, When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, It's going to rain, and it does.

[2 : 43] And when the south wind blows, you say, It's going to be hot. And it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky.

How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? That is, the time of Jesus' coming. Jesus sounds frustrated here. The people can see signs pertaining to material things, like when it's going to rain and when it's going to be hot.

But when it comes to signs pertaining to spiritual things, they fail to see it. They are oblivious, ignorant. They can't see what's happening. So they can't see what Jesus and His coming and all His works mean for them.

This reminds us of the previous chapter in Luke 11, where Jesus gets frustrated because the people keep asking for signs.

And yet Jesus has given them signs in Himself. The blind see, the sick are healed, the dead are resurrected, but the people keep asking for more and more signs and thus showing their hardness of hearts.

[4 : 09] They can't see because they don't want to. And so here in this passage as well, Jesus, the judge has come and He's warning them, but the people are oblivious.

They can only see material signs, but they're blinded to spiritual things. It's the same with people today, isn't it?

We today are equally, if not more, blind to spiritual things. All we tend to see often is the material, and it shows in our favorite conversation topics.

I did some research, and apparently Australia's favorite conversation topics are, number one, the weather, number two, sport, movies and TV shows, restaurants, and pets.

Now these are good things to talk about, of course. We do need to read the weather, especially if you hang your washing outside. We do need to know good restaurants to visit.

[5 : 23] I enjoy eating, and that's valuable to me. We do need to enjoy ourselves from time to time with sports and movies, but that's not all there is to life.

We are often blinded to spiritual things. We often forget that 2,000 years ago, God came down here in Jesus, healed the sick, raised the dead.

He himself died and rose again. He changed the world with 12 disciples, and he said he was going to return to judge the living and the dead.

That's a great event. That event should move people into action, but often it doesn't. That event should be the topic of conversation, but often it doesn't.

It's not. We are blind, ignorant, and oblivious. And Jesus' audience at that time were also blind, ignorant, and oblivious.

[6 : 34] And because they're ignorant, they did not do what they're supposed to do in verse 57 to 59. Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right?

What is the right thing to do? As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way. Or your adversary may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison.

I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. During that time when someone was in debt, but they would not or could not repay their debt, they could be reported to the magistrate and the judge, and then they would be thrown into a debtor prison, where apparently they would be beaten up so that someone, a family member or a friend, would step up and offer to pay for the debt.

And so, it's better, as Jesus says in verse 58, it's better for them to try to reconcile before being reported. And so, Jesus is saying to the people here, hey, the judge is already here.

I am here. Before the judgment comes, before you get thrown into hell, that eternal prison, try to reconcile your debt now.

[8 : 03] Now, especially if you're not a Christian, you may ask, what debt? I don't have any debt to settle with God.

Well, Jesus doesn't explain here in this passage because he's talking to the Jews, and the Jews know about the concept of sin as something that requires punishment, that requires payment.

But perhaps the idea is lost now, and so let me try to explain the unsaid assumption behind the text. You might already have some understanding of sin.

Sin is disobedience to God's law. You know, don't lie, don't murder, don't steal. And so, if you lie or murder or steal, then you sin. They're all examples of sin.

But then again, if we see only these things as sin, then sin becomes only some bad external actions. And some of us might say, oh, we are sinless because we've never lied or murdered or stolen anything, and therefore there's no punishment.

[9 : 10] There's no debt to pay. But then, that's not a complete biblical understanding of sin. Sin is not just disobedience of God's law.

Sin is primarily the, what some theologians say, the degodding of God or trying to dethrone God as the king.

And thus, we disobey His law because we want to degod Him. It's when we want to live life according to our own rules, following our own desires and for our own purposes.

Remember the first sin described in the Bible? The serpent said to Adam and Eve, if you eat this fruit, you will not die. You will be like God. And they ate it.

And that is sin. When we turn our own way, because we think we know better than God, and we want to be like God in our own lives. And when we sin, we want to live our own lives, our own way without God, what do we get?

[10 : 13] Well, if God is our creator, the source of our lives, and we want to run our own lives without the source of life, what do we get? Death. And that's, the Bible has always been consistent about that.

For the wages of sin is death, Romans 6. And because everyone sins, everyone wants to play God, then everyone has a debt to pay.

And that is death. Now Jesus, the judge, came, and instead of judging them straight away, instead of forcing them to pay the debt of death straight away, he came to pay that debt.

As we read last week, he came to undergo the baptism of the cross. He offered himself to be that person who would step up and pay for the person's debt, for our debt.

And so he's giving them, he's giving us a chance to settle the debt through him, through his death on the cross. This is no ordinary judge.

[11 : 30] If only the people there could see Jesus spiritually and not just worry about the material things of life like the weather, then they would take Jesus' offer, repent, and settle their accounts with God through Jesus.

But no, spiritual blindness keeps people away from repentance. And we see that in chapter 3, in verse 1 to 5.

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?

I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those 18 who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them, do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?

I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Jesus here refers to two events.

[12 : 45] Verse 1 refers to an event where Pilate killed some Galileans during their sacrifice and mixed their blood with the sacrifice. And verse 4 refers to the fall of a Siloam tower that killed 18 people.

Now, the people's spiritual blindness makes them think that the victims of these events must have been worse sinners because they were judged by God.

They died in a horrible way. Again, the people here are so stuck in just seeing the materials that they can only see material signs of God's judgment.

They die, they must be worse sinners. and they justify themselves. They think, oh, I'm not dying, so I'm okay.

I don't need to repent. God is not judging me as he does those people. But again, Jesus points to their spiritual condition and says in verse 5, you are the same unless you repent, you will all perish.

[14 : 00] Again, it's the same with us today, isn't it? We often like to compare ourselves with other people when it comes to external material sins, so that we may excuse ourselves for not being as bad as other people.

Oh, Hitler was bad, Stalin was bad. those people killing people in the Middle East and Russia and Ukraine, they are bad, but me, come on.

Yes, I do think the world would be better without so and so, but I would not actually kill them. Yes, I do lust after women other than my own wife from time to time, but who doesn't?

Yes, I can be greedy and pile up money and not be generous, but that's not a big deal, is it? Jesus says, unless you repent, you will all perish, all have sinned, all have lived their lives in their own way for themselves without God, and so all have a debt to pay, and all will be thrown to the debtor's prison, to hell, unless they repent and take Jesus' death on the cross as their own as their payment.

And that time for repentance is short. And so Jesus gives one last parable to show us the urgency of the situation in verse 6 to 9.

[15 : 41] Then Jesus told this parable, a man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any.

Cut it down. Why should it use up the soil? Sir, the gardener replied, leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it.

If it bears fruit next year, fine, that's good. If not, then cut it down. The imagery of a fig tree and a vineyard here is used in the Old Testament to refer to Israel as God's people.

And we've seen that in our Old Testament passage in Isaiah 5, and that's only one example, where God looks for fruit of righteousness in the vineyard of Israel, but has found none.

And this is appropriate because Jesus here in this passage, was talking to the people of Israel, who were supposedly God's people. And in case they were thinking that they did not need to repent because they were already God's people, you know, repentance is only for those who are not God's people, which might have been the case, that they were thinking that because as the previous verses show, they tended to justify themselves.

[17 : 14] Here, Jesus' message is unmistakable. Those Jews in Jesus' time needed to repent because their way of doing things was unfruitful to God, even though they thought they were the people of God.

They needed to turn around in repentance to God and bear the appropriate fruits of righteousness. And it's a warning for us too today.

If we have been born and baptized in the church and we think we are God's people, we need to reflect. If we think we are better than others, if we think we don't have to come to Jesus daily in repentance and repent daily from our sins and produce the fruit of righteousness, then this is a warning for us too.

Now, this parable has no ending. It doesn't tell us whether the fig tree will bear fruit in a year or whether it's going to be cut down.

And this is, I think, where Jesus' message becomes personal. That is, even though his warning is directed to the entire people of God as the fig tree, he's seeking a personal response.

[18 : 39] And the parable is open-ended because the result will depend on personal responses to his offer. Just as we saw last week, members of the same family might respond differently to Jesus' message.

And so, here too, people might respond differently and the parable might end differently to them. We must decide for ourselves to take Jesus' offer to pay for our debt.

And so, I invite you, if you're not a Christian yet, repent and take Jesus' offer to pay for your debt before the time runs out and he comes to judge the living and the debt.

Turn around from your way of life where you depend on yourself, do things your own way and for your own glory. Come to Jesus and he will surely receive you.

There's no one whose sins he won't forgive if they come to him in true repentance. No one. he has promised in John, whoever comes to me, I will never drive away.

[20 : 06] Repent and be baptized. If you have repented and have been baptized, can I encourage you to not forget about your daily repentance?

repentance. I include myself in this exhortation. I often forget to repent daily. We have been saved by Jesus.

Our debt has been paid in full on the cross. We are already united in Christ in his death and resurrection. But that's precisely why we need to repent every day.

As 1 John says, in verse 8, if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

And we continually confess our sins because in the previous verses, God is light and those who walk in light must not hide their sins.

[21 : 14] In fact, they cannot hide their sins. They confess them and repent from them. In fact, the closer we get to the light, the more our darkness gets exposed and so we repent even more.

Perhaps a good practice before bed is to remember the sins that we have done throughout the day, repent, confess them to God, and read this verse for assurance that God is faithful and just and will and has forgiven us our sins.

And if we have repented and have tasted the sweetness of God's mercy and forgiveness, let me encourage you again to share that sweetness to those people around you.

Tell them about Christ so they too might have a chance to be warned and to repent. As Charles Spurgeon has once said, let's pray now.

thank you Lord that you have warned us through Jesus when he came the first time, and thank you for giving him as a payment, as a ransom for our sins.

[23 : 12] May we who have taken him as a payment for our sins continue in our daily repentance and grow in our righteousness and share that sweetness of forgiveness.

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