

Knowing The Times (Part 1)

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[0:00] Now, we're continuing on our Sunday mornings to follow the journey of Jesus towards Jerusalem, towards the cross in Luke's gospel. So, we're in Luke chapter 12 this morning, which again, if you've got a church Bible, you can find on page 1046.

And we're going to read chapter 12, verse 49 to chapter 13 and verse 9. As Jesus encourages us to know the times. So, let's hear God's words once again.

As Jesus said, I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled. But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed.

Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on, there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two, and two against three.

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. He said to the crowd, when you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, it's going to rain. And it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, it's going to be hot.

[1:29] 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? Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? 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. 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. Then he 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've 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 man replied, leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig round it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine. If not, then cut it down.

Amen. Understanding the times and the seasons that we live in will help us, will lead us to act appropriately. Okay, so we find ourselves in Edinburgh in mid-November. Okay, we can naturally anticipate darkness and that wet weather might never be too far away. Okay, so if you're new to the city, bear that in mind. It's so important then to dress for the weather, to find ways to stay warm.

Okay, the Christmas market has just gone up in the city center. You go to any shop and you see the decorations up, the sales beginning. Aha, this might be the time to start buying gifts for the people that we love. Or for those of us who are students, you come to mid-November, you've got to know that exam season is getting close. So this is absolutely a time for revising, a time for getting those last assignments in and out the way so you can focus on December's exams. To know the times of our lives, it gives us an opportunity to respond and to be ready. There is an Old Testament wisdom book, the book of Ecclesiastes, that points us in that same direction. There is a famous poem there in chapter three. It begins this way, there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to uproot. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build. And our author's point is that God is the one who sets the times in our lives. Sometimes they come to us very unexpectedly.

Sometimes they are the last thing that we would ever want. But we need to learn to respond to the times in our lives in the right way. Now apply that to what's going on here in Luke chapter 12. We're

being told time and time and time again, this is Jesus, and He is none other than the Son of God. He is the promised King, and He is the Savior of the world. He has come in line with God's promise and God's plan. He is journeying to the cross that He might be the means of our salvation, the way for us to know peace with our God. But many in the crowds around Him didn't know or recognize that time. Didn't recognize that in the coming of Jesus, the Lord Himself had come near, so they were not responding to King Jesus in the right way. And Jesus wants to warn them. And by extension, Jesus would warn us today. Do we understand the significance of the times in which we live where Jesus has already come? And as we saw last week, He is going to come back again, the King of Kings, and He will come to judge each one of us, do we understand the time that we are living? And are we acting and responding then in the right way to Jesus and the salvation He offers? Let's notice first, as Jesus begins this part of His discussion with the crowds, He draws attention to a time of division. And we're going to see that might be surprising. But let's read again verses 49 and 50, where Jesus says, I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled, but I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it's completed. So there's two images there. Let's begin with the second, the image of baptism. Okay, so perhaps we're familiar with Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist. That was the start of His mission. And the Spirit of God came down like a dove on Jesus, and the voice from heaven said, this is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased. So that baptism is there at the start of Jesus' mission. But what Jesus is saying, I have another baptism. So what's He talking about there? He's talking about His going to the cross, and experiencing death, and going under the judgment of God.

[7 : 52] Jesus went under the waters to be baptized. Jesus goes under the judgment of God to be our Savior, to complete God's mission. So He speaks about this baptism image. And then there's that first image, the image of bringing fire. So Duncan read from this in Isaiah 64, from Isaiah 64. And whenever you read about the day of the Lord in the Old Testament, this decisive moment of God coming to bring judgment and salvation, often there is the imagery of fire is used. You see it as well in Joel chapter 2, quoted by Peter in Acts chapter 2. Fire is often a sign of God's presence, and God's presence in judgment, the fire of the day of the Lord. And what Jesus is saying is that in His coming, and in His going to the cross, there is this decisive moment of God's presence in judgment and salvation happening. And notice, Jesus says He longs for this fire to be kindled.

This is why Jesus came. This actually speaks gospel hope to us. Jesus is the promised Messiah who will face the judgment of God for others. And in so doing, He will face the judgment of God's presence in judgment.

He will face the judgment of God's presence in judgment. He will face the judgment of God's presence in judgment. Jesus longs for this fire to be kindled, for this moment of judgment and salvation to take place.

This fire speaks to us of the reality of God's judgment, of punishment. But it also speaks to the reality of the fire that purifies, purifying His people, purifying His world.

Jesus understands that this moment, this decisive moment of the cross is central to His life and mission. Notice the language, I have come to bring this fire. I have a baptism to undergo. And He says, I'm under constraint, I feel compelled to go towards the cross until it's completed.

[10 : 09] Jesus is someone who knows the Father's will. Jesus is the only one who always wanted to do the Father's will. So even as He walked that hard road of suffering and humiliation and death and judgment, Jesus gladly walks it as the only way by which we might be saved. For God's judgment to pass over us because it falls on His Son. This moment of the cross, the only way for us to be saved and to enjoy life with God, to receive the Spirit. So here is Jesus, described in the Bible as the Prince of Peace.

And He is on His way to the cross to make peace between a holy God and sinful people by dealing with that sin that separates, that sin that creates a barrier between us and our God.

So then, notice verse 51. Perhaps we'll find this surprising. When Jesus says, do you think I came to bring peace on earth?

No, I tell you. But division. How do we make sense of that? Jesus came to make peace, absolutely. But Jesus coming creates division, absolutely.

The division comes because there are people, even in Jesus' day, as they're listening to Him, they don't know the times in which they're living. They don't know here is God with us. They don't see that Christ has come to make peace through His blood shed on the cross. And so what Jesus is

focusing on here is the reality that the message of the cross divides people. Paul the Apostle recognizes that.

[12:05] So in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 18, he says, The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved.

It is the power of God. The same event, but seen in two very different ways. Today, as you and I, as we consider the cross of the Lord Jesus, what do we see?

Do we see a tragic waste of life? A good life cut all too short? Maybe we see an ugly death with no good purpose, so we want to turn away from all this talk about cross and blood and sacrifice? Or do we see by the grace of God, the power of God for your salvation, and what Jesus freely did there? Do you see that Jesus on the cross experienced shame? That you and I, by looking to Him, might know God's honor? That Jesus experienced God's curse, so that we might live knowing God's blessing, that Jesus underwent God's wrath, so that by His grace, we might be forgiven and no peace. Another way the coming of Jesus creates division is simply what He says in verses 52, that choosing to belong to Jesus, it serves to separate us from others. There is division on the basis of response to Jesus. Verse 52, from now on, there'll be five in one family divided, against each other, three against two, and two against three. He's not speaking there of a simple family dysfunction. Perhaps we know family dysfunction, but here He is making that point that if we choose to follow Christ, the people around us may then criticize us. To receive Jesus as our Savior may mean to risk and to receive rejection, even from within our own family. And again, some of us, we know this pain all too well. That challenge to live, perhaps, as the only Christian within our family, and the people that we love the most, they don't understand. They want to know, and it grieves our heart. Perhaps you've had that experience of standing up for Jesus in the classroom or the workplace, and it leads to a sense of isolation or exclusion at certain moments. We see it in individual life. We can see it within societies and within a nation that choosing to follow Jesus, saying, I stand for Him, can lead us to being excluded, and it can create division. So, the cross of Christ, Jesus says, stands as a dividing line.

Eternally, it stands as a dividing line. To recognize that Jesus went to the cross for me, that is to mean I receive peace. But to reject His offer of salvation, it is to experience punishment in the end.

[15:39] So, knowing this to be true, and hearing these words from Jesus, all of us are encouraged to be right with Jesus today. To know and experience His salvation for ourselves. To receive that promise of eternal life, to know life with God by trusting in Him. To have that hope that one day Jesus will come back, and He'll make this world pure and new. And because we trust Him, we'll be with Him in that new world forever.

And it's important as well, for those of us who are Christians, that we preach this gospel truth to ourselves today. If I find that I am marginalized, if I find I am excluded and isolated, what is going to help us to help us to persevere? Isn't it as we remember Jesus knowing exclusion and suffering for us and for our salvation and for our eternal reward? We need the gospel to help us to live faithfully, even when it means division.

So, the coming of Jesus represents a time of division. Verses 54 to 59, let's move to this central section, where Jesus is going to tell us His coming is a time to be reconciled.

Again, we need to hear that Jesus is being critical of the crowds. Verse 56, He says to them, He says, look, you can read the signs for the weather. You can look at the cloud, you know it's going to rain, you can feel the wind, you know it's going to be hot, but you are failing to read the significant signs of the coming of Jesus. In the UK, we love to talk about the weather.

We love forecasts. Many of us have multiple weather forecast apps on our phone. We love the signs of the weather, but are we awake and aware of the signs that point to Jesus, the Son of God and the Savior that we need for ourselves?

[18:01] Jesus says, you know, when the rain comes, we find shelter. When the heat comes, we take cover. But here is Jesus. He comes as God's promised Savior King. And the people around Him are failing to take shelter in Him. And why does that matter? To turn your back on Jesus is to risk the storm clouds of God's judgment. It's to risk the heat of God's wrath against our sin.

For the people in Jesus' day, the time they were living in was the time Jesus declared, when the kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom of God is at hand because Jesus, God's King, is here. God's rule was breaking in, in a new way. Enemies were being defeated. Here is the Lord who would save and be with His people, but they wouldn't and they couldn't read those signs.

Often it was because Jesus brought something that didn't match expectations. There wasn't a real openness to consider Jesus. That's often the problem that we experience. A king will come and he'll deal with enemies. The enemies Jesus dealt with was not the power of Rome. Jesus came to wage war on sickness.

Jesus came to get rid of the demonic. Jesus came on a war against death and against sin. Good news, but people didn't see it. The kingdom that Jesus came to build was spiritual and not political. It was a kingdom built on God's grace and not on God's law as the way to be in. And so many people missed it. The people that Jesus called to be citizens of His kingdom shocked many of the people in His day. It was the outsiders and the outcasts that gladly came.

[20 : 15] It was the lepers and the blind and the paralyzed and the demon-possessed that called Jesus friend and find salvation. Some of the lowest and the least, the tax collectors. Everybody hated the tax collectors, the notorious sinners. Jesus shares food with them, invites them to friendship.

And Jesus' kingdom is not narrow. He welcomes Samaritans. He welcomes people from many nations. People couldn't see it. The stories that Jesus told didn't match expectations. He told the story of the good Samaritan encouraging love for one's enemies. He tells stories of God throwing a banquet, a feast with a hugely surprising guest list. He tells the story of the prodigal son, of that shameless son who is welcomed and forgiven by the grace of a father.

And he's going to the cross. And for so many, they'll look at the cross and they'll see defeat, but it's actually victory. They will see shame, but actually it's glory. The signs were there, but people couldn't read them. How about us?

We recognize, don't we, that failing to read the signs can be a problem, can leave us unprepared. Leave us unprepared for the weather. Leave us unprepared for the exam. Leave us unprepared for the crisis that we're unprepared for the crisis. We're unprepared for the crisis.

We're unprepared for the crisis that comes. Those are a big deal, but they're not life or death things. But failing to read the signs of Jesus coming represents disaster for now and for our eternity.

[22 : 14] He is simply too big, too significant for us to ignore and walk on by. I mean, encourage all of us to be reading the Gospels, to be thinking, to be praying, to be answering these questions. Who is Jesus?

It's the Bible's testimony. He's God's son. He's God's king, and he's the only savior. Why did he come? Well, he's on this journey to go to the cross, to die in our place.

He's our substitute as our representative, to save us by grace. We don't need to earn our way into God's kingdom. He's come to bring in the new age of salvation in the spirit. And there's a third question to ask is, how should we respond? So the people in Jesus' day didn't respond in the right way, so how should we respond? And to help with that, Jesus tells the parable of verse 57 to 59.

Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? As you're 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. So there's a picture of two parties, and they're in a lawsuit, and the case is just about to be heard in court. And Jesus points to the common wisdom that it is good to work for peace as soon as possible, to look to be reconciled. If you're one of those parties, you want to seek the best possible outcome now. Jesus says, don't run the risk of experiencing penalty, of experiencing judgment.

[24 : 03] Now, why does Jesus tell that parable? He tells that parable to reveal a biblical truth, that God has a case against us, that our sin, our guilt makes us, by nature, by choice, enemies of God.

So God has a case against us, and what we should do is seek for peace today, to seek for the best possible outcome, which means looking to Jesus, the one who came to reconcile us to God through His sacrificial death. At the cross, Jesus takes my penalty so I can enjoy His peace. We need to receive that message today. So how should we respond to Jesus? The answer is with faith, with repentance.

And Jesus gives us that parable to speak of urgency. Be right before judgment falls. Seek peace with God through Jesus today.

One last time that Jesus speaks of here in the section, chapter 13, verses 1 to 9, a time to repent. So Jesus is speaking to this large crowd, and they're saying, it's really important to know the time in which you are living, especially it's really important to know that your King has come.

But to listen to the beginning of chapter 13, we can imagine the people in the crowd turning to Jesus saying, Jesus, what's the significance of these events that everybody is talking about?

[25 : 49] What's the significance of this event where some Galileans have been sacrificed to Roman gods? What a horror. What's the significance of the tragedy of the Tower of Siloam falling and crushing 18 people?

Now, the sign that they thought they were reading was that those Galileans were awful people, that those 18 people were worse than everybody else, and so God sent judgment now as a sign of that. Jesus, is that what we're supposed to learn whenever we see suffering or crisis or tragedy? How does Jesus respond?

Verse 2, 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 perish. So he wants to correct them. It's not that they were worse sinners than others. If you know the Old Testament book of Job, Job's friends presumed, well, bad things happened to Job, therefore God is a bad person. And Jesus is saying, you can't draw a straight line like that. But he does say there is a lesson that we can and we should learn, and it's a personal lesson, is that you and I, whenever we see terrible things happen, it should be a reminder to us of the importance of being right with our God.

[27 : 25] Jesus says it should stand for us as an urgent warning to be ready to repent, to turn our back on our sin, to turn our face towards God, to find His salvation. Jesus would have the crowds in that day use those events to teach them that life is short, that life comes with unexpected moments.

He would also have us to understand that God's judgment is real, therefore we must be right with God today. Jesus is giving hope for a broken world when He offers Himself as a Savior.

Because to know Jesus is to know that Jesus took God's judgment for us. To know Jesus is to have the assurance that we belong in His kingdom. To know Jesus is to know that whatever happens, if my faith is in Him, I will be with Him forever. And that when He returns, I will be part of the new heavens and the new earth. He tells them a parable in verses 6 to 9. What does that add to His message? When He tells that parable of the unfruitful tree, you know, three years, the person, the manager of the vineyard, the owner of the vineyard has been looking for fruit and nothing comes. So it's in danger of the chop.

So it's a good for nothing tree. But then there's the one who tends the trees, the gardener, He says, look, give it one more year. Let's keep caring for it. Let's keep providing for its growth and its life. Let's give it one more year. If it provides fruit, that's great. But if not, let's cut it down. What is that parable saying to us? It's saying the same thing as Peter says in 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9, a message about God's patience. God is patient. He doesn't instantly condemn us when we sin.

[29 : 50] He is a God who gives us opportunities to repent, to turn to Him, to trust in Him. But Jesus is saying there is a final day.

There is a decisive moment. That may be the moment of our death, or it may be the moment of Jesus' return. And because that is true, we need to be right today. There is urgency.

When we see the darkness in our world, when we see the tragedies in our news playing out in our own lives, it speaks to us, doesn't it, of the brevity of life.

It speaks to us of our longing for a better world. It should also motivate us to seek that forgiveness and that salvation that Jesus offers. And for us as Christians, it should motivate us to share the eternal hope of Jesus with the people around us.

As we come to recognize that Jesus is the only hope in the darkness that we see all around. So Jesus says to us, it's so important to know the times and to act appropriately.

[31 : 04] To know the time. God's time has come. His King has come. Salvation is here to respond. Jesus had been speaking to the crowd of these two signs.

The sacrifice that happened of the Galileans. The tower that fell. But even as He's talking, He has His eye on this journey on another sign. A sign that would take place in Jerusalem.

A sign of the cross. There on the cross, as Jesus hung for the sin of the world, there were some people who thought He was a terrible sinner. Some people looked at Him and say, He must deserve this day.

He must be under God's curse because of some awful thing that He has done. But in truth, as God's Word tells us, what's happening on the cross is the sinless Son of God is taking on Himself the sin of His people.

Going under the curse that we deserve so that we might receive blessing from Him. facing the storm of God's judgment against all that is wrong and unholy and broken so that we, by grace, might find shelter and find peace.

[32 : 16] So that we could enter into His kingdom of grace. So that we could live with real hope, knowing that our enemies have been defeated, those enemies of Satan and sin and death.

So that we could hear the good news of John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

What do you see when you look at Jesus? How are we responding to Him today? We all respond with faith to enjoy His salvation.

Let's pray. Lord, our God, we thank You that Jesus, in His kindness and in Your Word, so often gives us a reality check.

We can go day by day and even year by year and imagine life will always go on as it always has. But we're invited time and again to recognize that life is short, that there is the reality of a day of judgment, that Jesus will return.

[33 : 46] And we thank You, too, that Jesus always wants us to hear an invitation to believe and to be saved. Lord, that while we have today, we have an opportunity.

This is for us our day of salvation. Lord, may You impress Your gospel word on people's hearts. Impress the urgency of knowing and trusting Jesus on people's hearts and lives, so that together we might be sheltering, that together we might be gathered by the Lord Jesus to be safe and secure in Him for now and for eternity.