

Getting Jesus clear... on his message

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Date: 13 September 2020

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[0 : 00] The reading is from Luke chapter 12, starting at verse 54. Jesus also said to the crowds, When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, A shower is coming, and so it happens.

And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, There will be scorching heat, and it happens. You hypocrites, you know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison.

I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny. There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

And he answered them, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

[1 : 27] All those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?

No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Lizzie, thanks for reading.

Let me add my welcome. Please keep Luke chapter 12 open, and let me pray for us as we begin. The words of Jesus to Martha, full of anxieties.

But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. Heavenly Father, thank you for this reminder from the lips of the Lord Jesus of the most important thing for us as individuals and as a church, to listen to his words.

So please would you help us to do that now, both to be attentive, to grant us understanding, and help us to see the implications. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

[2 : 42] Amen. Well, I wonder how COVID has affected you. I guess for some, the answer is very obvious and very painful.

A loved one has died. Our mental health has suffered. We're full of anxiety and uncertainty. But what about our kind of worldview and outlook on life?

How has COVID affected that? It's something I've been thinking about recently, and certainly for myself, I think it's done two things. I think, firstly, I've been more focused on the present than I have on the future.

After all, why look forward to the future when you can't plan for it? When you can't plan when you're going to go away, if you're going to go away, where you're going to go away, when you don't know if the kids are going to be at school?

Even now, as the numbers of cases of COVID rises, there's increased uncertainty. But second, I think I've also become more inwardly focused rather than outwardly focused.

- [3 : 56] Physical horizons are limited, working largely from home, more so than usual. Social horizons have been limited, seeing much less of other people.
- Perhaps that explains why a number of people have said to me how very refreshing it's been, looking at Luke chapter 12 over these last few weeks or so and being reminded of the return of the Lord Jesus.
- I guess verse 40 is probably the key verse. As Jesus says, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming. It's an hour you do not expect.
- Personally, this chapter has been a wonderful tonic for me. I've kind of sensed my perspective on the world has been recalibrated. Where lockdown focuses on the present, Jesus says, be ready for the future.
- And where lockdown focuses on ourselves, Jesus says, the sign of being ready is that we are serving him. I've called this series of talks Getting Jesus Clear Today, clear on his message.
- [5 : 06] What the message of Jesus is to our world, to neighbours, to friends, in Dulwich and beyond, colleagues, through our mission partners elsewhere in the world.
- As we'll see, it's vital both as individuals but also as a church that we understand Jesus' core message and rightly respond to it.
- Well, some of you will have printed out the outline already, but if not, then hopefully it will come up on the screen. Firstly, know the times, the significance of Jesus' coming.
- Let me read verses 54 and 55. He also said to the crowds, when you see a cloud rising in the west, you say it once, a shower is coming and so it happens.
- And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, there'll be scorching heat and it happens. It's very easy to lose sight of the huge significance of Jesus coming into the world.
- [6 : 12] I guess as a culture, we tend to assume that Jesus is largely irrelevant, except of course at Christmas or if you're into old buildings or old hymns or you're an old person.
- Even as Jesus' disciples, it's easy to lose sight of the significance of his coming. And so here in verse 54, Jesus turns to the crowds.
- He says, look, you're experts in the weather and yet you've completely failed to grasp the significance of my coming into the world. When the clouds are coming in from the Mediterranean in the west, you know it's going to rain.
- When the wind is coming from the desert in the south, you know you're in for a dry spell, just as I guess most of us are looking forward to some warmer weather this week. And just as we're obsessed about the weather, I guess exactly the same way.
- One of my jobs on holiday is always to check the weather app each day. And if like us, you take your holidays in Cornwall, then you know how important it is not to get caught out by the weather.
- [7 : 20] You're obsessed with the weather, says Jesus. But can't you see that history is at a turning point? Can't you see just what God is doing now that I'm here?
- Verse 56, you hypocrites, you know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?
- Now this is a theme that Luke develops through his gospel. Just turn back to Luke chapter 11, verse 20, for example, which we looked at earlier on in the year.
- You may remember that Jesus is explaining a healing. He's cast out a demon. He's demonstrated his authority, his power over evil. And he makes the point that the whole point of this healing is not simply to elicit a kind of, wow, isn't that amazing?

response. But to demonstrate that God's kingdom rule has now arrived. As he says in verse 20, In other words, God's work of reclaiming humanity from Satan's grip has begun.

[8 : 42] There will be a final day at the end of history when Jesus will return, when evil will finally be destroyed, when he will usher in a whole new creation.

And in the meantime, Jesus is God's king come into his world. It explains what we saw last week in chapter 12, verses 49 and 50.

As Jesus explained why he has come, verse 49, I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it already kindled. I have a baptism to be baptized with and how great is my distress until it is accomplished.

Jesus is saying he's come both as judge but also as saviour. The one who alone can offer forgiveness of sins and peace with God.

Do you see what he's saying? Nothing could be more significant I was reading an article recently about the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD that destroyed the Roman city of Pompeii.

[9 : 53] How there were warning signs beforehand and yet also how the long inactivity of the volcano coupled with the economic wealth and prosperity of the region completely lulled people into a false sense of security.

Pliny the Elder was the commander of the Roman fleet based not far away at Mycenae. He would die in the eruption and yet this is what he had previously written about Italy.

In the whole world wherever the vault of heaven turns there is no land so well adorned with all that wins nature's crown as Italy.

The ruler and second mother of the world with her men and women her generals and soldiers her slaves her wealth of brilliant talent. And yet surely if you've been to Pompeii today walking through those ruined streets there can't be a better place on earth to demonstrate how easy it is and yet how foolish it is to be on the wrong side of history.

They fail to see what was coming. And yet wonderfully Jesus hasn't left us in the dark. He's demonstrated that he's both judge and saviour.

[11 : 22] He's shown he teaches us that he's going to return again. What a tragedy to be able to predict the weather or make the right pick on the stock market or to be able to analyse the sports results brilliantly or to call next year's fashions or whatever it is and yet fail to see the significance of Jesus coming into our world.

Secondly, settle up the opportunity of Jesus coming. Have a look at verses 57 to 59. And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?

As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way lest he drag you to the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer and the officer puts you in prison.

I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny. Well, I guess it's a common enough illustration.

I got a parking ticket recently having misread the signpost that was telling me where I was and wasn't allowed to park and I settled up pretty quickly especially when I was told that the fine would be 60 pounds rather than 30 pounds if I took more than two weeks or whatever it was.

[12 : 43] well, how much more important to settle things with God while we can. After all, Jesus is returning.

Judgment is coming. We're all accountable. On that day, the guilt of all of us will be exposed before Jesus the judge. I wonder if you've ever thought of the decision about whether or not to follow Jesus in these terms in terms of getting things settled with God.

What a terrible thing it will be if we've never really given the matter any serious thought. Now, for some of course it may well be because actually we see no real need to settle with God.

For others it may be because actually we've got it into our minds that there's nothing we can do to settle with God or that it's impossible anyway to predict what the verdict is going to be on that final day.

And yet, as we saw last week, the wonder of the Christian message is that Jesus came not only as judge but also as saviour. Indeed, at this very point in Luke's Gospel he's on his way to Jerusalem he'll be arrested put on trial on trumped up charges crucified bearing in himself the penalty for our sins.

[14 : 16] In other words, can we see Jesus is saying far more here simply than get things settled with God. That of course would throw out a whole range of questions such as well is God willing to settle on what terms?

instead he's saying look, God is willing to settle and I've come into the world to make it possible to settle.

As one writer put it, you can be courageous in admitting your sin precisely because God is abundant in his mercy. you can be courageous in admitting your sin precisely because God is abundant in his mercy.

But notice too the cost of not settling up. Let me address for a moment those who are considering following Jesus perhaps are weighing the whole matter up.

I hope you've rightly considered the cost of following him. we saw something about last week in verse 53 as Jesus spoke about the division that following him will cause even at the most painful of levels.

[15 : 30] Verse 53 they'll be divided father against son and son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

The cost of following Jesus both as Lord and King. But verses 57 to 59 also remind us there is a cost in not following Jesus.

And of course the danger is we so focus on the cost of saying yes to Jesus that we don't really see the cost of the far greater cost of saying no to Jesus.

The American best-selling author Mitch Cullum in his book Tuesdays with Maury says this of one of the characters. Had he known his death was imminent he might have gone somewhere else.

Instead he did what we all do. He went about his dull routine as if all the days in the world were still to come.

[16 : 43] They're rather thought-provoking words aren't they? he went about his dull routine as if all the days in the world were still to come. Can we see what Jesus is saying?

Don't make that mistake. In the normal course of life common sense dictates that you settle up quickly rather than being dragged through the course.

And yet we can fail to apply that same common sense that same sense of urgency to spiritual matters. Well I guess it begs the question what does it look like to settle up?

Thirdly repent responding to Jesus coming. Now in chapter 13 verses 1 to 5 we looked at it back in March you may remember in more detail but nonetheless two events were on the minds of Jesus listeners both involved terrible suffering the first massacre the Roman governor Pilate has allowed his troops to go on the rampage killing Galilean Jews the second the tragic collapse of a tower we're not told how it happened killing 18 people now Jesus response notice to both events is the same firstly he won't allow us to draw an automatic line between personal sin and human suffering verse two do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way no verse four do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem no in other words

Jesus won't let his finger wag and point the finger at others but the other thing he says is there in verse three no I tell you but unless you repent you will all likewise perish and again verse five no I tell you but unless you repent you will all likewise perish notice that Jesus isn't speaking here to those who were personally involved rather he's addressing those who so to speak kind of observe tragedy at a distance you know they've heard about it on the news it's the talk of the town so take Jesus to the bedside of someone suffering and he shows great compassion to that individual interview him on primetime TV about a national disaster and what does he say repent or you too will perish now that of course is also the voice of compassion because warnings are always compassionate

[19 : 49] Jesus is saying that suffering the suffering in our world which is always all around us is a signpost that all is not well with our world in the words of the 20th century Christian writer and broadcaster CS Lewis it is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world whether it's individual suffering a child being bullied at school whether it's the suffering of nations at the hands of corrupt rulers or whether it's natural disasters it points to the fact that we live in a world where each one of us have turned our backs on God it's what the Bible calls sin and the effects of sin are everywhere for us to see and a world under judgment under the judgment of God where because we reject God and turn our backs on him so he lifts his hand of restraint he gives us over to the consequences of our sin that in turn points to the final judgments on the last day now in this sense of course as many people have observed over these last few months or so

Covid is a blessing because it reminds us that all is not well with our world so how do we settle things with God Jesus is saying repent what is repentance it's widely misunderstood it's far more than simply feeling sorry it's far more than thinking I must try harder or admitting I've done wrong it's not even saying sorry if actually our lives carry on living in the same direction repentance repentance is a you turn repentance is the voice on the satnav which says turn around where possible it is humbling just think how politicians frantically resist any charge they've made a u-turn on something despite the fact that we all know they have done it's humbling it's saying i've run my life my way without god and i'm not going to continue going down that road i'm going to do a u-turn i'm going to turn around well how are we meant to apply these verses luke chapter 12 verse 54 to 13 5 well have a look at back to verse 54 for a moment because you see ever since chapter 12 verse 22 jesus has been addressing his disciples whereas what's going on now is he's suddenly addressing the crowds which means i think there's an application here both for individuals but also to us as a church firstly can we see what jesus is saying to us as individuals repent now no doubt some were hearing jesus here for the first time no doubt others had heard him before and yet had done nothing about it likewise it may be that you're new to christian things perhaps you haven't really heard this before in which case when you commit to understanding the significance of jesus christ for yourself the enormous significance far more important than anything else of jesus coming into our world god himself the one who is both judge and savior keep coming on a sunday we'd love you to join us join our next christianity explore course which will run in october ask a christian friend if you could look at one of the gospel accounts of jesus life with them but of course it may be that you have heard this before and it's to you that jesus levels the charge of verse 56 the charge of hypocrisy jesus is saying look you understand the weather you can read the stock markets you analyze the sports results but you won't apply the same level of discernment and diligence to investigating the claims about me if there was a legal case against you you'd settle out of court but you don't show the same urgency to get things settled with god can you hear the urgency in what jesus is saying get things settled before it's too late before he returns perhaps you're younger thinking well that's all very well i've heard you jesus but i'll just have a bit of fun i'll leave it till later on i'll enjoy myself a bit first perhaps you're older and you're thinking well i'll just wait until life is less busy till i've got less on my plate

don't take jesus for a fool the fact is if we're not ready for him today we mustn't presume we'll be ready for him tomorrow but what the application for us as a church well simply that this is the message we are to proclaim this is what is to be at the heart of the message that we proclaim both here in dulwich but also beyond as well we're to understand the times to be convinced the times we live in jesus is both judge and savior we're to be persuaded of the urgency of repentance and settling up with god before it's too late before jesus returns that is the core message we're to proclaim in fact it's how luke finishes his gospel just keep a finger in luke chapter 13 and turn to the very end of his gospel luke chapter 24 here is the risen jesus addressing his disciples he is commissioning the ones who are going to establish the church the ones who are going to oversee the proclamation of his message across the known world and what does he say to them verse 46 of luke 24 thus it is written that the christian suffer and on the third day rise from the dead well that's happened at this point and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations repentance and the forgiveness of sins now i wonder if we are in danger of losing that in part because of covid we lose sight of the future we become inward focused just thinking about ourselves you know as if for some reason jesus mission to the world can be put on hold until life returns to some kind of normality but i wonder if we are also in danger of losing it simply because there are so many other needs in our world we can become distracted we can end up as a church focusing our energies on other things perhaps we can think of other churches which do that on transforming society or social justice whatever it is and yes of course the gospel has implications for social justice but it's not the message jesus tells us to proclaim because it's not the most urgent message but as well as jesus teaching here shaping our message it must therefore also shape our priorities both what we say yes to doing as a local church but also what we say no to doing after all it's the saying no to things which enables us to do the things we want to do and to say yes to things it's the no's that mean we can focus on the priority and you'll see if you've got the outline to hand then there are some questions for us to think through and to chat about perhaps out in the car park or later on in the day just to help us to think through some of the implications of that for us as a church but for now let me lead us in prayer you know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky but why do you not know how to interpret the present time

heavenly father we thank you for the clarity with which the lord jesus speaks thank you that he came to earth to bring in your kingdom thank you that he is both judge and savior thank you heavenly father for this reminder of your extraordinary kindness that we can indeed settle with you thank you for the clarity with which jesus helps us to see that the message we should be proclaiming both here in dulwich and beyond and we pray heavenly father for all of us both as individuals and as a local church please would you help us to take these words to heart to be transformed by them and we ask it in jesus name amen go you