

Luke 12:54 – 59 (PM)

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[0 : 00] If you have a Bible with you, it might be helpful to follow along. We're in Luke 12, verses 54 to 59. And if you don't have a Bible, it's printed in your service sheet, so you can follow along there.

Our reading tonight has two sections. Verses 54 to 56 are about seeing and acknowledging the coming kingdom of God and the rule of Jesus the King.

And verses 57 to 59 are about responding by urgently seeking forgiveness and reconciliation with God. At the very end, we'll also look at Luke 12 as a whole, and we'll try to sum up some of what Jesus has been teaching us over these past 10 weeks.

So first, verses 54 to 56. Seeing and acknowledging the coming kingdom of God and the rule of Jesus the King. So since the beginning of his public ministry in Luke 4, Jesus has been traveling throughout Judea and Galilee, teaching in the power of the Spirit, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, healing the sick, casting out demons, befriending tax collectors and social outcasts, while rebuking the corrupt religious authorities.

And as word of Jesus spread, he became quite famous. And crowds began to follow him and gather wherever he traveled. And we see here, at the beginning of Luke 12, that so many thousands had gathered that they were trampling one another.

[1 : 34] So how should we think about these crowds that were following Jesus? At face value, it's hard to see any issue with them.

We might even think this is good news, right? At least these people are interested in Jesus. They want to see him. They want to hear what he's saying. This isn't necessarily the case.

A few weeks ago, I think Joel summed up really well the attitudes of these crowds. He said, Here's the problem, though.

Jesus didn't come to be a spectacle. At the beginning of his ministry in his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus proclaimed that he was fulfilling these words from Isaiah 61.

This was a prophecy about the Messiah, the promised king who would save God's people and set up God's eternal kingdom of justice and righteousness on earth.

[3 : 05] So as Jesus was proclaiming the good news and seeking justice and friendship with the oppressed and outcast, he wasn't trying to entertain the masses.

His deeds of healing and liberation were not meant to excite people or to draw a crowd. They weren't even merely acts of love and compassion.

They were signs of the time. They were like living pictures, which revealed that God's kingdom was breaking into the world in the person and work of Jesus, the king.

Now, in verse 56 of our passage, Jesus calls the crowds hypocrites. Not because they were unable to see and understand these signs, but because they didn't want to see that Jesus was the Messiah and acknowledge the evidence that God's kingdom was among them.

See, in verse 54 and 55, Jesus applauds the crowds for their ability to interpret signs in the natural world and to understand their significance. These people lived in an agricultural society.

[4 : 23] They knew that clouds coming in from the west brought moisture and rain from the Mediterranean Sea. They knew that winds from the south brought heat waves from the desert.

They weren't just capable of understanding these natural signs. They really were quite good at it.

And this was essential for their life and livelihood. But they don't apply the same diligence, the same skill, the same wisdom to perceiving the coming kingdom of God.

So Jesus says to them, Hypocrites, you know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

By calling them hypocrites, Jesus is not accusing them of acting or pretending to be something they're not. He is pointing out a fatal inconsistency at the core of their faith and worship.

They profess to believe in the God of Israel. They've witnessed all the signs that his kingdom has come in the Messiah Jesus, and yet they fail to respond appropriately.

[5 : 37] To take this one step further, Jesus is accusing them of knowing that God was doing something new, something different, something important among them, and deliberately ignoring it.

One scholar said, the crowds concentrated on the superficial. They gave attention to what they found interesting, but ignored what was most important.

It's worth asking, why? Why would they do this? Well, if we're honest, throughout this chapter, Jesus has been teaching these folks some really difficult things about the cost of discipleship. He's been exposing their idols. He's been shattering their comfortable, familiar ideas about what religion is, something external, a matter of law and national identity, rather than deep inner change and transformation.

He's been calling them to repent, to turn from their sin and their self-centered ways of thinking and living, and to seek instead the kingdom of God.

[6 : 49] And that's simply not what these people were looking for from Jesus. One writer put it like this, to bow before Jesus and acknowledge that he had come from God would have been life-changing, nation-changing, and world-changing.

And that would have clashed with their closed minds and self-interest. They were not ignorant, but they were deniers of the truth because they didn't like what the truth meant for them.

And frankly, I don't think the situation is all that different today. For many people in our time, maybe even some of us here this evening at some point in our lives, the biggest obstacle to receiving the kingdom of God is not a lack of understanding or of opportunity, but a lack of desire and willingness to submit to Jesus.

And be changed, transformed from the inside out to reflect his image rather than our own. In a place like Vancouver, the idea that abundant life and joy is found in denying ourselves, in embracing a life of obedience, humble service, sacrificial witness to a new king, even a king as good and kind as Jesus is almost a kind of blasphemy.

It flies in the face of what our culture holds dear about individuality and self-determination. And yet, this is exactly what Jesus has been saying throughout Luke 12.

[8 : 31] The signs are all there. God's kingdom has come. And I understand that retreating into ignorance or indifference might be more comfortable in the moment.

I've been there. I've done that. But Jesus is about to reveal that it's a dangerous and foolish response. And so in verse 57, he shifts the focus from understanding to action.

He shows that the right response to seeing and acknowledging Jesus' rule and the presence of God's kingdom among us is to urgently seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God through repentance.

He asks the crowds, why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? And then he answers his own question by urging them to settle debts with their accusers before they're brought before a judge.

Otherwise, they'll be found guilty and thrown into prison until they pay every last penny. This is more or less common sense advice, isn't it?

[9 : 41] If you have a debt, deal with it before you find yourself in court because if you can't pay it, you're going to be in a lot of trouble. Even more so for them than for us.

Debt can cause problems for us as well, but in the Roman world, you could end up in a debtor's prison. It's a very unpleasant place and you would do everything that you could to avoid that fate. But as you might expect, there's more going on here than common sense advice on debt relief or financial management. Jesus has been teaching for some time now on how to live and make wise decisions in light of the coming kingdom of God.

He said that he has come to cast fire on earth and that he'll come again at a time we do not know or expect to get rid of all the sin, all the wickedness, all the injustice that corrupts and destroys his people, the world that he loves.

Because of this, we need to be watchful, awake, prepared. We need to be wise stewards of what God has given us and we need to be attentive to the presence of God's kingdom among us.

[10 : 58] In this context, Jesus' advice about dealing with debt actually functions as a parable. It's an illustration of our urgent need to be reconciled to God before the coming judgment.

And there is a real sense of urgency, even finality, to this parable. We owe a debt to God because of sin that we cannot hope to repay.

One day, at a time that we don't know or expect, each of us will stand before Jesus, the one we just proclaimed in the creed who will come to judge the living and the dead and will give an account for that debt.

And on that day, the verdict will be final. The original language is quite emphatic. We'll never get out unless every penny of our debt is paid. But there's also tremendous hope in this parable because Jesus says that as long as we're on the road, which is a common image for life and living, there's the opportunity to settle our debt and go free.

that word that's translated as settled can also mean to be freed from, to be released from. And here, Jesus is opening up a window for us to see the gospel and all of its beauty and joy.

[12:26] Listen to what Paul wrote to the Colossians. He says, you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with all of its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. At this point in Luke's gospel, Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem.

He's set his face toward the cross where he would be baptized, plunged into suffering, immersed in our sin and guilt and the righteous judgment of God.

And he's doing all of this to save the lost and to reconcile us to God. On the cross, the judge was judged so that our debt could be canceled, set aside, nailed to the cross where he died.

And with this at the forefront of his mind, Jesus pleads with the crowds to repent, to see and to acknowledge the extraordinary thing that God was doing among them and to waste no time turning from their sin and accepting his gracious gift of forgiveness and reconciliation.

[14:01] This is really, though, what Jesus has been doing all throughout Luke 12. He has been teaching us some very hard truths, some good things, some honest things, but some difficult things about faithful discipleship in this in-between time when the kingdom of God has come but is not yet here in its fullness.

He's been reorienting our lives, our fears, our loves, our attitudes towards things like money and family, our expectations about the future, and challenging us to see everything in the light of his cross and his coming kingdom.

He's been calling us to action, to repentance, and a life of obedient and courageous witness in the face of persecution, division, and possibly even rejection.

But he has also given his people, those who hear his word and respond in repentance and faith, the most tender and loving reassurance.

If we go back to verse 32, Jesus says this to his disciples, Fear not, little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

[15:30] It's worth it. Jesus is worth it. If you are called to give up something for Jesus and his kingdom, whether it be money, approval, even the love and support of family members, it will be repaid 10,000 times over when you receive the gift of the inheritance of the kingdom of God.

The God who created the heavens and the earth, who dwells in unapproachable light, delights, delights to give you his kingdom.

kingdom. It's not a burden or an obligation. He doesn't do it begrudgingly. It's his joy. And therefore, let us make it our joy, our delight, to live freely, courageously, and joyfully for our king.

Amen.