

Luke 12:54 – 59

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[0 : 00] Wow, it's great to see live people here instead of speaking to a camera. Wonderful to see you all here today. And we're here at the end of this sermon series on the book of Luke chapter 12.

And it's quite a way that we end this passage because it is really a tremendously challenging passage. It's as though Jesus takes the most challenging part of what he's saying and he says, I'm going to speak to all of you, the whole crowd, with all kinds of different people in it, all kinds of different stages of belief in Jesus or opposition to him.

And he challenges them and he challenges us with the biggest question of all. What will you do about Jesus?

What are you going to do about him? You've been seeing him and hearing him. What will you do? It's a crucial question in all your life. It's more important than the question, will you marry me?

Or the question, what will I do with my profession? Or will I accept this position that is offered to me? Or what school should I go to?

[1 : 17] What investment should I make? This is far more important than all those questions of life. None of them comes close to that question, what will you do about Jesus?

So that's what we're going to talk about this morning. In verses 54 through 59, that question is like this loud wake-up call with that all-important question.

Now, as may be the case for many of you, my alarm clock is my cell phone. Now, I think I have set that ringtone too loudly for my alarm because it's a real shock to my system early in the morning when I hear it.

I feel like I'm having a heart attack. I have to lower the volume of my alarm, I think. But you might say, well, why don't you do it? Well, it's partly laziness.

I don't really understand my iPhone all that much. But I think it's mostly because I'm afraid that I will sleep through my alarm. So I keep it loud.

[2 : 25] I risk the shock of it all. And I think that Jesus, in the same way, knows that we are spiritually sleepy. And so Jesus' wake-up call in these verses are loud and they are searching so that you and I don't go back to sleep spiritually.

In the loudest of ringtones, he says, what will you do about me? And to do that, Jesus uses two really memorable pictures. He uses a weather forecast and he uses a legal drama, a lawsuit.

And so I want to talk about these. Those two pictures confront us with two questions. What do you see in Jesus and what will you do about Jesus? So first of all, what do you see?

In verse 54, he tells the crowds that they're really good weather forecasters. When you see a cloud rising in the west over the Mediterranean Sea, you say at once, a shower is coming.

It's going to rain. And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, coming up from the Negev Desert and the Arabian Desert, scorching heat is going to come.

- [3 : 38] And it happens. So you see, and the thing we have to remember, by the way, is the context. In Palestine, it was easier to predict the weather than it is here in BC.
- There's something very attractive about the profession of being a weather forecaster in BC because you can be wrong most of the time and be very successful.
- You can keep your job. I don't know if you remember the weather on Friday. It poured rain. And I congratulated myself because I noticed it was starting to rain. I was going to take the dog out.
- I said, oh, I'm going to put on his raincoat. And sure enough, as we started walking, I felt those first drops and it started pouring. And I was very thankful that he had his raincoat.
- I didn't have to dry off our shaggy dog at the end of that walk. But then about five minutes later, it started ending. And I thought, I have to go out and do some errands.
- [4 : 33] I don't need a rain jacket. Well, I got to the store and sure enough, downpour. And as I walked in, and it was less than 30 seconds, I was soaked.
- And the manager of the store was there. And I think she noticed my bedraggled appearance. And she said, isn't it a strange day? Just when you think it's going to stop raining, it starts again. I said, yes, I know, I know.
- So I was one for two in my weather forecasting. Very different predicting the weather in Palestine. Clouds from the west always meant rain.
- Wind from the south always meant scorching heat. And you know what? It was crucial to be accurate about those weather forecasts in Palestine.
- Because it affects the local crops, the livestock. When do you plant? When do you harvest? When do you ration? Everything was about agriculture in that time.
- [5 : 35] It was crucial to be good at discerning the weather. So they were good at it because it was crucial to them. But then he says these eye-opening words to us.
- This loud wake-up call. He says, you hypocrites. I always like to say that, to try that in a sermon. And here I get to say it. You hypocrites. You know how to interpret the appearances of earth and sky.
- But why do you not know how to interpret the present time? Now, why does Jesus call them hypocrites? Is it to grab their attention?
- To call them names? No, that's not what he's doing. He is actually describing their spiritual condition. Hypocrite was the word for stage actor.
- And so you see in Greek plays, that's what they are called. It meant somebody who is playing a part. So that what is happening on the outside in that actor's life doesn't match who he or she really is on the inside.
- [6 : 39] So, those of you who are fans of the Marvel Cinematic Universe MCU movies, which is a whole canon I've discovered, you know that Peter Quill, the Star-Lord, who was introduced in Guardians of the Galaxy as a half-human and half-alien leader of the Guardians, you know that Chris Pratt, the actor who plays Quill, is not half-alien.
- He is not half-human. He's never been abducted by extraterrestrial spaceships of a mercenary gang called the Ravagers. He's also never been disintegrated and restored back to life.
- In fact, he was born in a very small Minnesota town, and he is now married to the daughter of Arnold Schwarzenegger. On the inside, you see Chris Pratt is very different from Peter Quill, the Star-Lord, who we see playing on the screen.
- And he plays that character very well, very sincerely, but it is different. Now, you see what Jesus is telling the crowd. He says, you are like an actor. Outwardly, you're really good at discerning what is happening in the physical world around you.

You make your way well in that world and in the work. But inside, you are different. You can't or you won't discern who Jesus is.

[8 : 11] Who is he? You're not paying attention to the all-important thing. Everything that Jesus has been saying and doing means that he is your Savior.

That he brings you into a relationship with God that you absolutely need and you do not have without him. And through that, to transform all relationships forever.

That is why he came. He is going to Jerusalem, as he's speaking to these people, in order to die for them and for their salvation.

The thing that is most needful for them is what he is about. That's what they are not discerning. So, you see, when Jesus names them hypocrites, he is searching inside their hearts.

And he's saying a huge difference in what they are willing to discern. Why do you know how to interpret the present? Why do you not know, he says, how to interpret the present time?

[9 : 16] Which is the time of Jesus. We are in the time of Jesus, who has come as our Savior. Now, we are like those crowds who know how to discern the things of this world.

This is an impressive group here. And it's small enough that I can actually probably name people. So, Bill, you're a doctor. You're very good at discerning what the needs of patients are and diagnosing illness.

Isaac is very good at discerning what we need for sound and for technology and what might be wrong with it. Which happens quite a bit. We have a helicopter pilot here, Dan.

Dan's very good at discerning when and where it's safe to land. Even when the passenger says, you've got to do this. He discerns no or yes.

And we have teachers here as well. And teachers know how best to communicate and educate their students in this particular generation.

[10 : 30] Daryl Thomas knows this. This is what she does for her work. She discerns these students' needs. And many of you who are watching today, you have different ways of discerning.

You're wonderfully creative in your sense of art and music. You have a sense of how systems and organizations work. You have a grasp of where technology is heading.

You have a discernment about markets. And you can be good at investing. You see, these are marvelous abilities that you have. They are impressive discernment in the things of the world.

But Jesus wakes us up to the reality that at the same time, you can be unaware of where your heart is towards God. Your heart can be far away from him, Jesus says.

You may completely miss what God is doing in Jesus for you. You can actually not discern what God is doing that is of utmost importance for you.

[11 : 36] That he is about your salvation. That he is about your relationship with God forever. Is this true for you today? Is this a discernment that you are feeling and understanding and realizing that is lacking?

I want to show you something, how this can happen. In Luke, at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus went to a synagogue. It's a place where he grew up in Nazareth. And he was called on to read the scripture passage, like Caitlin did today.

So he picks up the scroll. And he turns to Isaiah 61, where it says, The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind.

To set at liberty those who are oppressed. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And then Jesus rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendants.

It's a time of just total quiet. And he sits down. The eyes of all the congregation are on, fixed on him. And he began to say, Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

[12 : 52] Now, this is an incredible thing to say. Because he is saying that me, this person, reading this Bible to you, is fulfilling everything that you're hearing here.

And that he is the fulfillment of all God's plans for his people and for the world. And you see, the people who were listening to Jesus in that crowd saw Jesus actually doing and saying all those things.

But they did not discern that Jesus was sent by God to save them. Because of their great need. Because of their future life needing a savior.

Because they themselves are the poor in spirit. In great need of God's help and forgiveness to restore us. Jesus proclaims good news to you so that you know the riches of God's grace.

This is what he does to the poor physically. But also to the spiritually poor. We and that crowd are captive to sin. We are oppressed with no hope without God.

[14 : 08] Jesus permanently liberates us to know God forever. Our eyes cannot see God's love and truth naturally. Jesus opens our eyes to see the love of God the Father for us forever.

And today, today in this time when there are so many things swirling around us. Injustice. Disease. The things that cause us anxiety.

In this day, God proclaims the year of his favor. It means it is the time that Jesus rules from heaven. That he brings you now the joy of knowing God.

Of being reconciled to him. Belonging to him. Freeing you to worship him in this world. Just as you will be worshiping him forever in a new heaven and a new earth.

That reality is far more important than anything that we can discern here on earth. And so that's why that question is so important for us.

[15 : 14] Do you see Jesus? So that's the first thing that Jesus is saying. Do you see him? And the second question that Jesus brings into our hearts this morning.

Is what will you do about him? And I must say this is so challenging for me. And it is for each of us as well. Look at verse 57.

Jesus gets very personal with the crowd. And really with each of us this morning as well. He is getting personal with you. He says in verse 57.

Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? That is the wake up question. That's the question that moves us to act.

What is the right thing to do? What is the only thing to do if Jesus is the anointed one from God sent to save you and the world by dying in Jerusalem on a cross for you?

[16 : 15] What is the right thing to do? Well Jesus answers that question by a little story about a lawsuit in verse 58. I love how God's word is so relevant because this is the age of lawsuits.

It is the age of the legal drama. And he says that every one of you is like a person walking on your way with someone who you owe a lot of money to.

And you're going to go before a judge and you know you cannot pay that debt at all. If you get there you're going to be found guilty and you're going to be jailed until every last penny is paid.

Which is an odd thing isn't it? It's a debtor's prison. You can only get out of it by somebody else paying your debt because you're not making any money in there. So he says action is urgently needed.

What does he say? He says Jesus says make an effort to settle with the one you owe money to on the way to the judge. Now I've got to say our English translation lets us down a little bit here.

[17 : 20] It makes it sound like oh make an effort. But no the translation actually says in the original earnestly seek to be released from your debt.

There's an urgency about this. You see what Jesus is saying here. We along with everybody in that crowd are debtors to God by our sin.

And each of us is moving towards the day when we will stand before Jesus our judge. He will hold everyone to account to make all things right.

That's what everything in the world is moving to. I don't know if you remember but in Psalm 10 we were reading this lament. And the lament is really heartfelt.

One of the verses that we didn't read this morning says this. It says why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart you will not call to account. But you do see God.

[18 : 20] For you note mischief and vexation that you may take it into your hands. That's an important verse. Because Jesus does see.

He will take injustice into his hands. Including the abuse in the schools that we are praying about. We long for people to be held into account who get away with injustice.

But Jesus is also saying to us here that we will be called into account as well. That there is sin in our own heart that we are held to account to.

And Jesus in chapter 12 has said you must be ready. For the son of man is coming in an hour that you do not expect. And I think that's why we say in our creeds every time we are together.

Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead. It's a call to be ready. Are we ready to be held to account? Now wonderfully at the same time that Jesus says this parable.

[19 : 25] He is going up to Jerusalem. And what is he going to do there? He is going to be judged in your place to release you from your sins.

The judge is the judged. And that is where your release comes from. This is what we earnestly seek. This is the good news in our deepest need.

And you know in the early church this was the pattern of preaching. So every preaching, every sermon had two points. I think they might have been shorter sermons than we are used to here.

And those two points were this. That Jesus is judge and that he saves. Listen to Acts 10. Peter's first sermon to the Gentiles. He said Jesus commanded us to preach to the people.

And to testify what? You see, Jesus is appointed to judge the living and the dead.

[20 : 36] Yet this judge, the one who will make all things right and hold everyone to account, is judged in our place on the cross. He is the giver of the forgiveness of sins.

And we receive that gift as we believe in him. So I want to close this sermon by asking this question. What will we do about Jesus?

How do I respond to this call by Jesus to be released from our debt? Well, Jesus said in that little sermon that I just read from Peter, that we believe in him.

That we earnestly seek him. The word that Jesus uses for this is repent. And you've heard that word a lot. But if we want to really understand the force of it, it is that we entrust ourselves to Jesus, the judge, and the savior.

And that in that turning to Jesus, we turn away from sin. They're diametrically opposed. As we turn to Jesus as the one who releases us, we turn away from sin.

[21 : 49] And that's why our service this morning has been a service of repentance. We have confessed our sins to God, and we've said this very strange line. We said, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders.

I've had lots of questions from people who are new to Anglicanism, saying, I don't feel miserable. I don't like that term. Why should I be called a miserable offender?

Well, it is not an emotion. Discerning. It is instead a discernment. Remember that word, discerning. It's discerning our deep need for Jesus' forgiveness.

Discerning that we need release from debt. Discerning that we are poor in spirit, and we need Jesus' good news. That we are captives that need to be set free.

That we are spiritually blind, and we need to see Jesus and his love for us. C.S. Lewis wrote a great article about the confession called Miserable Offenders.

[22 : 52] And he said this. He said, the prayer book does not mean that we should feel miserable, but that if we could see things from a sufficient height, from God's view, we would all realize that we are in fact proper objects of pity.

We need salvation. Does that sound very gloomy, he says? Does Christianity encourage morbid introspection? The alternative is much more morbid.

Those who do not think about their own sins make up for it by thinking incessantly about the sins of others. It is healthier to think of one's own.

It's the reverse of morbid. It's not even in the long run very gloomy. Because a serious attempt to repent and really know one's own sins is in the long run a lightening and a relieving process.

You see, what it means to repent is to actively entrust ourselves to Jesus. It's not a call to get your life in order, you know, and make sure everything is right.

[23 : 58] Instead, it's a call to discern that we need Jesus. We need his saving help. In Luke 12, it means to entrust yourselves to him, to acknowledge him as your savior, to ourselves and to others.

Publicly acknowledge that. It means to seek his kingdom. It means that we fear him so that you do not fear the opinions and the actions of other people. It means, he says in Luke 12, being loyal to Jesus above all others.

It means being rich towards God. Repentance means storing up treasure in heaven in a way that you serve others, especially those who are in need.

And I want to close by saying that Jesus has been telling us throughout chapter 12, you don't do this alone. You do not repent on your own power. You don't make things right by your great and powerful actions.

Instead, he gives us his Holy Spirit. He gives us a strong and tender love for us as a shepherd for a little flock. We receive his kingdom that he is pleased to give us so that we can live it out.

[25 : 12] And we know, above all, that we are of infinite value to him. This is what it means to have a savior. May God the Father give you his Holy Spirit and the grace to entrust yourself to Jesus, whom you have seen and whom you will act on.

Amen. Amen. Amen.