

Unless You Repent

Luke 12:49-13:9

We are going to pick up where we left off last Sunday, in v. 49 of Luke 12 and work our way to Luke 13:9. There is this overarching theme of preparing for judgment and Jesus' return. There are two things to observe as we dig into this text.

First, Jesus had set His face to the cross. His life was laser focused on going to Jerusalem and dying on the cross for the sins of His people. He was taking His disciples with Him and for that matter anyone who wanted to follow after Him and be His disciple. His words were to prepare them then and they prepare us today as we move toward Good Friday and Easter. If you want to be Jesus' disciple, let His words sink in and then obey them.

Second, Jesus wanted to prepare anyone who desired to follow Him for His return and therefore judgment. These are some of Jesus' strongest words but they should not be seen as dark and impending doom. They are words of grace and mercy. He is giving His disciples and us hope. They are words of hope because they let us know there is life after death. If Jesus, was going to die and not come back to life why even say any of this? What would be the point? There would be no point but Jesus is going to die and then come back to life. But Jesus was going to rise from the dead and He did rise from the dead and it is because He did rise from the dead that we consider His words this morning that prepare us for His return and to stand before Him in judgment.

In this passage, Jesus told His disciples and the crowd six things to do in preparation for His return. We looked at two of them last Sunday: *Be Ready* and *Be Faithful*. We will cover the last four this morning.

These are some of Jesus strongest words in all the gospels. He does not mince His words, He does not soft pedal what it means to be a disciple. There is not anything gentle about this text. If you have ever had a soft-focused picture of Jesus who is some Savior who only gives the warm fuzzies to people then brace yourself. Last Sunday we saw that Jesus' disciples must *Be Ready* and *Be Faithful*. Here are the last four points of this passage: *Be Resolute*, *Be Real*, *Be Reconciled* and *Be Repentant*. These four points drive home the main idea of *what it means to be a disciple who is ready for Jesus' imminent return and the judgment that follows*.

1. Be Resolute (Luke 12:49-53)

When I hear vv. 49-53 read together, my first thought is that these verses sound like disconnected thoughts. They perhaps sound like Jesus had just strung together several unrelated thoughts that were kind of eclectic in nature. Kind of like short proverbs but they are very much connected and Jesus point is to *be resolute* in our commitment to Him. Jesus wants us to *tenaciously cling* to Him because as judgment comes on this world there will be much suffering. We need to have a stubborn, staunch, unyielding commitment to Christ.

Why would we need to be ready to have this kind of faith in Jesus? He tells us in these verses and they are hard words to hear but the reality is suffering will come with your faith in Jesus and we will need to be resolute in our commitment to Christ.

Work through vv. 49-53: Listen to v. 49 from the NASB and the CSB. I think they capture what Jesus was trying to say better.

- NASB, "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!"
- CSB, "I came to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already set ablaze!"

The *fire* Jesus refers to is the fire of judgment on Jesus for the sins of God's people. God was going to unleash the wrath of God on Jesus. It would be an unrelenting, purifying, purging, holy fire unleashed from the very holiness of Almighty God. Jesus was ready for this fire to fall but until He reached the cross would it then fall on Him in full force.

That's why He said in v. 50, *I have a baptism to be baptized with and how great is My distress until it is accomplished.* Jesus reference to *baptism* was going to be a *baptism of fire*. On the cross, He would be immersed in the holy fire of the wrath of Almighty God for the sins of the people of God. Jesus was going to satisfy God's anger toward His people for their sin for all time: past, present and future.

Jesus knew what was coming and it created much distress in His heart and mind. Hebrews 12:29 says, *"for our God is a consuming fire."* And Jesus knew that and He was going to be immersed in that fire. Hebrews 10:31 says, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* Jesus' distress and fear were real and they were in the right place because He was going to pay for the costly sins of His people down to the last penny.

There are two ways to face the judgment of God for your sin: One picture is of unrepentant sinners who have not trusted Jesus as their substitute who redeemed them by dying in their place and for their sin on the cross. Because they refused to trust Christ as their substitute on the cross the fire of the wrath of God will fall on them. Don't be this person, turn to Christ while there is time.

The second picture is in v. 50. This is of the Savior, Jesus Christ, on whom the fire of God's wrath fell. And for sinners who confess that they have sinned against God and turn in faith to Jesus He becomes their substitute in the fire. God counts Jesus death on the cross as their death and He sees them as His perfect, sinless child. Jesus took their baptism of fire for them. Friends, the message is clear, trust Christ. Turn to Him as your hero who died in your place and for your sin.

After His discussion on a baptism of fire, Jesus concludes with some perplexing words. Most people do not think of Jesus saying that He did not come to give peace on earth. They only see Jesus as this meek and mild-mannered man who was a good teacher and tried unsuccessfully to get people to love one another. Even many Christians misunderstand Jesus at this point. They sing the old Christmas song that says Jesus came to bring peace on earth. But if you remember Luke 2:14 actually says Jesus came to bring peace. . . *with those whom he is pleased!* The peace is limited to those with whom God is pleased. Many people only have a *"Christmas Jesus"* who came to give peace on earth and good will to all men.

Brothers and sisters, the truth is gospel can be divisive. It is not because the gospel calls the people of God to be mean-spirited and divisive but because the gospel judges our hearts. It judges the hearts of men and women and they realize they are sinners and must give up lordship of their own lives, confess this as sin and follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The simple fact is—people do not like this. They feel judged and rightly so for the gospel confronts their worldview and judges their hearts and lives. Unrepentant people do not like this and therefore they hate what God came to do in Christ for this.

Because the gospel judges the hearts of sinners it can cause division among people and not simply people it will cause division in the very place where there should be unity--family. The old saying is that *blood is thicker than water*. This metaphor is used to describe the tight bonds of biological family. However, the blood of Christ is thicker than family blood. The blood of Christ saves the people of God and calls them to a new allegiance and this allegiance often conflicts with family and when it does there will be division.

Jesus' point was not something new but something old because He drew on Micah 7:5-7. Obedience to God has often caused divisions in families. In the prophet Micah's day, many of the Jewish people were refusing to obey God and instead worshiped false gods. Yet there were some within their own families who were obeying God's word and those who did were ostracized and treated harshly. Micah's message to them was this: *"Put no trust in a neighbor; have no confidence in a friend; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms; ⁶for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. ⁷But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."* God called His people to obey His word even if their family members did not. Jesus knew His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead was going to cast fire on the earth and the hearts of sinners would feel the judgment. It would create divisions so severe that families would be split. What does this mean? It means that Jesus' disciples needed to be resolute in their commitment to the gospel.

I don't know if you have ever experienced division in your family over the gospel. I have. It is hard because in the very place where there should be unity there is division and the gospel of Jesus Christ is at the center of that division. That is hard. Jesus will say in Luke 14:26, *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* These strong words must be interpreted in light of Jesus' words in Matthew 10:37, *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."*

What will you do when you have family members who want you to deny Christ or want you to disobey the word of God? Jesus said in Luke 8:21, *"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."* Those who follow Christ as His disciples may be divided from family members but he or she will be united to others who are Christ's disciples. He will give us a new family so although the gospel may create division, it will also create unity.

We will need to not only be resolute in our families but in other contexts of life. The gospel may create division in your work place. It may create division in your neighborhood. It has already created division in our culture. We have been studying the lives of the Reformers in GROW on Wednesday nights and many of the Reformers died for the faith in Christ. One child responded, *there was a lot of death in the Reformation*. It is true there were a lot of Reformers who died for their faith but what they knew was that there was life in the gospel and it was worth dying for and that life united them with the saints of all ages who trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus' disciples need to be resolute in their commitment to Him.

Brothers and sisters, division in the place where they should be unity is hard. I know for I have experienced this first hand. You need to know this, if you have Jesus, you have it all. He is all you need. His presence in your life in the dark night of the soul is healing comfort. It is the sweetest comfort in the pain of loss and hurt. Trust the One who taken the baptism of fire for you.

2. Be Real (Luke 12:54-56)

Tornado season is upon us since Spring has arrived. What happens if you get an alert on your phone or see an alert on TV that a tornado has been spotted in your area? You gather your family and friends and you head to the basement for safety. You heed the warnings because we have learned that Doppler Radar is reliable and since it can accurately forecast the weather and it sees a tornado in your area you listen.

The Jews in Jesus' day knew how to forecast the weather and they studied it in order to know if it was going to rain or if it was going to be a hot day. They would adjust their lives accordingly. Jesus zeroed in on the Jews' ability to study the weather and predict what in that day and time was hard to forecast and adjust their lives accordingly to not being able to read the sign of the times.

They were supposed to be a religious society and know how to interpret the word of God and therefore know when the Messiah had arrived. They observed the signs that Jesus had done in their presence that told them the long-awaited Son of God had come and yet they ignored the signs, they ignored the prophets, they ignored the word of God. Jesus used the Jews' knowledge of predicting the weather to confront their hypocrisy because they knew the Messiah had come. They knew judgment was imminent judgment.

We do much the same thing. We study trends and make predictions based on that knowledge: weather, the stock market, business trends, and even sports, and we learn what to do and adjust our lives accordingly. But do you study the word of God and obey what it says or are you like the hypocrites in Jesus' day, who although they were intelligent in one area played dumb in the most important area—God's word. Don't play dumb with God's word—learn it and obey it.

James 1:22-25, *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."*

3. Be Reconciled (Luke 12:57-59)

In vv. 57-59, Jesus continued to rebuke the Jews for knowing better. His question in v. 57 is a rhetorical question. He was telling them you know it is better to settle out of court than to go to court. In other words, you know what is right yet you pretend it is the opposite.

Ultimately, He was confronting them and telling them they knew there was coming a more serious judgment and yet they lived as if it was not coming. Also, they knew the Messiah was coming and yet they pretended He had not come. Their rejection of Him was going to cost them dearly because God had given them the most revelation of anyone and yet they refused to believe in Jesus. Because they had rejected Him they would not get out until they had paid their debt in full or as He previously said: *their beating will be severe and He would cut them to pieces.*

Verse 59 is not Jesus' teaching on Purgatory. *"Every last penny"* means judgment will be complete and paid in full only by being sentenced to eternity in Hell. There would be an eternal baptism of fire for those who reject Jesus.

When we flip the penny over what we should see is that Jesus paid the last penny of judgment on the cross for sinners. If you neglect this great salvation you will never pay the debt you owe but if you submit your life to Christ, He has paid your debt in full and you will receive the riches of God's grace, kindness, mercy, and love as your reward.

4. Be Repentant (Luke 13:1-9)

Finally, in vv. 1-5, the Jews are still resistant. They were pushing back on His hard teaching. They were objecting by saying, *"But what about this other group of people and how they died?"* This is a strategy to sidetrack and not deal honestly with what they have been faced with in Jesus' sermon.

This would be similar to someone saying, *“But what about the people in India who have never heard the gospel? What about the Muslims who were killed in the mass shooting in Christ’s Church, New Zealand who never heard the gospel? What about the people who died in the floods in Nebraska or the tornado in Alabama. What about them?”*

Jesus reply was that they were missing the point. They Jews thought bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people. Since nothing bad had happened to them then they must be righteous and therefore they did not need to worry about the judgment.

Jesus’ point is that everyone dies. It does not matter how you die; the fact is you will die and when you die you will stand before the Judge and if you have not repented and been reconciled to God in Christ then you will suffer and worse fate than those whom Pilate killed and those on whom the tower fell. What happened to them is nothing compared to the judgment that is coming.

The point for us is to be ready, be faithful, be resolute, be real, be reconciled, and be repentant. Trust Jesus while you have time. Do not wait for you do not know when Jesus will return or when you will die.

Jesus concluded His sermon with the parable of the barren fig tree in vv. 6-9. The fig tree is often used to represent the nation of Israel and does in this parable. They were highly privileged in that they had access to much light to help them interpret the signs of the times so that they should have known the Messiah had arrived but now He had been with them three years and yet the large majority denied that Jesus was the Messiah. But this parable is not simply for Israel but for those who have ears to hear.

The man who owned the fig tree was angry because the fig tree has borne no fruit in the usual time it should have borne fruit. He told the vinedresser to cut it down but the vinedresser pleaded with the man to allow him to cultivate the soil to see if it would bear fruit.

So the vinedresser cultivated the soil around the tree and this is where Jesus stopped. He never tells us whether the tree bore fruit or not. He leaves the parable open for us to know that the vinedresser is patient and merciful and He will give time BUT we do not know how much time.

We do not know when Jesus will return or when tragedy will claim our lives. We must place our faith in Christ while we have time. Jesus is a patient Savior but we do not know when His patience will run out. Only God knows when that time will be and when that time arrives all opportunities for salvation will be lost. Be repentant now.

I think the question is: How has Jesus been digging around your soul with the ups and downs of life? Have painful experiences caused you to think about eternity? Do you see the hard experiences in life as the pruning of the vinedresser preparing you to be fruitful in life? How has the Vinedresser been fertilizing your soul with the word and the Spirit? How has He been applying the hearty nourishment of the life-giving gospel in your life?

Jesus wants us to feel the heat of the fire in His sermon so we will turn to Him to be rescued. He wants us to take seriously the warnings in this text. His warnings are like paddles of a *defibrillator* that He puts on our chest and shocks us back to life. Finally, He wants us to taste the nourishment of the grace of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God fertilizing our heart as He puts in the shovel and turns the soil our hearts. We may not always like it but as we go through it we learn how He is causing us to bear fruit some thirty, some sixty and some one-hundred times over.