

Part 49: Repentance and Redemption

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Today's sermon might as well be called, "Quotes from Jesus that don't end up on coffee mugs."

I saw a bumper sticker once that said, "When I told you to love one another, I meant it. -Jesus." We like those kind of bumper stickers. They don't offend anyone. But I've seen so very few people with a T-shirt that says, "Let me dig around you and put manure on you." Or even more uncomfortably, "Do you think that I've come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you but rather division."

Already when this text was just read for us in Luke 12, you may not like what Jesus was saying, but that's almost the point. As we've been working through the book of Luke we have found ourselves in a section calling us to reconcile not just our lives, but time itself in relationship to Jesus and the plan of redemption.

You see before you reject or accept any truth claim you naturally try to reconcile it in relationship to who you are and what you think about life. But Jesus is teaching us how we can understand what he is saying about our time, our interpretation of it, our implications of it and then reconcile it in light of him and his word. This might seem counter intuitive, but if Christianity is true, it's the only objective way we can view all of reality.

This world brings anxiety and distress. No one's own experience can argue the opposite. But here, in this text we see themes of distress and judgement, but also hints of hope and peace. It's all intermixed. But there's one decoder ring that helps us see all of it and it's the person and work of Jesus Christ. We cannot understand our time, or our own lives, apart from understanding where we stand in relationship to Jesus Christ, his cross, and his second coming.

While you may bristle at the urgency and language Jesus gives here, you've got to wrestle with the reality of it. This is our main point today: **Our only hope in the crisis of life is in the crisis of Christ.** When we understand the crisis of the cross, we can rightly think about and understand everything. But if we miss the significance of Christ's cross, we find ourselves in a different crisis—that of judgement (judgement in Greek is *krisis*).

That's what we will see today: The Christ and the crisis. We will see this in three parts. First we will see **The Christ Part 1** (vs. 29-50), then we will examine **The Crisis** (12:51-13:5) and how it relates to us right now, finally we will see **The Christ Part 2** in Jesus' concluding parable.

To begin let's read our opening verses again **Luke 12:49-50.**

Here is our first point today: **The Christ Part 1.** Here we have an astounding window into Jesus' own heart. There are lots of times where the New Testament talks about Jesus' emotional life. But in this text Jesus himself opens that door and invites us in. Are you surprised at what Jesus reveals about his desires and affections?

We see two things here. First we see that Jesus understands that part of his purpose is purifying judgement. "I came to cast fire on the earth," is probably not the first purpose statement we think of when we think of the person and work of Jesus. And while Jesus came to do more than this (as we will see in this very text) we cannot divorce the work of judgement from the will and work of Jesus.

If you've been following closely as we've been working through Luke this isn't a surprise for us. Jesus already told us back in chapter 10 and chapter 11 that part of his ministry was to reveal the heart of unbelief in those who reject him, Simeon said in Luke 2 at Jesus' birth that he was a "sign opposed."

Part of Jesus' work was to save, yes and that abundantly. But part of Jesus' work was also to sure up the just sentence of judgment for all who miss him. Jesus in the flesh was acted in part as the lead prosecutor. He came to sure up the sentence of guilty by making unbelief and rebellion plain in the hearts of those who reject him.

Jesus not only understands this as part of his purpose, but secondly, did you see that he's not ashamed about it. He's actually anxious for it. "Would that it were already kindled."

This is a great example of what it looks like to reconcile this text in relationship to Jesus instead of ourselves. It seems almost brutal that Jesus would want judgement to befall people. But have you ever heard stories about people who go to join a commune or something like that? They go to great lengths to start a society free from all that plagues the rest of the world--there's going to be sharing, perfect systems, better roads and recycling, greater educational opportunities. They sterilize the whole infrastructure. But what happens? They all fail. Jealousy, resentment, anger, deceit and abuse all sneak their way back in.

Why? In the words of our modern philosopher, Taylor Swift, "Hey, it's me. I'm the problem it's me."

That's because sin is not something that lurks outside of us. Sin is something that lurks inside of us. It might seem like an offensive reality, but our world wears the badge of this wound. To long for a society where we no longer hurt, steal, kill, abuse or suffer is to long for a world where fire has purified sin by removing the source of sin: sinners.

Jesus says so in **Mark 7:20-23** when he says, "It's not what comes into a person that defiles him...but what comes out...For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Sober and honest secular minds think this. I saw an online poll posted by one secular humanist this week and the prompt was: "Which universe is the better one?" The two options were "One with humans" and "One without humans." 58% said "with humans." 42% said "without humans." That might seem like a win for secular humanism, but the reality that 42% think the world would be better off without humans is stunning. The author of the poll said he had to wrap his mind around this reality. But even in the heart of our collective humanity we understand the problem of sinners. The problem is us. To answer that the universe is better with humanity actually demands a foundationally Christian worldview. Only the Christian worldview affirms the original goodness of humanity while also admitting the depravity of sin and this tension is solved in Jesus.

That's the very tension Jesus is holding in this text. Right after he talks about the relief that would come if he were to judge the world right now in that moment, he says something else: "I have a baptism to be baptized with and how great is my distress until it is accomplished."

Here we see the heart of our savior in full. Yes, Jesus rejoices at the idea of immediate fiery judgement, but he doesn't do it now. Why? Because he's looking forward to a baptism. What is the baptism? The gospel of Mark makes it more clear in chapter 10 when Jesus says the baptism is the cross.

Jesus, who is the one who will bring judgement, is not immediately bringing judgment. Why? Because in an astounding turn of events, he himself was going to be judged. Not for his sins, but for ours. He was the only good person, being fully God and fully man. What came out of his mouth was healing, salvation, blessing, and not gross sin.

This tension weighed heavy on Jesus. Can you imagine that? Does this help you bear under the weight of a broken world yourself? Jesus lived in the same tension we do. He knew the pain of this world would remain until God remade the world through judgement.

But he also knew the weight of that more than we ever could. We suffer under the weight of a sinful world. But if you are a Christian you suffer knowing there's an offer of deliverance before judgement. But Jesus, who is our sacrificial lamb, knew there was great hope ahead even for him, but he knew that all of that glory stood on the opposite side of the cross.

For him to fulfill his purpose, he had to face the same judgement that every Christian is spared. And this reality weighed on his soul. One commentator said, "The prospect of his suffering was a perpetual Gethsemane." For every soul he healed, for every message he preached, he knew that one day the bill would come due—relief had to be paid by redemption, his baptism on the cross.

How did Jesus himself endure this distress? Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2, "He continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). Jesus reconciled his own experience and his own anxiety with the providence of the Father.

What does it look like for you to do the same? As Jesus himself faithfully lived in this age of crisis by trusting in the providence of the Father, he prepares us for the same mental battle.

This is where Jesus goes next, and this is our second point: **The Crisis**.

Jesus is going to give us three expectations for how we live in this tension and all three of them are preparing us for the reality of division.

Jesus first speaks to his disciples and prepares them for the **Relational Division** of following Christ. This is where he goes when he says, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."

Now it's important to note that the angels who proclaimed Jesus' birth back in **Luke 2:14** really said, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased." Isaiah calls Jesus, "The Prince of Peace."

Jesus does come to bring peace, but during this moment of redemptive history there is a difference between peace with God and peace with the world. The promise of the cross is real, intimate, abiding peace with the Father through the work of the Son. The promise of the New Heavens and the New Earth after the fire of judgement is peace unending. But right now in Jesus' ministry, right now in the church's ministry, peace with God now doesn't mean peace with the world.

Here Jesus paints the crisis of our relationships. To come to the Father through the Son might strain the relationships between fathers and sons. Not because we shun them, not because we neglect Jesus' command to love them, not because we seek to cause evil to them, but because they may respond with hostility to the Jesus who is now Lord over your life. Jesus says in John 15, "If the world hates you, know it has hated me before it hated you."

In my time working in campus ministry I've seen this. I've seen how conversion to Jesus caused parents to worry that their career aspirations for their children have been compromised because instead of being a doctor, they desire to be a missionary.

In other cultures around our world, when a son or a wife converts to Christianity, the family publishes and obituary and has a funeral for that individual. They are now dead to them.

These realities should break our hearts, they should send us to our knees in prayer, they should fill our mouths with the message of the gospel, but they should not be unexpected in this time of tension. This is the age of division.

Jesus is actually quoting from Micah 7 here and in that passage we see the hope we have if and when we experience this on account of our belonging to Jesus: **Micah 7:5-7**.

There's a book out called, "How to Win Friends and Influence Others." By worldly standards becoming a Christian is not a great step in that direction. Some Christians are jerks and they are offensive because of their sin. But if you've ever felt relational division on account of Jesus—maybe the person you really want to date is separated from you because they are not a believer—what does Jesus hold out for you? The same hope he himself had: "Wait for the God of your salvation," trust the cross. Peace will come.

The second point of division in this age is **Experiential Division**. What does this mean? Well, as Jesus turns to the crowds, it means that our first impulse will always be to interpret life on our own. It takes incredible work to rely on God's interpretation of our lives and not our own. As the writer of Proverbs puts it, "lean not on your own understanding."

He gives this example in verses 54-55. He says, "You look at the clouds and you know when it's going to rain and you respond accordingly." "You know when it's going to be hot, and you are not unprepared."

Maybe you have things like this in your own life. You're child missed a nap, so you cancel your evening plans. You saw your boss show up late to work with a smashed bumper so you plan on keeping your head down so as not to catch an already upset person.

Jesus is saying that we are all smart people, we can naturally do all of it. Why then is it so common to look at the crisis, the pain, the hurt, the preaching of the gospel, the staying of immediate judgement and not live our lives first and foremost out of this spiritual reality. Here we see how blind we often are

to the call to, "Seek first the Kingdom of God." It is not our default, and Jesus says, that's a problem that needs to be worked on.

Behind the experiences of your life are spiritual, eternal realities. As C.S. Lewis said, "There are no ordinary people...it is immortals whom we joke with, work with and marry." Jesus is making the same point here in our lives. We never encounter an ordinary moment, only eternal ones. To neglect this without repenting is not simply to be a fool, it's actually to be condemned as a criminal.

Jesus gives an example of what this would look like as he shares the next point of division: ***Legal Division.***

Pay close attention to this text and see if you can discern what Jesus assumes about the accused in this passage: **Luke 12:57-59.**

What's the obvious assumption Jesus is making here? That the accused really is guilty! He's telling him to try and settle things, or literally to make yourself free from, the crime that you've committed. And you should do it now because once you get to court, once the evidence is read, you've got no case. You're really guilty.

Jesus' little anecdote is a not so veiled picture of how each and every one of us ought to live before God. Paul says in Romans that the wages of our sin is death. We are the criminal. We have back-taxes of worship due to our Lord that we cannot pay. We have stolen his honor, violated his house, and murdered his son. Our argument will not hold up when we make it to the court.

But now is the time to settle those accounts. If you're one who is interested in Jesus, maybe seeking him out, skeptical, but interested, I'm glad you're here. And I don't wish to force you to believe, nor can I force you to, but Jesus here wants to add to your consideration a weighted reality of the time. Now is the time to get right with Jesus before you get before the judgement seat of God.

How confident are you that you have time remaining? Dear Christian, how confident are you that you have been made free from what you legally earned in your sin?

In light of these questions you might wonder if you can ever have certainty? Can you have peace amidst this division?

Yes. And here's the last response Jesus gives helping us find ***Hope in Repentance.*** **Luke 13:1-5.**

So as Jesus talks about interpreting the times, there's a group of people who attempt to do that themselves: "Ok, well what does Pilate's murder of the Jews mean?"

Instead of talking about how those men deserved what was coming, or how Pilate himself was the only person with a problem, Jesus broadened the meaning to all of us. He says, "Just because you're relatively comfortable right now does not mean you're safe." Peace with the world doesn't mean peace with God.

The events of this time don't highlight other people's problems, they highlight yours. Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Twice Jesus says that. We will all stand before the crisis of the judgment seat

of God, and what hope will you have then? Only the hope of repentance in life. Dead men don't repent. Repentance is for the living.

Have you repented? What does that even mean? Repentance is a change of heart, and a change of direction.

As a Tennessee Titans fan I love watching men repent when they try and tackle Derrick Henry. Derrick Henry is one of the biggest and fastest running backs to ever play the game, at his height and speed he runs with an applied force of 5207 pounds. So you can find highlight reels on YouTube of men who are running in to tackle Henry, only to pull up and change direction at the end.

Commentators call this "Making a business decision," Jesus calls this "repentance." Repentance sees the force of sin and grieves it. It has a change of heart. But true repentance shows that change by not staying in the same lane but by changing direction. We don't just feel sorry, we move the other way.

Where we once thought tackling sin was a good idea, we now make it our business to try and avoid it because we've felt the pain of it.

The whole scope of your life is meant to bring you to this reality: We must repent of our sins through faith in Jesus and rend the whole of our lives to him. This is what Paul says in **Romans 2:3-5**.

Why are you here now? How might you interpret this very moment in your life? Repent and believe in Jesus. That's your only hope. Dear Christian, how might you move forward daily? Repent, keep clinging to Jesus. The first of Martin Luther's famous 95 Theses is this: **"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."**

Now this experience for us is profound, but it's more profound when we understand how it might happen. Here we return again to consider **The Christ Part 2**.

Look with me at Jesus' final parable in **Luke 13:6-9**.

Jesus is actually returning to themes from Micah 7 here and the Jewish hearers of this would have picked up on Jesus' theme immediately. Israel in the Old Testament was the vineyard of God. As Jesus is preaching and teaching, and the Jews are resisting him, they are proving that God's vineyard is bare. Later in Luke Jesus will talk about the way national Israel will be judged because they failed to produce the fruit of faith and repentance.

But this passage is not only in reference to Israel. Here we see the heart of Jesus towards all. The opening verses of Micah 7 paint a stunning picture: the vine is bare, the fruit is gone.

The natural state of our hearts, the natural state of Israel, the natural state of the church is not fruitfulness but barrenness. That's why fire kindles, that's why the master is right and justified to cut it down.

But here we see the vinedresser who says, "Hold up, let me do some work."

Here, just as we saw in the opening, judgement is stayed by the work of Jesus but only for a time.

Now, this is a parable so we need to be careful how we read it. There is no division in the Trinity. The Father is not an angry dad, and Jesus is this gracious son who has to win him over. We already saw that Jesus himself is zealous for judgement alongside the Father.

But what we see here instead is the era of a unique time. A time when judgement is suspended for the work of the vinedresser.

The tension of the cross upholds God's rightful desire for righteous judgement and God's holy desire for salvation and repentance. The two are at odds in every worldly analogy, but it's never at odds in the cross. This is the work Jesus has left to do. He is going to till the soil of unbelieving hearts with the base of the cross: both Israel, and Gentiles will have an opportunity to respond on account of this work.

John Stott says of the cross: **"In the cross of Christ, justice and mercy kiss each other. God's justice is satisfied by the death of his Son, and his mercy is extended to all who believe in him...The cross is the only place where justice and mercy can meet, because it is the only place where God's holiness and love are both fully displayed. In the cross, God's holiness is vindicated, but his love is also triumphant."**

Look at how Micah 7, closes: **Micah 7:18-20.**

Judgement is a certainty. Jesus says so himself. One day the era of assessing fruit will be done and then the axe falls.

But now, our savior under the distress of the cross, has put himself to work. Crisis is coming. Judgement will fall to all. But will you find relief from that in the crisis of the cross? Will you see that apart from Jesus taking this judgement for you, there is no hope?

But if we find peace through the crisis of the cross, we find the relief of judgement in eternity. We find the welcome of the Father, the embrace of the resurrected Son, and the immediate intimacy of the Spirit.

You will ultimately reconcile yourself on account of the cross. No one avoids it. But now is the time to reconcile yourself with it through faith in Jesus. The savior is at work, repent and believe. And put yourself daily to the unity we have with the Father through the Son even when we live in an age of division.