LUKE 12:54-56

Interpreting the Time

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If you have your Bibles with you today, please turn with me to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 12. This morning, I'll read for us three verses. Verses 54 through 56. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word. Lord, we thank You that You are the God who has spoken. Lord, help us to be the people who would listen Lord, help us to hear Your Word and to read it for ourselves in a manner that is distinct from every other form of communication or expression of literature that we could ever even imagine. Because Your Word is exalted above all things but Your name.

This we know. And so, Father, help us to so elevate the reading of Your Word in our hearts and minds that we would agree with the Scriptures that say, let God be true and all men be liars. Lord, may Your Word be that touchstone of truth that validates propositions.

May it be for us the source of our morality, the grounds of our decisions. May it be the foundation of our knowledge of ourself and of You, because You have told us who You are. You've told us who we are. You've told us how we may come to know You and have that irreparable gap of sin corrected, bridged, fixed.

So, Father, we pray that we would expect heavenly, miraculous things when Your Word is opened and read. And for this, we need Your Spirit to

accompany it and to bless us. Father, we pray that inasmuch as the sermon that follows is faithful, Lord, we pray that You would bless that as well. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen. Luke 12, beginning with verse 54, the Word of God. He 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? This ends the reading of God's Word. But are we really thankful? That Scripture called us hypocrites. I don't like being called a hypocrite. Anybody like that? Not me. What does it mean to be called a hypocrite? It would be similar, kids, to being called a poser. You don't want to be called a poser, That's not what the cool kids wanted to be called as recently as ten years ago, but things change quickly. I hope being a poser isn't a good thing today. It means to be very foolish and even culpable of pretending to be wise or smart or good when in reality you're not those things. It's play acting. It's acting over the top. It's pretending. Well, why does Jesus call those who are actually listening to him, the crowds that are following him, hypocrites?

And what does that have to do with us today? What lesson can we learn? As a Christian and as a pastor, when I read the Bible and I see something like this, I'm always trying to recreate in my mind the scene, the context, and understand where I fit in that narrative and what it says to me.

Because surely I stand with those who are following Christ in the crowds. And Jesus does not say here that some of you are hypocrites. He says it in an inclusive manner. And indeed, there is not a sin listed in the Bible that does not in some way, shape, or form touch upon my own heart.

I am called to repent and believe. Well, how does this text call me to that? Let me first tell you how it doesn't call me to that. It does not call me to repent of not understanding eschatology as well as I might.

Eschatology is the theology or the doctrines associated with Christ's second coming. Christ came once on Christmas. He was incarnate by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary. He lived His life. He died. He was crucified. He was buried. He was raised again. He ascended into heaven. That's His first coming. But He's coming again.

Eschatology is the study of the end times, the last times, His ultimate return. And there are a variety of thoughts and opinions and theologies built around how we conceive that to be. Maybe He's going to come after a thousand years of His saints reigning. Maybe He's going to come and then reign for a thousand years. Maybe the thousand years are now and He's reigning from the throne of heaven. For those of you who have taken a Sunday school class, Postmill, premill, and amill.

Different schools of thought on the end times. And we can disagree and debate about whether there's going to be a rapture, and when is the tribulation going to be, and we can go on and on and on. Who are the two witnesses? What does exactly the beast mean in Revelation? And we can get tied up in knots sometimes over those details.

If you were to go to like a Christian book website, like Christian book distributors, you'll find that to this day, and it's been this way for a long, long time, since at least the 60s, the single largest category of Christian publication concerns eschatology. The end times. Books are written on that at a rate of probably one a day.

This text is not about eschatology. In fact, this text, although it has something maybe to do with eschatology, that's not what it's about. It's not calling anyone a hypocrite because they've got the wrong eschatological

framework or don't understand exactly what the rapture is going to be. Those questions are irrelevant to this text.

One of the biggest problems we have in addressing this text is because it has to do with interpreting the times. We automatically slip into this thought that abstracts everything Jesus has said into this distant future that might not even occur in our lifetime. Why am I so insistent upon noting this and excluding it from a possibility of application?

Because Jesus tells His auditors that they are hypocrites because they don't understand the present time. Did you notice that word? He's not talking about when He's going to come as a thief in the night. He's not talking about when the Master is going to come home from the wedding banquet that He was referring to just verses earlier in chapter 12 of Luke. He's telling His people, His crowds, those He has come to love and to save, He's saying, you are hypocrites because you don't understand your time, this time, this opportunity. You don't understand today.

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? the time of Jesus' first coming. Think back to what's happened earlier in this extended conversation described for us in Luke chapter 12. Jesus is teaching and preaching about the kingdom and about how knowing Jesus is the one thing necessary. Acknowledging Him before men is the one thing necessary to have life and have it eternally.

And someone interrupts Him and says, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me. Talk about not understanding the time. Could you imagine if I was handing out thousand dollar bills? Do they even still make them anymore? And you come up to me and say, hey, I'd like a quarter. Talk about missing the point.

Understanding the present time is something that is imperative for the follower of Christ. And we must seek to interpret the times, the present

time, even for us, for two reasons. First is that we can, and second is that we ought. We can. Sometimes we look at the world around us, and we throw up our hands and say, I can't make any sense of this.

Think about if those of you who are disciplined to read your news broadly rather than just have one or two sources and kind of create your little echo chamber where your particular perspective is always 100% right and everyone else is an idiot. That's how we get our news today. Sorry, everybody. I probably offended everyone. I'm offended. We might, if we're a little more savvy, recognize that everything we read from everybody in a post-modern world is all biased. And we might critically say, yeah, no, I don't know if I can believe everything from that source, and half of you are thinking that the other half ought to be listening to what I just said. You all ought to be listening.

If we are mature enough to recognize how information and data and narrative is molded and foisted upon you, and we all tend to drink it in and imbibe it to our hearts' destruction, we might, recognizing that thing, how can we even know what's happening?

How can we know what really happened on these dates of such great significance? How can we know what's really happening overseas when it's all being told to us by people with an agenda? Even the people we like the most. And you might throw your hands up and say, how can I interpret the times I live in? How can I even know what's going on? Everybody's lying all the time. Amen?

Well, Jesus seems to say we're capable of interpreting the times in a way that is of great spiritual significance. He's not telling us that we might and ought to understand the sociopolitical realities globally. But he's saying something about interpreting our times that he finds it inexcusable if we fail. We can do so. Jesus establishes that by saying that there are certain things you yourself can take note of that you yourself know bring cer-

tain effects. And he points them to the weather. A notoriously difficult thing to forecast. Keep in mind, we're living in the ancient land of Israel. And we see in the West, what's to the West of Israel?

The Mediterranean Sea. And we see a cloud rising in the West. That's a word that could have the idea of increasing. It's coming closer to us. And we think, well, there's mountains from Galilee down to Judea. We're about to get some rain. We are able to look and see a cloud rising in the west and we say at once, a shower is coming. And so it happens. There are certain things we are able to see and immediately recognize the causality and the guaranteed effect and say, oh, it's going to rain.

And we're able to plan our picnics accordingly. What about if there's a south wind blowing? What's south of Israel? Desert. And we see a wind coming from there and it's like if you're living in Southern California where Carrie and I lived and raised our kids and pastored there for 16 years, when those Santa Ana winds come, I know it's going to be a scorching heat. I don't have to wonder. And I decide, okay, I'm not walking to work on that day. I plan accordingly. I know there will be a scorching heat and it happens.

Jesus is underscoring the fact that despite the reality that there are many things that you can't put together and don't have the data to come up with a working hypothesis. He says there are some things that you can know for certain. There are some things, in fact, the certainty of which render you without excuse if you are not prepared. If a cloud rises in the West and is coming inland, and you plan your barbecue to be outdoors that evening, that's on you. If you do not prepare for a scorching heat, despite the fact that a south wind came up that morning, you could have and should have known that.

You see, there are things we can know. And the things that we can know are sufficient for us to interpret the time to our benefit. Hold that

thought. Jesus has established that we are able, we have the intellectual ability to know certain things. We see certain events happen and we understand causality such that we are sure of certain outcomes and so it happens. We cannot plead ignorance of what's happening. Secondly, not only can we, but we ought to. we ought to.

That word ought is of more significance in understanding the human condition than most other words in the English language. When I have opportunities to talk to atheists about things like morality, things about whether or not there's a God, whether or not humans are distinct from the other species, this is a word I come back to a lot. the word ought. You see, even if all cultures don't agree exactly on all the things that are right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, the fact is that humans are uniquely, uniquely, constantly aware of this category we call moral imperatives. Even if we don't all agree on the details, it is inarguably the case that all humans somehow and for some reason believe that there are simply some things that must happen because it is right and good and proper for them to happen. Even if we disagree on what that thing is, the fact that we are all conditioned somehow to know right from wrong, however badly we have skewed it, that we have those categories is a profound consequence in thinking about the human condition. The fact that everybody is coded, designed, programmed in such a way that they think and feel as moral creatures. Our morality touches upon our responsibility to be wise with today.

Jesus calls His listeners hypocrites. And that is a word that is flush with moral overtones. Being called a hypocrite doesn't mean you're ignorant. It means you are willfully obstinate. It doesn't mean that you don't have all the facts. It means that there is an extent to which you are being deceived and deceitful with the facts. To be called a hypocrite is much like being called a fool in the Old Testament. It is a moral shortcoming, not an intellectual defect.

We have a moral necessity to take those things we know and to draw conclusions appropriately about how we are going to interpret the day that we're living in. We know, because God's Word has said so, that some things are right, some things are wrong, some things are true, some things are false, some things are good, some things are bad. And we are called to recognize those truths that are clearly and manifestly made clear in His Word We are to use them as the lens through which we look at the world around us.

What if God's people, listening to Jesus preach in His first century context, had been apprised of all that the Old Testament taught concerning the coming of the Messiah, had chosen not to cram that through their own preferential lens of building a worldly earth, and looked instead to Jesus who would be the Lamb who takes away His people's sin. Instead of the King who would simply defeat all the bad guys in the world, right now, right here, for my earthly benefit today.

What if they had chosen to take everything God had made clear through prophets like Micah, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah, going all the way back to Moses, and even Abram? And what if they had looked at all of that data and interpreted the coming of Jesus in light of all that had been made clear in Scripture? They would have interpreted the time. They would have responded in the same way that that first Pentecost Day sermon auditors responded. What must we do to be saved? Instead, they said, Jesus, this is what you could do to save us. Tell my brother to divide his inheritance." Are you going to come now to bring the kingdom?

Despite the fact that he has been declaring the forgiveness of sins, that question was asked with a view towards the continued persistence of Roman legion in Palestine. There is a moral necessity to take what God has made clear and interpret today in light of that. Because although you cannot unreservedly accept everything you hear from any media outlet that

you could possibly come across on the internet, you can unreservedly put your confidence in every single word. Not one jot or tittle is useless, failed, or incorrect. The Word of God is a rock upon which to build, and it is a lens by which we can see.

Will we interpret the time of Christ's presence among us correctly? When Jesus says this to these people listening, He is basically rebuking them for not thinking about the great privilege that it is to not only be alive at the time of Jesus, but to be present in His company. It's like the apostles in their role as disciples wanting to know why they can't be fasting when Jesus says, you don't fast when the bridegroom is with you.

Understand the time. This is a time for following Jesus, for loving Him, for serving Him, for obeying Him, for glorying in the privilege of being in fellowship with Him. This isn't a time for bemoaning and bewailing. This is a time for celebration. This is a time for repentance, which is its own kind of celebration. One of my favorite words in the Bible, repent. The thought that it is possible opens up a world of hope and the very gates of glory itself.

The fact that something has been done about my guilt and my shame by this Jesus Christ who invites me to turn to Him, because of what the Scriptures have said about this Jesus, and what I have heard about Him through the preaching of His servants and the raising of godly parents, I know that I can turn to Jesus with repentance, believing in Him, and be saved. I interpret the time. How do we interpret the time? And do we give the weight to what the time is really all about that it deserves?

Or are we distracted like so many cats that want to play in the boxes and miss out on the toy within on Christmas morn? when we as Christians are more upset about things we can't know for certain about socio-politics than we are ecstatic over the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. When we find it much more important to argue about politics than to per-

suade others of the gospel. Brothers and sisters, we have a problem. And I would be so bold as to say that you and I are hypocrites.

These times, the entire timeline of this world, from creation through the second return of Christ, exists for one purpose. One purpose that has multiple parts, but one purpose. To glorify God. And our one job as the church, preeminent, is to make disciples. We make disciples by leading people to the Jesus Christ, who is the eternal Son of God, who gave His life and died that sinners who repent and believe on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life. And if that message does not overmaster your social platform, maybe you're not interpreting the time. Maybe I'm not interpreting the time. Maybe I'm wasting some of my time. I kind of hope this sermon hurts you as bad as it hurt me to write it.

Full confession. This week, I've been reading this series of books that are fantasy fiction, okay? We're talking swords, goblins, ogres. I was raised on Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Talk to the elders if that's grounds for firing me. I sure hope not. I like a good story with elves and dwarves and goblins and hobbits and all the rest, but I got so upset with this series of books because one of the characters was such a jerk. I literally got upset and had to put it down and say, I'm not reading that author anymore. Carrie knows exactly what I'm talking about. I was disgusted.

Does it make any sense on God's green earth that my emotions could be so moved by something so imaginary and foolish? I was more upset about that than I am that most of the people on my street are facing an eternity without Christ. Do you ever have thoughts like that? Quote the Puritans, those kinds of thoughts are damp and qualmy. It used to actually be a word in the English language. It means exactly what it sounds like, qualmy. I don't do as good a job interpreting the time as I need to.

The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians and he says to them, he says, live in love or walk in love. Walk as children of light. Live in the light is

how it's translated some. And he gives them a third command. He says, walk wisely. Walk wisely. Making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. That is what interpreting the time has to do with. Making the most of this opportunity. What is the most that you can make of any opportunity?

Those who win souls are wise. Is everything you do, whether it's talking about politics or recipes or fantasy literature, is everything you do in your mind and heart aimed at building some relationship or connection in which you can, to use my old young life phrase, win the right to be heard? Become all things to all men that by any means you might win some?

Sounds like a shockingly Arminian doctrine, but yet I'm quoting the Apostle Paul in his Corinthian correspondence. Do you find yourself, whether you are a new Christian or a seasoned, ordained servant, wherever you are in that spectrum, thinking, how can I use this conversation to glorify God? And maybe, just maybe, be part of God's story of what He's doing. That amazing person I'm debating with or talking to, who is created in God's image, has the capacity to live for eternity in the courts of glory. And do I long to be a part of that story?

Just even a small part, Lord. Just one sentence in the spiritual biography of that person. One word. Give me one word in the story of what you're doing in their life. And I will lay aside my pride, my ego, my opinion about global things I barely understand. That's interpreting the times. Loving your neighbor. Those who even count themselves your enemies, and you in your foolishness consider enemies. Loving them. Love is a big word. Hate is powerful, but love is a bigger word.

Do you interpret the time? and understand that the presence of the Jesus who came and who reigns in heaven changes everything and needs to affect everything. Everything from the silly books you read that are about fantasy worlds, which can be redemptively used, to the conversations

at the mailbox, to the live streams you subscribe to, The social media platforms that you vent on.

Is Jesus manifestly present? Is your desire to express to others His presence with you and for you now and His invitation to them a motivating factor at the very least? Or are we like these ancient Israelites, experts at the weather and amateurs at Jesus? Far better to be an expert at Jesus than an amateur on the weather. Amen?

I hope that each of you know that whether you are shaded red or blue on November 4th, I love you dearly. I couldn't care less what your politics are. Truly, could not care less. I literally don't care. What I care about is that you know Jesus and will work hard to glorify Him this week. and maybe share something of what He's done for you with one other person.

Political parties don't last. Nations don't last. The kingdom of God is eternal. And brothers and sisters, that is what you are a part of. Your citizenship is in heaven. And you are an ambassador of Christ. And we have an opportunity to show what that means. And if the church would do that, instead of dropping to the lowest common denominator and getting dragged into the muck. What a glorious thought. What a glorious thought. Interpret the time. Christ is here by His Spirit. He is present by His Word. He is here. He is alive. And He desires to use you to draw someone close to Him. Who is Jesus to you? How do you interpret Him? Do you interpret Him just as another socio-political figure? Do you interpret Him just as a good teacher? If so, you are not interpreting the time well. You're making a dreadful mistake. He is God come in the flesh. He's not a teacher God sent, He is God come as a teacher. Makes all the difference in the world.

What has Jesus done for you? Has He just taught you certain things and sort of refined your ethical system? Or has He hung on a cross and died to pay the penalty for your sins? A penalty that you can't pay yourself, short of going to hell for eternity. Has He come to take on Himself the

judgments of a holy God against the sinfulness of people like me and you? Has He done that for you?

Because He invites all who are weary and heavy laden to come to Him. You are invited to come to Him. Just as you are. with all of your sin and hold out that beggar's hand and receive and accept and rest on him for salvation." You are invited to answer this question, what has Jesus done for you with this answer, He died for me as the Son of God that my sins might be forgiven and I might have a sure hope of heaven.

Has He done that for you? And dear Christian, are you committed to interpreting the time well? Are you committed to looking at the time that Jesus has given you and considering your gifts and saying, how can I be the best blessing to others? And if the best blessing that you think you can be is to put a band-aid on someone having a heart attack, you're not right.

You can start the CPR. You can tell people what God has done for you in Christ. You can proclaim the gospel. You can share your testimony and point people to the blood of the Lamb. You can invite people to be a part of the glorious kingdom of the living Savior, who at this present time, reigns from the throne of heaven.

Almighty God, we ask Your blessings upon us. And Father, we humbly confess, Lord I confess, that so often I, in my own practice, do not appear to be interpreting the times well. I get so upset and angry even, and I'm so distracted by things that are so temporary and of such little eternal worth. Father, help me to be heavenly minded. Help me to consider myself first and foremost utterly committed to You, Lord Christ, a citizen of Your kingdom.

Lord, give me a heart that loves and respects as many image bearers of the living God as I encounter. And make it evident to all that that is the case. Father, help me to know that today is a great day of salvation. Not only is it today a day in which I can walk closer to You and be more and

more sanctified by Your Spirit as I work out the salvation You've given me with fear and trembling, Lord, that is true and precious. Lord, help me also to see that today is a day of your salvation for many countless people around the world who today might hear an invitation to come with repentance and to believe on Christ and to live and to have their attitudes slowly but surely, perhaps even quickly and catastrophically changed and reoriented towards you and away from the things of this world that divide and anger and frustrate. Father, bless us. Bless your church. Bless this world. Increase your gospel. We ask all these things in Jesus' name, Amen.



Pastor Robert Bjerkaas

147 Sermons

Pastor Bob serves as Senior Pastor of Columbia Presbyterian Church in Columbia, Maryland, a role he began in January 2024. He served as senior pastor at Trinity Presbyterian Church in St Albans, VT from 1999 – 2007. He was also Senior Pastor of Church in the Canyon in Calabasas, California,...