

Caution Ahead: It's About Time

Luke 12:54-13:9

Introduction: "Until I am measured, I am unknown, yet how you miss me when I've flown." The answer to that riddle is the same as Gollum's riddle to Bilbo Baggins in "The Hobbit":

*This thing all things devours
Birds, beasts, trees and flowers
Gnaws iron, bites steel
Grinds hard stones to meal
Slays kings, ruins town
And beat high mountains down*

The answer, of course, is **time**. Time is something we cannot turn back, are anxious to add to, and according to DC Talk (yep, some of you know what I'm talking about), it is tick, tick, ticking away. We can and will focus on the changing matters of our time, what will happen to our country and world in coming generations, but more importantly, we all have a time frame that we have to think about individually.

Jesus continues His discourse of warning His disciples about the dangers ahead (both external and internal), but the scope of the discourse shifts. Instead of solely focusing on His followers, He extends the conversation to the crowds, which numbered in the thousands (Luke 12:1). This was directed at all the people there, all of Israel, and by implication, all of us. The issue for all the people Jesus addressed is the issue of time. We are all on borrowed time, not assured of tomorrow, so what we do with it, and what we do with knowledge of it today matters eternally.

See the signs (54-56)

Luke 12:54-56 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. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat,' and it happens. ⁵⁶ 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?**

- **Signs predict**

Jesus pointed out the obvious to declare the absurd. He used a simple weather gauge to remind the people that they all were forecasters, without the use of Doppler, satellite, or a weather app to know what's on the horizon. When they saw clouds rising from the west, off the coast, they knew rain was coming. When winds would come up from the South during certain times of the year, they know they would bring with them the heat from the Sinai Peninsula. Its amazing to me that with all the sophistication of weather instrumentation, we know what weather is coming simply by the time of year and observing with our senses. When the Santa Ana's pick up, we know hot, arid, dry weather is coming. When we see clouds from the Pacific, we know rain is coming. And to top all of these, a friend told me a few Fridays ago that she knew rain was coming because her newly replaced hip acted up. I didn't know they added a weather chip at the surgery, but what a country we live in!

- **Signs declare**

In a dramatic turn of voice, Jesus called out the crowd as **hypocrites!** They could easily predict the weather, but could not come to grips with the truth that was standing right in front of them. It did not take a degree in meteorology to know that heavy coastal clouds mean rain (especially when you are

already getting wet), and it does not take a degree in theology to see that standing right in front of them was the promised Messiah, the perfect, sinless Savior who displayed His power over and over by the miraculous power that only Deity could produce. This crowd could cry out for more evidence, but they were simply delaying what they knew to be true. They could cry out for more time, but the reality of the present time meant that what they needed was right in front of them, and they were not assured of tomorrow. Jesus made that last fact abundantly clear with His second illustration.

Settle up (57-59)

Luke 12:57-59 "And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸ As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. ⁵⁹ I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny."

- **See yourself**

It is interesting that Jesus called the crowds into hypocrisy, what was typically reserved for the religious leaders. But He specifically called each person to examine his or her life, not a corporate body or general assembly. Each one had to view himself in terms of their need and the truth. When we see things in the plural instead of singular, or corporate instead of individual we begin to make excuses, shift blame, and switch the focus. But Jesus point was simple: **When it comes to time, every person must answer for himself.** Each is accountable for his sin, regardless of the setup, background, or situation. So each person must understand that your life is one that is heading toward a **judge**, heading toward a court room, and heading toward a ruling that will determine one's eternal state.

- **Settle now – before your options are gone**

What was Jesus' point? Simple, once a debtor gets INTO the courtroom, it is too late. If there is a debt, the person should try to settle **out of court** with the magistrate, or in this case, the official who conducted the preliminary hearing. Once the judgment came to full court, the judge had no choice but to rule for a prison sentence that would be more than the accused could pay. Jesus was giving warning to the crowd that if they waited until the point of death (or the end of personal time), it would be too late and their eternal status would be sealed. For the crowd, the time to admit their sin, confess it, turn from it to their Savior was NOW. He was standing right in front of them, ready to offer the freeing relationship brought about by forgiveness. It is the same offer that is given today, this morning in fact, for those who realize their debt of sin and their inability to pay it off, except for a lifetime separated from God in hell. But how do we know that is what Jesus was calling them to do? *Because what Jesus said next is of the utmost importance to the issue of time.*

Turn Around (13:1-5)

Luke 13:1-5 There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you **repent**, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you **repent**, you will all likewise perish."

- **Wrong Thinking Exposed**

On the tail end of this discussion, a group from the crowd interjected and told Jesus about a tragedy (most likely a recent one) where there was a group from Galilee (Jesus' home) who had been killed by

Pilate, the Roman overseer of the area, on the Temple Mount during a feast time. This was an event NOT recorded by historians like Josephus, though many other similar examples were (Pilate was known for riling up the Jews, like marching his troops into Jerusalem with symbols of idols that were offensive to the Jews - simply to offend). Most likely these Galileans had reacted, complained, or resisted to an offense and were killed as seditionists (a capital offense to the Romans). This was a known event but there are several reasons the crowd brought this event up to Jesus at this time, and they had to do with their thinking.

The statement or interjection from the crowd exposed a few areas of wrong thinking:

1. **The Rope-a-Dope** – They tried to get the force of Jesus' statement off of themselves. In other words, it is always easier to focus on *other people* than to deal with our own sin. This situation was especially **controversial**, and it is always easier to engage in these types of discussions. Its easier to point out what's wrong with the church, what happened to the latest celebrity pastor or how someone else is doing rather than come to grips with the reality of our own life. The crowd was trying to draw Jesus' eye away from themselves onto something seemingly more interesting and worse.
2. **A Political Engagement** – They brought up issues of politics, including the chief enemy named Pilate, as a basis of what was wrong. Jesus was speaking about knowing the signs of the present time, that division would come, and that there was judgment coming. Pilate and Rome were seen as the mortal enemies of the Jews, and politics was brought up because many believed that until Rome was physically removed, the people living in Israel could not truly be saved. Two observations at this point: 1) Jesus was well aware of current events and the politics of the day. He was not ignorant or uninformed of what was going on, but was willing to talk about these things as starting points of conversation. 2) Jesus NEVER pointed to earthly politics as the answer or solution to mans problem. Government has a God given mandate and roll in the life of culture (a servant of God to carry out wrath on the wrongdoer, receive taxes, etc - Rom. 13:1-7), but until Jesus establishes His Kingdom, it will be an imperfect governance. But notice also how Jesus turned a political conversation into a theological one.
3. **A Theological misunderstanding** – The crowd had a wrong view of God, sin, and punishment. In the multitudes mind hidden or overt sin would lead to dire consequence from God. This is seen back in the OT with Jobs friends questioning him as to the reason God had taken everything away. Eliphaz explained to Job "*Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?*" (Job 4:7). We see in the NT where Jesus was questioned whether a man born blind was a sinner or if his parents had done something sinful to deserve this fate (John 9:1-3). This mindset was prevalent in the day - when something bad happened, it had to be attributed to some direct sin committed.
But instead of answering this wrong thinking directly, Jesus went one step further to make His point. He did not address the morality of Pilate, the sin of the Galileans, nor what was deserved. He brought up the 18 people who were caught in a construction accident at the pool of Siloam. This was the end of Hezekiah's tunnel where an outside spring was brought safely inside the walls of Jerusalem. Apparently during construction a tower fell on these unsuspecting people. In Jewish mindset, these people would have certainly had some sin against the law in their life that brought about this tragedy. But Jesus did not entertain this thought, nor explain it away. His message was simple:

"Do you think the Galileans (that died) were worse than other Galileans"

"Do you think those that died at Siloam were worse sinners than all others in Jerusalem?"

"No, but unless YOU REPENT, you will all likewise perish!"

The answer to the riddle of sin and time is the same for everyone. Jesus called the crowd to one simple response: REPENT. But what does that mean? What does it mean for us to repent as Jesus commanded?

- **Repentance Commanded**

Definition:

The word Jesus used for repent is the word *metanoia*, which means "to change ones thinking". At its core, repentance means a change, and particularly at the level of our thinking. We are called to **love** the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind (Matt. 22:37), but that is an impossibility because our minds have been corrupted by sin. This is why we need faith to save, but that faith can only come from God as a gift of His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). Because He gives us faith, we can respond in belief. In order to be able to love God with our mind and heart, He had to give us another gift, that of repentance, which is connected with faith. **Repentance is first and foremost an act of God that He gifts to us.** We could not earn it nor conjure it up in our mind, but it had to be sourced in God alone. The crowd Jesus spoke with believed they could be saved apart from a radical work inside them, instead thinking they could keep the Law enough externally to satisfy God's wrath, failing to realize that no one can ever DO enough to save themselves.

Romans 2:4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to **repentance**?

2 Timothy 2:24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them **repentance** leading to a knowledge of the truth,

*"To summarize, genuine repentance begins with a work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the sinner, whereby He regenerates the heart, illumines the mind, and exposes error by a revelation of divine truth. Because of this divine work, the sinner's **mind is changed** and his view of reality is radically altered – especially with regard to God, self, sin, and the way of salvation."¹*

Work:

The work of repentance is brought to us by God's grace at salvation, and it means that we must see ourselves first and foremost as sinners in light of God's holiness and glory. In coming to grips with this sin, we stop making excuses and confess our sin to the Lord, receiving the forgiveness of Jesus who paid for every one of my sins on the cross. This frees me to turn my mind from my sin to God, from myself to God, and from idols to Christ. It is a 180 degree change (not, as Jason Kidd said when he first came to the NBA with the Mavericks - "I'm going to help this franchise turnaround 360 degrees). This separates repentance from remorse. Remorse means we feel bad, will try to do our best to change, but will never find any peace nor power to truly change.

2 Corinthians 7:9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into **repenting**. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.¹⁰ For godly grief produces a **repentance** that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

How do we experientially the difference?

¹ Paul Washer, "The Gospel Call and True Salvation", p. 6.

“One of the greatest evidences of true conversion is not sinless perfection, as some have erroneously supposed. Instead, it is sensitivity to sin, transparency before God regarding sin, and open confession of sin.”²

“The evidence that a person has truly repented unto salvation is that he continues repenting throughout the full course of his life.” (Washer, p. 19)

Result:

The result of repentance is a movement away from idols, or anything that would take the place of God, and toward Christ, including loving and serving Him.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how **you turned to God** from idols **to serve the living and true God**,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

What does all this mean? It means that repentance is not only essential in our salvation, it is equally important to our maturation or growth as a believer. Repentance is not secondary, optional, or unimportant. It is a gift that God gives us and brings **comfort** to us knowing that God not only forgives but continues to change us. It means that **how we think** is important to how we interact with God and how we respond in obedience. This means:

- 1) We must engage in a growth of our knowledge of God and Christ if we are going to be sanctified. When we think wrongly, we will inevitably live wrongly
- 2) Our life of repentance is NOT only about the external or overt sins we commit. Most often when we talk about repentance we talk about sins we've committed: lying, lust, sexual sin, anger, or things we say. However, as we grow in maturation, we realize that the way we think about ourselves in light of God and other is what truly needs to change. Obedience is a necessary response and result of salvation, just as fruit of sin is a result of selfish, prideful, and idolatrous thinking. We begin to realize that it is our thinking that keep us from loving Christ and being truly obedient.
- 3) We must remember that the discipline of our thinking then is as important as the other disciplines we engage in. We often move immediately to external remedies to grow, not realizing that we must constantly come to grips with our position and identity in Christ that was purchased in our salvation and we continually realize it by a repentant mind.

*"At conversion, a person begins to see God and himself as never before. This greater revelation of God's holiness and righteousness leads to a greater revelation of self, which, in turn, results in a repentance or brokenness over sin. Nevertheless, the believer is not left in despair, for he is also afforded a greater revelation of the grace of God in the face of Christ, which leads to joy unspeakable. **This cycle simply repeats itself throughout the Christian life.** As the years pass, the Christian sees more of God and more of self, resulting in a greater and **deeper brokenness.** Yet all the while, the Christian's joy grows in equal measure because he is privy to greater and greater revelations of the love, grace, and mercy of God in the person and work of Christ. Not only this, but a great interchange occurs in that the Christian learns to rest less and less in his own performance and more and more on the perfect work of Christ. **Thus, his joy is not only increased, but it also becomes more consistent and stable. he has left off putting***

² Washer, p. 11

confidence in the flesh, which is idolatry, and is resting in the virtue and merits of Christ, which is true Christian piety."³

- **Time is Borrowed (13:6-9)**

Luke 13:6 And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' ⁸ And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹ Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Jesus concluded His teaching with a final warning. Telling a parable about a fig tree (a favorite description of the Jews), He told of a tree that refused to produce fruit. For three years, nothing, and the owner was ready to cut it down. But the vinedresser asked for another year to give the tree every opportunity to produce the necessary fruit. The meaning was clear for His audience: **the time of salvation was now because the time of judgment was coming soon.**

This is exactly what we all have to grapple with in terms of time. We are all living on borrowed time - it is not up to us how long we live. Have you seen the signs? Have you settled up? Have you turned from your sin to Christ? Today is the day.

Concluding thoughts for discussion:

- The Jews of the day had a wrong view of God in terms of natural disasters and tragedy. What are ways that we think wrongly about God today when those things happen? What do we struggle to come to grips with when the "innocent" suffer?
- What insight do we get from Jesus in terms how we interact with culture, politics, and debate?
- What is a good definition of repentance? Why is a focus on repentance so important in our focus on the gospel?
- What does repentance look like for those who are believers? What are areas of our "mind and heart" that we need to repent of often?

³ Washer, p. 20-21