

As Jesus comes to the end of his sermon he turns away from his disciples to address the crowd as a whole. He has been speaking about his return, but now he applies this to everyone. Jesus is coming back – will we be ready? There is only one right response to Jesus, and that's repentance and trust in him. So Jesus gives us three reasons why we should respond to him and his words now.

GOD'S JUDGEMENT IS COMING SOON (Vs 49-53)

What Jesus says in vs 49 and 51 is a far cry from what you usually imagine is Jesus' reason for coming into our world. Jesus says he has come to bring division. We struggle with this because we misread that verse from earlier in Luke at Christmas. The angels promise "Peace on earth on all his favour rests". Yet even at the start of the gospel there is the hint of division - between those on whom God's favour rests and those on whom it doesn't. The peace the angel promises is peace with God. If it was peace on the earth then we'd have to say Jesus has categorically failed.

That statement makes no sense unless we realise we don't have peace with God. Many people find it hard to face up to that fact. But the Bible points out that actually we are like participants in a coup who have set up a rival government on this world against its rightful ruler.

So when the angel comes proclaiming "peace on earth" he is saying "there is mercy available". The ruler is coming to claim back his throne, but there is a way that you can receive mercy, rather than justice.

As Jesus is heading towards the end of his public ministry he is saying "that time is getting shorter". There will be a time of division, a time when it will be clear who knows God's favour and who doesn't. That division will be clearer than the division between families. The time is now for everyone to respond to Jesus' words.

What Jesus says in vs 52 and 53 is one of the uncomfortable passages in the Bible. If you are a Christian these verses may be very painful for you as you think of relatives who don't or didn't trust Christ. At this point in Luke he is calling each of us to make a decision for ourselves – he is saying "how you relate to me is far more important than even your family ties". Yet it's at those points of greatest cost where we see how much Christ means to us. But there is comfort – God saves. Keep praying. But we must also remember that is that God is a God of the family and loves to work through entire families (just see many examples in Acts). So trust him for your family.

Jesus says all this in the context of great love. You might hate the idea of these warnings because you think they can only come from someone who enjoys making you squirm. However, notice what Jesus says in verse 50. “I have a baptism to undergo and how distressed I am until it is completed”. This distressing baptism is Jesus’ death. He is heading towards Jerusalem where he will suffer and die. It is no ordinary death – in this death he is taking the wrath of God on himself. He is suffering so we can receive the mercy he offers. He is being cut off so we can be included. So as Jesus gives this call to repent and this warning – it’s out of love and urgency.

GOD’S PLAN IS REVEALED (Vs 54-56)

God has made his plans, his timetables for us very clear.

We cannot say we’ve never been told. In fact, Jesus says, they are as clear as the sky. You know when certain clouds form, you know what the weather will be like. Now, remember Jesus is speaking in Israel – the weather is far more predictable than an island like Britain. (I doubt he’d use that illustration with us – we can’t predict what the next few hours will be like). But the point remains the same. We know how to go about our business. We make plans. We take things into account. If we know something is going to happen tomorrow we make plans to deal with it. When we know there will be a tube strike and we need to be in the city, we make other arrangements.

However so many people don’t do that with things about God.

That’s why Jesus calls the crowd “hypocrites”. Now, we’ve heard that word before haven’t we? Jesus begins Luke 12 by describing the Pharisees as hypocrites. Do you remember what we said about that statement when we looked at it? Jesus wasn’t saying that the Pharisees were all conmen, deceiving the people. His bigger point was that they were different on the inside – in their heart- than they were on the outside (whether they realised it or not). Now Jesus is saying this attitude, this yeast of the Pharisees (as he has called it), has begun to spread.

So what should they have known? These are Jews. They knew the Old Testament well. They were children of Abraham who were descendants of those who were lead out of Egypt into the Promised Land. They knew the promises of God. They have seen John the Baptist. He was a weird guy, who came dressed strangely, eating locusts. He had one message – “Repent”. He came preparing the way for Jesus. Crowds flocked into the wilderness to hear him, and to be baptised by him. He was

the talk of the town. Everyone wanted to see and hear John. The crowds listening to Jesus now would probably have been there.

John made it very clear that Jesus was the one he had been waiting for. Jesus publicly begins his ministry by reading from Isaiah and saying “I am the one he wrote about”. He did what the Christ, the Messiah came to do. He showed he was God. The signs were clear.

The crowds knew, or at least they had heard, that the kingdom of God was near – that the time for repentance and casting yourself on the mercy of God was now. But they didn’t do it. They came to hear, but they didn’t respond. They were curious, they were not desperate. They didn’t cling to Jesus in the way you’d cling to a waterproof in a storm. They looked like they took Jesus seriously, but they didn’t. They simply did not take the signs seriously.

If there is one warning we must all hear from this sermon of Jesus’ in Luke 12 it is this – hear and act on Jesus’ words. Don’t be a hypocrite. Don’t be different on the outside than on the inside. Don’t be content with a religious exterior. Don’t just be one of the crowd who listen to Jesus. Act. Act on Jesus’ words in the same way you would act on information that would change your job, or the value of your house, or something to do with your children.

The danger of hypocrisy and pride is so real. The Puritans said “The same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay”. The word of God comes – God can melt our hearts and we repent, or it can be hardening our heart towards him so we don’t even notice our situation. Pray that you never get into that situation.

GOD’S MERCY IS AVAILABLE NOW (Vs 57-59)

God’s mercy is available now – but not forever. It is a time limited offer. There is a window of opportunity that we must not miss.

This is not because God’s love is limited. It’s because of the nature of the situation we are in. To illustrate it Jesus uses the picture of a court case. Imagine you’ve wronged someone. Perhaps you are a newspaper and you’ve printed lies about someone. Quite rightly that person sues you, they start proceedings to take you to court. You know that you don’t have a leg to stand on, that once you get in that courtroom you will be fined a huge amount, it will cripple you. But a few weeks before their lawyers get in touch and say “we can arrange an out of court settlement if you’d like”. You’d be daft not to take it. Because settling things out of court is far

better for you if you are the party in the wrong. Once that court case starts you have no hope.

That's our situation. We have wronged God. He will judge us. We have a day in court to face him. It is set. But he gives this amazing offer – that there is an opportunity for an out of court settlement.

That if we act now we won't have to face him as our enemy. That this out of court settlement is amazing – that he has himself come and gone through the court case in our absence, found us guilty, and taken the punishment on himself. It's fantastic! It's what Jesus came to do.

But feel the force of why Jesus is saying it. Time is limited to receive this gift. If we leave it till we get to see him ourselves it will be too late. One of my besetting sins is procrastination. I discovered this while at Bible College when I was reading an article in a Christian Counselling journal about procrastination while I should have been writing an essay. But on this issue, procrastination is fatal. That's what Jesus is saying. Don't put off trusting me.

Notice what Jesus says at the end – the person who does not do this “will not get out until he has paid the last penny”. And what is the debt we owe a perfect eternal God for not worshipping him as he should be worshipped? Well, it is eternal.

“Judge for yourselves what is right”. This is an issue to stop and think for yourself. Don't follow the crowd. Don't follow those you respect (like the Pharisees in the crowds case) who won't do this. It is time even to break from your family, painful as this is, and trust Jesus. Because time is limited. It is important. It is clear.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS (Note : Not a complete list, and you will need to add details from the notes and more application questions)

Why does Jesus say he has come to the earth (vs 49, 51)? Does this surprise us?

If he has come to judge, why will some be saved? How does vs 50 fit in? What do you think Jesus is talking about here?

Verses 52 and 53 are uncomfortable to read. Why does Jesus say them? What do they tell us about the importance of being ready for Jesus' return?

Jesus concludes this sermon by addressing the crowds. What should they know? (Vs 54-56)? (Think about who they might be and what they may already be aware of)

He calls them “hypocrites”. Where have we heard that word before in this sermon? How has the attitude of the Pharisees already begun to infect the crowds?

How are we “hypocrites” if we don’t live getting ready for Jesus’ return? What might this hypocrisy look like in our lives?

The last few verses in this chapter sound stern but are good news. What is Jesus encouraging the crowds to do?

How would you summarise the main point(s) of Jesus’ sermon in this chapter? What are the main things we should do in response?