

“PREPARING FOR THE COMING CRISIS”

I. Introduction

- A. Those of you who are old enough will recall the concerns that began to emerge two decades ago as the year 2000 drew near, concerns about what came to be known as the Y2K crisis.
1. At that time, many people were worried that computer programs would not be able to handle the transition to the new millennium, resulting in a massive shutdown that would essentially paralyze our society.
 2. Maybe you were among those who made preparations for that crisis by storing up food, water, fuel, cash, or other supplies.
 3. If you did, you might have been a little embarrassed when nothing out of the ordinary happened on January 1, 2000.
 4. At the same time, you probably concluded that it was better to be safe than sorry.
- B. If there can be wisdom in making preparations for a potential crisis, then there is far more wisdom in preparing for a certain crisis.
1. As Jesus made clear in the verses that we studied last week, a day of crisis is approaching.
 2. The Son of Man is coming at an hour we do not expect.
 3. Jesus continues to develop this theme in today’s passage from Luke’s Gospel.
 4. As we study the three paragraphs that make up this text, we will see that they tell us three things about how to prepare for the coming crisis.

5. First, we need to let the gospel produce division.
6. Second, we need to understand that the fullness of time has come.
7. And third, we need to settle our account with God.

II. Let the Gospel Produce Division

- A. Our passage begins with Jesus saying that he came to cast fire on the earth.
 1. This certainly doesn't sound like something good, but we need to remember that fire can do two different things.
 2. While fire destroys that which is combustible, it also refines that which is non-combustible.
 3. John the Baptist used the image of fire back in chapter 3 when he said this about Jesus: "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." (3:16-17)
 4. Jesus came to divide and sift, to separate the wheat from the chaff.
 5. He came to bring about the destruction of evil and the purification of those whom God has chosen to redeem.
 6. This is why John spoke of the baptism that Jesus would perform as a baptism of Spirit and fire.
 7. For those who trust in Jesus as their representative sin-bearer, his Spirit-and-fire baptism is a baptism of blessing rather than one of destruction.

- B. We see another connection between fire and baptism in our text from Luke 12.
1. After saying that he came to cast fire on the earth, Jesus uses the term “baptism” to refer to his approaching suffering and death.
 2. While this might at first seem odd, it is consistent with the way other New Testament writers speak of baptism.
 3. In 1 Peter 3, the apostle Peter says that Christian baptism corresponds to the judgment that God brought upon the earth in the Noahic flood.
 4. And in 1 Corinthians 10, the apostle Paul identifies Israel’s Red Sea crossing as a baptism.
 5. The reason why these Old Testament events are described by New Testament writers as “baptisms” is because they involved deliverance for one group and judgment for another.
 6. The same waters upon which Noah’s ark floated to safety brought destruction to the rest of the world.
 7. The same waters that parted to make a dry pathway for the Israelites came crashing down on Pharaoh’s army and drowned them when they tried to pass through.
 8. This helps us to understand why Jesus would speak of his death on the cross as a baptism.
 9. The cross was a matter of judgment for Jesus and a matter of deliverance for those he died to save.
 10. This explains why Jesus submitted to John the Baptist’s baptism of repentance.
 11. Jesus did not have any sins of his own for which he needed to repent.

12. But he submitted to John's baptism because he was identifying himself with those for whom he would die a substitutionary death in the judicial ordeal of the cross.
 13. As theologian John Fesko explains, "When Christ was crucified and underwent His baptism-judgment, He suffered the curse of the covenant on behalf of those who look to Him by faith. In so doing, the believer is united to Christ by faith, and Christ's baptism-judgment becomes the believer's baptism-judgment." [*Word, Water, and Spirit*, 245]
- C. This text makes it clear that Jesus knew that he was about to be plunged under the waters of divine judgment.
1. While the thought of what he was about to experience on the cross filled him with distress, his heart was set on accomplishing it.
 2. As Luke pointed out back in chapter 9, when the days drew near for Jesus's death, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.
 3. This is something upon which we should frequently meditate.
 4. Consider these thoughts from J.C. Ryle: "Forever let us bear in mind that all Christ's sufferings on our behalf were endured willingly, voluntarily, and of His own free choice. They were not submitted to patiently merely because He could not avoid them. They were not borne without a murmur merely because He could not escape them. He lived a humble life for thirty-three years merely because He loved to do so. He died a death of agony with a willing and a ready mind. Both in life and death He was carrying out the eternal counsel whereby God was to be glorified and sinners were to be saved. He carried it out with all His heart, mighty as the struggle was which it entailed upon His flesh and blood. He delighted to do God's will."
- D. The next thing that Jesus says in our text may come as a bit of a surprise: "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."

1. The reason why this is surprising is because it seems to be in conflict with what was said earlier in this Gospel about Jesus's coming.
 2. In chapter 1, John the Baptist's father Zechariah celebrated the advent of the Messiah by singing about "the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."
 3. And in chapter 2, the multitude of angels that appeared to the shepherds said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"
 4. Jesus is not contradicting those passages here in chapter 12.
 5. His mission as Messiah was to establish peace on the earth, but that peace will not come in all of its fullness until his second coming.
 6. Those who believe in Jesus have peace with God now, but those who reject Jesus live in hostility towards him and his followers.
 7. Because of this, being reconciled to God results in being estranged from those who are still alienated from God.
- E. This is even true among families, as Jesus explains in verses 52 and 53.
1. We sometimes see this when people from Jewish or Muslim or Roman Catholic backgrounds come to faith in Christ and their family members utterly disown them.
 2. Even when the division is not as severe as that, there is still a separation.
 3. There is no getting around this.
 4. When you become a Christian, your ultimate loyalty belongs to Jesus Christ.

5. You have to be faithful to him, even when doing so makes your family and your closest friends unhappy with you.
6. It is not your place to try to establish peace with others by making compromises.
7. While the Scripture does say that as far as it depends on you, you should strive to live at peace with everyone, this does not mean that you are free to set aside God's truth in the name of peace.
8. If we refuse to let the gospel produce division, we will not be prepared for the coming crisis.

III. Understand That the Fullness of Time Has Come

- A. The second paragraph in our text begins with Jesus using an illustration.
 1. He points out how the people of his day had learned to interpret the signs that indicated changes in the weather.
 2. In Palestine, a cloud from the west was an indication that moisture was coming in from the Mediterranean and there would soon be a rain shower.
 3. Conversely, a southwesterly breeze meant that hot air was blowing in from the desert, bringing scorching heat.
 4. Even back in those days, people were able to read the signs that told them what kind of weather conditions they should expect.
- B. Jesus uses this example in order to draw a parallel with what was happening in his ministry.
 1. He came performing powerful signs and teaching with unprecedented authority.
 2. It was clear that God was at work through him.

3. His ministry testified that the fullness of time had arrived and that the long-expected Messiah had come.
 4. The Jews of that time period were extremely interested in the advent of the Messiah.
 5. They were looking for him intently, so much so that they occasionally misidentified other individuals as messianic figures.
 6. Yet Jesus points out that they were not being honest in their messianic interests and inquiries.
 7. This is why he calls them hypocrites.
 8. In their stubbornness, they refused to discern what was being made so clear in the things he was saying and doing.
 9. If they had been truly honest in their assessment of Jesus, they could not have avoided coming to the conclusion that he is the Messiah.
- C. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the first coming of Christ is referred to by phrases like “the fullness of time”, “the end of the ages”, and “the last days.”
1. The reason why these phrases are used in reference to Christ’s first coming is because all of God’s promises were reaching their fulfillment in Jesus’s person and work.
 2. To fail to understand this meant failing to receive the things that God had promised his people in the Old Testament.
 3. This is why Jesus rebuked the crowds in the way that he did.
 4. If they refused to understand the fullness of God’s revelation in Christ, they would remain lost in their sins.
 5. This brings to mind the apostle Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 6, where he stresses the urgency of being reconciled to God by saying,

“Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

6. If Paul could say that two thousand years ago, then how much more is it true today!
7. The gospel is readily available to people in our day.
8. Salvation is being held out to all who will receive it.
9. But this offer of salvation will not last forever.
10. When the final crisis comes, when Jesus Christ returns in glory, there will be no more possibility of forgiveness.
11. Today is the day to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
12. We need to maintain this sense of urgency if we are going to be prepared for the final crisis.

IV. Settle Your Account with God

- A. This brings us to the third and final paragraph in our text, where Jesus uses another illustration to explain the importance of preparing for the coming crisis.
 1. This illustration is taken from a courtroom context.
 2. Jesus says that we should settle with our accuser before we are brought before the judge, lest the judge hand us over to be put in prison.
 3. This is describing a scenario involving a dispute over a debt.
 4. The accuser is the person to whom the debt is owed, and the prison is a debtors-prison.
 5. In that culture, people who could not pay their debts were held in prison until their family and friends raised enough money to pay

what was owed.

6. Obviously, this was a situation to be avoided by all possible means.

B. Now, we need to remember that this is an illustration, and that Jesus gave it in a context where he is talking about the coming day of judgment.

1. This tells us that Jesus is not talking about our dealings with other people here, but about our dealings with God.

2. In the illustration, the “accuser” is not some other person but the law of God.

3. The judge is not a human judge but God himself.

4. The point being made is that when we stand before God on the last day, we will have to answer to the demands of God’s law.

C. We are all debtors to the law, because none of us has perfectly kept all that the law requires.

1. We are all born in sin.

2. We are all by nature children of wrath.

3. Yet this does not change the fact that the demands of God’s law must be fully satisfied.

4. The Bible declares that everyone who fails to do all the things written in the Book of the Law are under the curse of the law.

5. If we have to appear before God’s judgment seat and answer to the law’s accusations, we will be condemned by the law.

6. Thus J.C. Ryle concludes, “The law brings us in guilty. The judgment is sure to go against us. Without reconciliation, the end of our life's journey will be hell.”

- D. This is why Jesus says that we need to settle with our accuser before we are brought into our Judge's courtroom.
1. And while there is nothing that we can do to satisfy the law's demands, in Christ God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.
 2. As it says in Galatians 3, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'" (Gal 3:13 ESV)
 3. And again in Colossians 2, "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Col 2:13–14 ESV)
 4. This is why there is no possibility of salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ.
 5. While we could never pay the debt we owe, when we look to Christ in faith, our debt is cancelled in full because Jesus has settled our account for us.
 6. Make sure that you avail yourself of the offer of salvation that is held forth in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 7. If you fail to do so, the Judge will find you guilty on the last day, and there will be no way to escape the sentence of eternal condemnation.
 8. But if you trust in Christ and continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, the Word of God assures you that there is no condemnation for you.
 9. Your debt had been paid, you have been reconciled to God, and the coming crisis will actually be the day when your salvation is brought to its glorious consummation.