

Do You Know the Hour at Hand?

We all have those moments in our lives when we come to a fork in the road and we must make a choice, for good or for ill, which path we will choose. Now, most of those choices have very little impact on our lives: what kind of car will we purchase, or whether we will live on this side of the train tracks or that side. But other choices can affect our lives radically: whether or not we ought to get married and if so, whether or not we ought to have a child, or two, or three, whether we should invest years of going to college or immediately go into the work force right out of high school. Those choices impact our lives so significantly that the path we choose will have huge ramifications of the kind of life we will live during our short stint of time here on earth.

But what if you could make a choice in this life that not only affected the rest of your time here on earth but made every difference in where you will one day spend your life for the rest of eternity? But please note that even the way I have chosen to ask this question affects greatly how we understand the issue before us. Because life really isn't about you at all – where you will spend eternity, whether in hell or heaven. No! Life is first and foremost about God and what will bring Him glory by the life you live. Only when that is in place, can you begin to rightly think about your enjoyment forever. Why? Because then and only then will you rightly understand that your eternal enjoyment, in fact, eternal life itself, is not found in the rewards God could give us – but **in God Himself**. He and He alone is our blessed joy, hope, and treasure for all eternity. Jesus completely transforms what it is that we now enjoy. Jesus made this clear in **John 17**:

This is eternal life, **that they may know** You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (**John 17:3**).

And Jesus is not saying here that eternal life is merely knowing facts about the only true God and Jesus Christ. No! Eternal life is knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ, the way a child knows his mother and father – the way a husband knows his wife and a wife her husband. To love and be loved by the eternal God and His Son, Jesus is what life is all about. It is why and for what we were all created for as human beings. It is why we were enabled to reason and to have a will that could freely choose what it is that we most desired. God designed us to have a relationship with Him. Jesus describes the scope of His salvific work as:

“O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; ²⁶ and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, **so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them**” (**John 17:25-26**).

Jesus gives us here another purpose statement for His mission for why He came to earth: so that the love with which the Father loved His Son Jesus may be in you, the elect children Jesus has come to die for, because of your union with Jesus. That is why Jesus came to earth for us. He came to establish His Kingdom in you – to be your God-King and you to be His people – together loved and

known by the Heavenly Father.

But not everyone is eager to receive Jesus and therefore the One who sent Him! That is the true tragedy of human history. Many people think that the real tragedy of human history is war or genocide or even the terrors of holocaust. But none of those calamities even come close to the greatest tragedy of them all when man in rage shakes his fist in the face of Almighty God and His Christ crying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us" (Ps. 2:3).

The only reaction towards God that could make this one more tragic is that if those who shake their fist in rebellion to God were actually the very people whom God chose in love to be His own. In fact, God made many promises exclusively to them and when He appeared to bring all those promises to fulfillment – He came to His very own – instead of falling before Him and receiving Him into their hearts, they nailed Him to a tree and declared Him to be cursed of God. What could be sadder in all of Scripture than to hear:

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him (John 1:9-11).

To see the very chosen people of God reject the plan and purpose of God – to hate Him so much that they chose to kill their Messiah rather than enter into eternal life – was so devastating that the apostle Paul even declared:

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh . . . Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1).

Jesus Himself was so torn by Israel's rejection of God's salvation that He looked down upon Jerusalem and wept:

³⁷ "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. ³⁸ "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! ³⁹ "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!' " (Matt. 23:37-39).

What could be more terrible for Israel to hear than when they rejected the chief corner stone of God's new kingdom and Jesus declared His judgment upon them:

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'? ⁴³ "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. ⁴⁴ "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust" (Matt. 21:42-44).

When Jesus speaks those heartbreaking words to Israel, “the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it” we all realize that the final day of Israel's long history is quickly drawing to a close. Their history will be complete at the cross when Jesus cuts a new covenant with His own blood, thus opening the way to the true Israel made up of all the elect Jews and Gentiles who receive Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the true and living God (cf. **Eph. 2:11-22; 3:1-13; Gal. 6:16**). In Jesus Christ, the true Israel of God will finally be saved as God promised but only if they turn from their dead works to the finished work of Jesus, the Passover-Lamb of God, crucified for their sins and raised for their justification before God (cf. **Rom. 4:24-25**). The time of the promised coming Kingdom of God is now at hand. And God is about to form the people of that eternal Kingdom, who will produce the fruit of it, through the new Passover-Lamb, who through His very own blood will cut the new and final covenant, by which they will His people and God will be their God (cf. **Gen. 17:8; Ex. 29:45; Jer. 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 34:24; 37:23, 27; Zech. 8:8; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10; Rev. 21:3, 7**). The Kingdom of God is now here!

But, tragically, Israel, God's chosen people, do not know what time it is. Look at Jesus' rebuke in **Luke 12:54-56**. In Palestine, a cloud appearing in the west meant a storm was forming over the Mediterranean Sea. With that common knowledge, almost anyone within Israel could read the signs and reliably predict a shower was on its way (v. 54). Similarly, most knew that when a southwesterly breeze was blowing in, bringing the desert heat into Palestine, there was going to be such a scorching heat that the plants would begin to wilt (v. 55). These common weather conditions were so well known that just about any Jew could easily assess their surroundings and make accurate judgments about what was about to appear on the horizon. But what they were missing was far more important, eternally so. The whole cosmos was currently undergoing dramatic changes within the history of redemption, what all Israel's Scriptures had been preparing them for and yet they could not read the signs of the times in which they were living. Jesus said clearly:

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; **it is these that testify about Me;**⁴⁰ and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life . . . “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope.⁴⁶ “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, **for he wrote about Me.**⁴⁷ “But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (**John 5:39-40; 45-47**).

Jesus rebukes them as “hypocrites” (v. 56). Why? As we have been reading thus far in Luke's Gospel, their Scriptures and Jesus have provided Israel with more than ample evidence that Jesus was in fact God's promised Messiah. The signs were clear. Even a Pharisee of Nicodemus' caliber testified:

“Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (**John 3:2**).

No one could do the things Jesus did unless God was doing them through Him, or perhaps even more clearly, unless He was God (cf. **John 5:19**)! Jesus said:

“But the testimony which I have is greater than *the testimony of John*; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the

Father has sent Me.³⁷ “And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.³⁸ “You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent (**John 5:36-38**).

So, why are so many of the Jews completely missing who Jesus is? Humanly speaking, Jesus explains:

“If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.⁴³ “Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word.⁴⁴ “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.⁴⁵ “But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.⁴⁶ “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?⁴⁷ “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God” (**John 8:42-47**).

But Divinely speaking, Jesus explains elsewhere:

“But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. “[WHY?] All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.³⁸ “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (**John 6:36-38**).

Jesus answered and said to them, “Do not grumble among yourselves.⁴⁴ “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.⁴⁵ “It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me (**John 6:43-45**).

When you BEGIN to wrap your mind around those verses, then you will be able to grasp the heart of who God is before His creation! Jesus says clearly and without apology that the reason the Jews do not believe in Him is because the Father has not chosen to give them to Jesus so that they can believe in Him. In other words, they do believe Jesus because they have not been born of God (**John 1:12; 3:3, 5-6**).

This then helps us understand the other statements Jesus made in our passage this morning. Let's go back to **Luke 12:49-53**.

Jesus begins with the image of fire and gives us another statement of why He was sent to earth by His heavenly Father – to pour out fire on the earth (**v. 49**). Fire is used in Luke's Gospel as an image of God's judgment and of the Holy Spirit (**READ - 3:9, 16-17; 9:54; 17:29**). Throughout Scripture, as well as throughout the ancient near east, fire, like water, was often used as a “trial by ordeal” - those who were guilty, would be consumed by fire in judgment, while those who were innocent would be purified and saved through the fire. A wonderful example of this was when God preserved Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah through the fiery judgment of Nebuchadnezzar (**cf. Dan. 3:24ff.**).

Jesus came to bring judgment upon the earth, which will ultimately divide the entire human race into two, and only two, groups: the sheep and the goats, the believer in Jesus and the unbeliever outside of Jesus (cf. **Matt. 25:32**). The divisions of the human race will no longer be Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and freeman (cf. **1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; 6:15**) – all of those divisions have been forever cast aside as irrelevant. The only division of the human race that will determine whether you spend eternity in the presence of God in Heaven or under His terrifying wrath in Hell is what you do with Jesus! That ultimate day of judgment – the day of ultimate division – has not yet come, even though Jesus expresses His longing here for that day to be hastened (**Luke 12:49** – that the world would be set ablaze; cf. **2 Pet. 3:10**). But it will come no doubt! Jesus is eager to get on with it! How do we know for sure?

Because it has already fallen on Jesus (v. 50). One thing must happen before the judgment of the world will come – Jesus must undergo His judgment – his baptism – first. Jesus is speaking of another kind of “trial by ordeal” - this time the judgment of water. God will place the sin of all the elect upon Him and He will die the sinner's death in judgment as our vicar – our substitute! He will pay the penalty for our guilt! He will die the death we should have died!

That is what must be accomplished before He judges the world! To bring this part of His mission to completion will be painful – it will be the most painful, terrifying experience Jesus will have ever or ever will go through! And for that He approaches that hour with great distress filling His heart (v. 50).

By His death, Jesus will cut the New Covenant in which He will cut the whole of humanity with a new division between those in Christ and those outside of Christ. That is the hour that is coming and many throughout history have come to that fork in the road of their life and chosen the broad and easy way that leads to destruction (cf. **Matt. 7:13-14**). Those old divisions between Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and freeman will no longer matter – even those natural divisions within families (vv. 51-53). Think about what Jesus is saying here: once Jesus has cut the New Covenant in His own blood – His blood will be the only (along with those who are washed in it) will be the only blood that matters. No longer will the blood between father and son matter as much as the blood of Jesus. Just because you are a child of Abraham will make no difference at all – at all – if you are not washed in the blood of the New Passover-Lamb of God (cf. **See Rom. 9-11**). Even Paul declared:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God (**Rom. 2:28-29**).

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one* . . . so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace . . . AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY [GENTILES], AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR [JEWS]; ¹⁸ for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you [Gentiles] are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household (**Eph. 2:13-15, 17-19**).

By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;⁶ *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (**Eph. 3:4-6**).

In **v. 51** Jesus appears to make a contradictory statement with the rest of the Gospel. He says that He did not come to bring peace on earth. But what did the angels proclaim on the night of His birth?

“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased”
(**Luke 2:14; cf. 7:50; 8:48; 10:5-6; Acts 10:36**).

Many misread not only what Jesus said during His ministry on earth but what He was coming to do, so it is no surprise that many misunderstand what Jesus is saying here (**v. 51**). Jesus did come to earth to bring peace – peace to the elect, those chosen “in Christ” - peace between God and those who are in Jesus Christ through faith alone! But that same peace or reconciliation between God and His elect will necessarily bring division, animosity, even hatred between those who now belong to Jesus and those who have rejected Him. Even between a mother and her daughter if one of them belongs to Jesus and the other does not.

Finally, in **vv. 57-59** in light of the pressing hour at hand Jesus tells the crowd to “settle their debts” before they stand before the judge (**vv. 57-58**). Why? Because if they fail to do so now, the judge will not be merciful in the least – they will go to an awful prison and stay there until the very last cent of what they owe has been paid (**v. 59**). The word Jesus uses here makes the judgment all the more worrisome – He refers to “the lepton” the smallest coin of that day. If a denarius is basically a day's wage – the “lepton” represented about 30 minutes of work. What Jesus is saying is that the jailer will not let you out of prison until the last cent is extracted from you – until the last drop of blood is squeezed out of you! In the ancient world, the debtor would often be beaten daily in prison as an incentive for the family and friends to pay off his debt. However, most knew that upon entering “debtor's prison” the likelihood of being released before death was not very high.

The picture Jesus is providing describes the urgency by which not only each individual must respond to Jesus, but especially the each of the Jewish people for whom Jesus is now standing before in the final days of their history – they all owe God a huge debt – an enormous debt they will never be able to pay! Their only hope – as is yours – is that they reconcile with their accuser before they stand before the Judge of the Universe. That is why Jesus came into our world! He came to reconcile us to God with His own blood at the cross of Calvary.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (**Gal. 4:4-5**).

The hour is quickly running out. There is still time, but not for long. Turn to Jesus Christ and be saved for “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (**2 Cor. 5:21**).

Amen! -SDG-