

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"Make Every Effort to Settle with God."*

I like preaching verse by verse, but one thing we need to be cautious of is taking sections in chunks and looking at them independently of the passages around them. So, it's a good idea as we go verse-by-verse to consider the context:

- Look back at **verses 35 through 40**. You probably have a heading in your Bible for this section. Something about Christ's return. Jesus is telling the crowds that we must be ready.
- Then in **verses 41 through 48** he talks about faithful servants who are ready when he returns and how they will be blessed, and unfaithful servants who are not ready when he returns and how they will be punished.
- In **verses 49 through 53**, which we covered last week, he talks about the purpose of his coming, but it's not exactly like we tend to think. He says in **verse 51**, **"Don't think that I have come to give peace. Instead, I came to bring division."** How do we explain this when we know other verses teach that Jesus brought peace? He came to bring peace between God and man, but this can create division between man and man.

Then he follows up with this morning's verses about discerning the time. He uses two illustrations that stress the importance of discernment and diligence in spiritual matters. The two illustrations are:

1. First, discerning the weather
2. Second, diligence in settling lawsuits.

Let's take a look at the first illustration in **verse 54**...

Luke 12:54 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.

There have been times Jesus addressed the large crowds and times he addressed just the disciples. Here he turns from the disciples to the crowds again. He wanted everyone to discern the time.

The first century had no Weather Channel. Their predictions came from the formation of clouds and winds. Jesus' listeners knew:

- If a cloud formed in the west over the Mediterranean Sea, rain was on the way.
- If a warm wind blew south from the Arabian desert, a heat wave was coming.

I was thinking about the account with Elijah when God told him it would rain after the drought...

1 Kings 18:43 [Elijah] said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again," seven times. **44** And at the seventh time he said, "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'"

We've got this Old Testament example of discerning the weather, which continued into Jesus's day.

But his commendation is about to turn to rebuke...

Luke 12:56 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?

Jesus rebuked the people because they knew how to discern the weather, but not the **present time**.

And notice it says **present time**. Singular:

- The New King James says **this time**
- The NIV, Amplified, and NASB says **this present time**

Jesus isn't talking about discerning multiple times or seasons. He's talking specifically about his day, because the rebuke is for those not recognizing he is the Messiah.

If they knew as much about spiritual matters as they knew about the weather, then they would've embraced Jesus.

Instead:

- They could tell whether it would be hot outside
- They could recognize when the weather was going to change
- They could predict a storm
- They could identify good days for planting and harvesting

But they couldn't tell when the Messiah was in their midst.

How tragic is it today that people can:

- Predict the movements of heavenly bodies
- Put people on the moon
- Put satellites into space
- Split atoms
- Perform heart transplants

But are blind to what God is doing in the world.

People know how to get to space, but they don't know how to get to heaven.

Now let me get you to think about something...

When our kids can't do something, we don't typically criticize them for it. Instead, we teach them how to do it. For example:

- If our kids don't know how to run the lawnmower, we don't criticize them when the lawn isn't mowed. Instead, we teach them how to mow the lawn.
- If our kids don't know how to run the dishwasher, we don't criticize them when the dishes aren't done. Instead, we teach them how to run the dishwasher.

The only time we criticize them when the lawn isn't mowed and the dishes aren't done is when we have taught them to do these things.

The reason I mention this is it looks like Jesus is criticizing them for being unable to discern the time, but that's not the case. Instead, he's criticizing them for NOT discerning the time, because they should have done so.

Just like the kids who have been taught how to use the lawnmower and dishwasher these Jews had been taught the prophecies about the Messiah. They had the Scriptures for centuries telling them about Christ's coming and they should have interpreted them to understand Jesus was the Messiah.

So why didn't they?

It was really an issue of interest. Jesus rebuked the Jews because they paid far more attention to the weather than to spiritual matters.

We pay attention to the weather. It is not as though the weather is unimportant. It's just that spiritual matters are of infinitely greater importance.

And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson one: we should be more interested in spiritual matters than earthly matters.

It's pretty easy to criticize the Jews. They had the Messiah, the Son of God, in their midst teaching, performing miracles, and fulfilling prophecies...but they rejected him. They definitely look pretty bad.

But let's think about the application for us.

What are we most interested in?

Have you ever met people who are super good at certain things?

- A car can drive by, they don't even have to look at it, and they can tell you what's wrong with it.
- You're watching sports and someone can tell you all these wild, specific statistics about players and teams, sometimes going back years or even decades.
- Some people hear a few seconds of a song and they can tell you the name, the artist, and the album it's from.
- Some people hear a few words of the line of a movie, and they can quote much of the movie and tell you the year it came out and whether it won any awards.
- Some people can look at projects and they can quickly tell you the tools you're going to need and how much it's going to cost.

The knowledge we have can fall in the category of being fun, interesting, beneficial, and even profitable.

We should be knowledgeable about different things, and there's nothing wrong with having lots of interests, but:

- Are we most interested in spiritual matters or earthly matters?
- What are we experts on?
- What do we know the most about?

To apply this to our lives, what would be the weather to us? Is it:

- Sports
- Cars
- Music
- Politics
- The stock market
- News

I was going over the sermon with Katie and she said, *"Isn't it funny the weather is the go-to topic for people in conversations?"*

It's fine knowing about other things, but are we more interested in them than we are in heavenly things?

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Now let's look at Jesus's second illustration about settling a legal dispute...

Luke 12:57 **"And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?"**

In this verse the word **judge** has the idea of deciding or figuring out. It is as though Jesus said...

"Why can't you decide for yourselves what is right, or figure out the right thing to do?"

He's talking about them being in a foolish situation that they won't resolve. They should have determined the right thing to do by this point.

And here's the situation...

Luke 12:58 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.

This illustration is about us getting right with God before we have to stand before him and be judged. Let me give you a few things in your Bibles to circle to make this clear:

- Circle the word **accuser**, draw a line and write, “Devil.”
- Circle the word **judge**, draw a line and write, “God.”
- Circle the word **prison**, draw a line and write, “Hell.”

Let’s talk about the devil first. His name means accuser...

Revelation 12:10 The ACCUSER OF OUR BROTHERS has been thrown down, who ACCUSES THEM DAY AND NIGHT before our God.

We see the devil in this role in the book of Job...

Job 1:8 The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” 9 Satan answered, “Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”

God said Job was a godly man, but the devil accused him of only being godly because God had blessed him so much. If God took these things away then Job would curse God to his face.

The devil was wrong.

Then another day...

Job 2:3 The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason.” 4 Satan answered, “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.”

God told the devil that Job remained a godly man, but the devil said it was only because Job hadn’t suffered physically. If he did he would curse God to his face.

Again, the devil was wrong, but we get to see his accusing nature.

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Now listen to another verse about the devil...

John 8:44 [The devil] does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The devil is a liar, the father of lies, and it says there is no truth in him.

I don’t think it is completely literal that there is no truth in him, because I know at least a few times he can tell the truth, and that’s when he accuses me...and each of you. Maybe he lies and says some things that aren’t true, but I know that he could accuse me of different things, make me sound terrible...and be telling the truth. When he accuses me that’s at least one time he doesn’t have to lie.

I read a quote that said...

“Don’t be upset about the terrible things people think about you, because you’re actually much worse than they that.”

Listen to these verses, and in particular the two questions Paul asks...

Romans 8:33 who shall bring any charge against God's elect?...34 Who is to condemn?

What is the answer to these two questions?

1. Who brings a charge, or accusation, against God’s elect?
2. Who condemns?

These aren’t rhetorical questions. There is an answer. The devil, or the accuser, is the one.

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And who does he accuse us to? Bring his charges to? Condemn us to?

To God. He is the judge.

We are all on our way to him. We are all going to stand before him someday. Nobody escapes it.

And because the accusations against us are true we will be condemned.

That’s why we should make every effort to settle with God before standing before him. And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson two: make every effort to settle with God before standing before him.

The main point of Jesus’s illustration is we are on our way to face the judge and we should make every effort to settle with him.

In **verse 58** let me get you to circle one more thing. Circle the words **settle with him**, draw a line and write, “Make peace.” We need to make peace with God before we stand before him.

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All of Jesus’s illustrations and parables used ordinary scenarios people would be familiar with and this one is no different...

In ordinary life if we are involved in legal disputes and we are accused, and we are guilty, the best thing to do is try to settle outside of court, because if it goes to trial, we will be found guilty, and it will be even worse for us.

If I put it in modern day vernacular, it is as though Jesus says...

“Do everything you can to settle outside of court, because if you stand before the judge it is not going to go well for you.”

The spiritual application is: If we wait to get right with God until we stand before him, then it is too late.

William Hendrickson said...

“Jesus is winding up his address with a dramatic appeal to every listener, urging him to make his peace with God; to do so now, before it is too late. To each person Jesus is saying, ‘be reconciled to God.’”

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Look one chapter to the right at **Luke 13:34** to see Jesus making this similar point...

Luke 13:34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35 Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

Jesus is saying that he wanted to be at peace with the Jews and protect them.

But the people wouldn't settle with him. Jesus knew the Roman armies would destroy the city and the temple, but they wouldn't seek terms of peace.

The Jews were marching to judgment and God was the judge, but they wouldn't settle with him. They wouldn't seek terms of peace with him.

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And if you want to see how bad it is to stand before the judge without settling with him first, look at **verse 59**...

Luke 12:59 I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny."

Jesus reminds us of the great penalty of not settling before the Day of Judgment. All of this is meant to impress upon us the urgency to get right with God now.

People will do almost anything to stay out of prison, and for good reason, but many of the same people would not put forth the same effort to stay out of hell, even though it is infinitely worse than any earthly prison.

And this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson three: people can't settle their debt in hell.

Here are a few facts about hell:

- Just as life in heaven is eternal, the punishment in hell is eternal:
 - **Matthew 25:46 [the unrighteous] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."**
 - **2 Thessalonians 1:9 [the unrighteous] will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,**
 - **Revelation 14:11 the smoke of torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night**
- The fires of hell are not quenched, which means they also burn forever: **Mark 9:48 where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.**
- Just as the righteous are resurrected and receive new bodies, the unrighteous are also resurrected and receive their own bodies which will allow them to endure the punishment of hell:
 - **John 5:29 [people will] come out [of the grave], those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.**
 - **Acts 24:15 there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.**

I mention these verses because I wanted you to have this understanding to interpret **verse 59** correctly. We always want to let the Bible interpret the Bible. If you only had **verse 59** it looks like hell comes to an end as soon as you pay off your debt. But we can see from these verses I just read, as well as other verses in Scripture, that hell is eternal. People never escape.

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The prison Jesus is referring to would be the debtor's prison where people could work to pay off their debt. But herein is the problem...

We can never pay off our sin debt. Payment for sin is required, but we can't make the payment.

This is why people can never escape hell, because they can never pay their debt.

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So, how can we make things right with God? How can we be at peace with him before we stand before him if we can't pay the debt we owe?

The answer brings us to lesson four...

Lesson four: only Christ can pay our debt.

Most people, even those who don't attend church, are familiar with what we commonly call the Lord's prayer. In it, Jesus taught us to pray...

Matthew 6:12 Forgive us our debts.

We live in a world convinced that the way to go to heaven is by being good enough and earning it. I don't fault anyone for believing this, because I believed it for the first 20 years of my life.

I make mention of it because it occurred to me that it is very ironic that people would think this when what is probably the most famous prayer in history tells us that instead of working to pay off our sin debt we are supposed to pray for it to be forgiven.

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Jesus wasn't referring to anything financial, but spiritual: our sin debt against God.

If we have a financial debt:

- Given enough time
- Or given enough money
- Or given enough hard work

We can pay it off.

But our sin debt is one we can't pay off:

- No matter how much time we have
- No matter how much money we have
- No matter how hard we work

We have this debt whether we're rich, poor, young, or old. And if we recognize we have the sin debt, we can pray to have it forgiven.

Think of the parable of the unforgiving servant. **Matthew 18:23-27** records:

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since HE COULD NOT PAY (because we can't pay this debt), his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him AND FORGAVE HIM THE DEBT.

The man had a debt **he could not pay**, but he fell to his knees, begged the King, and the king **forgave the debt**.

The man represents us and the desperation and fear his debt caused him represents the desperation and fear our sin debt should cause us.

The King represents the Lord and the compassion He felt for this man represents the compassion He feels toward sinners who cry out to Him for mercy.

What did the servant do to be forgiven for such a debt?

He did nothing more than acknowledge his debt and humble himself.

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We know the accuser wants to take us to court, have us stand before the judge, and bring all of his terrible—and true—accusations against us.

But we can get a lawyer who will defend us...

1 John 2:1 If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

The Greek word for advocate refers to a person who steps in on behalf of the accused to defend their case for them. This is what we have in Christ.

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Let me conclude by tying all these verses together...

If we knew a storm was coming we would prepare. If we knew the accuser was coming to take us before the judge we would get a lawyer and try to settle the case out of court.

The storm of God's wrath is coming, and according to **James 5:9** the judge is already standing at the door.

We must get right with God and we can do that through repentance and faith in our advocate, Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.