**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**THE JOURNEY TO JUDGMENT**

**Luke 12:49 – 13:9**

**INTRODUCTION**

When you're investigating whether to invest in a company, one of the first questions you should ask is what is the company’s mission statement? The mission statement helps you understand why the company exists, and what they’re trying to accomplish. It helps you determine whether you want to partner with the company as you look at whether it shares common values and common objectives with you.

Some mission statements are simple. For example, McDonald's mission statement is to "be our customer's favourite place and way to eat and drink." Some aim to be profound, like Starbucks: "to inspire and nurture the human spirit - one person, one cup and one neighbourhood at a time." Others are cold and matter-of-fact, like Apple: "Apple designs Macs, the best personal computers in the world, along with OS X, iLife, iWork and professional software."

What was Jesus' mission statement? Whether you’re a Christian here today or someone who’s exploring Christianity, there is no more important question than this one, because Jesus isn't just inviting you to partner with him financially. He's calling you to give the entirety of your life to him. Before you do, you need to what Jesus is all about. Why was he in the world? What did he come to accomplish? What was his mission statement?

Many answers initially come to mind. We could say that Jesus' mission was to die on the cross to forgive the sins of all who trust in him, and that would be true. We could also say that Jesus' mission was to redeem a people for himself by bearing our sins upon himself on the cross, and that would absolutely be true as well. These are glorious truths, and they lie at the heart of Jesus' mission on earth.

Today, however, we get to hear Jesus fashion his own mission statement, and it's not quite what we would expect. Indeed, it's rather alarming. As he describes the reason for his coming in Luke 12 – his own personal mission statement – this is what he says in verse 49:

"I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!"

Why did Jesus come? He came to cast fire on the earth. That's his mission statement. What does that mean? Fire can give life in the form of heat and light, but it can also bring death as it burns and consumes. What kind of fire is Jesus talking about?

Back in Luke 3, we heard John the Baptist describe Jesus' mission statement using the same imagery of fire. This is what he said in verses 15-17:

"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 **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**."

In other words, when Luke uses the term "fire" in talking about Jesus' mission, he's talking about God's judgment. When Jesus says he came to cast fire on the earth, he's not talking about heat that will keep everyone warm. He's talking about heat that will consume those who don't follow him. You're either going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, or baptized with the fires of hell. You're either going to be gathered into his barn as his wheat, or burned up like useless chaff.

God’s Final Judgment is the topic of our text today. It’s a sobering one. It’s a frightening one. But as with all Scripture, it is also full of grace. Yes, Jesus came to bring God’s judgment, but before it comes, he offers a way of salvation from that judgment.

**Read Luke 12:49 - 13:9.**

The title of this message is **The Journey to Judgment.** My aim today is to show you that **Jesus Can Free You from the Fear of God’s Judgment.** We will have three points today:

(1) Judgment is Divisive

(2) Judgment is Eternal

(3) Judgment is Universal

(1) **JUDGMENT IS DIVISIVE**

Jesus has just finished speaking about his second coming earlier in Chapter 12. In verses 41-48 he uses the illustration of a master leaving his household in charge of one of his servants, and when the master returns, he either rewards the servant or punishes him based on how faithful he was in fulfilling his responsibilities.

Jesus of course is speaking about God’s final judgment, the moment in history where everyone who has ever lived will either receive eternal reward or eternal punishment. And in Chapter 12, Jesus couldn’t be clearer in showing us that he will be the one who will judge us when he returns.

God’s Final Judgment is a moment that Jesus longs for. We see that in verse 49: "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!" Try to sense the feeling behind verse 49. Jesus is longing for God's judgment to come to pass. He's saying, "Oh to see that day when God brings his judgment to the world! How long until it arrives? I wish it were already here."

If you’re a follower of Christ, you need to pause and ask yourself whether this is something you long for, because as a follower of Christ, you are to love what he loves and hate what he hates. We are to want what he wants, and what he wants is for God’s judgment to come to pass.

What do you long for? Your long-awaited vacation? A promotion at work? A bigger house? Retirement? Perhaps you long for heaven. That’s a good thing. It is a rare thing, however, to meet someone who longs for God’s final judgment. Those who long for heaven tend to see God's judgment as an unfortunate consequence of Christ's return. It's the part about eternity that we would prefer not to talk about. But that's not Jesus' heart. Jesus longs for the day when God’s judgment comes.

Why is there such a disparity between us and Jesus? When it comes to God's judgment, why do we see it as something to grimly accept, whereas Jesus sees it as something to be excited about? It's because we do not value God's glory enough.

On Judgment Day, God will divide the sheep from the goats, the believers from the unbelievers, and God will glorify his Holy Name among both groups. Among unbelievers – the skeptics, the atheists, and those who followed false gods – they will finally see that the Triune God of Scripture is the one, true, living God. They will see that God, and God alone, is worthy of worship, and that everything else worshipped by man - whether it be bank accounts or Buddha - had absolutely zero value. God will completely and totally vindicate the holiness of his name among those who rejected him. And among believers – those who trust in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins - they will finally see God face to face in the fullness of his glory and be welcomed into his presence to worship him forever.

The Day of Judgment is the Day of God's glory. If you don't care about God's glory, you won't care about God's judgment. But if you do care, if your greatest desire in life is to see God glorified and worshipped, then there is no greater day than the Day of Judgment. Jesus longed for that Day, and if you follow him and trust him, then you must learn to long for that Day as well.

But before that day comes, something else must happen first. Jesus talks about it in verse 50: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" Before God's judgment can come, Jesus needs to be baptized. What is this baptism? We know he's not talking about John's baptism because that already happened, and Jesus is speaking in future tense here. We also know that he's not talking about believer's baptism, because Jesus was never baptized again after John's baptism. So what is he talking about?

The answer is found in Mark 10, where two of Jesus’ disciples ask if they can sit one at his right hand and one at his left in heaven. In reply, Jesus says in Mark 10:38:

"You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

In other words, when Jesus speaks about his baptism, he’s speaking about his death. No one but Jesus could be baptized with his baptism, because no one but Jesus could die on the cross for the sins of others. So when Jesus says that he has a baptism to be baptized with in verse 50, he’s saying that before God’s judgment comes, Jesus must first die.

This is good news for us. It tells us that Jesus doesn’t just long for judgment. He longs for us to be saved from that judgment. And in order for that to happen, the penalty for those who are to be saved must be paid. That’s what happened in the bloody baptism of Jesus on the cross, where he would bear our sins in his body, taking the judgment that we deserve upon himself.

You see, this text isn't just about judgment. It's about the way to escape from judgment. Jesus longs for our salvation just as much as he longs for his vindication. We see that right in verse 50 where he says how great his distress is until his death is accomplished! Jesus longs for God’s judgment, and he longs for people to be saved from that judgment. Jesus isn’t only just. He is also merciful. His justice and his mercy are held in perfect balance, and he longs for both to be expressed.

If you've never trusted in Christ before, I invite you to do so today. Today can be the day when you escape God's judgment, both now and forevermore, so that you never have to fear God's wrath. On the Day of Judgment, it won't matter that you weren't good enough to enter heaven or to escape hell. None of us are. All that matters is how you responded to Christ. Do you repent of your sins and trust in Christ as your Lord and Saviour? Then you will be saved.

This decision to trust in Christ, however, is not without implications. The division to come on the Day of Judgment is foreshadowed by division in this lifetime. Jesus says in verses 51-52: “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.” Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, it doesn’t matter. Families will be divided against themselves because of how they respond to Jesus.

This is part of the cost of following Jesus. To follow Jesus is to put him first, even above your own family. This doesn’t mean that, once you become a Christian, you stop loving your family members. If anything, you are to love them more. You are to pray for them with the urgency of knowing that if they never trust in Christ, they’re going to hell. You are to care for them with the sober realization that the way you live affects the way they think about Christ. But the sad reality is that, despite our prayers, our care, and our love, there will be times when our families won’t want anything to do with us anymore. They will think we’re weirdos and bigots, and our relationships with them will never be the same.

This is part of the cost of following Jesus. If division is coming on the Day of Judgment over how people respond to Jesus, then it’s no surprise that division is coming now over how people respond to Jesus.

(2) **JUDGMENT IS ETERNAL**

Now you may be thinking that you have a lot more to worry about in life right now than final judgment. You have bills to pay, you have school assignments to do, you have relationships to attend to, and you have goals to achieve. Why should you care about this future, final judgment? Right now you care way more about your future career, your future spouse, or your future retirement, and the last thing on your mind is future judgment. Maybe you’ll give it some thought when you’re older and death is knocking at your door, but not now. Not when life is so full and busy.

If this is what you’re thinking, then prepare for Jesus to shake some sense into you as we move into our second point: Judgment is Eternal.

We live in an age of information. We know way more about way more things in a way more accessible way than ever before. All you have to do is open your phone, ask google or siri a question, and there you have it! You have your answer.

But have you ever stopped and asked yourself whether you’re learning about what you should be learning about? As the old saying goes, have you spent so much time thinking about what you *can* do, that you haven’t stopped and thought about what you *should* do? So many people spend all this time becoming experts on all sorts of topics, from gardening to astronomy to video games, that they have neglected to ask the bigger questions about life. Where do we come from? Why are we here? And where are we going?

Jesus criticizes the crowds for doing just this in verses 54-56. He says, “You know how to read the weather, but you don’t know how to read the times. You spend all this time studying clouds and wind, but you’ve spent no time studying the significance of who I am.” Jesus has a word for this: hypocrisy. “You hypocrites!” Jesus says in verse 56, “You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present times?”

Hypocrisy is living a dual life. When it came to studying the weather, they were experts. They’re diligent. They’re careful. But when it came to studying the bigger questions of life, they were lazy, apathetic, and foolish.

Now if we fail to interpret the times, then the same will be said of us as well. There’s nothing wrong with learning about how things like weather work, but there *is* something wrong if we fail to apply the same standard of diligence to the things of God.

But what are we to understand about the things of God? How are we to interpret the present time? Jesus tells us by using this illustration in verses 57-59: “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? 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. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”

Jesus is saying that, if we understood life correctly, then we would see that all of life is nothing more than a journey to judgment. Even now, at this moment, an accuser is taking us to the judge, because we owe this accuser a debt that must be paid. If we reach the judge, it’s over for us. We’ll be locked up until the last penny is paid.

And when will that be? When will every last penny be paid? Never. You see, in this parable, God is both judge and accuser. He is the accuser to whom we owe the debt, and he is the judge who will punish us for the debt. The debt that we owe is the guilt of our sin. Every time we sin, we rack up debt with God. But here’s the thing: it only takes one sin to rack up an infinite debt with God. Our sin is so great, and our God is so holy, that all it takes is one sin to incur an infinite debt that can never be repaid.

This means that, if you reach the judge without ever reaching a settlement with God, you’re put in a prison called hell, and you’re never getting out. The judgment you will receive is eternal. It will never come to an end. The only way to escape it is to settle with God before Judgment Day. If you do, then you will never be judged. You will never see that dirty cold prison cell called hell. But if you don’t, if you live this life and die without ever settling with God, then he will sentence you to an eternity in hell.

These are hard truths. They are disturbing truths. There is nothing more disturbing than the thought of spending an eternity in a place of torment. But don’t miss the hope in this little parable. Don’t miss the good news that God is willing to settle with us! On this journey to judgment, God is willing to say, “Let’s make a deal before we get to judgment.” And what is that deal? God pays it all, and you pay nothing.

This is God’s settlement offer to us. We don’t need to meet him half way. There’s no give and take or bargaining. God has done everything for us in Christ, and all we need to do is to receive this free gift of salvation by faith. And if we do, then God will say, “I no longer hold your debt against you, because my Son has paid it in full on the cross.”

(3) **JUDGMENT IS UNIVERSAL**

But what does it look like to live by faith? How do we receive God’s settlement offer of salvation? It’s not as easy as saying, “I accept”. There’s more to it than that. Jesus is going to tell us what that is as we move on to our third point: Judgment is Universal.

Luke tells us in Chapter 13, verse 1 that “There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” Some people who had been listening to Jesus talk about judgment go on to tell him about this horrible act of violence. A group of Jews from Galilee had been slaughtered by the Romans. This likely happened around Passover, which was the only time that the Jewish people killed their own animals as sacrifices to God and not priests. But as they were doing so, Pilate had several of them killed.

How does this relate to what Jesus was just teaching about judgment? We can infer the answer to this question by looking at Jesus’ response in verses 2-3, where he says, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Jesus knew the real reason for why they were telling Jesus this bit of news. They wanted to justify themselves. In effect, they were saying, “Jesus, all this talk about judgment is fine and dandy, but how is it relevant to us? We’re not sinners! We’re not going to be judged by God. But those Galileans who were killed by the Romans… they’re the real sinners. That’s what God does to real sinners. Nothing like that has happened to us, so we must be fine with God.”

They couldn’t have been more wrong. Those Galileans weren’t murdered because they were *worse* sinners than everyone else. They were murdered simply because they *were* sinners. And then in verse 3, Jesus reminds us that all of us are sinners. “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish!” Jesus is saying that we all deserve to perish in an equally horrific way. We may not be murdered. Indeed, we may die peacefully in our sleep. But what awaits us once we die will be no less gruesome, and no less horrific, than what happened to the Galileans.

Jesus makes the same point again in verses 4-5. This time, he shares his own news of tragedy. A tower in Siloam, which was a water reservoir near Jerusalem, had fallen and killed eighteen people. Did that happen because they were worse sinners than others? No! They were no worse than anyone else. What happened to them doesn’t prove that God won’t judge us. Instead, it shows us what all of us deserve, for “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Do you want to perish like the Galileans or the Jews at Siloam? Then you must repent! Jesus emphasizes the necessity and urgency of repentance by saying it twice in verses 3 and 5. “Repent! Or you will all likewise perish!” Repent, and you’ll be saved from this grisly end. Fail to repent, and you will experience the same horror and pain.

How do we repent? What does repentance look like? In a recent Gospel Coalition blog post titled “The Missing Word in our Modern Gospel”, Kevin DeYoung writes that *repentance* is just that: it is missing from our pulpits, it is missing from the books we read, and it is missing from our conversations.

As a preacher, I can testify that it is so much easier to talk about faith than repentance. Saying “Just trust in Christ, and your sins will be forgiven” is way easier to say than “Unless you repent, you will all perish.” But this is what DeYoung writes:

“[Repentance and faith] are virtually synonymous in the New Testament, not that the words mean the same thing, but that they are signs of the same Spirit-prompted work and lead to the same end times inheritance. Strictly speaking, the proper response to the gospel is twofold: repent and believe. If only one item in the pair is mentioned—which happens often in the New Testament—we should realize that the other half is assumed. You can’t really believe without also repenting, and you haven’t really repented if you don’t also believe.”

So what does it mean to repent? The Heidelberg Catechism helpfully puts it this way: “to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it.” Repentance is turning away from sin with the will, and with the heart. When you repent, you change, both in how you live, and how you feel. You take practical steps to stop sinning, and you increasingly feel disgust at your sin.

If you say that you have trusted in Christ, but you’re living comfortably in your sin, then you haven’t repented. And if you haven’t repented, you haven’t truly believed. You haven’t settled with your accuser on the journey to judgment. Instead, you’re on the way to the judge, who will put you in prison for eternity as you pay off the infinite debt of your sin.

True belief leads to true repentance. You don’t have one without the other. Those who are forgiven of their sin will want to be free from their sin. This doesn’t mean that you won’t sin any more. The struggle with sin continues even after you have truly believed. But when you have truly believed, then it signals the end of your war against God, and the beginning of your war against sin.

Jesus ends our text today with one last parable to emphasize yet again the urgency of repentance There are two men in this parable: the owner of a vineyard, and a vinedresser responsible for tending the vineyard. This is what the parable says, starting in verse 6: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 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?’”

God is the owner of the vineyard, and we are the fig tree under inspection. Fig trees are planted for one purpose: to bear fruit. If they don’t, they’re useless. They just take up space and are to be cut down so that a new fig tree can be planted.

This is the threat facing all who fail to repent and believe. You are a fruitless fig tree that is under inspection by God who is thinking about cutting you down. But there is hope. Yet again, in the face of imminent judgment, Jesus shows us that there is hope. The vinedresser in verse 8 replies to the man, “Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”

What Jesus is doing is he’s personifying God’s justice and mercy. God’s justice is the owner of the vineyard, and God’s mercy is the vinedresser. Divine mercy stays divine justice, but only for a time. After a year, if the fruit of repentance and faith are still missing from the fig tree, then the owner will cut that tree down.

**CONCLUSION**

So today, will you repent and believe? It doesn’t matter if it’s the first time or the thousandth time. The life of the Christian is one of daily repentance and trust in the gospel. Even if you don’t feel convicted of a specific sin, you can always acknowledge that you are a sinner before God in need of his grace.

But if you have never repented before, I urge you to do so today. You are on a journey to judgment, and you don’t know when that journey will end. But I do know this: when it ends, it will be too late for you. You will reach the judge, you will be found guilty of your infinite debt, and you will be sentenced to an eternity in hell. You need to settle with God now through repentance and faith in Christ, so that you may be saved.