

Interpreting the Times

Luke 12:54-59 (New American Standard Bible)

⁵⁴ And He was also saying to the crowds, “Whenever you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘A shower is coming,’ and so it turns out. ⁵⁵ And whenever you feel a south wind blowing, you say, ‘It will be a hot day,’ and it turns out that way. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but how is it that you do not know how to analyze this present time? ⁵⁷ “And why do you not even judge by yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸ For when you are going with your accuser to appear before the magistrate, on the way, make an effort to settle with him, so that he does not drag you before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. ⁵⁹ I tell you, you will not get out of there until you have paid up the very last lepton.” (kc: lepton—mite—the lowest denomination coin ever)

Introduction

Once a year, typically in September, I preach a sermon on the end times. Today is that Sunday. I do so in order that we the God’s people may be ready for Christ’s Second Coming. I pray that this sermon will help all of us.

Last Sunday after the service, one of members told me about how times have changed. She was talking about weddings. In the old days, weddings were typically held in the church with God’s blessings. Not anymore. Nowadays, it is held in the backyards, reception halls, parks, restaurants, and so forth. Wedding in the church is a rare thing today. This is more than just a change in trends. It is a sign of our times. People are not interested in the church. They don’t care much about the Christian wedding.

Here’s another alarming statistic: the average attendance of Sunday morning services for Methodists is once-a-month. Does it shock you? Before COVID-19 days, mind you. If you think that’s bad enough, what do you think of it now? Less than once-a-month. What’s going on? We need to understand the signs of our times. The point I am making is this: Even the people in the church drift away from their faith. We are living in such a time as this where people keep the form of godliness but deny its power or practice thereof.

Content

Do you remember Noah? Yes, that famous guy with the ark and many animals. Many years ago.

In Noah’s time, before the Great Flood overflowed them, people were eating, drinking, marrying, as if the world would go on forever as it had been (Matthew 24:38). They did so until the day Noah and his family entered the ark. All those years before the Great Flood, they saw Noah building the ark, piece by piece. They would make fun of Noah’s foolishness,

in fact, Noah's wisdom. Why? Because Noah was building the huge boat on top of the mountain, not at the shore. However, as the saying goes, whoever laughs last laughs best, right? Everything changed once the rain started pouring down. Forty days and forty nights. Non-stop. By then, people realized that they were the fools, not Noah. Worst of all, they paid the price for their foolishness with their own lives. They didn't know it was coming. So will it be, Jesus warns, with this generation: *"³⁷ For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰ At that time there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left"* (Matthew 24:38-41).

Speaking of the weather, nowadays, we do have satellite technology that keeps track every single move of hurricanes, winds, and waves. So, we are in a much better position than the people in Noah's time on the weather forecasts, but in terms of reading and analyzing our present time, are we any better? Well, not really.

Today is no different from Noah's time. To most of us, life still goes on. We keep doing whatever our forefathers have done: *eating, drinking, playing, dancing, marrying...* We might have gotten smarter than our ancestors on the matters of our lives: physical, emotional, financial, and relational. A lot of resources are out there, too. E.g. Bookshelves in bookstores are inundated with self-help books. E.g. 2. Google it!

Yet, when it comes down to understanding the signs of the present time, like our forefathers, we too are ignorant, indifferent, and insensitive. Indeed, we are very poor in reading and analyzing our present time.

Question: would it be better if Jesus were living among us like He did two thousand years ago in Israel? I am not sure.

In Jesus' time, people witnessed with their own eyes everything Jesus did: numerous wonders and signs, casting out evil spirits, and healing the sick. Yet, they failed to understand His teaching, let alone seeing the very God in their midst, dwelling in human flesh. Despite all the miracles they witnessed, they still asked Jesus to show more signs from God. They were so blind and ignorant that they eventually rejected Jesus as the Messiah and even crucified Him. Jesus lamented such irony that the crowds were so good at discerning the weather patterns yet completely ignorant of the signs of their time.

Jesus' Message is very clear: Be on the alert and understand the signs of end times and get ready. Know the signs of the present time you are living in and align your lifestyle accordingly.

To help you out, let me sum up the signs of the last days where we are in right now.

Sign #1: *“In the last days, difficult times will come. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them”* (2 Tim 3:1-5). Wow! How accurately it describes our times!

Have you ever wondered why people are so crazy about bragging about their lives through social media? Have you also noticed that people are so mean to each other? What happened to civility, respect, and manners? Let me repeat the signs of end times: *Most people’s love become cold. Lovers of themselves. Boastful. Proud. Abusive. Violent. Unforgiving.* The list goes on. The bottom line is the world no longer acknowledges Christ’s teaching, the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do to you (Matthew 7:12).

Sign #2: *“Scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men”* (2 Peter 3:3-7, Jude 1:18). When people don’t acknowledge the Lord the Creator of heaven and earth, when they despise the Lord, when they don’t fear the Last Judgment where they will stand accountable before God’s judgment throne, they live recklessly and become scoffers of the Lord’s Second Coming.

Action Points

To us who live in the end times, Jesus commands to do the following three things.

Reconcile: Don’t wait! Make peace with God and with others. Now. Do it right now! Reconcile today with your family and friends who don’t speak to you, or you don’t speak to them. Pray for God’s help and initiate the peace making. E.g. A lady had not spoken to her son for 10 years. Acting on my advice, she reached out to him with cards and phone calls. Three or four times a year. No response at first. However, she finally saw their relationship restored about a year later. Praise God.

Jesus says not to wait until your adversary comes to you, for it may never happen. Be proactive. You initiate it. Don’t put it off until your death bed, either. Remember Jesus’ example of the debtor and the magistrate in today’s story? E.g. Imprisonment of the insolvent in Jesus’ time. E.g. 2. The Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us ... as we forgive...” With sin unforgiven, we cannot be in God’s presence. Reconcile now!!!

Grow in knowing the Lord: are you growing in your faith and love? Are you growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)? Are you living a holy and godly life (2 Peter 3:11)? Are you clear minded and self-controlled so that you may pray (1 Peter 4:7)?

Please note that godly lifestyle doesn't come naturally nor happen overnight. It is a product of life-long discipline. Stay disciplined in prayer, dig into God's Word, and live a godly life. E.g. *No Bible No Breakfast*. Make every effort to be spotless and blameless (2 Peter 3:14). In your words, thoughts, and actions: *"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer"* (Psalm 19:14).

Be transformed. Do not conform to the pattern of the world. I wish all of us realized how much we are under the influence of the secular media in our thoughts and words. E.g. It shocks me to see some believers calling the name of the Lord in vain with no shame or guilt. Stay away from temptations that come into our living room through Internet or TV. E.g. One alarming statistic says that more than 60% of the Christian men are on pornography. Try a fast from TV and Internet. For a week, for a starter. You will have a better sleep and rest. Be transformed by the renewal of your mind every day (Romans 12:2). Stay accountable to Jesus every day.

Conclusion

Look at verse 56. Jesus calls "You hypocrites!"—who is He referring to? He is calling hypocrites those who are very good at understanding the natural signs (e.g. weather phenomena) yet poor at analyzing the signs from God, isn't He? If we fail to understand the signs of our times, we too may be fools and even hypocrites in His eyes. May it never be! May God help us to understand the signs of this present time and be ready for Christ's Second Coming.

Amen.