

October 19th, 2008 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 20”

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Luke 12:54-56

Jesus also said to the crowds, **“When you see clouds rising from the west, you immediately say, ‘A shower is coming,’ and it does. And when a south wind is blowing, you say, ‘It will be hot,’ and it is.**

You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, so why don’t you know how to interpret this present time?

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

Jesus tells us, in our text, that it is important to be able to interpret the signs of the times. I spent some time in preparation for this sermon trying to categorize the messages that Jesus is giving His followers in this portion of the Scripture, because Jesus is outlining the signs of the times for us. There are a few themes that recur throughout this series of parables upon which we should pick up. Today, I am going to go through this chunk of Scripture and try to make the signs that Jesus is pointing out to us clear to us.

Jesus’ primary point appears to me to be that our primary concern should be that we develop the proper belief structure that will allow us to be profitable in bringing others into the Kingdom of Heaven. He says, in **Luke 13:18-21**:

“What is the Kingdom of God like?” Jesus said. “To what can I compare it? It’s like a mustard seed that a man planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and birds came down from the sky to roost in its branches.”

[Jesus] said again, “To what can I compare the kingdom of God?

It’s like yeast that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until the whole mixture was leavened.”

The common characteristic of the mustard seed and the leaven to which Jesus is referring is that both start off as small parts of their environment, and then change their environment for the better through their growth. The mustard seed, when planted, spontaneously develops limbs to provide lodging for the birds of the air, and the leaven, which we call yeast, rises within the lump of dough, and changes the lump of dough into bread.

Most of us understand that birds can make nests in tree branches because the branches are spread out. If we cut down a tree and stacked all of the wood, we would have roughly the same

amount of wood as we had when the tree was standing, but the wood would be compacted in such a manner that birds could not make nests within the stack.

If you compare the texture of bread from the store to that of dough, you can see the little air pockets that the yeast produces in the dough to turn it into bread. The air increases the volume of the dough, thus reducing the density of the dough in much the same way as we increase the volume and reduce the density of a balloon by blowing it up, and the bread is more palatable when it is less dense. You would much rather eat a piece of bread than a lump of cooked dough, even if you could cook the lump of dough to the point in which the inside of the dough was done without the outside of the dough being burned.

Think of the mustard seed or the lump of unleavened dough as our personalities at birth. When we are born, our personalities are immaturely compacted like dough, meaning that our only concern is ourselves. Babies are completely self-centered, and if you don't believe it, have one and see what happens at 2am when the baby becomes hungry. Does the baby have any regard for the fact that you have to go to work in the morning, or that you are tired from taking care of him all day and you need your beauty sleep? Not a bit. The baby is only concerned about his or her own needs, and what you need, to the baby, is completely irrelevant.

Now think of the most mature person in the history of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was so completely other directed that He left His home in heaven and came to the earth, not as the son of a King as was Solomon, or as the adopted son of a princess, as was Moses, but as the son of a young working class newly married couple with few resources. Jesus came as the carpenter's son. He did not leave the heavenly realm to enjoy the riches of the earth, but to be crucified on the Cross of Calvary; and not His own sin, but for ours. Paul tells us, in **1 Timothy 1:15**:

15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

Jesus Christ did not come into the world to find noble people, but to find the dregs of the earth and to save them from their sins. The Apostle Paul, who, after being converted to Christianity on the Damascus Road, wrote over half of the New Testament, and who put his head on Nero's chopping block in defense of his faith in Jesus Christ, confessed, in the prior passage of Scripture, that he was the chief of sinners. But **Romans 3:23** makes it clearer that:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

If a man that devoted his very life to the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and ultimately gave his life for the cause calls himself the chief of sinners, how can any of us claim to be righteous? The truth of the matter is that we are all sinners, just as all babies are immature and self-centered, and the most important thing that we can do as Christians is to keep that fact uppermost in our minds.

The real essence of Christian maturity is for us to acknowledge our own sinfulness, meaning our own self-centeredness and our own immaturity and to then work to improve it. Jesus tells the crowd, in **Luke 12:57-59**:

57 "Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?"

58 When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, make every effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge, the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison.

59 I tell you, you shall not depart from there till you have paid the very last mite.”

In this parable, the magistrate is God, and our adversary is Jesus Christ. Because of our own personal immaturity and self-centeredness, we cannot stand in the judgment against the Law of the Lord, however, Jesus Christ is willing to give us a chance to avoid going before the judge. We can choose to settle with Jesus by acknowledging our own personal self-centeredness and immaturity, repenting of it and extending the forgiveness to our repentant peers that Jesus Christ is extending to us, which is how we develop Christian maturity.

A certain woman called her counselor to get some advice. “My daughter” the woman began, “started shacking up with a young man two years ago. My husband and I warned her not to do it, but she was bound and determined to live with this young man without the benefit of marriage. My husband and I decided not to honor their dishonorable relationship, and to not treat them as family, because my daughter did not bother to marry him and make him family.”

“That’s appropriate”, replied the counselor, “but how can I help you today?”

“Well”, said the woman, “now they have decided to get married. I want to know your opinion as to how we should respond to this situation.”

“My opinion”, replied the counselor, “is that even though you are the bride’s parents, you ought not pay for a fancy wedding for your daughter. It is traditional that the bride’s parents pay for the wedding, but your daughter has chosen to live in a non-traditional fashion by shacking up with the young man.

“People that decide to live in a non-traditional fashion forfeit the right to request that others treat them in a traditional fashion. So advise your daughter and her young man to just go down to the Justice of the Peace and get married this weekend, or have a minister marry them in his office. Congratulate them on their decision and support them getting married. Although they acted non-traditionally in the past, they are choosing to correct their situation now, and I think that their marrying is an act of repentance that you should accept and encourage. So don’t pay for anything, but be supportive of their marriage, and then, allow them to forget the errors that they made in the past. After all, I’m sure that you made a few errors during your youth.”

“Thanks for your help, and I will take your advice”, said the woman.

This advice is the essence of Christianity. People that are saved have to repent of their sins and make restitution as much as is possible, which helps them overcome their self-centeredness. As we are working to develop personal maturity, the Lord Jesus Christ forgives us, and others, of our sins, and we have the obligation to forgive those that sin against us and are repentant as well, which is part of our maturation process. Jesus Christ did not come into the world because He expected to find mature, other-directed individuals, but to find the immature and the self-centered, to forgive and restore them, and help them mature. Jesus tells us, in **Luke 17:3-4**:

3 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”

In our own evaluation, grading ourselves and others on the scale that we think is appropriate, we may consider ourselves better and more mature than others, but when we look at

the scale that God uses, we see that we are carnal, which means practice the sins of self-centeredness and immaturity. Paul tells us, in **1Corinthians 3:1-3**:

1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able;

3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

Envy, strife and divisiveness are the signs of carnality. Looking at situations spiritually rather than carnally is the essence of Christianity, but immaturity makes us unable to do so. Listen to the example given in **Luke 13:10-13**:

One Sabbath day when Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, a woman was there who had been crippled by a demon for eighteen years. She was doubled over and couldn't straighten up.

When Jesus saw her, He called out to her and said, "Woman, you are healed from your affliction." As soon as He laid His hands on her, she could stand up straight, and she began to praise God.

The ruler of the synagogue was angry with Jesus for healing on the Sabbath and said to the people, "There are six days set aside for working. Come on one of those days to be healed and not on the Sabbath."

The reaction of the ruler of the synagogue was the essence of non-Christian immaturity. The ruler of the synagogue saw his job as enforcing the rules of worship, and the ruler's self-centered immaturity caused him to intellectually opine that no one should do anything in the synagogue that superseded his jurisdiction. The ruler of the synagogue had authority over the order and the type of ceremonial worship activities practiced, but he had no authority over the power of Jesus Christ, which irritated the ruler so much so that he decided to ignore the benefit of Jesus' miraculous act for the woman, and find a reason to denigrate Jesus' power in order to reassert his own power. Of course, there is nothing spiritual about that response; it is strictly envious, which is an act of carnality. Jesus spoke to the absurdity of the reason that the ruler gave for his disapproval in the hope that the ruler would understand the petty, envious, carnal reason for his emotional upset and repent of his sin, in **Luke 13:10-13**:

The Lord replied, "You hypocrite! Even on the Sabbath each one of you here unties his ox or his donkey from the stall and leads it to water.

So shouldn't this woman—a descendant of Abraham who has been bound by Satan for eighteen years—be freed on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

His reply embarrassed His opponents, while the crowd kept rejoicing at all the wonderful things He did.

Jesus' opponents were embarrassed because it was obvious to all the reason that they stated for their rebuke of Jesus was both ridiculous, and was not the real cause. In reality, they did not care about the Sabbath Day; they cared Jesus stealing their thunder because He was more holy than they were.

I am a Baptist because when I was fourteen years old, I was recruited by Mr. J.T. Campbell, the choir director at the Hartzell United Methodist Church in Chicago, Ill, to play the

organ for the Providence Missionary Baptist Church of the same city. Mr. Campbell was in his 70's, and was well respected across the city of Chicago among Black churches as a choral director.

In the United Methodist church, pastors are sent to churches annually by the church hierarchy, and in 1966, after the annual meeting, Hartzell received a new pastor. The new pastor came to the church with a new program for the church, and called a business meeting to lay out his plan. After the pastor completed his presentation, he opened the floor to the membership so that he could receive questions and give clarifications, as he knew that some of the things in the plan were new to the members of the church.

An older lady raised her hand and was given the floor. Rather than addressing the pastor, she addressed Mr. Campbell. "Mr. Campbell", she said, "I've never heard of a church doing this particular thing that the pastor is talking about. What do you think? Is it a good idea?"

Mr. Campbell, being a mature churchman, tried to respond diplomatically, but it was clear from both the question and the response of the congregation that the church looked to Mr. Campbell as the known leadership quantity while the pastor and his ideas were on trial. The pastor reacted negatively to the fact that Mr. Campbell was the de facto leader of the church by trying to marginalize Mr. Campbell. But Mr. Campbell was a good Christian that knew about church leadership, and so he decided to just leave Hartzell and move to another church with which he was affiliated rather than get into a church fight with the new pastor. Mr. Campbell had previously recruited my older brother to be the church organist at Hartzell, and Mr. Campbell did not want to hurt the worship services at Hartzell by taking my brother away from the church, so he asked me to go to Providence with him to play the organ. That's how I became a Baptist.

Mr. Campbell was a mature churchman, and, being mature, he followed the instructions of the Apostle Paul on the subject, given in **Romans 12:17-21**:

17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This passage of Scripture is the definition of Christian love. In the Greek and Aramaic, which are the original languages of the New Testament, there are three different words for the three types of love. The type of love to which this passage of Scripture refers to is *agapao*, which is the Christian love that we are commanded to have for our fellow members of the human race.

Christian love is not an emotional connection, but is defined as doing the charitable thing, irrespective of personal feelings. In the King James Version of the Bible, *agapao* is translated as charity. We are commanded by God to live charitably. This admonition does not tell us to allow ourselves to be victimized by evil, nor does it say that evildoers ought not be isolated from the society.

Verse 18 of Romans 12 tells us that we ought to live peaceably with all men if it is possible, as much as depends on us, so we ought not act aggressively. This means that we ought not take personal vengeance, as verse 19 of Romans 12 tells us, however, we have a

responsibility to both defend ourselves and to stand between evil and the innocent. Paul tells Titus, his son in the ministry, in **Titus 1:5-11**

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—

6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.

7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,

8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled,

9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

10 For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,

11 whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.

Paul tells us to oppose that which is negative, but in such a charitable way that no blame can be attached to us for aggressiveness, in **Titus 1:15-2:8**:

15 To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.

16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

1 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine:

2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience;

3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—

4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,

5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

6 Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded,

7 in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility,

8 sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.

Paul concludes this passage of Scripture with a call to action, in **Titus 2:11-15**:

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

15 Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

God, through the pen of Paul, tells us to engage in the battle between good and evil, but

to do so within the rules of engagement that correspond with *agapao* love, or charity. Not emotionally, or aggressively, but with such authority and such correctness that even our enemies have to acknowledge that there is nothing evil about that which we do.

Jesus embarrassed His opponents by His impeccable logic, not by sarcasm or by demeaning them. Jesus' opponents were enraged at Him, not because of that which Jesus did, but because Jesus pointed out the lack of leadership and logic in that which they did. We cannot hang those that oppose the word of God, but we can allow them to hang themselves, as did Jesus.

So, we are called to recognize that which is going on now, and to be like a seed of spirituality and logic in an illogical world, or the yeast of Godly maturity in a self-centered world of immaturity. Paul tells us how we should behave and why, in **Titus 3:1-11**:

1 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work,

2 to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,

5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

9 But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.

10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition,

11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

While we ought reject ungodly arguments and divisive people, we ought not reject formerly ungodly people who have repented, because we have made ungodly arguments in our time, and God allowed us the space to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We do not have the maturity that we have because of our own righteousness, but because of the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has made provision for us to receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth.

The truth is the real sign of the time. Jesus tells us to search for the truth in that which His Word, says rather than that which we think is right, and that we should do all that we can to live according to that which He is teaching us. We ought to seek the truth and learn that which the Scripture says now, because Jesus tells us that the day is coming in which it will be too late to change our ways. **Luke 13:22-30** records:

22 And [Jesus] went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.

23 Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And [Jesus] said to them,

24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and

will not be able.

25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,'

26 then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.'

27 But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'

28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.

29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.

30 And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

Although we have eaten and drunk in the presence of the Lord, our casual affiliation with the Lord will not save us unless we develop our Christian maturity to the point in which we can live according to the admonitions of the *agapao* love of Christ; unless we have in us the mind of Christ. We don't have to have an emotional attachment to our Christian brothers and sisters, but we do have to have a volitional attachment to treat them as Jesus admonishes us, patiently, kindly, not enviously, not boastfully, not proudly, not rudely, not in a self-absorbed fashion, not vengefully. We need to have perseverance, hopefulness and trust that both we and our Christian peers will continue to progress in Christian maturity, and we have to admonish and encourage one another in such a way as to bring the desired result to pass.

We have to understand the signs of the times, especially as they pertain to those with whom we have influence as Christians. We need to remember our responsibility, as did the keeper of the vineyard in the parable that Jesus spoke in **Luke 13:6-9:**

6 [Jesus] also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.

7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?'

8 But [the keeper of the vineyard] answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it.

9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.' "

We have the responsibility to develop our Christian maturity, as the Holy Spirit is digging around us and fertilizing us, even as we are digging around those with whom we have influence and fertilizing them. Let us remember the admonition of the Lord to keep in mind the signs of the times and continue to prepare ourselves and those with whom we have influence for the coming of the Lord.

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