Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Failure to Discern the Times and the Threat
Scripture: Luke 12:54-59
Code: 42-179

2004

Let's turn to the Word of God now. It's the last paragraph of Luke 12 in our ongoing study of this great historical record of the Lord Jesus Christ written by Luke. We come now to verses54 though 59 and the base today title is the title that I gave early in the week about discerning the time or discerning the signs but as I thought more about this text, it really is about the tragedy of wasted opportunity...the tragedy of wasted opportunity. We all know what it is to miss an opportunity. We all know what it is to waste a privilege. Sometimes it's minimally damaging. Sometimes it sends your life in a direction from which you can never recover. Wasted opportunity is not unfamiliar to us and you could draw from all kinds of experiences and all kinds of lives as illustrations of wasted opportunity.

But whenever I think about wasted opportunity, I think about one name. One name jumps into my mind. It's the name Judas Iscariot, because there were, after all, only 12 people in the history of the world given the privilege of spending three years with Jesus every day and every night and Judas was one of those. The intimacy with which he was associated with the Creator of the universe in human form belonged only to that little group. That has to be the greatest opportunity that any human being ever experienced and consequently his rejection of Christ stands as the greatest illustration of wasting your opportunity and even the world recognizes the horror of such a wasted opportunity. There he was with the Son of God every day for three years, knowing Him, knowing Him intimately, seeing His character at the closest level, hearing His truth, listening to His wisdom, watching what He did, seeing His reactions, experiencing His compassion, seeing the demonstrations of His divine power, experiencing the supernatural force of His life and, in the end, he decided that Jesus was worth 30 pieces of silver and no more. It's just unimaginable. It's unthinkable that a man could waste that kind of opportunity and end up tragically tormented forever and if you think there's torment in hell, imagine the torment of a person like Judas remembering his wasted opportunity.

But Judas is no solitary figure in history. He is solitary in one sense and the whole world understands the despicable character of Judas. I have never met a person named Judas and I have never even seen a dog named Judas. The name is forbidden. That's how despicable the man is but, as I said, he's not a solitary figure. There were many Judases in Jesus' day, if not in degree, certainly in kind. There were many who rejected Christ after being exposed to His teaching, after seeing Him, hearing Him, being near Him, watching the divine power of His life. The whole generation of Jews living in the land of Israel and those living on the fringes of Israel where Jesus went all experienced ample

evidence of His character and His nature. They all were the privileged of all human history.

This is the only period of time in which God walked on the earth and that three years of ministry in which it was manifested He was God was visible. It was experienced by the populous of the land of Israel. That most privileged generation turns out to be a Judas generation who reject Jesus with ample exposure to the reality of who He was and there are still plenty of people like that today. There are still Judases today. In fact, most people in the world who were exposed to Jesus reject Him and, as I said, maybe not in degree do they waste an opportunity to the level that Judas did, but in kind they reject Christ the way he did, people who in spite of the testimony of Scripture, in spite of the evidence of the Bible, the unmistakable clarity with which Jesus reveals Himself and the record which is an authoritative and tested and proven true record affirms who He is, they still reject Him and so all those who were exposed to Him when He was on earth, all those who were exposed to Him through the testimony of Scripture who waste that opportunity and that privilege by rejecting Him end up in the category of Judases.

The words that our Lord says in the text before us address this issue of wasted opportunity. Let's look at them starting in verse 54. "And He was also saying to the multitudes, 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, "A shower is coming," and so it turns out. And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, "It will be a hot day," and it turns out that way. You hypocrites. You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time? And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right? For a while, you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate. On your way there, make an effort to settle with him in order that he may not drag you before the judge and the judge turn you over to the constable and the constable throw you into prison. I say to you, you shall not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent.'"

These two illustrations, these two parables that our Lord uses, are intended to illustrate very important spiritual truth. By the way, He used very similar stories on other occasions. The first one about the weather appears in a very similar form in Matthew16:1-4. The second one about settling before you get to court appears in a very similar form in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 25. So these are the kind of illustrations that probably came up often in Jesus' ministry. Those incidents occurred in Galilee. This, of course, is down in Judea. These are warning words and warning sort of becomes the tone of Jesus' ministry from now on in these remaining months before His death but not just warning; it's sort of an indicting warning. It's a warning that the die is cast and it gets stronger and stronger as the months go on. The nation has made itself the all time illustration of wasted opportunity and it's not just Judas. It's a whole nation of Judases and the consequences are monumental and forever. Here in these two illustrations, our Lord says, "You failed to discern two things, the time and the threat...the time and the threat." And, of course, the Jews prided themselves on their discernment. They prided themselves on their spiritual insight but they failed with damning deadly and eternal results to discern the time and the threat.

Now let's just set the context as the opening words of verse54 do, "And He was also saying to the multitudes..." Now this is a change. This is a long discourse and it runs all the way to chapter13 verse 9. It starts in chapter 12 verse 1 but in chapter12 verse 1, we read that there were so many thousands of the multitude, tens of thousands, myriads, which basically means 10,000, and there were so many of them they were stepping on one another, massive crowd. But it also says in verse 1 He was speaking to His disciples and over in verse 22, "And He said to His disciples..." The massive crowd has made up its mind by this time and it is to reject Christ. They are going to follow the lead of the Scribes and Pharisees, their religious leaders, who have spread the word that He is satanic. He has to be satanic, not divine, because He attacks our religion. He attacks our religious system and so He's got to be from Satan and so that's the spin the leaders put and the people buy into that and, for the most part, the nation as such has rejected Him.

Even though He ministered in Galilee for over a year, when He goes back to Galilee after His resurrection to meet with believers there, there are only 500 who gather around Him and in Judea when they meet in the Upper Room, there are only 120. So it was a small group of people when Christ was here that really responded. The massive portion of the population rejected Him and so here in verse 54, He directs His words to the multitudes whereas up to this point, He's been talking primarily to the disciples and that's because, as I've been saying and I won't go through it all again, up to this verse, He's been addressing people who are still making up their mind. The word "disciple" means learner, mathetes, student. Those who were still open, the ones who are committed, who are marginally committed, who are still thinking it through, who are interested and who are at least open to it, He's addressing the words up to this point to them and saying, "Abandon the false religion of Judaism. Fear God. Confess Me. Trust yourself to the Holy Spirit. Disdain materialism. Leave the world and pursue the kingdom. Do it with urgency because you don't know how much time you have. Join the faithful and not the unfaithful who will be separated from God forever." It's all very evangelistic up to this point, calling people to come to faith in Him, to receive the salvation that He offers and that's why He's speaking to those who were still in the process of coming to that conclusion.

But here in verse 54, He opens it up to the crowd and it stops being an invitation because they've already made up their mind and it becomes an indictment. It becomes a warning directed at them in their unbelief and from here on to the end of this discourse, chapter 13 verse 9, all of it has that same tone of indictment and judgment to fall. Essentially, up to verse 54, He is inviting Jews to believe. Here, He begins condemning unbelieving Jews and we can extend it beyond that because the Bible is intended for all generations. Up to this point, He has been inviting people to believe and now He condemns those who do not. And first of all, let's look at Illustration No. 1 which shows that they failed to discern the time. Verse 54, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say a shower is coming and so it turns out." Now that's just a simple unsophisticated way to tell the weather and, as I said, very much like an illustration Jesus used in Matthew16 verses 1-4.

You look out at the Mediterranean and you see a cloud and you say it's going to rain because we all know how rain works. Water evaporates off the sea. It collects in a cloud. It comes over the land and it drops...that's how rain is. So you make a simple deduction like Elijah. Remember back in 1 Kings 18:44-45, Elijah was in a drought and he looked out over the sea and he saw a cloud the size of a man's hand moving toward the land and he knew the drought was going to be over and that's exactly what happened. As you see the rain cloud coming off the sea, you know it's going to bring the rain. Our Lord's point is, "Look. With just minimal evidence, one simple fact, you make confident conclusions." You do it all the time. You don't require a whole lot of information. You don't need a TV weather guy. You don't need a Doppler radar deal. You don't need the weather service. You don't need satellites. You look over there and you see a dark cloud coming off the sea and you say it's going to rain and you know what? You're right. That's how it works. It turns out that way. In other words, with only a minimal amount of evidence, but actual evidence, you can draw a firm conclusion that is in fact accurate.

And then He says, "When you see a south wind"...that would be blowing from the south and west coming from the desert not the sea. When you see a south or feel a south wind blowing, you say, "It'll be a hot day." Kauson means fervent, scorching heat. "It's going to be a scorcher," would be the way to say it because that's what's called a siroccos. It's a wind off the desert. Now in Southern California, we can identify with this very easily. Our rain comes from the west and the north and our heat comes from what we call the Santa Ana winds that come off the desert and gain heat as they come and bring that hot wind to us. We have very similar topography and weather patterns to the land of Israel. This is just simple stuff. You feel a hot wind coming from the east; it's going to be a scorcher. You see a cloud coming off the sea; it's going to rain...universally known, simple and yet accurate.

Then He applies it in verse 56. Listen to this, "You hypocrites." Now let me stop you there. You say, "What's the connection? What does telling the weather have to do with hypocrisy?" Well, first of all, let me say that this was our Lord's favorite term to describe the people of Israel. He called them hypocrites more than He called them anything else and not only the leaders but the people as well. If you just take your little concordance and bounce through, for example, the Gospel of Matthew and see how many times He calls them hypocrites, you would be surprised. Well, you say, "I know they were hypocrites. Sure, because of their false religion." That's true. To be a hypocrite means to lie about what you really are, right? It means to deceive somebody about the truth and they were hypocrites because their piety was phony. Their spirituality was false. Their allegiance to God was a sham. Their holiness was superficial. Their religion was external and their hearts were wicked and evil. Their whole religion was an hypocrisy. It was all phony, as all false religion is...all of it...because false religion can't change the heart. Is that what Jesus meant? Well, that would be a little oblique, wouldn't it? Why after telling two weather stories would you just make a blanket statement like, "You're all a bunch of hypocrites" unless you had something more specific in mind.

Well, He does and He says what it is. Verse 56, "Here's your hypocrisy. You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky. Why do you not analyze this present time?" What was their hypocrisy? Their hypocrisy was simply this: You see a cloud and you conclude rain. You feel a wind and you conclude heat. Minimal evidence and you draw a confident and accurate conclusion and with all the evidence that I have shown you that I am God the redeemer, the Messiah, the Savior, you reject Me. You hypocrites. You have more than enough. Their hypocrisy was in pretending not to have enough evidence and so they forever said to Jesus, "Show us a sign." He says, "I'm not giving you any more signs except the sign of Jonah...resurrection." You phonies.

You know how to draw conclusions from evidence. You do it every day. You do it in something as simple as the weather. You know how to look at something and say this is going to lead to that. You know what I have revealed to you is true and undeniable and supernatural. Why don't you dokimadzo? Why don't you analyze? Why don't you think through and test and discern the evidence, massive evidence, the testimony of the angels to Zechariah and Elizabeth about the birth of the forerunner, John the Baptist, the angelic announcement to Mary of the birth of Jesus and the fact that He was born of a virgin, the monumental prophesy of Zechariah the priest that the Christ was coming to bring salvation and forgiveness of sins to people through the tender mercies of God and that He would bring salvation light into the sinful darkness and life to those in the shadow of death and peace to the alienated and the troubled, the testimony of the angels to the shepherds that the Messiah had been born...glory to God in the highest...and the shepherds then going to give testimony of what they had heard of the Christ child whom they came to see, the testimony of Simeon and Anna in the temple when Jesus came to the temple to be dedicated and they had been convinced that this indeed was the Messiah, the one who had come for the consolation or comfort of Israel and the salvation of the Gentiles.

And then John the Baptist preached and pointed out, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world," and the Father speaks out of heaven, "This is My beloved Son," and the Spirit comes and descends upon Him. And then Jesus, led by the Spirit into the wilderness, encounters Satan and conquers him in temptation, is then filled with the Spirit, goes out to minister, teaches divine truth, heals the sick, casts out demons, controls nature and raises the dead. The evidence is unmistakable. From the enunciation to Zacharias and Elizabeth through the very works and words of Jesus, the evidence is massive from one end of Israel to the other wherever He's gone. There's no way to escape it. "How," He says, "in the world can you make conclusions with minimal evidence that are accurate and not make the conclusion that is inescapable about this? Why will you not sit down and analyze it? Why will you not discern it?" They wouldn't. They didn't want to know who He was. They wanted to accept their preconception. Why? Because He attacked their religious system. He stomped on their self-righteousness. It wasn't that they didn't want a kingdom; sure they wanted a kingdom. It wasn't that they didn't want salvation; they wanted salvation. It wasn't that they didn't want forgiveness and eternal life. They want all that. It wasn't the cure they hated; it was the diagnosis they

resented and you see that.

Go back to Luke 4. This most notable event, one of the most fascinating in all the life of Jesus, and often overlooked, Luke4, He goes to His own synagogue in Nazareth. Now He's been in ministry over a year. He's been ministering down in Judea. He's now up in Galilee. He's done miracles all through Capernaum. He's taught there. Now He finally comes to His own town, Nazareth. He goes to His own synagogue where all His family and friends are, everybody who knows Him, where He grew up. And, by the way, people didn't move around. They lived there their whole lives in that little placed called Nazareth up on the hillside there in Galilee and they all knew Him and He came back and they had heard about Him, of all the wonders that He'd done, all the miracles, all the teaching, all the amazing things that were part of His life and when He finally came to Nazareth, they wanted to hear from Him. He's now a famous, you know, hometown boy.

And so He takes the place of the teacher and He goes to the front in verse 17 and the book of the Prophet Isaiah was handed to Him and He opened the book, found the place where it was written and He turns immediately in the scroll to Isaiah61:1-2, which is a messianic prophesy predicting the coming of Messiah and what He would do, and He reads it, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." And He closed the book and He gave it back to the attendant and sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him and He began to say to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. I am the one on whom the Spirit has descended. I am the one whom He has anointed to preach the Gospel, to proclaim release to the captive, recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden. I am the one to announce the favorable year of the Lord has come." There it was.

What's the favorable year of the Lord? The moment in history when God's favor falls, the long awaited moment when God's favor falls, when God's salvation comes, because God's Savior arrives. No other generation experienced that but all other Jewish generations anticipated it. This was the moment they'd all waited for, when God was favorable, when God showed extraordinary favor and goodness to sinners by the sending of His Son. This language has overtones of the jubilee year, you know, when all the slaves are set free and all the debts were cancelled and all the land went back to its original family and everybody had a new beginning. This is the favorable year of the Lord. This is the spiritual jubilee you've all waited for, when all the prisoners are set free and all the debts are cancelled and everybody receives the inheritance. This was Israel's hope. They'd lived for this. Today, it's fulfilled...amazing, astonishing, in this obscure little town of Nazareth.

By the way, there's another statement in verse 2 of Isaiah61 that Jesus didn't read. The verse actually says, "...to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God." He didn't read that part because this wasn't the time for the day of vengeance. This was the time for salvation.

Vengeance and judgment would come later. As it says in the Gospel of John, He didn't come to judge; He came to save. This was the day of salvation; this was it. This is what they had been waiting for for so long, the favorable year that Isaiah had prophesied. Jesus said in Luke10:23, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see for I say to you, 'Many prophets and kings wish to see the things which you see and didn't see them and hear the things you hear and didn't hear them.'" Boy, are you a privileged generation. This is the day of salvation...incredible day.

And they were stunned by what He said but as He went on, they had an amazing reaction. Verse 28, "And all the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things." As He began to indict them, and He basically told them, "You are people God can't bless. You're just like the generation in Elijah's time. God can't do anything with you. He has to go to a pagan land to help a widow. You're just like the generation in Elisha's time. Lepers all over the place; God can't help any of them. He has to go to a border terrorist named Naaman, who's a non-Jew. Your hearts are so evil, so steeped in self-righteousness." That's what they didn't like. It wasn't that they didn't want salvation or heaven. They just hated the idea that they were sinful. They were not, in their minds, the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the downtrodden. They were spiritually proud and His indictment infuriated them.

In verse 29, amazingly, they rose up, cast Him out of the city, led Him to the brow of the hill on which the city had been built in order to throw Him down the cliff. One sermon in His hometown where everybody knew Him and they wanted to kill Him. Does that tell you how deep they were steeped in their self-righteousness? How evil their hearts were? This was their time. This was the favorable year of the Lord and they wanted to kill the one who came to bring them the favor of God. It's just astonishing.

In John chapter 8 verse 37, "I know that you are Abraham's offspring," He said, "yet you seek to kill me because My Word has no place in you." You seek to kill me. In John 8:58, Jesus said, "Before Abraham was born, I am," and they picked up stones to throw at Him. In John chapter 10 verse 31, Jesus said, "I and the Father are one," and again they took up stones to stone Him. Two things they couldn't take; they were sinful and He was God. They wouldn't accept those realities. Nothing new under the sun, folks. That's why people reject Jesus today, not because there's no evidence...there's all kinds of evidence. It's because they don't want to acknowledge their sinfulness. They don't want to acknowledge Jesus is God because if you acknowledge that Jesus is God then what Jesus said is true and Jesus said they're sinful. Too many implications to accept the deity of Christ and they were following their leaders. Luke 7:30 says that the leaders didn't believe in Him and the people didn't either. Why? Well, back to John 3. It's very clear. Our Lord says, verse 16, "God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life, for God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world...that comes later...but that the world through Him should be saved. He who believes in Him is not judged but he who does not believe has been judged already because he's not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, light has come into the world and men love the darkness rather than the light for their

deeds were evil." The light was there. They could see the light. The evidence was in. They rejected the evidence. They wouldn't analyze it. They wouldn't discern it. They were unwilling. It wasn't a matter of information; it was a matter of will because they loved their sin. Verse 20, He says, "Everyone who does evil hates the light." You don't want to get near the Christ of Scripture. You don't want to get near the true Christ if you hate the light because it'll expose your sin.

And in John 12, there's a couple of verses that also speak to this issue. Jesus said, "For a little while longer, the light is among you. Walk while you have the light that darkness may not overtake you. He who walks in the darkness doesn't know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light in order that you might become sons of the light." What He said to them was, "You have the light. It's here. It's the light of God shining. It's the light of salvation. It's the light of forgiveness. It's the light of eternal life. But it's also the light that exposes your sin and if you're going to love your sin, you're going to love it to your own destruction," and that's what they did. That's the great tragedy.

Look at Luke 19. This is where it all gets kind of summed up. Luke 19:41, He approached the city, saw it and wept. And this is what He said, verse 42. Listen to this statement. "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace." If you had only known that I was offering you peace...if you had only known but you refused. "Now they have been hidden from your eyes." This is a judicial act on God's part. I gave you time. I gave you opportunity. It's gone. For the most part, for that nation, by now it was over. And He pronounces the judgment in verse 43, "For the day shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, surround you, hem you in on every side, level you to the ground, and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another." That's the destruction of Jerusalem...began in 66 A.D., finished up in 70 A.D. when the Romans besieged and finally sacked the City of Jerusalem, the horrific event that caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of the Jews, many who of course were hearing Jesus even then who were very young, still 30 years away from this occasion. But He says, "If you had only known...if you had only known." End of verse 44, "...but because you didn't recognize the time of your visitation, now it's hidden from your eyes." If only you had known.

You better discern the time. There is a time. There is a season. God says in Genesis6:3, "My Spirit doesn't always strive with man." There is a time when the Spirit strives. There is a time when opportunity is there. Don't waste it! And, as I said, it'd still be 30 years. In that 30 years, the nation would not turn to Him. It would be hidden. They had rejected it. Their rejection was so complete, so full. You say, "What do you mean by that?" What was there left to do to prove the point? They rejected with a full understanding of who Jesus was, His words, His works. What else could be done? This is Hebrews 6 stuff. If you've seen it all, heard it all, experienced it all and you reject it, you could never be renewed to repentance. I mean what else can be said? You have a time. Only God knows what that time is and you better discern the time of your opportunity, your Gospel opportunity.

That doesn't mean there weren't Jews converted; there were. As the Gospel was preached starting in the book of Acts, there were 3,000 on the day of Pentecost, right? And in chapter 4, there were 5,000 and as you keep adding, you've probably got 20,000 people that could come to Christ in the early years of the church but the nation as a whole, judged because of wasted opportunity. At the first, there weren't very many. There were only 500 in Galilee when Jesus went there after His resurrection and 120 in Judea in the Upper Room. That's not very many for God having been on earth. You see how...you say, "Oh, you know, surely people would believe if they saw miracles." No. Surely they would believe if God was here...no. God was here; they didn't believe. But grace was offered and it was offered and it was offered and, of course, then the authorities realized what was going on. They had killed Jesus but they hadn't stopped the movement so then they had to start killing the preachers, and so they killed James and then they killed Stephen and they kept killing and exiling the Apostles but the Gospel was still moving. It moved away from Jerusalem. It moved into the Gentile world and it's moving even today and here you are with an opportunity, with a Gospel time that God has given to you. This is your time. This is the time of your visitation to know the truth and it's still open to anyone who believes. Judgment hasn't yet come to you or to this world or to this society. It came to Israel in 70 A.D. with horrific death sweeping across that place. Judgment hasn't fallen on us. Maybe it will in some cataclysm; I don't know. But you have now and that's all you have. There's no guarantee about how long God is going to strive with you.

In John chapter1, it says in verse 10, "He was in the world. The world was made through Him and the world didn't know him." That's still true. It doesn't know its own Creator. "He came to His own." That means His own realm and it can mean His own people, His own nation, and those who were His own did not receive Him. That's true. They killed Him. But still, grace is open. Verse12, "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." You can still believe. There were Jews who did believe. In the book of Acts, they began to believe...3,000, 5,000...and the Gospel is still open and there's plenty of evidence. You don't need any more signs. The evidence is there. When somebody comes to me and says, "I don't know if Jesus is really God," do you know what I tell them to do? Read the Gospels. Start with the Gospel of John because it's written that you might know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that you might believe, and believing, have life. That's why it was written. That's the record.

You say, "Well, just how would somebody be convinced?" Because the Word of God is alive and powerful...right?...and it penetrates and it cuts and slices to heart because it's not a human book. It's supernatural. The Jews say, "We want more signs. We want more signs. Show us more. Show us more." And you remember what Jesus said about that, "I'm not giving you any more signs and, in fact, you've had so many signs that it's going to be better in the judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than it is going to be for you because they didn't have anywhere near the privilege revelations that you have." And when they came and said, "Who is this Jesus," He said to them, "Go and report to them what you've seen. The blind received sight. The lame walked. The lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. The poor have the Gospel preached to them. Who do you think it is?" It's

all in the Scripture and the record is authoritative. It has been tested through the centuries. It is accurate.

Now let's go back to Luke 12. With all that informing our understanding of this verse, He says to them, verse 56, "So you hypocrites. You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky with minimal evidence. Why don't you apply those same logical abilities and discern the time that you're living in." The time, this present time, with a definite article. I always have to say that, you know, the supposed search for Jesus today by the unbelieving critics and the agnostics and the liberals and the impenitent journalists and the self-styled religious scholars will never come to the right conclusion because the Jesus of the Bible is not acceptable, because if you say He's God, then what He says is true, and if what He says is true, then all the religious hypocrites are unmasked and all the sinners are exposed. They don't like you teaching on sin. They don't like you teaching on hell. It has nothing to do with evidence. So they failed to discern the time...tragic failure.

Secondly, Jesus tells a little illustration or analogy to show they failed to discern the threat...they failed to discern the threat. I don't know if you've ever been hauled into court by somebody who had a charge against you but it's pretty frightening. I had that experience when I was sued along with some other pastors here years ago and dragged into court...literally, not physically...but forced to go to court to try to defend myself against those who were falsely accusing. Ten years of that court battle and, ultimately, ends up in the U.S. Supreme Court which upholds the California State Supreme Court decision in our favor that we had done nothing wrong. But Jesus tells a story about a man who had done something wrong and was going to be hauled into court for it. He says in verse 57, "Why do you not even on your own initiative judge what's right?" Why don't you for your own sake forget the era you're living in, forget the big opportunity? Why don't you look at your own life and analyze the aspect of righteousness? Another way to say that was "Why don't you look at yourself and your sin?" I mean He could easily have said, "Why don't you on your own initiative judge what's wrong with you?" You better get down to dikaion, down to righteousness here, down to the issue of righteousness. And what He is saying is, "You're in eternal danger. You are in eternal danger."

Back in chapter 12 verse 2, "There is nothing covered up that will not be revealed. There is nothing hidden that will not be known. Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light. What you've whispered in the inner room will be proclaimed on the housetop and I say to you, my friends, 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more they can do, but I warn you whom to fear. Fear the one...that's God...who after He's killed you has authority to cast you into hell.'" Yeah, I tell you, fear Him. Do you understand the threat? Why don't you, literally in the Greek, for yourselves take a look at the matter of what's right and consequently what's wrong? It's astonishing how people live on the edge of hell because of their sin and never deal with it, never deal with the reality of their sin, and they all say this. This is the typical, "Well, I think that when I get there, you know, I've done more good than bad." You don't ever want to get before the throne of God in that condition with that assumption. Don't figure it'll all work out when you arrive there.

Verse58, "For while you're going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate..." This is something that would happen in life just like it happens today. Somebody defrauds somebody. Somebody harms somebody. Somebody commits an offense or a crime against somebody and the person offended wants to get it settled, make it right, so he arranges to appear before the magistrate. The magistrate is the archonta, the archon, the ruler, the person of power, and this is sort of a preliminary hearing which would occur. You'd go and the guy would lay out his case and the magistrate would then remand the thing to the judge and put him to court. So He says, "While you're going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on the way to the initial hearing," He says, "make an effort to settle with him in order that he may not drag you before the judge and the judge turn you over to the constable and the constable throw you into prison."

Now the terms here are very interesting because they're very accurate in terms of how things were in the case of the court and its function. The magistrate, as I said, was the ruler who gave an initial hearing. The judge is just that, kriten, the judge. The constable, proctor is the word, and the constable was the person who had the responsibility to exact the punishment. He is called an exacter of penalties. A proctor, here called a constable, is one who enforced the payment of debt by imprisonment. It's always been interesting to me. I've been in Northern Ireland and I toured with the Northern Ireland Police, who have no small job, and they are called constables and the police are the constabulary. They are the ones who enforce the payment of debts by imprisonment. That's what they do and that's exactly what this Greek word means. So He says, "You don't ever want to get to the judge because if you get to the judge, your guilt is going to be exposed at the level of the court and then they're going to assign you to the proctor or the constable who's going to put you in prison." And verse 59, "I say to you you're not going to get out of there until you've paid the very last cent." And, you know, in a debtor's prison, it was almost impossible to pay. How are you going to pay what you owe? How are you going to make it right when you're in prison? And so people languished and died there.

So there's only one point to make here. This is not some very complicated allegory. He says, "If you've got any sense, you will settle your issues of guilt before you arrive at the judge." Okay? Pretty simple. Can't you think that through? You better discern the time, Gospel opportunity, and you better discern the threat. You don't ever want to arrive at the great white throne judgment. You don't ever want to get there at the court and say, "I want to speak in my defense." You won't be able to speak. The record will speak for itself and once your guilt is revealed, and it will be in the court, you're going to be sent to an eternal punishment and every last cent, lepton, one-eighth of a penny, a mite, smallest coin, down to the last cent, you're going to pay apodidomi, in full. You're going to get the full wrath of the court on your crimes. Hebrews 9:27, "It's appointed unto man once to die and after this, the judgment." You don't want to get there. Settle before you arrive. Why can't you discern the time, Gospel opportunity, the favorable year of the Lord, salvation offered? And why can't you discern the threat? You don't ever want to show up in heaven and say, "Well, here I am, God. I hope the good

stuff outweighed the bad stuff." If you are there, you're done. Those who have settled before they get there never go to that court. That's why at the great white throne judgment of God, there are only unbelievers. No believers will ever be there because we're not under any condemnation. Why? Because we put our trust in Christ. That's how you settle with God. You put your trust in Christ, the one who bore the penalty for your sin and the justice of the court and the judge is satisfied. God is willing to reconcile...God is willing to reconcile. He's a reconciling God.

2 Corinthians 5 talks about that God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. He's provided reconciliation. God wants you to settle out of court and the way you settle is to make peace with Him through His Son, through faith in Christ, whom God made sin for us that we might be made the righteous of God in Him. God punished Him, the just for the unjust, that we might be brought to God. Grace is available. Forgiveness is available. Freedom from sin is available. Freedom from punishment, the hope of eternal life, escape from judgment. You can settle with God out of court. If you don't, you'll get to court and you will pay in full down to the last cent. Don't even be there. Settle your account. Put your trust in Christ. He says to them, "How...how could you waste such an opportunity? You didn't discern the time and you didn't discern the threat"...tragedy. Isaiah 55, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near." 2Corinthians 6, "Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation." Don't miss it. Let's pray.

How profoundly enriched we are, Lord, to relive a really monumental moment almost 2,000 years ago in Israel, to relive the very moment that Jesus said these things and to see it not just as history, though it is, but to see it as a living reality that goes on even now. For all of us who have been exposed to the favorable year of the Lord, the coming of Messiah, the Gospel of grace and forgiveness and salvation in Him, all of us who have come to know the truth, we stand as those Jews did, accountable for that record, accountable for that evidence, and we who typically every day draw confident conclusions from minimal evidence about all kinds of things in life would be hypocritical if we fumbled around with the idea that we didn't have enough evidence that Jesus was really the Savior. That's just hypocrisy. The evidence is overwhelming and unarguable.

It's the issue of sin that we have to come to grips with and so, Lord, I pray that You will do that work in the hearts of those that are here that don't yet know Christ. Lord, may this be a day when many will settle out of court and never have to face You as judge, never have to know what the day of the vengeance of our God is because they will have embraced the favor of God through the Gospel of the Messiah and the Redeemer Jesus Christ.

Lord, what a gift You've given us in the truth. We praise You for it. We embrace it and desire to proclaim it faithfully. Father, we now commit this truth to You that You might use it in our lives as You see fit. We thank You for the joy and the privilege of worshipping You, of knowing You, and, oh God, how we thank You that we by Your grace have settled out of court. We will never know You as judge. We will never experience the day of the vengeance of our God. We only know the favor and the

goodness and the grace of salvation and shall know that in all its fullness forever. For that, we praise You and thank You in Your Son's name.

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