

Discerning The Times  
Luke 12:54-56

In the Book of 1 Chronicles chapter 12, there is a somewhat obscure verse given to us, obscure because it is intermixed within an accounting that was being given by the Israelite tribes as they came to Hebron to pledge their allegiance to King David after the death of Saul.

And there in verse 32 of 1 Chronicles 12, we read regarding the Tribe of Issachar,  
32 Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their kinsmen were at their command. (1 Chronicles 12:32)

Of particular note in this chronicle of the tribes of Israel, most all of the tribes reporting to David were giving an account of their fighting men. And Issachar would do that later on also. But here in these words, as we read about the "Sons of Issachar", instead of mentioning the fighting men, we're told about men who have a special gift of "understanding the times" and "of knowledge about what Israel should do", men who would be able to give "wisdom" and "counsel" to the newly crowned King of Israel, King David.

And though this one verse is seemingly insignificant when taken simply within the context of an accounting being given by the several tribes of the Israelites, many bible scholars have ascribed a strong meaning to its few words, especially those bible scholars who pay close attention to the prophecies about the soon coming "end of days".

You'll recall that just a few verses earlier here in Luke chapter 12, the Lord Jesus had spoken a parable to His disciples about a master returning from a great wedding feast. That parable was describing the time when Jesus would return to take His children to be with Him in heaven.

And now here, just a few verses later, within this passage that we'll study today, the Lord Jesus gives even more strong words of warning regarding those soon coming end of days, saying in verse 56 that each of us ought to be able to discern the signs of the times. Listen!

<sup>54</sup> . . . "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming.' And so it happens. <sup>55</sup> And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat,' and it happens. <sup>56</sup> You

hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? (Luke 12:54-56)

As I read these words, I'm also reminded of the admonition given to us by the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 13 where he tells us to wake up from our slumber and discern what the times and the signs of the times are telling us. Listen!

<sup>11</sup> And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. <sup>12</sup> The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. <sup>13</sup> Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. <sup>14</sup> Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Romans 13:11-14)

Folks do not these words so well describe the sinful behaviors taking place within the corrupt culture of our day, "orgies and drunkenness, sexual immorality and debauchery, dissension and jealousy".

And no, in our day we don't call our behaviors orgies and debauchery. We instead like to use softer, less condemning words and call what we do "hooking up". And those behaviors are now so common to the souls of men and women in our current culture that none of it seems wrong. How sad! How so very sad!

Also in these words given to us here in the Book of Romans, the Lord used a very descriptive euphemism for the condition that besets many of us Christians of our day. He used the word "slumber". "Slumber"!

My understanding of the meaning of this word is that as I slumber, I'm not quite asleep and not quite awake. I'm somewhere in between. I hear things and I see things, but those things are "fuzzy" to my understanding and I'm especially not able to comprehend their real meaning and their real impact and consequence in my life.

And again yes, I do believe that many of us Christians live daily within this condition of "slumber", especially many of our church leaders.

It seems that the weekly messages being given by some of the most devout of evangelical preachers seldom mention words like these given here by the Lord Jesus, words that give us warning that the signs of the coming end of days, that time when we will be called to give an accounting of our behaviors while on this earth, are becoming nearer and nearer.

And yes, the Holy Spirit is, or at least should be, in the weekly messages of most of those preachers. And if those preachers obey the unction of the Holy Spirit about the words He wants them to preach, perhaps those preachers are not being led to speak about the end times of this world. But then again, perhaps they are, and they are just not listening to the unction of the Holy Spirit. Whatever the cause, the result is the same. Few speak about the soon coming of our Lord.

One of the problems that is spoken about in these scriptures is that many of the people in the congregations want to hear sermons that “tickle their ears”, those “feel good” sermons that don't convict them of their sins, but instead keep them in their “spirit of slumber.” And the preachers who are eager to please their congregations rather than please the Lord, simply keep saying words that their congregations want to hear.

For myself, I have asked the Lord to guide my study of these words of scripture. And as I examine these words, verse by verse, I'm compelled to deal with each verse as it comes to me. And today, we have these words given here in verses 54, 55 and 56. And these are the words we'll ask the Holy Spirit to explain to us. Listen again to these words and we'll continue to consider their meaning.

<sup>54</sup> He (the Lord Jesus) said to the crowd: “When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, ‘It's going to rain,’ and it does. <sup>55</sup> And when the south wind blows, you say, ‘It's going to be hot,’ and it is. <sup>56</sup> Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?  
(Luke 12:54-56)

As we examine these words, to correctly understand their meaning, we need to consider them within the context within which they are given.

And here throughout this chapter, the Lord Jesus keeps giving warning after warning about how the men and women in this age and in every age should conduct the matters of their daily lives, that they need to keep in mind that they

will be held accountable for their behaviors. That at any time, the Master, the Lord Jesus may return and when He does, He will surely demand that accounting from each one of us.

His Words constantly warning us that we must not be consumed with laying up treasures here on earth, treasures that moths and rust can destroy. But rather to lay up treasures in heaven, treasures that have eternal value.

And most all of His words point to a time when He will return for His beloved children to take us to those mansions that He has prepared for us, those mansions that He promised to give us in John chapter 14 where He said,

<sup>1</sup> "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

<sup>2</sup> In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:1:3)

Those are such comforting and promising words, especially as we live with such troubled hearts during these ever increasing difficult times that are taking place in our world today.

In every age, God has been faithful to send forth His messengers, messengers who are especially equipped with His Spiritual Gifts, Spiritual Gifts that enable them to "discern the times" and to give us warning that the Kingdom of God is coming nearer.

I have no doubt that the "Sons of Issachar" were some of those specially equipped Messengers from the Lord.

And in then also in Jesus' day, God sent forth John the Baptist to go out ahead of Jesus to proclaim the soon coming Kingdom of God.

And I have no doubt that now in our day, some of those same "Spiritual Gifts" have also been given to some of the Christian brethren of our day, preachers like David Jeremiah, Jonathan Kahn, Gary Hamrick and on and on, men who have been given a gift from the Lord to discern the signs of the times about the Lord's soon coming return and to declare them to you and to me.

And here, in the words of scripture given to us in Luke chapter 12, in verses 35 and following, our Lord tells us to be “girded up and waiting” for His return. And here also in our scripture text for today, He tells us to just look around us at the signs that are being given, that those signs have within them a message announcing His soon coming return. Listen again to these words!

<sup>54</sup> . . . “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. <sup>55</sup> And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. <sup>56</sup> You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? (Luke 12:54-56)

Note carefully in these words the strong rebuke that’s being given to us by the Lord Jesus. He calls us “hypocrites”! Some might argue that no, Jesus is not calling you and me hypocrites. He’s calling the people of His day hypocrites, especially the church leaders of His day, those Scribes and those Pharisees. But folks, Jesus really is most likely doing both!

Yes, these words were for the people of His day, but they are also for the people of our day, you and me. We really do need to be men and women who can discern the times and the signs of our Lord’s soon return. And we really do need to get about God’s calling upon our souls, and start preaching and teaching these words of warning about our Lord’s soon return.

With that being said, what are those “signs” that the Lord is telling us about here in these words? As we mentioned in an earlier study, the Lord Jesus gave some very obvious signs of the soon coming days when He’ll return. And I’d like to repeat those for us here. Those words given to us in Luke chapter 17. Listen!

<sup>26</sup> . . . as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: <sup>27</sup> They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

<sup>28</sup> Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; <sup>29</sup> but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed *them* all. <sup>30</sup> Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. (Luke 17:26-30)

Folks, these signs are so obvious! Can these days that we are now living within be any more like the days of Noah and the days of Sodom? In the days of Noah, all the people of the earth were just getting about their daily lives. But one thing that was taking place behind the scenes in those days was an extreme “turning away from the Lord”. “Apostacy” was rampant. And when God shut the door to the Ark there were only eight people on the earth who still believed in God left to be saved. And all the other people on the earth would suffer eternal destruction.

Can you imagine that folks. In that day, there was only eight people left on this earth that were worthy of being saved. All the other people were so reprobate that they were condemned to die in the flood. But God, in His mercy and grace, saved those eight people, Noah and his family.

And then also, as Jesus told us here, the last days will also be as in the days of Sodom. And in Sodom, as with the days of Noah, the people were just getting about their daily lives. But unfortunately, their daily lifestyles there in Sodom were especially corrupt with rampant homosexual sins filling their behaviors.

And dear friends is not our day just like the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, rampant with vile and perverse homosexual sins, men and women publicly flaunting their perverse behaviors before the world, drawing as many as they can into their perversity, even innocent children. And most of the world seems to agree with them.

Do not these signs fit the exact understanding of what the Lord Jesus was saying when He warned us saying . . .

<sup>56</sup> Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?  
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And yes, there are many, many more very obvious signs being given to us every day. In Luke chapter 21, Jesus spoke a parable to the people saying,

<sup>29</sup> Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.'” (Luke 21:29-31)

In Matthew chapter 24, verses 6 and 7, Jesus said,

<sup>6</sup>You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.(Matthew 24:6-7)

And in 2 Timothy chapter 3, the Lord gives us some very obvious signs to look for, signs that are so very, very prevalent in today's culture. Listen to these words.

<sup>1</sup>But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 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 Timothy 3:1-5)

And in 2 Peter 3, we read where scoffers will try to keep us doubting and discouraged. Listen, verse 3 of 2 Peter 3,

<sup>3</sup> knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."(2 Peter 3:3-4)

And in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5

<sup>2</sup>For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.(1 Thessalonians 5:2-3)

And there are so many, many more such warnings as these, but I'll finish with the words given by our Lord in Luke chapter 21, where He said,

<sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.(Luke 21: 28)

Folks, you and I need to be as the "Sons of Issachar" and "discern the times" that we are living within. The Lord truly is coming back soon and we need to be preparing for it with joyous anticipation.

One last thought and one last question before we close. "Why don't all of the preachers in all of the churches preach this message of Jesus' soon return to

their congregations on a regular basis"? And I truly don't know the answer to that question. I do believe that it really should be done.

But in defense of those who don't preach it much, perhaps it's because God has called those preachers to preach a different message, perhaps to concentrate their messages on "evangelism" or on "discipleship" or on "service to the community of believers".

And those are all good and valid matters given within these scriptures that pastors and preachers must preach about on a regular basis.

But because our Lord has also given us scriptures like these in today's passage over and over and over again, I have no doubt that He also intends for this message of His soon coming return to be given its rightful and regular position on every preacher's preaching and teaching schedule, and so they should.

Listen again to these words, and we'll close.

<sup>54</sup> . . . "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming.' And so it happens. <sup>55</sup> And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat,' and it happens. <sup>56</sup> You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? (Luke 12:54-56)

<sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.(Luke 21: 28)

Let's pray.