

# The Priority of Real Repentance

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[ 0 : 00 ] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning, and you'll find it in Luke's Gospel, chapter 12, and that's page 872.

Page 872, if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, we're continuing our studies in Luke's Gospel, and reading this morning from Luke 12, at verse 54.

Remember in this whole section, this is the fourth section, really, in this part of Luke's Gospel, where Jesus is speaking all about the priorities for life.

The priorities for life lived with the coming of the kingdom of heaven in view. Jesus is on the road, literally, with his disciples to glory, which for him is the road to Jerusalem and to the cross, and only through the cross to his resurrection glory.

But as he teaches them, he's also teaching us and every follower, everyone who would follow the Lord Jesus Christ, what the priorities are for life and for that journey to glory.

[ 1 : 06 ] So Luke 12 and 54, Jesus also said to the crowds, when you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, a shower is coming, and so it happens.

And when you see the south wind blowing, you say there'll be scorching heat, and it happens. 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?

And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison.

I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny. There was some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

And he answered them, do you think that those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you.

[ 2 : 19 ] But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those 18, on whom the Tyre of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?

No, I tell you. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. And he told this parable. A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.

And he said to the vinedresser, look, for three years now I've come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it take up the ground? And he answered him, sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure.

Then, if it should bear fruit next year, well and good. But if not, you can cut it down. Now, he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, and there was a woman who had a disabling spirit for 18 years.

She was bent over. Couldn't fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, woman, you are freed from your disability.

[ 3 : 38 ] He laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, he said to the people, there are six days in which work must be done.

Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. And the Lord answered him, you hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?

And must not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for 18 years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day? As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and

all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

And he said, therefore, what is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It's like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.

And again he said, to what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It's like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it was all leavened.

[ 5 : 04 ] Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. Well, if you'd turn with me into Luke's Gospel, chapter 12, page 872.

Page 872 in our church Bibles. And it's a passage all about the priority of real repentance.

The last few weeks, as I said, we've been hearing Jesus teach everyone who would follow on his road to the glory of heaven, teach them what the absolute priorities are for life in this world if we're going to follow truly in Jesus' road, which is the only road to the glory of heaven.

Let's be clear about that. Jesus himself says, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. That's why, as we've seen, the first priority is a real relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

We need to be like Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet, letting him tell us what is important in this life. And a real response must be made to Jesus, to the light that he shines into all of our lives.

[ 6 : 30 ] And so we must heed his warning. Be careful, lest the light in you should be darkness. Don't block out the light of Christ in your life.

Don't think that there can be any hope for you if you do that. There'll be more hope, says Jesus, for the pagans in the city of Nineveh than for those who have had the truth of God and rejected it.

And be on your guard, he says, against all kinds of covetousness we saw last week. All ambitions for this world that may cause you to lose out on the only thing that really matters.

And in fact, the only reason for this life on earth, which is to seek and find the kingdom of God, the lasting riches of heaven. And Jesus' words are full, aren't they, of a radical challenge demanding a radical change in our thinking about all these real priorities in our lives.

A total climb down from the arrogance, from the self-absorption of the way that we naturally think about life in this world. An admission that we're quite wrong most of the time about life's priorities that we need to turn around completely.

[ 7 : 43 ] An acknowledgement of the folly of our thinking if we think that we really do know the best way in life by ourselves. An acknowledgement about the precariousness of our earthly life and existence.

Indeed, the twistedness very often of our thinking which so desperately needs to be straightened out. And if we're honest, recognizing the bondage to self-harm and in the end self-destruction that we need liberation from lest we fall prey to the just judgment of God.

Now that radical surrender, that self-humbling, that suing for mercy at the hand of God, it can be summed up really in just one word that really encapsulates everything Jesus has been speaking about.

And that word is repentance. You'll see that it's a key word in our passage here today. Look at chapter 13 verse 3 and verse 5.

Unless you repent, says Jesus, you likewise will also perish. Now what's it all about? Why is repentance such an absolute priority for Jesus, for anybody who would follow him?

[ 9 : 02 ] Well, let's listen to Jesus in these verses and see what he's telling us. As he teaches us about a subject that none of us really like to think about and usually we avoid most of the time.

The coming judgment of God. Look at verses 54 to 59. Jesus is plain as a pike staff. God's coming judgment, he says, is unavoidable.

People are ignorant. They can't see it coming. And they're indolent. They won't act in the light of reality. But God's judgment is unavoidable, says Jesus, and therefore now is the time to repent.

Do you notice how all through these passages, by the way, Jesus is firing salvos of questions at people and leaving them speechless? In our world, we tend to think that Jesus and his church is always on the back foot, cowering, cowering away from the onslaught of questions that come from, well, the clever consensus formers, the clever thinkers, the clever leaders of our human societies. You know, the Richard Dawkins, the Antony Graylings, the Stephen Frys, all these sort of media people who so much shape our thinking in our modern world. They think that Jesus and indeed his church are completely finished, that they're floored, that we're silenced, that we don't have any

answers to give to their great and mighty pronouncements of cleverness.

[10:34] But in fact, friends, the truth is very, very different. If you actually read the Bible, you will find that all through the Bible, it is God who is putting man on the spot and asking questions of us.

He's interrogating us and he's asking questions that constantly expose the futility of our human thinking. C.S. Lewis was absolutely right, when he wrote that book and said, it's not man, it's not God who's in the dock, it's man who's in the dock.

God is the great questioner. And it's a very uncomfortable place to be when he himself is the chief prosecutor. He is a very fearsome advocate.

And that's what we see when he has people in his sights. Look at verse 56. His opening salvo to all these learned people is, 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?

Do you think you're sophisticated? He's saying to them. How sophisticated is this? You can't even tell the time. It's very disparaging what he's saying. He says, it's like talking to young children.

[11:42] Haven't you learned to tell the time yet? Goodness me. Oh, you pride yourself, says Jesus, in understanding the world. You're great at all the trivial things like the weather forecast, but you people are ignorant of the most important things about life.

So verse 54, he says, you're brilliant at telling when a shower is coming. You see a cloud in the west. Well, you don't really need a PhD in meteorology to predict that when you live in Glasgow, do you? There only are two forecasts here.

It's either raining or it's going to rain. And we don't understand that second bit. We don't get that scorching heat from the desert like they do in verse 55.

See, their weather patterns are very predictable. And of course, they know all the matters of earth and sky. It's very clear to them. But what really matters, says Jesus, life and death and the meaning of life itself and the reality of heaven and hell, you're ignorant about that, he says.

And you're not even apparently interested. They're not even thinking about such things. Otherwise, how on earth could people not see the way the spiritual wind was blowing across their nation in Jesus' ministry?

[12:59] How could they not grasp what was really happening? How could they not see the telltale signs of looming disaster? As they themselves, God's people, are not welcoming but rejecting God's own promised Messiah.

You don't even see this coming, says Jesus. What are they so blind to? Well, just look back at the previous paragraphs we looked at last week.

Verse 49. The fire of God, the judgment of God, let loose on the earth in the coming of Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus said his own ministry is about.

Not peace, but division. Jesus came with a message to divide the world now and to divide it ultimately and forever.

He came with his gospel to call time on the world. It's wake up time, is what he's saying. But you're not listening. What Jesus said plainly to his own generation in Israel was it's time to wake up to me, to your Messiah, to your king.

[14:09] That's a whole story of Luke's gospel we've been reading. It's a story of the anointed Messiah, the king of God, come at last to his own people, presenting himself to them so they might welcome him as their Lord, as their savior.

That's how the very book began. Do you remember the announcement in the words of the prophets that they're all fulfilled? The sunrise from on high has visited us to give light to those who walk in darkness.

That's why the old saints, Simeon and Anna, were rejoicing and overjoyed. They'd been waiting all their lives for the redemption of Jerusalem. They'd been waiting for this promised consolation of Israel, the great day of the Lord.

But of course there's another side to that because according to the prophets when that great day came it wasn't just a great day of joy and salvation, it was the beginning of the great day of judgment when God himself stands upon the earth to right all wrongs, to judge in righteousness and truth.

And for that privileged nation to face the Lord himself in the person of the incarnate son, well that was for them to come face to face with the judgment of God now in real time and with eternal consequences.

[ 15 : 36 ] And here they were rejecting him, the official channels and leaders of the nation and opposing him. Why could the crowds not see what that must surely mean for them?

Why couldn't they grasp the calamity that must surely ensue from such a reaction? If in the past when Israel constantly rejected the prophets that God sent, if in the end God exiled the whole nation to Babylon, how could they not see that if this ultimate crime against God in rejecting his own son, how could they not see that that must lead to something far, far worse?

To an everlasting judgment. But they were ignorant. Full of knowledge and interest in predicting things of earth and sky, things of this world's business, but ignorant completely about matters of eternal consequence.

Well, it's not really any different today, is it? Our world is full and puts endless effort into predicting all the things of earth and sky, things of daily life and commerce.

Vast industries are devoted to all of these things, working out what the future will bring. When will the Bank of England raise its interest rates? What will happen next year in the housing market?

[ 17 : 07 ] Which party will win the election? Who will hold the balance of power? Will it be Weeck or Big Nigel? Or all sorts of other questions of really vital national importance?

like who's going to take over from Jeremy Clarkson on Top Gear? That's what the papers are full of, isn't it? But in the midst of all the chatter, in the midst of all the interest in all these matters of earth and sky, does anybody have a clue about God's timing for this world and its future?

What time is it when the Son of God has appeared on earth? Answer, it's the beginning of God's ultimate judgment for this world.

I came, says Jesus, to cast fire on this earth. That's what Jesus means by telling the time properly, understanding the significance of his coming to earth.

But the people he's speaking to, like many, many people since just haven't grasped that. And Jesus says to them, you're not only ignorant, but because you are, you're indolent.

[ 18 : 25 ] You won't act in time. The whole point in being able to tell the time is so that you can act at the right time. Just as some people won't have done this morning because they didn't put their clocks forward.

The whole point of a weather forecast is so that you assimilate it and act now to avoid disaster, especially if it's a warning of a hurricane or a tsunami or something. And just so, says Jesus, exactly.

That's the point. And it's plain, isn't it, that he is talking about a great calamity of judgment. Listen again to the illustration he uses in verse 57.

Why do you not judge for yourselves what's right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer and the officer put you in prison.

I tell you, you will never get out until you've paid the very last penny. You're on the way, says Jesus, to the judge, now in your life. And now is the time to act to avoid disaster.

[ 19 : 27 ] And you must act now. Or you will face certain ruin. How do you interpret the present time? It's time to repent.

It's time to sue for mercy. It's time to seek forgiveness from the one you've wronged before it's too late. That's the plain message, isn't it, that Jesus is giving to Israel in his day.

It's what John the Baptist had preached consistently. Do you remember the beginning of Luke's gospel? Repent, he said. Accept your king and your messiah or perish and face God's wrath.

Don't wait, said John. The time is short. The axe, he said, is already at the roots of the tree. It's just waiting for the order to be lifted up and swung to chop it down and cast it into the fire.

That was John's warning back in chapter 3, verse 9. You see, that is exactly the warning that God gives to every generation of the human race and to every individual in this world.

[ 20 : 35 ] Life, according to Jesus, is a journey to the bar of judgment. And unless you find mercy before that day, he says, the outlook is as bleak as it is certain.

Look at verse 59 again. You will never get out of the debtor's prison until you pay the last penny in full, which means, of course, you will never get out because once you're in the debtor's prison, there's no more opportunity ever to earn money anywhere else.

And if it is a debt that is infinite, then the penalty must surely be everlasting. Now, friends, I know that for some of us, even to mention things like judgment and judgment day provokes a reaction of horror.

Many today are very indignant, aren't they, at the very thought of a God who could possibly judge. We want to have a God who judges. No, no, no. Funny thing is, we seem to miss the extraordinary hypocrisy and the fact that we ourselves reserve the right to make all kinds of judgments about things all the time, don't we?

People are very quick to judge. That's unjust. That's wrong. That's unfair. Isn't that one of the very first things you ever hear your children say? That's not fair, isn't it? Or if we see somebody innocent, suffering, we get indignant about it, especially if that innocent person is us, of course.

[ 22 : 03 ] Or we say if we look down on somebody and say, well, they got what they deserved. They deserved that, got what's coming to them, if we perceive that they're wrong.

So isn't it interesting in our world today that God isn't allowed to judge anybody, but we judge people all the time. That's why Jesus keeps calling human beings hypocrites.

You noticed? We all judge. It just depends on our outlook. It depends on our politics and all sorts of things, what bias we have. If you're a daily male reader, you'll unashamedly make moral judgments in one direction, most likely.

If you're a guardian reader, you'll probably claim complete impartiality, but make judgments in exactly the opposite direction, with a very smug look on your face. I find it interesting to say the least that our world is full of morally indignant people making judgments about all sorts of things, and yet who get very angry at the thought that God, who made the whole world and everything in it, that God should dare to make any judgments at all, ever.

We can't have a judge like that, although we're full of indignant judgments ourselves. And of course, here's the thing, most of our judgments as human beings are utterly confused and wrong so much of the time, even in the church.

[ 23 : 33 ] Remember years ago when there was that terrible hurricane Katrina that hit and flattened New Orleans? You'll remember that there was a whole rash of American TV preachers of the right confidently proclaiming that this was God's judgment upon a city that was full of gambling and drinking and a promiscuous sexual culture.

Of course, there was others then who immediately stood up and said exactly the opposite, outraged at the very notion that God could ever judge anybody ever for anything. Total confusion. Well, the funny thing is that kind of confusion about God's judgment isn't new at all.

It's right here in our passage. Look at verses 1 to 5. Both these opposing attitudes, you see, betray that whatever your view of God's judgment, whether you think it's real against human beings or not, nobody ever thinks it's ever going to affect them.

It's either not coming at all, God's judgment, or it's coming for other people, but it's not coming for me. But you see, Jesus won't let us away with that kind of thinking.

Not only is God's judgment avoidable, so that now is the time to repent, unavoidable rather. He's just as clear here, do you see, in verses 1 to 5, that God's judgment is universal.

[ 24 : 56 ] People are arrogant. They don't think that they need to repent. But judgment is universal, and therefore it's a pressing need for everyone to repent. See, verse 1 says, at that very moment, some people interrupted him to tell him about a massacre of Galileans, probably they told him it was self-righteous satisfaction, because Galileans were rather despised by the Judean Jews.

They were a kind of lower class, rather a moral bunch. Well, you see, those Galileans got what they deserved, Jesus. You see, we can interpret God's timing about things.

God does judge the wicked, you see? Just like the TV preachers. Well then, says Jesus, answering the verse 4, do you see? How about that Tower of Siloam disaster then, that happened right in the middle of your holy city, Jerusalem, and crushed a whole lot of your kinsmen, Judean Jews, very religious people.

Were they rotten offenders deserving death? You can rather imagine the silence, can't you? No, says Jesus, in both cases, your judgment is quite wrong.

Now notice, Jesus does not say that they weren't sinners, and therefore didn't deserve any judgment, nor does he deny that God was ultimately responsible for both of these things.

[ 26 : 21 ] In fact, Jesus doesn't even enter into that discussion at all. But what he does say twice is exceptionally clear, is it not? Look at verse 3 and verse 5 again. All of these things he's saying are warnings to all of you, that unless you repent, you all will likewise perish.

That's God's message in every such terrible happening according to Jesus. Just like that latest dreadful plane crash in the Alps. Not for us to say, oh, they must have deserved that from God.

Nor is it for us to say, well, how can there be a fair and just God to allow all this? Rather, says Jesus, it's for us to say there, but for God's preserving grace and mercy, it could be me. It could be you. Christians sometimes find it hard, don't we, to meet the taunts of atheists and cynics in the face of that kind of disaster.

Where's God then? Why didn't he stop it? But here is Jesus himself saying that every such thing in history is but a shadow of a coming judgment which will be universal for human beings and will be absolute and eternal.

[ 27 : 43 ] And that every such event shouts to the world a warning. Don't you realize the time? It's ticking on for you and for your life.

And unless you repent, all of you will likewise one day perish. Do you think anyone on that German wings plane was a worse sinner than you or me?

Do you? Of course not, says Jesus. But one day, you and I also will meet our maker just as they did a few days ago.

God's coming judgment is unavoidable and it is universal. And that's why in verses 6 to 9, Jesus' message is very plain indeed.

Christ's gospel warning is urgent. People today, just as in Jesus, they are indifferent. They haven't listened to the warnings from God. But Jesus is plain.

[ 28 : 43 ] They are living on borrowed time already. God is patient. God is extraordinarily patient with rebellious humankind. But that patience will not last forever.

Look at how patient the master is with this fruitless fig tree. The fig tree is an image, isn't it? All through the Bible for the people of Israel. The whole story of the Bible is the story of Israel's unresponsiveness and God's extraordinary patience.

But in the end, a fruitless tree is only fit for one thing and that is firewood. That was what John the Baptist proclaimed back in Luke chapter 3.

The axe is already laid at the root of the trees, he said. It's ready for the order to be taken up and swung in judgment. And now here we are after three years of Christ's own ministry, pleading with them just as John did.

bear fruit in keeping with real repentance, said John. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance, says Jesus. But still no fruit.

[ 29 : 56 ] And yet again, the vine dresser intercedes with compassion. One more year, he says, one more chance with an outpouring of extraordinary mercy making every possibility for repentance.

repentance. That's what happened, isn't it? With the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus going out with all the apostles. To whom?

To the Jew first. To the people of Israel first. Even some of those who had blasphemed the Son of Man as Jesus had spoken about in Luke 10. Even some of them were forgiven.

Saul of Tarsus was one of them, wasn't he? Formerly, he said, I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent opponent. But I received mercy because of that extra year.

Because of the patience of God. Because at last, on borrowed time, he did heed the warning. And he did repent.

[ 31 : 00 ] No one can ever accuse God, the judge of all the earth, of injustice or of summary justice. He is patient. He is merciful.

He is full of compassion. Extending opportunity way beyond the call of justice. But not forever.

There comes a time, as verse 9 makes plain, when even borrowed time runs out. And so the warning is urgent for Israel then, in that generation, and indeed for the whole world.

As Paul later made plain to the men of Athens in Acts 17, the past times of ignorance God has overlooked. But now, he calls all men everywhere to repent.

Because he has fixed the day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. He is merciful.

[ 31 : 58 ] He is patient. He holds out his hands of grace. He extends that day of grace. But not forever. If in the end, despite all warnings and all his invitations, if in the end there is still no fruit, then verse 9 says, plainly, the axe must fall and the axe will fall.

And friends, the history books tell us that the axe did fall upon Israel in that very generation in AD 70 when the Romans came and sacked the city of Jerusalem and destroyed its temple.

And very chillingly, the history books tell us that many of that generation died just like the people upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell as the masonry of the buildings of Jerusalem fell on them and crushed them.

And others of them died just like those Galileans as they were making sacrifices in the temple butchered with their own blood mixed with them. You all will likewise perish, Jesus said.

Jesus wasn't joking. Not then and not now. And friends, nothing, nothing could be worse for any human being than to discover that ultimately.

[ 33 : 21 ] having failed to heed His warning, having failed to grasp the mercy while there is still time. But lest you fear that that might be impossible, that things might have gone too far for you in your life, that perhaps you've been too long rebellious, too long in denial, too long crooked and twisted against God and His truth.

But please don't miss this last section, verses 10 to 21. Because even in the face of Christ's very real and urgent gospel warnings about judgment, He's just as clear.

He leaves us in no doubt that Christ's gospel rescue is unstoppable in this world. People are ignorant and arrogant and indifferent. And as these verses clearly show us, even the established religion, the church often hates the presence of the real Jesus and opposes His true life-changing gospel and exposes itself to be on the same side as the devil, as Satan himself.

Nevertheless, even amid all of that, Jesus is not slow to grant repentance and bring rescue to every single one that He has come to save.

He has been that day since He came in person and His work continues unabated even now all over the world. Luke tells us of the beginning of the spread of the gospel in his second book in Acts.

[ 35 : 00 ] And in that day, Paul wrote to the Colossians, didn't he, that all over the world this same gospel is bearing fruit and growing. And it will go on, says Jesus, until His kingdom triumphs and fills the whole earth with His glory as the waters cover the sea.

The glory of the kingdom of the redeemed, of those rescued by Jesus from bondage to sin and to the devil and to whom He grants repentance and life everlasting.

That's the wonderful message of these last verses here told in a picture and in parable. Do you see? Again, you see the healing of Jesus here is another deliberately acted out parable just as the healing of the dumb man had been back in chapter 11.

Here's Jesus talking all about sin, all about crookedness, all about a need to turn and repent to be made straight. And lo and behold, here's a woman who's bent doubles as verse 11, unable totally to straighten herself.

So long had she been that way, 18 years and more. She's a picture, isn't she? of sin and slavery and bondage. The very description reminds us of the descriptions of the people of Israel in bondage to Pharaoh with their backs bent under the burdens of slavery.

[ 36 : 20 ] And here it's far worse, of course, because Jesus is explicit in verse 16. Her ultimate problem was that she was in bondage to Satan himself. Of course, all infirmity is ultimately traceable to Satan just as all sin is.

Someone has put it, illness is simply a shadow, a foretaste, a part of death. And death is something that Satan is responsible for and has power over. And here comes this woman, a living illustration of the bondage and enslavement of the human spirit to sin and guilt.

And here she comes to the house of God, to the church of God, seeking hope, seeking restoration, seeking healing in the word of God on the Sabbath, on the day of grace and mercy that God had given also as a living illustration of his release from bondage.

It was a reminder perpetually of his ultimate redemption, pointing forward to the great restoration and rest that still lay in the future for God's people. There was no slave in Israel, no slave in Egypt enjoyed a Sabbath rest, was there?

It was the gift of God to his redeemed people, to his liberated ones. A perpetual reminder that the Lord had redeemed them out of bondage, brought them into his presence and lifted them up once again to dignity, to true humanity.

[ 37 : 45 ] I am the Lord your God, he says in Leviticus 26, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of bondage, that you should not be their slaves.

And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. It was a foretaste of the ultimate rescue, the ultimate redemption from slavery to sin and from the bondage to Satan that would come at last when the great redeemer, Jesus Christ the Lord, came.

And here we are on this Sabbath and this bent-backed woman was loosed from the bondage to Satan by the Son of God himself in an instant of time. A real and wonderful healing miracle. Yes, it was indeed, but it was more than just that. According to Jesus, it was a great deliverance from Satan. And it was another foretaste of the great Sabbath that is to come when Jesus returns to reign forever over this whole earth.

And the whole earth will be straightened out from its crookedness to sin. And every last vestige of that curse will be banished. And the children of God will be set free bodily at last.

[ 39 : 06 ] Never again to be subject to sin and sickness and death. Never again. See, the gospel is about the restoration of true Sabbath rest to this whole universe.

And it can come only through the overcoming of Satan's power by the power of Christ's death for sin, by his atonement for sin, which alone can grant the gift of repentance and faith.

because sins are truly forgiven, because they're paid for, because they're taken away by the cross of Christ. What a tragedy that the established church of Christ today was so blind to that, so opposed to his true ministry.

It saw the wonder of his liberation from Satan as nothing more than anathema to be criticized, a doctrine to be opposed, indignant that healing should take place on the Sabbath.

Far more concerned with institutional rules and procedures than people's lives being transformed for eternity by Christ's gospel, by people being rescued from the guilt and power of sin.

[ 40 : 23 ] Well, sadly, through the history of the church, I'd write to this very present day. It's often been the same. In fact, I watched a video this week of another such preacher of the church of Satan as this leader here in our passage was, blaspheming the cross of Jesus openly to his congregation.

He took us this text, Christ did not die for our sins. But you see, despite such opposition, which was rife then, just as it is today, the real Jesus and his true gospel will not be stopped.

His rescue is unstoppable. This must not be done, said the clergy of the day on our Sabbath in our synagogue. No, says Jesus in verse 16, this must be done.

Loosing those in bondage to Satan is what the Sabbath day is all about. It's what the Sabbath gospel is all about. This is the day to rejoice and be glad because it is the time to repent and to be able to enter in an instant of time into the restored life of rest and renewal and recreation that comes when there is release from the power of sin and death and hell and Satan.

Today is the Sabbath of Sabbaths. It's the Jubilee year is what Jesus is saying. Today is the time for release of debts, for releasing the captives, for restoring the bent and crooked to make them walk tall again in the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 42 : 06 ] Remember, that's how Jesus announced his whole gospel in Luke chapter 4 at the beginning, proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor, the Jubilee, the Sabbath of Sabbath of Sabbaths, the year of liberty for the captives, of receiving sight for the blind, of setting at liberty they're pressed.

And must not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, be loosed from this bondage to Satan on the Sabbath day, now, in this day of salvation?

It's what Paul calls it in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, isn't it? Also quoting Isaiah. The day of salvation. The year of the Lord's favor.

And that's what Jesus is saying here. See how wonderful this extra year of God's mercy and his patience is as he is seeking fruit in this world.

The real fruit of repentance before at last the judgment comes. There's still time for fruit, he's saying. There's still time for repentance as the seed of the gospel goes forth offering mercy.

[ 43 : 17 ] And notwithstanding any opposition from Satan and his many allies, even those within the visible church, that seed will go on bearing fruit throughout the whole earth until the kingdom of Christ is so large that it will give rest to people of every nation in its branches.

Just like the birds in the tree in verse 19. even though it grew from something that seemed absolutely invisible. That's an image everyone would recognize in Israel from Ezekiel 17 about the tree of God's kingdom filling the earth until all the birds of the nations rest in them.

God's gospel rescue is unstoppable. And it will, like the leaven in verse 21, persistently do its work in this world until a vast quantity of flour is transformed.

Until a multitude that no man can number are transformed through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And friends, it's true. All over the world today, this real gospel of the real Lord Jesus Christ is growing and bearing fruit.

And Christ's word of both mercy and judgment is proclaimed and heard. And people have been ignorant and indolent and arrogant and indifferent and frankly hostile and twisted against God for many years often.

[ 44 : 53 ] As this woman was bent and crooked for many years. People like that are being liberated from bondage, rescued from darkness and made straight and human again by the mercy of God in Christ.

What a wonderful encouragement surely to all of us to proclaim this true gospel and to respond to it because life and indeed eternity can be changed in an instant of time when you heed Jesus' voice. But don't miss Jesus' stark challenge about understanding the time. Now is the time to take heed, to wake up to the truth.

Now is the time that decision must be made and will be made and when division is being forged forever. Look at verse 17. It's very clear you must either be rejoicing in Jesus or be numbered among his adversaries.

And be very clear friends, in the end all his adversaries will be put to shame and that shame will be devastating public and permanent.

[ 46 : 15 ] Do you know how to interpret the present time? That's Jesus' question to all of us. Let me sum it up in the apostle Peter's words about the day we live in. The Lord is patient towards you, he says, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.

That's verse 8, isn't it? The extra year of gracious opportunity. But Peter goes straight on, but the day of the Lord will come like a thief and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

And that's verse 9. It will come and you must be ready, says Jesus. I've quoted before this poem that's on a clock in Chester Cathedral called Time's Paces.

When as a child I laughed and wept, time crept. When as a youth I waxed more bold, time strolled. When I became a full-grown man, time ran. When older still I daily grew, time flew.

Soon I shall find in passing on time gone. O Christ, wilt thou have saved me then?

[ 47 : 38 ] That's the real question, friends, isn't it? Because whatever the time is in your life and mine, it's not standing still. It's time, says Jesus, to repent in the bountiful time.

Don't forget it is borrowed time. So make sure that you are in time for eternity.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, how we thank you that you're a God who speaks the truth to us and warns us in time and points us to your patience and your grace and your mercy and your invitation and your love.

May we have eyes to see and ears to hear that on the day of the great judgment, none of us should find ourselves trapped in a neglect and in a regret that will be never ending.

Grant us grace today, we pray, and grant us repentance in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.

[ 48 : 57 ] Amen. Amen. Thank you.