

INTERPRETING THE TIMES

Luke 12:49-56 Text vs. 54-56 *⁵⁴He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. ⁵⁵And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. ⁵⁶Hypocrites! 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?"*

These are amazing times in which we live. And they are exciting times. But they are, also, troubling times. People who lived before us could never have imagined traveling on jet aircraft, using personal computers and cell phones, or living in a Covid-19 pandemic with total isolation. This is a world where the movement of the stars can be predicted because of Earth's orbit around the sun. Stars appear to move, because during the year they don't return to the same spot in the sky at the same time every night. As the Earth orbits around the sun, it winds up on the other side of the sun every six months. Yet, here we are! Men walking on the moon knowing how to get to the stars. But many still not knowing how to get to heaven! Every day our world is changing, getting closer to Socialism, and moving us away from God and Christian principles. So, our lesson today is a call for people of faith, **you**, to understand the times in which you are living. Over these past weeks we've been studying Luke, chapter twelve. Last Sunday we examined how to be a good servant and what that had to do with the Second Coming of Jesus. We learned three things: Jesus commanded us to, *"Be dressed! - Be ready! and Keep your lamps lit!"* Today, Jesus warns His disciples, and anyone who would listen, when you read the signs of the times you'll know what to expect! Last week it was, *be ready!* Today, it's *interpret the times!* And in reading the times for God's Judgment, there are *four things* you should know. The *first* is, *Judgment is real!* In A.D. 79, the Roman city of Pompeii suffered the destructive eruption of Mt. Vesuvius just six miles East of Naples, Italy. I've been there. I've walked the rim of Mt. Vesuvius. I walked down into the mouth of that volcano a little way. It smelled sulphury. Like rotten eggs. I've walked the streets of Pompeii. Tragic pictures show the explosion of Mt. Vesuvius was so sudden residents were killed going about their daily routines. They were entombed forever, buried alive in volcanic ash from the lava flow that poured from that mountain that day. But what you may not realize is, the citizens of Pompeii did not have to die! It's recorded that for weeks prior to the eruption there were sounds of rumbling. The earth shaking. Ominous plumes of smoke coming out of the volcano were visible for days before the eruption. And the citizens of Pompeii died! Because they ignored the warnings! They didn't believe it would happen! Which shows us, warnings are good, only if you respond to them. It's the same with sirens blowing a warning of an approaching tornado. Or public announcements warning of a hurricane. Which brings us to the *second* point of our lesson. You need to *prepare for God's Judgment!* Because His Judgment is coming! Charles Colson writes about this in his book *Who Speaks for God*. Chuck Colson was an attorney serving as Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon from 1969 to 1970 as a political advisor. He was known as President Nixon's "hatchet man". At the height of the Watergate scandal, Colson gained notoriety as one of the "Watergate Seven". Five men were caught burglarizing the Democratic National Committee's headquarters in the Watergate complex on June 17, 1972, along with E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy. Colson pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice for attempting to frame *Pentagon Papers* defendant Daniel Ellsberg and went to prison for it in 1974. In 1975 he was released, after serving seven months in minimum security at the Federal Prison in Montgomery, Alabama, at Maxwell Air Force Base. He was the first member of the Nixon administration to be imprisoned for Watergate-related charges. Later, he bought a home in here in Naples, in Port Royal. In October 2000, Florida Governor Jeb Bush restored Colson's civil rights, allowing him to vote, sit on a jury, run for office, and practice law. But in 1973, prior to his imprisonment, Chuck Colson had become an evangelical Christian, and his conversion sparked a radical change in his life. It led to his founding of his non-profit ministry, *Prison Fellowship*. In his book, he writes of the night he came to understand he was a sinner, and on his way to Judgment. *"That night, when I sat alone in my car, my own sin – not just dirty politics, but the hatred and evil so deep within me, was thrust before my eyes, forcefully, and painfully. For the first time in my life, I felt unclean. And worst of all, I could not escape. In those moments of clarity, I found myself driven irresistibly into the arms of the living God."* And just like Charles Colson, many are on their way to stand before the Heavenly Judge guilty and heading for judgment. And the wisest thing to do when you're guilty, is to settle out of court before your judgment is handed down, which makes sense. Because God, as Judge of all the Earth, will one day judge everybody on this Earth. And the only verdict that can be expected is **guilty!** And when you're guilty, you have to pay the ultimate price for guilt. Romans 3:11-20 says. *"There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks God. All have turned away. They have, together, become worthless. There is no one who does good. Not even one. Their throats are open graves. Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Ruin and misery mark their ways. And the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the Law of Moses. Rather, through the Law of Moses, we become conscious of our sin."* It's only by having Jesus Christ as your Advocate, your Heavenly

Defense Attorney, to speak on your behalf at the judgment bar of God, that you will be set free! His defense of you will be like this: Since someone must pay for your sin, I will! And I have done it for you. I took your place on the cross for your sins, and they are now forgiven! If He can't say that for you, then you're going to pay a heavy price for your sin. And your sentence will be - eternal separation from the presence of God! It's called Hell! So, you'd better settle with God before it's too late! And you know, people will do almost anything to stay out of jail. But how many people are going to have enough self-control to stay out of Hell? Well, the answer to that question is, how well are you preparing yourself for your future Judgment. It has to do with how you *interpret this present time*. Preparation begins *now*, with a sense of your sin. Remember what Charles Colson said as he sat in his car alone? *"My own sin – not just dirty politics, but the hatred and evil so deep within me was thrust before my eyes, forcefully and painfully. For the first time in my life, I felt unclean."* And that brings us right to the *third* point in our lesson. Preparing for God's Judgment involves *real change*. That's the point Charles Colson was making. *He had to change his life!* And it's tough to change your life. Really tough! In fact, changing your life may be the most challenging and uncomfortable thing you'll ever do. One person I know said, "If I want to change my life, I *have* to change my life." And that can be very scary! It all depends on why you want to change your life. You may need to move to another city where you don't know anyone in order to let go of your past. You may need to make new friends. That may be why some people move to Everglades City, Chokoloskee, Plantation Island, Copeland. Or to your city! They want to get away! They want to start all over again! In other words, changing life means, making tough decisions. So, how badly do you want to change your life? What are you willing to do, and what are you willing to give up in order to make that happen? You must realize, once you decide to change your life, anything is possible. And that leads to the *fourth*, and *final* point in our lesson: *Preparation involves accepting Jesus as your personal Savior*. Giving your life completely and totally over to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior is how you change your life! Billy Graham said it: *"The most important decision you will ever make is to turn your life over to Jesus Christ. And it will be the wisest decision you'll ever make. Why? For one thing, God wants to give you the strength to deal with your circumstances, and not be overcome by them. He wants to give you wisdom to deal with your problems, instead of making them worse for yourself by making more bad decisions. Most of all, He wants to forgive your past. He wants to give you hope for the future."* Forgiveness of your past! Hope for your future! That's what this is all about. And the promise is: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone. The new has come! All this is from God."* (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). If you are interpreting the times in which you are now living, you must discover for yourself how Jesus can come into your life, today. Having Jesus as your Lord and Savior is the only way to face God's judgment, and be found, not guilty! AMEN