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Straight Talk From Jesus

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TEXT: Luke 12:49-53 (ESV)

He 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 will 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 were 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 these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in 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 have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use 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.'"

"Give it to me straight!" is a phrase someone might say to their doctor after a battery of tests has been done on them, and now it's time to hear the results of those tests. Maybe you've said to someone who seems to be evasive with answers to your questions, "Stop beating around the bush and just give it to me straight!" "Give it to me straight," is a way of saying to someone, "Talk to me honestly, directly and frankly." And most of us

appreciate it when someone does just that. In today's text from Luke's Gospel, we hear some "straight talk" coming from Jesus. He gives it to us straight as to what we are to do with him and his claims and his promises. He's talking to a crowd of people who have so far not been sure what to make of him and how to respond to him and his salvation message about the arrival of God's kingdom through him. They're not believing. So Jesus addresses their lack of belief. He gives it to them straight by making four points. First, he tells them, "Look at the evidence, people." He says to them, "You know how to predict the weather from the signs of nature. You hypocrites. How do you not know how to interpret the present time?" Basically what Jesus is saying is this:

In my time with you, the present time I've given you signs to interpret miracles, healings all with the intent to help you see who I am, and that God is up to something very important for this world, through me all to help you believe in me. So why are you acting like you don't see these things and refusing to believe in me?

Look at the evidence is what he tells people to do even today, if they're skeptical about him and standing outside of a faith relationship with him. He has given us all the things we need to know about him in order for us to believe in him. You can check out the evidence about him in the word of God. Take a look at what he said about himself. He says, "I'm the son of God. The father and I are one. I'm the Savior I came to seek and to save the lost." And look at the amazing miracles he did that only God could possibly do. Look at the Old Testament promises that Jesus fulfilled. And finally, look at the greatest sign of all: His resurrection. He was dead. And he was raised back to life by his Heavenly Father as an endorsement of everything he said and did. Look at that empty tomb where he was laid. If someone stole the body, then tell me who did it. The disciples couldn't have taken it away because it was under armed guard, and the opposition to Jesus wouldn't have taken it for a missing body would just stir up rumors of resurrection. And that was the last thing in the world they wanted. And what about all those appearances of Jesus after his death? To Peter and to the other disciples? To Paul, to the 500. And also look at those disciples who scattered and denied him at his crucifixion, now boldly proclaiming Christ at the risk of being persecuted and killed like their master. And they did get killed for him. Nothing could shut them up about Jesus being alive. So let me ask you this: would you be willing to die for a lie you just made up? And look at 2000 years of history and the number of lives changed by him, by the millions and the church continuing to grow and thrive, even under the worst of times. And take the time to ask a believer that you know of what Jesus has done in his

or her life. All of that's evidence to be considered. And I've barely scratched the surface of things for you to consider. So if you're curious or unsure, look at the evidence in the Bible, history. This is too important a matter to just ignore or be apathetic about. Keep on the shelf. He wants you to believe in him and follow him, trust in him, so you might receive eternal salvation.

Next, Jesus said, wise up and settle your accounts before it's too late, he points out, as you would settle your debt accounts with your accuser, who's taking you to court in order to avoid imprisonment, so settle your account with God before the judgment day arrives, because debtors who have not settled with God before that will be lost forever. Jesus is pointing out our sinfulness before God that needs to be taken care of. We're not okay. He's giving it to us straight about ourselves and the trouble we're in because of sin. We're all debtors before God. Debt is a term that's used to describe sin, and all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And the wages of our sin is death. We sometimes think of sin as only the big things like murder or stealing. And so we say, "Well, I don't sin." But its sin is so much more than that. It includes every bad thought, word or deed, every act of disobedience against God and His commandments that we have committed. And we can't really help ourselves because each of us has this sinful nature which is self-centered and prideful, and we want to be in charge of our own life and run things ourselves and take care of ourselves. And so, we sin many, many, many, many times a day. Now you may say, well, "I don't sin that much." Well, okay, just stop and consider this then. Let's say you could get yourself down to committing only three sins a day. That's pretty good, isn't it? That would seem amazing. But three sins a day is over 1000 sins a year. And if you live to be 75, you'll have 75,000 strikes against you. And any judge in his right mind would be right to throw the book at you and put you away forever. Because God is just. And He doesn't grade on the curve. It takes 100% to enter into his Heaven. It's quite a predicament we're in. We are all debtors before him, deserving of his judgment and punishment. And we need help. And God, out of his love for us, has provided help through his son, Jesus Christ, who's talking to us today. Out of his love for us, God has provided payment for our debt of sins at the cross. Keep in mind, when Jesus was saying these words to the crowds, he was on his way to Jerusalem where he would be rejected and suffer greatly and die as an atoning sacrifice for our debt of sin on a cross. At that cross, he will bear our sins. He will experience the wrath of God that we were to experience. You see, Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for many. And Jesus is saying "Things are not all right between you and God. You have a huge debt that needs to be settled with God before that day of judgment

comes. And I've come to save you from that predicament to take care of your debt. So trust in me."

Next, Jesus says, "And this is how you do it. Repent or you will perish." He addressed a couple of local tragedies where people died horrific deaths, and he said "it's not because they were worse than anyone else, just deserving God's punishment, if that's what you're thinking. But I do tell you, let this serve as a reminder that life is short and fragile. And unless you repent by turning to me in faith, you all shall eternally perish." To repent is to turn away from the old way of thinking and living out life. It's a move from a mindset that says, "I don't need God or want God in my life. I don't need anyone telling me how to run my life. I'll do things my way. I'm not even sure I believe in God and I'm going to get the most pleasure I can with this life and not waste any time thinking about spiritual matters." Or it might be this: "I can save myself. I'm pretty good. I'm sure God will appreciate the good things I've done in this world. I've done more good than bad. So of course he'll let me into his Heaven." Or someone might say "God would never allow anyone to go to hell. He's not that kind of God – He is loving. I believe everyone is saved." Or someone might think "I'm in with God because of my bloodlines, my nationalism." Many people in that crowd thought that because they were Jewish, they were automatically in with God. Today, some might think to themselves, "I'm a good, patriotic American. I love my country. I've served it." Or might think "I belong to a certain church denomination. Therefore, I'm sure I'm in with God." All of these ways of thinking are dangerous and lead to a terrible dead end that Jesus refers to as perishing. And He says, "Turn away from this kind of thinking and living or you will perish. You will be eternally separated from God forever. Repent. Turn around and follow me, Jesus, in faith. For I came to save you from all that and give you real life."

So, here's what we have so far in this little talk from Jesus.

1. Look at the evidence about me so you can believe.
2. Wise up about your own condition before God and get accounts settled.
3. You do that by repenting and turning to me in faith so that you don't perish.

And finally, the fourth one, Jesus then finishes up this message with this last exhortation: "And do it now." This is practically an altar call on the part of Jesus. Do it now while you have time. That's what the story of the unfruitful fig tree and the patient owner is trying to tell us. Jesus is pointing out, "Yes, God is patient like that owner, but

he will not wait forever. There will come a day when it will be too late for you. Judgment will come. The axe will be used. So, turn to me now while you can." The truth is, as Jesus has already taught us elsewhere, you don't know when that day is going to come, and you could die any time before that, and then it would be too late.

This is very straight talk from Jesus, isn't it? He's not pussyfooting around with us. He pulls no punches. He doesn't leave us guessing as to what we are to be doing in regard to him. He gives it to us straight. "I've come to save you. Look at the evidence I've given you. Look at yourself for who you are, a debtor before God who needs saving. So repent and come to me to be saved from perishing. And do it now."

Many have unfortunately said no to him. I have attended a number of funerals for people who were unbelievers. Very sad affairs. Some poetry is read and some eulogies about the individual and sentimental secular songs and attempts at gentle humor to take away the sting. But no talk of victory, Heaven as the promise of eternal life. It leaves you feeling very hollow and empty, which is what Jesus wants to help you avoid.

So let me talk straight with you right now. There's an important question. I want you to seriously consider if you were to die today are you certain that you go to Heaven? Now you might be thinking, "No one could know that for sure, Steve." But the risen Jesus is saying to us today through his holy word, "Oh, yes, you can. You can know that by turning to me as your savior and receiving the free gift of eternal life with God!" "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." So, friend, if you have not received him and his gift, I appeal to you to look at the evidence. And look at yourself and your own debt before God and where it will lead if you don't settle. And then repent and turn away from your old ways of thinking and doing things, and turn to Jesus Christ who saves us and knows what will make life work best for us. Do it now before it's too late for you. You just bow your head. Tell him you want to receive his gift of forgiveness and eternal life. Tell him you want to follow him and serve him as your savior, master, friend. He graciously promises he'll receive you when you do that.

And for those who do believe in him and are part of his church, there are some serious things to be considered here. There's some straight talk for us from Jesus we need to really pay attention to. First, we must always give it to our world straight. I'm talking about the gospel – the gospel of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ – must always

be at the center of everything we say and do. All too often, we as the church, try to package Jesus for our culture today, and we push it that sin is just a minor topic on his agenda. To remove accountability to God for our sinfulness is to remove one of the realities that makes His grace so powerful. In the effort to make the Gospel more palatable or relevant to the culture, we are risking crippling it – the Gospel – of its most precious truth: **that God has paid the debt for sin through the atonement of Jesus Christ. Trusting in Him, you shall be saved. Let us not ever be ashamed of that gospel of forgiveness!** And also, let us, as his church, never lose the sense of urgency or forthrightness for saving people from perishing without Christ. Now is not the time for us to be silent. The clock is ticking. He will return any day to judge the living and the dead. And we know that life is short and fragile. We have people in our lives, certainly you don't want them to be lost. So, if we truly love them, then we will not beat around the bush with them, but boldly tell them, give it to them straight about salvation through Jesus and encourage them to turn to Jesus now and be saved.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this straight talk from Jesus, for making things so clear for us. May this truth take root in our lives and be a source of confidence and strength as we trust and serve him the rest of our days. And by the power of Your Holy Spirit, help us as your church to never lose sight of your purpose for us: to bring all people to Jesus Christ through the telling of the Gospel so that they might receive the gift of salvation. Amen.