

Dividing, Interpreting and Judging

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Date: 18 June 2017

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Are we well? Excellent. Great to see you. Why don't we just pause for a minute and let's just pray and let's commit ourselves to our Heavenly Father this morning as we turn to His Word. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you so much for those truths and those songs that we've been singing about, the truths about you, that you are faithful and you are strong and you never change.

And so it's onto you that we throw ourselves this morning as we come to your Word. Father, I'm so aware that my words have got no power. Father, I'm so aware that your Word is life-giving and we pray, Father, that you would speak deep into our lives this morning by your Spirit, through your living words and that it would be for your glory and for our good as your people.

And this is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, maybe you want to turn back to that passage in Luke chapter 12, if you have it there. So vital that we have God's Word open in front of us this morning as we turn to it. But I thought we'd begin this morning just by having a little quote. So here's my quote for you as we kick off. There's only two types of people in the world. The ones that entertain and the ones that observe. Anybody got any ideas?

So those were the words of Britney Spears. See, if the students and the teenagers were here, we would have gone mental for that. These are the words of Britney Spears. I wonder if I asked you to complete that sentence this morning, how you would complete it. Now, there's only two types of people in the world. Now, I don't know about you, but I've heard an awful lot of people in my time, which isn't really an awful lot, but for a lot of people tell me how they would finish that sentence. I've had people tell me that am I a Marmite person? Am I not a Marmite person? I've had people ask me, are you a cat person? Are you a dog person? I've had people ask me, are you a morning person? Are you an evening person? And people who know me will know the answer to that question. But what we're going to think about this morning is how Jesus would answer that question. How would Jesus answer that question? Now, we've been in Luke's gospel for quite a while now, and we've been in this section where the big question that we've been thinking through is what does it mean to follow this king? So it's been a lesson in the school of discipleship. What does it mean to follow Jesus? And we've seen Luke, as he presents us with this man Jesus, what he did, what he taught, he's been building up for us this picture of what life as a disciple looks like. And Jesus has been spelling it out, spelling out exactly what it means to follow in his footsteps. And we've noticed it as we've gone along. As he's done that, he's also been rebuffing and exposing the life and the values of the world. And we've seen just how different those two life choices are. So backtrack with me just for a moment, and maybe if you've got your Bible you want to flick the last couple of chapters. What have we seen Jesus teach his followers?

[3 : 34] In a world that doesn't fear God, that doesn't acknowledge him but rather shakes the fist at him, what is Jesus teaching his followers? That you need to fear God rightly as your creator.

In your world where people worship money, you, you seek first the kingdom of God. In a world that worries and it doubts, you can trust that your heavenly father will provide everything that you need. In a world that doesn't believe I'm coming back, Jesus says, as we saw last week, that you need to live in light of my return and be ready for your master's coming. Now I don't know how you felt as we've gone through those last couple of chapters, but as I've been processing it in my head, it's really struck me that as I seek to follow after this man, as I seek to live as he's telling me to live in my circles, I invite you just now to think about the people in your circles.

As we try to live this out, you and I are going to look very different from the world around us. I felt that a few Sundays ago, Sunday evening. Got the bus up to church, got my seat, thought I'd get ahead with the reading for the evening, turn to Psalm 73, was reading it on the bus, happy as Larry.

Psalm 73 comes to the bit, for behold, those who are far from you will perish, and you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. So I'm reading this on the bus, and I become very aware that the guy sitting next to me is having a read of it as well. I wonder what he was thinking. And I bet he wasn't thinking. I really fancy that verse on the bumper sticker of my car.

There's a difference. To walk with this king, to have his word at the center of our lives, is to go against the grain of the world, not with it. There's a difference. And what we're going to see in these verses this morning is Jesus bring home the reality of that difference. If you've got it, there, see it in verse 49. Strong language. Jesus talking about how he has come to cast fire on the earth. So not only has he come to be the one who brings salvation, but in doing so, he has come to be the fire that divides, meaning that people will stand on one side or the other based on their rejection or their acceptance of him. The big idea for us to grasp this morning is that Jesus identifies himself here as the most divisive figure in human history. To follow him is to follow the divisive king. And let's be honest, it's a toughie this morning.

[6 : 47] For many of us, I'm sure as we heard it read there, it probably maybe fell into the category of, I really wish Jesus hadn't said that. So here's my question to you. What do you do with tough words from Jesus? I guess we've got three options, don't we? We can run. I have nothing to do with it. We can hide, pretend they're not there, or we can digest. Remember when I was young, my mum, it's dad's day today, isn't it? But I'll tell you about my mum. She used to make sure that me and my brother every morning had a cod liver oil tablet. Now, if you've ever had one of these tablets, you learn very quickly, don't you, that you don't chew a cod liver oil tablet. But she used to give us one of these things every morning. And it didn't taste nice, but it was good for us. I want to suggest that that is how we should approach these words of Jesus here. That Luke wants Theophilus to know these words. That God wants his people to know these words. And God wants us to know these words of our

Saviour and our Lord. This is what it means to follow him. These words are hard to hear, that these are good words for us to know. Now, do you remember Sesame Street?

The sermon this morning brought to you in association with two words, division and decision. Division and decision. Verses 49 to 53, Jesus turns to his disciples and he tells them to expect division. Verses 54 to 59, Jesus turns to the crowd and he calls them to make a decision. So in the time we have reading this morning, really I want us to see four quick things from these verses. Firstly, I want us to see the heart. See the heart of Jesus as we read about him in these verses. Remember the context. Here is Jesus journeying to Jerusalem. Now he's not booked an Airbnb and he's not in for a bit of sightseeing in this city. He is journeying to Jerusalem with a purpose. Now how is he feeling on this journey? Do you notice it there in verse 50? If you've got an ESV, the word is distressed. If you've got an NIV, the word is constraints. The Greek word there meaning that on this journey he was gripped by a severe emotional stress. Now why? Because he knows what's ahead of him in Jerusalem. The baptism reference there is him referring to his death.

So he's going to Jerusalem to accomplish the work which his father gave him to do, to hand himself over to sinful men, to face being humiliated by his enemies, to endure the agony of a slow death and lay down his life to carry out the divine plan of God to save sinners.

And he doesn't walk this road lightly. This is what we need to see. This is a costly journey for Jesus. Here is our Savior this morning. I invite you to take a fresh look at him.

[10 : 17] In our world, I don't know if you've noticed it, all the talk at the minute, what is it of? It's for the need of strong and stable leadership, isn't it? You hear it everywhere at the minute. Well here is King Jesus.

Here is a man full of conviction. And here is a man full of compassion. Here is a man, as John would write, who is full of grace and full of truth.

This is the heart of our King this morning. And that's the backdrop to what he says next. Verse secondly, we need to see the reality. Verse 51.

Look at the question that he asks his disciples. What is he asking? Do you think I've come to bring peace on earth? I wonder how you would answer that question.

How does Jesus answer it? No, I tell you, but division. And it's strong language. Imagine that there's many in our world today that would say that surely peace on earth is the whole point of Jesus.

[11 : 27] I mean, did he not come to start some kind of global group hug? Surely it would be better for everyone if Jesus hadn't said that. And we think of the lyrics, don't we, that John Lennon penned all those years ago.

Imagine there's no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for and no religion to. Imagine all the people living life in peace. So what is he talking about here?

I don't think he's encouraging his followers to grab their pitchforks and to go in a march. He's come on a rescue mission to save sinners. He's come to bring peace with God to all who would trust in him.

But the reality here in these verses this morning is that not all will accept him. And because not all will accept him, there will be division here and now.

And he goes on, doesn't he, to spell out and to picture how that division is going to manifest itself.

[12 : 29] And do you see the picture that he gives? It's of a family. You can imagine them, can't you? They're living all under one roof. And the picture is that blood unites them.

But their take on Jesus, it very much divides them. Do you see it there? Dads against sons. Sons against dads. Mums against daughters. Daughters against mums. Mother-in-law against daughter-in-law.

Daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. Well, here is Jesus spelling out that this division, on account of him, is going to penetrate even to the heart of the most intimate of relationships.

I heard it said recently that in the Muslim world, that you shouldn't be preaching Jesus unless you've got a spare room in your house. When people turn to follow him, it means that it's often followed by being disowned by their family and their friends.

And we think about it in our lives, don't we? That we might not face that level of persecution. But on some level, we know the reality of this division, do we not?

[13 : 36] Think about your own life. You share a room at work with someone who thinks that your faith in Jesus is nonsense. Someone in your university class who thinks that your views on certain subjects as you hold to biblical truth have no place in modern thinking.

Someone in your family who thinks that your choices in life because you trust in Jesus are holding you back rather than pushing you on. And I'm sure many of us, we know the pain of that division.

So my question this morning, and the question I've been wrestling with for the last few weeks, is what do we do when we experience the pain of that division?

What do we do? Well, if you're still awake this morning, let me offer you one encouragement and let me offer you two incentives. Does that sound okay?

One and two? It's the easiest football formation ever. One, two. One encouragement. Keep going. Keep going with Jesus. It's worth it in the end.

[14 : 43] We have to remember, don't we, that our king is not negotiating power in a hung parliament. Our king is on his throne. God has exalted him and he is ruling and he is reigning now.

And one day his rule and his reign will be seen by all. So we keep going with our king. Two incentives. That's the encouragement. Two incentives to keep going.

Firstly, that we have a king who knows. We have a king who knows. We have a king who knows the pain of walking this divisive road.

Even deeper than that. We have a flesh and a blood king who knows what rejection and division in his own family feels like. We see it in the gospels.

You can check it out afterwards. John would tell us that not even his own brothers believed in him. Matthew would tell us that Jesus said about his own that a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his household.

[15 : 47] Mark would tell us that at one point Jesus' own brothers claimed that he was out of his mind. Imagine how difficult that must have been for him.

And isn't it amazing that his own family living with him for 30 years still didn't have a clue who he was. It's incredible. But I think as we think about that, that we have both a great example and a great encouragement.

Because these same brothers who mocked eventually went on to become not only the followers of Jesus, but actually the leaders and the martyrs in the early church.

And I take great heart from that. And I take great encouragement for that to keep praying for and keep witnessing to my friends and my family who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as their king and savior.

So this is the first incentive. We've got a king who knows. Second incentive is we've got a family who cares. God in his goodness and in his wisdom, he hasn't saved us so that we can live out the Christian life in isolation.

[16 : 58] But he saved us so that we can live it out in community with a new spiritual family. I don't know if you remember a few weeks ago we had a church lunch in the upstairs hall.

Everyone loved the lift. But somebody joked to me that Grace, our little daughter, must get home and wonder who her parents are. And it was a nice compliment because they were noticing that the fact that every time they turned around someone else was playing with our little daughter.

And I must say I love that. Because I want my girl to grow up to know that she has numerous spiritual aunts and numerous spiritual uncles in this church family who love her and who care for her.

That she's got many spiritual mums and dads in this congregation who are praying for her and who love her. And it encourages me to know that I have many brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandpas and grandmas in this church family who care, who pray for and who love me.

I've just felt it the last few weeks as I've come to church. I've left and I've commented to a few people. It's just been good for me to be here today. You see the beauty of what God has done through his son Jesus Christ?

[18 : 13] He's created a new spiritual family. This is what he's birthed here. And on a side note, this will be next month's Pastor's Pen, so act surprised when it comes out.

But do we not have a wonderful opportunity here as we look out at the world? Everything that's going on at the minute. As we look out in a world that is divided and it's fractured and it's hurting.

What a wonderful opportunity that we have as a family here this morning to put on display the glory of God. As people look in here and they see unity in diversity.

And we can showcase the glory of what God has done in the gospel. That he has broken down the man-made walls that divided us through his son Jesus Christ.

It's incredible. And I wonder, as we function as a family here this morning, I wonder if some of us need a family hug. Right?

[19 : 16] Maybe that's something you could do after we finish the services by way of application. As we function as a family. Because it's tough, is it not? It's tough following Jesus. But we're not doing it in isolation.

We're doing it together. So let's live that out. Especially for those as we think about it. And we pray that God would save many in our city to himself. That we come and be part of this church family.

And as many count the cost for following Jesus. Who may well face rejection in their own family. Is it not so important that we step up as the spiritual church family?

Fill that void. Embrace them. Love them. We've got a king who knows. We've got family who cares. And with this, the third thing to see.

And with this we transition from the word division to the word decision, if you remember that. Is to see the significance. It's the third thing that we need to see from these verses. And we need to notice who Jesus is addressing here.

[20 : 19] Because he turns from addressing his disciples to addressing the crowds. Now we've been thinking about the crowd, haven't we, over the last few weeks. These people who are following Jesus, who are watching him, who are listening to him, are trying to suss him out.

And yet they remain uncommitted to him. And Jesus calls on the crowd to see the significance of who he is. And do you notice it there?

He appeals to their sense of logic. And he appeals to their knowledge of the weather. Now that's something that we can relate to. We love to talk about the weather.

We're not the only generation that love to talk about the weather. Here is one. And the logic is, it's a kind of you know what happens next kind of logic. So follow it through with him.

What does he say, Jesus? You see a cloud rising in the west. These clouds full of rain that would blow in off the meds. You see those clouds, says Jesus. And you know fine well to expect rain.

[21 : 26] You see the south wind blowing in off the desert. You know fine well it's going to be a scorcher. I was thinking about this last night as I was taking out the bins. How would we describe the weather last night?

It was muggy. It's a good Scottish word there, muggy. And what happened next when there was muggy weather? It's a bit of rain. And I felt clever because I could have predicted that there was rain coming after this muggy weather.

It's the same kind of logic, isn't it? And Jesus is saying to this crowd, you are good at reading the signs. So why won't you use that same logic when it comes to reading me?

Now here's the logic. The significance of the arrival of Jesus is God making good on his promise that he will one day act to save his wayward and sinful people.

How will he do it? He will send his king. And you'll know he's coming. He will be one who goes ahead of him. He will be a voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for this king.

[22 : 28] Prepare the way for the Lord. And you'll know this king is coming. He's here because he will be one who opens the eyes of the blind. He will be one who heals the sick. And we've seen it, haven't we, that Luke's been spelling it out for us.

As he's telling the events of Jesus' life and his teaching that this saving king, God's king, is here. And the hour of salvation is here in the coming of this king.

The day of salvation, the day of grace. To get right with God by bowing the knee to his son. This moment of salvation history is now.

Because this same king, Jesus, is the king whom God will exalt and through whom one day he will judge the world. What Jesus is driving at here with this crowd is not so much their inability to join the dots in order to see the full picture of who he truly is.

What he's getting at is their stubbornness and their refusal to act upon the picture that those joined up dots have created for them. And here is Jesus effectively asking the crowd, where do you stand?

[23 : 43] Where do you stand in relation to me? I wonder if some of us see ourselves in this crowd. You've been following, you've been here for the last little while, maybe even been here for years.

You've been following Luke's gospel as we've gone through it and you always identify with the crowd. You're watching on, you're looking on, you're trying to suss this man Jesus out. Well, here is the call this morning from the lips of Jesus.

To see who he really is and to bow the knee to him. And to come and receive life in him. Will you see the significance of who this man Jesus really is?

And that takes us to the fourth and the final thing to see and it's to see the offer. Jesus, the master storyteller. Do you notice it here?

He tells this crowd a parable about debt. And we get debt, don't we, in our culture. Someone told me recently that we are the generation who wakes up each morning and sings, I owe, I owe, it's off to work, I go.

[24 : 48] We get debt, mortgages, we get student loans, we get debt. And here is a generation who get debt. And Jesus here helps this crowd see that they need to settle that debt with their accuser before it is too late.

Follow the logic, follow the sequence. You've got a debt, settle. Because if you don't, he'll take you to court. And once you're in court, if you've not settled that debt, the judge will find you guilty and he'll throw you in prison.

And you won't get out until you've paid the last penny. Greek word there for penny, lepton. The smallest, the most valuable, sorry, the smallest and the least valuable coin of this day.

Worth about six minutes of an average daily wage. And so Jesus says in the same way that time is running out for you to get right with your accuser, time is running out for you to get right with God.

So the offer that Jesus is making to this crowd is to come to him and to get right, get peace with God. And I guess the gospel, wouldn't it, it would tell us two things about this debt, our debt.

[26 : 07] It would firstly tell us that our debt of sin, our rebellion against a holy God, it is big. The sin. We've accumulated a sizable sin debt.

And I deserve prison because of my sin. I deserve prison because of my debts. Because it's a debt that I am unable to pay.

It's the first thing the gospel would tell us. But second thing the gospel would tell us is that Jesus, as he travels to Jerusalem and to his death, and this is glorious this morning, that he is on his way to take the prison sentence that you and I deserve, to trade places with us so that you and I through him can go free.

Jesus is the only way for my debt to be paid. He is on the way to Jerusalem to the cross to pay my debt.

And that's why I can sing, Oh, praise the one who paid my debt and raised this life up from the debt. J.I. Packer, He writes this, Grace means God moving heaven and earth to save sinners who could not lift a finger to save themselves.

[27 : 30] The day of grace is today, says Jesus. And life is on offer to us this morning through this quite magnificent Savior.

And so as we close our time together this morning, let me take you back to that initial question. Do you remember Brittany? She's talking about two types of people in the world.

And what were we thinking about? We're thinking about how Jesus would answer that question. Well, here's what C.S. Lewis famously said. He said, There are two kinds of people.

Those who say to God, Thy will be done. And those to whom God says, All right then, Have it your way. I think Jesus would have found Lewis's answer pretty on the money.

Actually, there are only two types of people in this world, says Jesus. Those who will bow the knee to him and accept him as Savior, receive life.

[28 : 32] And those who won't. We've seen Jesus present himself as the most divisive figure in all of human history. Let me close where the passage closes this morning and ask you where you stand in relation to him.

Will you come to him? Will you come to the one who's offering to pay your debt, who's paid your debt on the cross? The one who is offering you life in his name and peace with God your creator.

Just before I pray, I realize and I feel the way of the hard words of Jesus. This morning, and I wonder if you do too. So why don't we just pause just before we pray.

Maybe there's some stuff that you want to pray about this morning as you think about the challenge that God's words brought to us. So why don't we just have a few moments of quiet and then I'll pray as we close. So Father, we thank you for this morning.

And we thank you for your words. Father, we pray and ask you to help us to be those who, like Jesus so wonderfully modeled for us, walk our lives and live our lives full of grace and truth.

[29 : 52] Father, would you help us as we experience the reality of this division to know the peace and the presence of your Holy Spirit we ask.

Because we ask through and in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.