

Title: Why don't you believe?  
Text: Luke 12.54-59  
Theme: Missing the point  
Series: Luke  
Prop Stmtnt: God gives evidence so we will take him seriously.

15 years ago, schools were giving out tablets to students because this was going to help them advance quickly. Now, the new trend is to have no screens and no phones because study after study has come out showing that large amounts of screen time have a detrimental effect on a child's developing of attention span, problem-solving skills and cognitive flexibility. When you see the movie before reading the book, all of the imagination is done for you. When you are the passive consumer of videos and games, there are portions of your brain that are not being engaged. God calls us to love him with all of our hearts, souls and minds. Genuine Christianity is not grounded in our emotions, or traditions that we repeat on autopilot. Genuine Christianity is built on truth that demands your thoughtful engagement and critical thinking skills.

We are studying Luke's gospel in which we are studying the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus teaches his disciples carefully and deliberately about himself and his plan for his kingdom, because he wants them to learn how to think rightly. Instead of giving them all of the answers to the questions in the first week, he spent 3 years teaching them how to think about God, God's Word, God's World, God's economy, God's kingdom and plan. In that sense, instead of just giving them fish, he taught them how to fish. He left questions unanswered when they weren't ready for the answers. He answered their questions with questions so they would follow him with their minds, not just with blind obedience. God gave you a mind to use and with that God gave you his Word to read so you would gain insight and be able to look around you at the world you live and see the signs for God and for what he is up to. God designed his plan for this world. He made the world and made us. He gave us his Word so that we would know who we are and what his plan is. He told us in his Word about promises that he would keep and signs that would point to significant events so we would be informed and prepared. Are you? If not, why not?

Read Text:

1. **Why do you choose to ignore the important issues?** (54-56)

We read Psalm 19 together as our call to worship. This Psalm is about how God has revealed himself to us. In the first place, God has revealed himself through creation. We call that general revelation because everyone can see the evidences of God's handiwork. Secondly, God has revealed himself through special revelation, his Word. Creation points to the Creator and the Word of God informs us about what kind of Creator he is and what he is up to. We see evidence for the majesty and grandeur of God from mountains, oceans, solar systems and distant galaxies that blow up our imagination with beauty and size. But it is God's Word that tells us how this all-powerful Creator is personal, trinitarian, righteous, merciful, and Sovereign. The evidence for God in creation is so clear and so compelling that no human being can claim

ignorance of God's existence. God has given clear evidence of himself through nature and we all believe in God whether or not we want to admit it. This is what Jesus is saying.

**A. You have the skill to see and predict the weather.**

Talking to the crowds again, Jesus said that you see a cloud (storm cloud) rising in the west and you say (predict), at once (with confidence) as a warning or a promise, "a shower is coming." And so, it happens. Weather patterns often come from the west and in Israel, the Mediterranean Sea was a massive body of water directly to their west that had/has all sorts of influence on the weather of that region. If a cloud rises in the west, then we assume that moisture is moving in from the Sea. If the winds start blowing in from the south, we assume (being in the northern hemisphere) that they will bring warmer or hotter temps. We do this sort of thing all the time, but why are we so brazen, so confident, so certain that we make this prediction?

We believe in scientific law. We believe that this world is governed by a series of laws that enable us to make decisions on which we stake our lives. In science 101, you learn that natural science or scientific law are descriptive laws that govern our universe. We call them laws because we have observed them and tested them and they are constant. For example, mankind has observed and charted the rotation of the earth (a day), the phases of the moon (month or 29.53 days), the orbit of the earth around the sun (a year) to the second. The length of a year is actually 365.2422 days. Or 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 46.08 seconds. Our ability to send spacecraft into orbit and bring them home again is all based on these numbers being consistent.

If you are an air traffic controller you are making decisions based on laws of speed. The speed of 454 miles per hour is based on distance and time. A mile is 5,280 feet. If a jet covers 454 miles in 60 minutes, we state that the jet is going 454 miles per hour. If, however, the earth's rotation was to suddenly slow down, then an hour is no longer an hour and we would be subject to scorching days and freezing nights, a weakened magnetic field and increased solar radiation, etc. People assume laws of nature. Every day the sun rises and sets. Every month the moon goes through phases. Every year there are seasons. When a storm cloud rises in the west and heads our way, we predict rain because we believe in scientific law.

For thousands of years, we have observed the weather and have made calculations based on that. So, if you see a dark cloud rising in the west that begins to take over the sky, and you feel the temperature drop and the wind pick up and you see birds intensify their eating habits, fly lower than normal, pause their migration journey and seek shelter, you know that a storm is about to hit. All of those signs suggest patterns that come from laws. We do not believe that these are haphazard, chaotic or unpredictable. Why not? Because we really do not believe in evolution. If this universe, solar system, earth and all of her ecosystems evolved, then they are still evolving, that is they are unpredictable. But we make predictions all of the time because we believe in our ability to look at the evidence before us and based on events that have taken

place over and over in time past, we make decisions. That is the point that Jesus is making. *"You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky."* Then comes the "why" question?

**B. Why can't you interpret your present time? (56b)**

Jesus charges them with hypocrisy. What do you think Jesus is getting at? How were they being hypocrites? Hypocrisy is claiming or pretending to be one thing and doing another or criticizing someone for something that you do. So, how were these people being hypocrites? They were claiming to look at the signs of weather (laws of nature) as if that would happen while at the same time, they were looking at the signs of God all around them ("the present time) and pretending that they didn't know what the signs meant or what they predicted would not happen. If natural law and general revelation, established by God's Word is binding, then God's special revelation is binding. For centuries, God made promises to his people to give them a Messiah. He was the serpent crusher of Genesis 3, the innocent substitute of Genesis 22, the Passover Lamb, sacrifice of the day of atonement, the bronze serpent, and the perfect prophet. He was the one born of a virgin and born in Bethlehem. He was Isaiah's suffering servant and Daniel's Son of Man. He came preaching good news to the poor, healing the sick, feeding the hungry and raising the dead. He was all of these promises fulfilled standing in front of them in flesh and blood and talking to them. Why don't you look at what is before you (Jesus) and see it for what it is? Jesus calls them hypocrites because their response to him is willful blindness.

These people had no excuse for their blindness. Neither do we. In fact, we have greater accountability. Look at 2 Peter 1, beginning in v.16 where Peter talks about being an eyewitness of the majesty of Jesus. Peter was referring to witnessing the transfiguration of Jesus which included seeing Moses and Elijah as well as hearing the voice of God the Father speak to Peter, James and John about his Son when he said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Peter says, (v.18) *"we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain."* There are many standout moments in the life of Christ. This one is near the top. What more evidence is there to the deity of Christ, the authority of Christ, and the plan of God than this? Moses and Elijah are talking with Jesus about what is going to happen to Jesus and God the Father speaks about his Son. Peter is telling us that he knows firsthand that all of this was true because he was there and he is telling us the truth. He saw it with his own eyes and heard it with his own ears. When the Father said this, he was using language from Psalm 2. The Father was confirming for Peter, James and John that Jesus was his Son, that Jesus was God, and that Jesus was king. This statement reflects Psalm 2.7 where God affirms the Kingship of the Messiah in David's line. Psalm 2.7 and Isaiah 42.1 are being fulfilled. The Father is establishing his Son as King. But then Peter says in v.19 that we have something even more certain. What does Peter mean by that? Is he saying that as incredible of an experience as that was (the transfiguration) that we have something that is even better than that? Is that the point? What could be more certain than seeing Jesus in his glory and hearing the voice of the Father authenticate Christ? Is Peter saying that God's Word is more certain than seeing Jesus with his own eyes? I don't think that is Peter's point. He is not pitting the Bible against Jesus in his glory nor contrasting the two. Peter is saying that given the fact that what he saw was the fulfillment of some of the promises of God's Word, that there is a sense in

which God's Word is even more certain. If Peter needed any more proof to believe the Scriptures, he had them. In that moment he was witnessing the fulfillment of several prophecies. He was seeing God's promises being kept and fulfilled before his eyes. Having the Word of God is even more certain because we have all of the promises that God has made. The crowd witnessed Christ with their own eyes and we not only have much of that from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but we have the rest of the NT plus 2,000 years of history that shows us how this has played out. We need to ask ourselves the same question that Jesus asked the crowd which was basically this: Are you willing to believe the evidence of God's Word which is before you?

God tells us in his word things that are going to happen ahead of time, so you will believe everything else that he says. (little prophecies prove the big stuff) If God says that someone is going to try to rob your house tonight what would you do? Or someone is going to try steal your van tonight or try to steal one of your kids, what would you do? If you believed God, you would alert the police and take other pre-cautions. God tells you little things so that you will pay attention to the big things! The big thing is the coming kingdom of Christ. For hundreds of years God told Israel that he was going to send the Messiah to them. And he did and they didn't believe him. Jesus has told us that he is going to return. Do you believe him? Do you see what is going on around you? Can you interpret the present time? Look at Israel. Seriously, to those of you who are not convinced of the authority of God's Word, take a look at Israel. How do you explain the existence and history Israel without affirming the Bible? And how do you explain the fact that this tiny little country always seems to be in the center of the world stage?

Israel is smaller than every state in our country except four. Israel is even smaller than New Jersey. When something happens in New Jersey, nobody cares, right? But, when something happens in Israel, it seems as if the whole world pays attention because we all know that Israel is the powder keg and one of these events could light the fuse that blows everything up. Don't take your eyes off Israel.

A short time ago, a Tigers game at Comerica Park was postponed because a strong line of thunderstorms that were coming. The fans were told to get out of the seats and into an enclosed area because weather forecasters looked at the signs and said that this was a potential for some trouble. Why would you believe that and act on that, but not believe God's Word?

## **2. Why don't you see the danger you are in? (57-59)**

Again, Jesus asks "why." Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? The analogy he gives is clear. You are going to face the judge and be held accountable. Many of you have received notification that you have been selected for jury duty. With that comes instructions to call the night before to see if you are indeed needed to report. Before things go to trial, there is a lot of pretrial work that goes on between the prosecution and the defendants in order to avoid having to actually go to trial. The prosecution is motivated to get a good plea bargain ahead of time in order to prosecute as many cases as possible. The defendant is motivated to

try to get the best deal possible for its client. If an agreement has not been reached then the case goes to trial. But that back-and-forth negotiating can go on up until the point the trial begins. In that case, the prosecution can say to the defendant, there are 60 people on the other side of this wall, from whom a jury is going to be seated. Your future is in their hands. If they find you guilty, you could be sent to prison for 25 years. But, if you plead guilty, I will recommend to the judge that you get no more than 10. What do you say?

The impending consequential verdict causes the defendant to realize that there is no more kicking the can down the road. This is the end of the line. Right now, you have an opportunity to cut a deal, but shortly that window of opportunity will be over.

The crime Jesus is referring to is a failure to pay a debt. The one who owes the money has failed to pay back what is owed and up until now has not made any arrangements to address this. We are not as familiar with this, but for hundreds (thousands) of years, societies have had “debtors prisons” where people were sent until the debt was settled. If a person was sent to prison, he could not work and earn money to pay the debt and he could not get out until the debt was satisfied. Therefore, many people who went to a debtor’s prison never got out because now they had no job and they had no means of paying anything, much less the very last penny. While debtor’s prison sounds terrible, and it was in many respects, it was highly motivational for people to not go into debt or do everything they could to stay out. Jesus is asking the crowd why they don’t see the true condition of their lives? You know what is going to happen. Why is there no urgency on your part to cut a deal, to get resolution, to fix this?

Shortly, Jesus will weep over Jerusalem because he knows that in a few years the entire city will be destroyed, the temple will be burned, thousands of people will starve and be slaughtered, and thousands more will be raped, tortured and taken captive. The religious leaders defiantly declared that “let the death of Jesus be on us and on our children.” We don’t care. What a tragedy for them because they received what they demanded. They ignored the danger they were in. It is likely that some of the people who listened to Jesus speak these words experienced the immediate consequences of the fall of Jerusalem and the nation in 70 A.D.

Why no urgency for them or for us? I can only think of 3 related reasons, none of which are rational. 1) You simply do not believe that you will die. Getting old is what happens to other people. That idea will not age well. 2) You do not believe that you will be held accountable. Related to that 3) you think that if you don’t think about it, then it won’t take place. You try to avoid the obvious. Jesus is saying if you are having a panic attack because you are about to face the judge and get thrown in a prison from which you don’t have any rational hope of being released from, then why don’t you have a panic attack about the condition of your soul?

What is the danger that we are in? Apart from Christ, our sin puts us in debt to God with a debt we could never pay. And we will die and we will face the judge and the prison that Jesus is referring to, is hell. How can we escape a guilty verdict when the debt of our sin is beyond our means of payment? There is only one way. Christ. By living a perfect life in your place, Jesus, himself was the full and final payment for the debt of your sin. When you admit your sin to

God, and you trust only in Christ who died in your place, God takes your debt from you, and credits you with the infinite righteousness of Christ. You do more than escape the debtor's prison, you are placed into his forever family, where you have access by grace to God, forever.