

Interpreting the times

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

During this coronavirus pandemic, for every question we answer another ten are left unanswered. Is this from God? What is he doing? How should I pray? If you are like me, you're reading the Bible with more attentiveness, hoping that in your reading you'll stumble across something that will give some insight. So, when I noticed "Interpreting the times" as a section heading for these verses, I took notice.

It is clear from Jesus' words that he was disappointed in the crowd's inability to interpret the times they were living in. They could read the signs that predicted weather, but they could not read the signs that heralded the arrival of the age of the Messiah. The Old Testament foretold his coming. Everything pointed to this moment and they were missing it. Fortunately, their failure to recognize the importance of their times did not keep Jesus from accomplishing his purposes.

What about these times? Is there anything special about them and how we are to interpret them? Once again, Jesus can help us. A few verses later, in Luke 13:1-5, Jesus offers some insight. Here we read about people whose lives came to tragic ends, some by the hands of Pilate, others by the forces of gravity. The question of the day was, "Were these people worse sinners than others?" Jesus answered, "I tell you no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Whether hard times are themselves an act of judgment or not, in scripture, they always serve as a reminder of the judgment to come. We are all guilty of sin. If we die in our sin, we will perish. Thankfully, there is another option. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

God is reminding the world these days of how high the stakes are. It is not just the lives or livelihoods of people that are in danger. Without Jesus, their souls are in danger. That is why Jesus came, to seek and save the lost. It was the reason he came the first time. It is his desire during these times. It will be his desire at all times.

Discussion questions

What is God impressing on your heart, through scripture, prayer and other believers, about the meaning of these times?

What have you sensed God calling you personally to do, stop doing, think about or pray about during the pandemic?

Who do you know who might be open to the gospel at this time?

How might you give people access to the gospel during these times?

To a world that does not want to hear about the judgment to come, how might you communicate both law and gospel? Judgment and grace?

