

INTRODUCTION

I don’t watch much television as a rule—I read. I might catch an episode of “Star Trek: the Next Generation”, or watch Fox News. However, I do tune in the Weather Channel quite often. I’ve always been interested in weather, and since I’m a pilot, I had to learn a great deal about weather to pass the written exams for my private pilot license and instrument rating. I know enough about meteorology to know that forecasting the weather is sometimes mostly a guess. The television weathermen sound pretty sure about their forecasts.

Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody ever does anything about it: why? Because we don’t *make* the weather—God does. If you don’t like the weather, don’t call the Weather Channel and complain! In our passage of scripture today, Jesus talks about forecasting the weather. He comments that the Jews were pretty accurate in forecasting weather, but they weren’t as good at observing the current spiritual conditions and interpreting the spiritual climate. We have the same problem today. Jesus is going to share three very important spiritual truths in this passage, which we’ll call weather warnings. When you learn of a severe storm warning, or a tornado warning, you’d better pay attention. I suggest we all pay careful attention to these three spiritual storm warnings Jesus gives. In Luke 12:51-53 He says, “Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” Here’s the first weather warning:

I. DEVOTION TO JESUS MAY ALIENATE YOU FROM OTHERS!

Jesus is the Prince of Peace and when the angels announced His birth they said, “Peace on earth, goodwill to men.” So, you may be surprised by these words of Jesus. In Matthew’s account, Jesus says, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10:34) He wasn’t speaking of a literal sword and literal bloodshed, because He told Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane to put away his sword. Jesus was simply stating the truth that He calls people to live a life of such radical commitment that His followers will be rejected and ostracized from others. If you choose to live the Christian life in this world, people are going to “cut you off” from their circle of friendship, because you live by a different set of rules than they do. This division can occur on a couple of levels:

1. The truth about Jesus divides humanity

We divide people into many groups, but Jesus divides them into only two. When He spoke of a family of five being divided, they weren’t divided into three groups, or four groups, or as five separate individuals, but into two groups. Jesus said it would be, “two against three, or three against two” or He could have said “four against one.” The point is that Jesus divides the entire world’s population into two groups. Jesus is not intentionally dividing them, but people choose themselves which of the two groups they will join. In Matthew 12:30 Jesus said, “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.”

Some people have the idea that Jesus is the great Uniter of the world’s people, and that Christianity is a wonderful ethical system that will produce one world family where everyone lives in peace and harmony with each other. Actually, the words of Jesus are so radical they divide people into two groups. He said there are *only* two eternal destinies: Heaven and Hell. There is a popular teaching today called Universalism. Other groups like Ba’hai and the Unity School of Christianity share its basic premise. This philosophy basically says there are many legitimate ways to God. You can go through Jesus, or you can go through Buddha, or Mohammed, or you can just formulate your own do-it-yourself spirituality, but we will all end up happy and accepted by God, whoever God is to you. That’s not what Jesus taught. He said there is only one way to heaven—and it was through Him. He said, “I am the way, the truth, the life, no man comes to the Father but by me.” (John 14:6). In Matthew 25, Jesus said at the Judgement, people would be divided into two groups: sheep and goats. The Father would welcome His Sheep into heaven, and the goats would be sent to the hell. He didn’t say there would be sheep and goats and squirrels and cows, only two groups.

That is not a very popular message in America today. Since September 11, I have been overjoyed to see the renewed surge of patriotism and more people are asking God to bless America. We claim to be one nation under God—but which God are we talking about? The God of the Hindus, the God of the Muslims, the new-agers god, or the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ? Some of the Universalists would say, “but they are all the same God!”

Dr. Joseph Stowell is the President of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. A few weeks after 9/11 he attended the National Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast in Washington. He said that in the spirit of “harmony” they had turned it into a pluralistic meeting where a rabbi, priest, a mullah, and even a Native American shaman prayed. The speaker was an Episcopal rector who said, “After 9/11 God is back in America. Now, we must each be willing to give up the religious traditions that divide us so we can be one.” Dr. Stowell said he was asking him to give up the distinctiveness of Jesus—and he couldn’t do it. He was thinking, “Dear God, please don’t let there be a standing ovation, because I cannot stand and support a statement like that.” Sure enough a few minutes later, the speaker finished and there was a thunderous standing ovation—and at the risk of being labeled as some kind of narrow-minded, intolerant bigot, Dr. Stowell didn’t stand. He looked around and in that crowd of several hundred people; he was the only one sitting. The more we insist Jesus is the only way to heaven, the more “intolerant” we will be labeled. If we think Jesus will unite all Americans, think again.

2. Response to Jesus may divide your family

I made up a story about a family I’d like to tell you. I made up the names, but I am basing this story on what I’ve seen happen dozens of times since I’ve been preaching. Let me introduce you to our imaginary family. John and Mary worked hard to provide for their three children. Matt was a senior in High School, Ruth was a sophomore, and Scott a fifth grader. They were a loving family, but they never attended church. At the dinner table one night Ruth mentioned one of her friends went to a big youth rally at a local church and now she was very religious. Her friend at school told her Jesus is the Son of God and salvation was free. He had given her a copy of the gospel of John. Ruth was troubled because she didn’t really know what she believed. Her older

brother, Matt, scowled and said, “I don’t wanna talk about any of that religious stuff during supper!” John agreed. He said some religious nut at work was always talking to him about “being saved.” John said he didn’t want it talked about in his home.

An argument soon broke out. Mary said, “Well, we could do with a little religion around this house! Maybe we would be a little nicer to each other. If Ruth wants to check it out, I think we ought to let her.” She told Ruth she went to church some as a child and teenager, but dropped out during college, but after dinner she would help her look through the little book she had been given. Little Scott chimed in and said, “Maybe we ought to go down to that church and check it out. A lot of my friends go there every week.”

So after supper, Matt and John headed for the TV set and Mary, Ruth, and Scott sat around and read the first three chapters of John. Mary said, “If you want to go to church this Sunday, I’ll take you. Maybe we can talk with the preacher about this.” They did go to church and spoke to the pastor after the service. They found the people to be friendly, and soon the three of them were attending every week—while John and Matt stayed home and made smart remarks about the religious fanatics in their family. Mary was troubled about her life and her eternity and committed her life to Christ. Ruth and Scott soon did the same thing. When she told John, his response was not encouraging. A few weeks later, she lost her temper and John was quick to point out that, “he thought Christians were nice and sweet” so much for her “being saved.” Matt continued to make fun of Ruth and Scott. As the weeks past, it seemed the family only became more and more divided over this issue. Now, how does the story end?

You supply your own ending. For the fairy tale ending: John and Matt would come to Christ and the family would be united and live happily ever after. For the Harlequin Romance ending: Mary would decide her love for John was stronger than any other love, and she would renounce her religion and throw herself into his arms. But Jesus said the ending is often different. Families are often divided when a person commits his or her life to Christ.

A few years ago, a Muslim man came to our church and placed his faith in Christ and was baptized. The moment he did, he said his family back in his home country considered him to be dead. They held a funeral for him. He said if he returned to his country, he would be murdered—and that the person killing him would be honored as having done a noble act by killing him. It is true not only here, but around the world, that your devotion to Jesus may alienate you from others.

Some of you today know this pain first hand because you live with a mate who is not a Christian. Or you have parents or children who are not believers. You know the real pain of being called a fool or fanatic by your family members.

You may say, “I thought Jesus came to heal and restore families, not divide them.” He can and will when you have a husband and a wife who have both surrendered to Jesus. Then Jesus is the super glue that will hold the marriage together whatever happens. Jesus can only restore broken families if each member surrenders to His Lordship. Jesus doesn’t *intentionally* divide families or groups - He just understands that will be the inevitable result when family members reject the gospel.

The second weather warning is:

II. PAY ATTENTION TO GOD’S SPIRITUAL FORECAST!

Now, let’s see what Jesus had to say about the weather. In Luke 12: 54-56 we read: 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?”

I’ve spent a great deal of time in Israel, and the weather there is very interesting. The Mediterranean Sea is to the west, so when there is a west wind, it brings the moisture from the sea and you can know it will probably rain soon. The dry arid desert of the Sinai Peninsula is to the south, so when there’s a south wind, you can expect hot weather. In Jesus time, as well as today, you can often predict the weather by walking outside, licking your finger, and holding it up. Although they were good at predicting the weather by observing the conditions, they were clueless about understanding God’s spiritual climate. Here’s the tragic mistake of Jesus’ listeners:

1. The Jews missed the signs of Christ’s First Coming

For hundreds of years, God used prophets to predict the Messiah would come. He graciously gave hundreds of signs that the Jews could consult in order to identify the Messiah: but they missed the signs. God showed them hundreds of years in advance the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem; He would be born of a virgin, of the tribe of Judah. Daniel even prophesied the exact *time* when the Messiah would be born, that’s why wise men from the East were looking for the birth of the King of the Jews—they were looking for the signs, but the Jews weren’t.

John reports Jesus came unto His own (the Jews) and they didn’t receive Him. (John 1:11) When Jesus spoke these words, He knew the cross was only a few weeks away and the Jewish people were clueless about His identity and purpose. Just a few weeks after He spoke these words, Jesus would approach Jerusalem and weep over the city because they missed all these signs. In Luke 19:41, 44 we read: As he approached Jerusalem, he wept over it and said, “If you had only known on this day what would bring you peace ... but you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.” That was the tragedy. They didn’t recognize the signs of the times; God was doing the greatest thing in history—and they missed it! But before we are too harsh on the Jews 2,000 years ago, let me ask you:

2. Are you missing God’s signs now?

You can lick your finger and hold it up. If there’s a strong north wind in East Texas, you know that it’s going to get colder. If the humidity is high and there is a south wind from the Gulf, you can expect rain. How good are you at understanding the spiritual signs? Jesus said it is possible for us to understand the “sign of the times.” Are you tuned in to God’s Spiritual Weather Channel?

The best sign we have to understand the spiritual forecast is the Word of God. We have an advantage over the Jews in Jesus’ day: we have the complete written revelation of God. There were over 300 Old Testament Scriptures predicting the first coming of Jesus. There are over 1,000 scriptures predicting the events of the Second Coming of Christ. The Bible isn’t hard to understand once you have the key. The key is *all the Bible is about Jesus*. The Old Testament says: Someone is coming. The gospels say: Someone has come, and His name is Jesus. The Epistles and Revelation tell us: Someone is coming again—get ready!

But there are plenty of other clues God is given us, too. Lick your finger and pay attention to the winds of what is happening in our world today. The Bible says in the last days, perilous times will come. When you turn on CNN and see the tension and warfare in Israel, you know a storm is coming. As we see the growing animosity of the Muslim World against Israel and Christians, it is time for us to lick our finger and hold it up to understand that all of this is part of God’s prediction of the last days. Our world currently has the technology for a one-world economy with a one-world government. We now have the technology to register an invisible bar code on the hand or forehead of people. There is an ill wind blowing and we should pay attention to the political and spiritual climate.

In 1992, Billy Graham wrote a great book on Revelation and titled it *Storm Warning*. A storm is coming—but don’t despair! He is our shelter in the storm and as the storm clouds are gathering, they will also bring showers of blessings, seasons of refreshing from the Lord. There is also a fresh wind blowing. The Bible also predicts in Joel and Acts that in the Last Days, God will pour out His Spirit our sons and daughters will proclaim God’s Word, young men will see visions and old men will dream dreams! Let me play spiritual weatherman for a moment and give you the forecast based upon what I see in the Word and in the world. I believe we are going to see a continuation of the rise of evil and godlessness—but we are going to also see a parallel movement of God that will be unlike anything this world has seen since Pentecost. Can you see the signs? A couple of weeks ago, 217 teenagers were baptized in this baptistry in four days. God is up to something. I tell you, there has never been a better time to be a sold-out Christian and part of a Spirit-filled church. And as we see these two parallel developments, our world and nation will become more and more divided over Jesus. The middle ground will disappear until there is nowhere else to stand; you’ll either have to be *sold* out to Jesus or be among those who openly reject Him.

Pay attention to the conditions. If you aren’t right with God, don’t wait. God’s storm warning has been issued and you’d better prepare. Here’s God’s message to you: “I tell you, NOW is the time of God’s favor, NOW is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2b) Will you come to Jesus today and let Him save you? Back-slidden Christian, fall on your face and cry, “Jesus, I’m tired of being a defeated, lukewarm follower. Set my heart on fire!”

There is one final weather warning:

III. SETTLE YOUR CASE WITH GOD OUT OF COURT!

In verses 57-59, Jesus says, “Why don’t you judge for yourselves what is right? As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you in prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.” In this context, Jesus isn’t talking about lawsuits with one another; He is using a parable to communicate the importance of being reconciled with God. Don’t wait until you are before the Judge to plead your case—settle it out of court. Eugene Peterson captures this idea in *The Message*: “You don’t have to be a genius to understand these things. Just use your common sense, the kind you’d use if, while being taken to court, you decided to settle up with your accuser on the way, knowing that if the case went to the judge you’d probably go to jail and pay every last penny of the fine. That’s the kind of decision I’m asking you to make.”

This warning is not about paying a few dollars to someone you owe; it’s about getting right with God. In the Bible we are commanded to “Be reconciled with God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20) We are not naturally reconciled with God; in fact we have a real problem:

1. Each of us stands accused and guilty

The Bible says we are sinners by nature and by choice. If you want to relate to God on the basis of your own goodness you would have to be absolutely perfect and sinless because God is Holy and sinless. You may think you are pretty good person, but the Bible says in James 2:10 says: For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all. You may claim, “I may tell a few lies, or cheat a little on my expense account, but I’ve never robbed a bank or murdered a person.” Look again, God says that if you break one of His laws, then you just as guilty as someone who has broken every single one of them. So each of us stands accused and guilty—we *are* going to have to face the Heavenly Judge—your case is already on the docket. Hebrews 9:27 says: “It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that—the judgement.” That’s the bad news. But the good news is that God has given you an opportunity to settle your salvation case out of court. Make sure that you are reconciled *before* your case comes before the Judge. Here’s the wonderful offer:

2. The Judge offers you a perfect lawyer and a pardon

Some of you think the term “perfect lawyer” is an oxymoron. Mark Twain was walking through a cemetery and saw a tombstone that read, “Here lies a lawyer and an honest man.” Twain remarked, “What do you know? There’s a grave with two men buried in it!” But actually, I know a lot of good, honest lawyers. We have some in our church today. I asked a couple of my lawyer friends what this passage means as it relates to settling a case out of court: “You can never predict what a judge or jury will decide but in a settlement, all the parties have a certainty about the outcome—and that’s what we all need: a certainty about our final destination.” Another wrote: “God offers us mercy, grace and forgiveness before we go to judgment. Then it is up to us to accept his wonderful settlement offer rather than face a judgement with known consequences—eternal death.”

In some settlements a party will insist they are not accepting any guilt in the settlement, but in our case, we *must* admit our guilt. When we do, and accept God's offer, He provides a wonderful advocate, a perfect lawyer for us.

1 John 1:9-2:1 says: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives...if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father (the Judge) in our defense—Jesus Christ the Righteous One.

In other words, the only way to avoid standing before the Eternal Judge will demand absolute perfection of us is to settle our case out of court. We must admit we are sinners and trust our advocate, the Lord Jesus.

When I was nine years old, I realized I was sinner. I decided to trust Jesus as my advocate, my Savior, my Defense Attorney. When I did, He stepped before the judge and said, "Your honor, I stand here on behalf of the accused, David Dykes. He IS guilty, your honor, but instead of judging him, I ask you to transfer my righteous character over to him. In other words, your honor, instead of looking at His guilt, look at me and judge him on that basis." Whenever that happens, the Judge bangs His heavenly gavel and says, "Pardoned!" You really should trust this advocate—the judge is His Daddy!

CONCLUSION

So there you have God's three weather warnings. Mordacai Ham was a great evangelist. In fact, he was preaching when Billy Graham accepted Christ. Whenever Mordecai entered a town, he asked who was the worst atheist or infidel in the city and he would go visit that person. In one Kentucky community the local atheist was a farmer. He never went to church and forbade his wife and children from going. He was an outspoken critic of belief in God. Mordecai Ham met him at his barn and introduced himself. Mordecai was known to be totally honest and blunt. The farmer asked what he was doing on his farm and Mordecai said he was to pray for him. He was going to ask God to kill him. When the farmer began to protest, Mordecai said, "You shouldn't be upset, because you don't believe in God anyway. But if there IS a God, death would be appropriate for a man who has poisoned his family's spiritual prospects." The farmer begged him not to pray for him to die. So instead, Mordecai Ham prayed for his salvation and for the salvation of his family. Before the week was out, both the farmer and his family had trusted Christ and been baptized.

Pay attention to the weather, the spiritual climate. Do you understand the times? God is up to something, and it's time to be saved, to settle your salvation case out of court! It's time to obey Jesus. It's time to walk in the Spirit. It's time to be an active part of the Body of Christ—His Church. Ask God to set your heart on fire—and don't expect to become popular—some of your friends and even family members may ridicule you, but what is more important? Gaining the approval of others or gaining the acceptance of the King of Kings and Lord of Lord?

OUTLINE

THREE SPIRITUAL WEATHER WARNINGS:

I. Devotion to Jesus may alienate you from others!

1. The truth about Jesus divides humanity

Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."
Matthew 12:30

2. Response to Jesus may divide your family

II. Pay attention to God's Spiritual forecast!

1. The Jews missed the signs of Christ's First Coming

As he approached Jerusalem, he wept over it and said, "If you had only known on this day what would bring you peace ... but you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." *Luke 19:41, 44*

2. Are you missing God's signs now?

I tell you, NOW is the time of God's favor, NOW is the day of salvation. *2 Corinthians 6:2*

III. Settle your case out of court!

1. Each of us stands accused and guilty

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all.
James 2:10

2. The Judge offers you a perfect lawyer and a pardon

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. ... if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father (the Judge) in our defense—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. *1 John 1:9-2:1*



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If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes