Introduction:

**Is Christianity Relevant?**

**by Edwin Crozier**

**October 6, 2019 AM Assembly**

Have you ever wanted to stand up in the middle of a sermon and say, “Preacher! This is not helping me. You need to speak to what I’m going through. You need to talk into my life. You need to address what I’m dealing with right now. You need to be more relevant”? If so, you aren’t the only one. In fact, if you can believe it, there was a time when that is exactly what someone did to Jesus. We find it in **Luke 12**. Thousands of people had gathered to hear Jesus teach. He was waxing eloquent about false teachers He wanted His disciples to ignore. He was preaching on the fear of God. He was preaching on confessing Jesus and being confessed by Jesus. But there was a man in Jesus’s audience that just wasn’t having it. He didn’t need this sermon. He needed something else. He was in the middle of a family feud. He was in a showdown with his brother. It was an emotional situation. Dad had died. And the most likely executor of the estate, the older brother, wasn’t dividing the inheritance. Imagine the pain this fight was causing. Passover is no fun when you have to eat it with family that isn’t being fair. No doubt, this was tearing their family apart. It was dishonoring their father’s memory. It was a mess. And this man wanted Jesus to address that. Jesus had just finished making a point about the Holy Spirit when this man cries out: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!” In other words, “Teacher! What you are saying is not what I need. I need something relevant. I need something that speaks to what I’m dealing with right now. I am being oppressed, cheated, marginalized, abused, and mistreated. My brother is not being fair and I am suffering. Talk about that. Be more relevant.” Jesus’s response was profound and His response explains why Christianity is relevant. Let’s dig in to **Luke 12:13-21**.

Discussion:

1. Who made me judge and arbitrator over y’all? (**Luke 12:14**).
   1. Jesus’s initial response is fascinating. “Who made me your judge and arbitrator?” That is, “Why are you asking Me about this? Why do you care what I have to say about it?” Some claim Jesus is pointing out He isn’t going to get involved. It isn’t in His purview. It is not His job. There are courts for these kinds of things and appropriate channels in the Jewish community for dealing with these dilemmas. That may well be true. However, I really think Jesus is making a different point. After all, that is exactly what He does do. He does get involved. He does teach on this scenario. He accuses the man and possibly his brother of being covetous and tells them to stop. He does behave as judge.
   2. Then why does Jesus say this? I believe He is asking this question in a very similar fashion to His response to the guy often called the rich, young ruler. In **Luke 18:18**, a wealthy ruler comes up to Jesus and says, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” First, I can’t help but notice all the connections between this and the story we are reading. He sees Jesus as the Teacher. It’s about inheritance. And he is talking about life which is what Jesus makes the discussion in **Luke 12** about. Jesus’s first response to the ruler is “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” Jesus’s point, as most agree, is not that He isn’t good. He is telling the ruler, “Don’t call me good, unless you’re ready to listen to what I have to say.” I think Jesus is doing the same thing in our story in **Luke 12:14**. Jesus is putting this back on the man. After all, what is the literal answer to Jesus’s question? Who is making Jesus the judge and arbitrator between these brothers? The man making the request. Jesus’s response then is basically, “Alright, you want Me to get specific? You want Me to hit you right where you live? I haven’t been relevant enough for you in this sermon? You want Me to get really relevant in your life? Get ready. But if you are going to ask Me the question, you better be ready to hear My answer.” And then He weighs in, but in a different way than expected.
2. Beware covetousness (**Luke 12:15**).
   1. Jesus doesn’t give a ruling awarding one of the brothers a legal victory. Instead, He gets real with instruction on what they most needed. Notice in **Luke 12:14**, Jesus “said to him.” That is, Jesus spoke to the man who made the request. But in **Luke 12:15**, Jesus “said to them.” Who is “them”? It is possible Jesus is turning to the crowd. But listen to the NET version of **Luke 12:14-15**. “But Jesus said to him, ‘Man, who made me judge or arbitrator between you two?’ Then he said to them…” Did you catch it? Emphasis on “you two.” This is one of those cases in which the Greek is using the second person plural. Because our modern English doesn’t have a distinct second person plural form (“you” is both plural and singular), we can miss it. It is possible that “them” in the next sentence is a reference to the crowd. However, in the flow, what is most likely is a statement made to the “you two” just referenced. Jesus spoke to the brothers.
   2. What does He say? “Beware covetousness.” Or as the New American Standard Updated Edition says, “Beware every form of greed.” Jesus doesn’t award an amount to the younger brother. He doesn’t “decide” the case between the brothers. He actually warns them both as the crowd listens in. Why are these brothers having this fight? Because of greed. There is no love in this fight. There is only covetousness, desire, materialism, greed. I have no doubt the brothers both thought the other one was the one being covetous. But Jesus doesn’t address one of the brothers, He addresses them both. Jesus’s point is, “You want me to be relevant to your life today? Let’s talk about the greed you two are letting govern your lives and relationship. You think I’m being relevant if I tell your brother to divide the inheritance. Your brother will think I’m relevant if I tell him he doesn’t have to. You both think I’m being relevant if I drop down a decision. But here is what is relevant. You are both sinners. You are both greedy. If you would both abandon greed, you wouldn’t need anyone to decide this case for you. You’d be able to deal with it yourselves and everyone would be happy about it. Is that relevant enough for you?” Then He explained why this was the answer and His reason is shocking all on its own and really gets to the heart of our question.
3. Life doesn’t consist of possessions (**Luke 12:15b**).
   1. This brother was asking Jesus to get relevant and we are asking the question, “Is Christianity relevant?” The problem is that is an incomplete question. According to merriam-webster.com, “relevant” means “having significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand.” In other words, we cannot simply ask “Is Christianity relevant?” We have to ask, “To what is Christianity relevant?” What is “the matter at hand”? That is what Jesus gets at here. The matter at hand is “life.”
   2. The brothers thought what was most relevant to their lives was the inheritance. To them, what was most relevant to life was the material and financial goods they had or wanted to have. Here is the 99% wishing the 1% would redistribute the wealth. Here is the 1% wishing the 99% would work harder. Here are the refugees wishing the nationalists would open their doors and share the land. Here are the nationalists wishing the refugees would find their own land. Here are the oppressed and the marginalized wishing the majority would let them have a say. Here is the majority wishing the marginalized would keep quiet and be satisfied with their piece of the pie. Here is a younger brother who wants the part of his Dad’s estate that he believes is coming to him. Here is an older brother that doesn’t think the younger brother deserves it. To them, what was relevant was stuff, material goods, wealth, land, money.
   3. However, Jesus essentially says, “Your problem is you want me to get relevant, but you don’t even know what relevant is. You think life is about stuff and possessions. You think life is about having more. You think life is about making sure you get what is coming to you, you getting what you are owed, you getting what you are entitled to. You think life is about making sure everyone gets what is justly and fairly theirs. But that isn’t what life is about. Even if I went through and adjudicated every financial and material disagreement in the world, redistributing the wealth in a completely fair and just way, that wouldn’t make life better. Because that isn’t what life is about. That isn’t really what is relevant.” Then what is relevant, Jesus?
4. Wise fools (**Luke 12:16-21**).
   1. The worst level to be in high school or college is the sophomore. Do you know what “sophomore” means? It is a compound word combining “sophos,” a Greek word meaning “wise,” and “moros,” a Greek word meaning “foolish.” In other words, a sophomore is a wise fool. We might say that a sophomore is someone with just enough wisdom and knowledge to hurt himself. She knows enough to think she is an expert. But that level of expertise will only get her in trouble. Jesus tells a story to warn against being the wise fool, to warn against being sophomoric. He tells a story to explain what is really relevant to life and why possessions aren’t it. But we can see why the sophomore might think so.
   2. A man with a lot of possessions did well. He was already rich and his investments paid off. His land produced even more than he could imagine. In fact, it produced so much, he didn’t know what to do with all of it. “I know what I’ll do,” he says to himself. “I’ll just build bigger warehouses, store all my stuff, and live off of it the rest of my life.” What would our culture say about this man? Wise? Or Fool? He had worked hard. He had invested well. Now, he was getting to live off the fruit of his labor. He had lived like no one else, now he was getting to live like no one else. Here was a wise man. A man to look up to and emulate.
   3. In fact, it seems this man himself thought he was wise. Did you notice what he told his soul in **Luke 12:19**? “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” Do you know where that advice comes from? It comes from **Ecclesiastes 8:15**. **Ecclesiastes** is an Old Testament book that we call Wisdom literature. It is connected to Solomon whom the Bible calls the wisest king Israel ever had (**1 Kings 4:29-34**). **Ecclesiastes 8:15** says, “And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.” See? This man is being wise. He can even go to a Bible verse to prove it. In fact, there is a second verse that is very similar in **Ecclesiastes 5:18**. Here the Preacher said, “Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.” Though, the word for “enjoyment” here is different than in the other two passages, the sentiment is the same. The man is being wise, right? But God says to Him in **Luke 12:20**, “Fool!” How can this be?
   4. Keep reading into **Ecclesiastes 5:19**: “Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.” What had this rich man missed? He had missed God. He didn’t give credit to God. He didn’t give thanks to God. All of this was the gift of God. He was merely a steward of God’s riches. And he missed it. In fact, this all ties in to the very sermon Jesus had been preaching, the sermon the man thought was irrelevant because he thought the only thing relevant was getting his inheritance. What the rich man said in the privacy of his own soul was made public by God (see **Luke 12:2-3**). The rich man didn’t fear God who had the authority to cast his soul into hell (see **Luke 12:4-5**). The rich man did not acknowledge God or the gift of God in his own life (see **Luke 12:8-9**). But he was relevant, wasn’t he? He could give good advice on how to make money, how to invest, how to take care of yourself, how to plan for the future. He could write books and have his own radio show. Oh, he was wise. But only wise enough to be dangerous. He had missed the most important part of wisdom’s teaching.
   5. In **Ecclesiastes 9:1-6**, wisdom proclaims that one event happens to everyone. It happens to the wise and the fools, the righteous and the unrighteous, it happens to the clean and the unclean. This passage doesn’t specifically say it, but it happens to the rich and the poor. Everyone dies. So, yes, enjoy what God blesses you with, but remember, you are going to die and you have no idea when (see **Ecclesiastes 9:11-12**). In fact, the Preacher of **Ecclesiastes** grasped what the rich man of **Luke 12** missed. In **Ecclesiastes 2:18-21**, the wise man realized that for all his wisdom and ability to gather wealth, he was going to die and had no idea whose his things would become. Would they go to a fool or a wise man? And it is this passage that God references when He calls the rich man of **Luke 12** a fool. “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (**Luke 12:20**).
   6. Here’s the key. It wasn’t wrong for the rich man to work hard and have good crops. It wasn’t even wrong for him to enjoy the crops. But he missed it. These were the gift of God and he was supposed to steward them for God’s glory. He wasn’t supposed to consult with his own soul about what to do, he was supposed to seek God. And he was supposed to remember that he was going to die and that looming reality needed to govern everything. Which gets to the final point of **Ecclesiastes**. What does wisdom ultimately teach? According to **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”
   7. And this brings us back to our rich man. Jesus concludes by saying, “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (**Luke 12:21**). What is Jesus’s point? The rich man didn’t know what was really relevant to life. He thought it was possessions and material goods. Don’t we all. But we find out just about everything we think is relevant to life is ultimately irrelevant. Because one of these days, we are going to die. It may be tomorrow. It may be 75 years from now. But it is going to happen. And then what will become of everything we thought was so relevant? On that day, it won’t be relevant what house we lived in or if we had a house at all. On that day, it won’t be relevant what clothes we wore. On that day, it won’t be relevant what car we drove. On that day, it won’t be relevant what job title we held or how much money we made. On that day, the only thing that will be relevant will be our relationship with God. And brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, that is what Christianity is all about. It is about our relationship with God.
   8. At the beginning of **Luke**, Zechariah the priest, the father of John the Baptist prophecies about John and ultimately about Jesus. He says, “And you child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace” (**Luke 1:76-79**). John would be the prophet of the Lord, preparing the way for Him, because the Lord would come and be the sunrise to give light to those who sit in darkness. Why do we sit in darkness? Because we sit in the shadow of death. That is where every single one of us sit. No matter how much money we make. No matter what house we live in. No matter what clothes we wear. No matter what we experience. Whether we are the oppressors or the oppressed. Whether we are the mainstream or the marginalized. Whether we are the ins or the outs. Whether we are the rich or the poor. We sit in the shadow of death. And Christianity is the only light that cuts through that shadow. Christianity is the only light that shines on the path of peace. Christianity is the only light that prepares us for death.

Conclusion:

I find it interesting. A man who was hoping to receive an inheritance interrupted Jesus’s sermon. Jesus told that man a story about another man who was leaving an inheritance. It was as if Jesus was saying to this man, “Man, you are thinking about the wrong end of this thing. You missed the point of your father’s funeral. It doesn’t mean you are going to be rich. It means you are going to die.” **Ecclesiastes 7:2** says, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.” The fact is Christianity does have a lot to say about how to deal with all kinds of things in our lives. But that is not why Christianity is relevant. Christianity is relevant because it is the one thing we can carry with us on the day of our death. So, sure, we do preach sermons about how to be better husbands and wives, how to be better parents and children, how to work on the job, how to be wise with finances. We do preach lessons about how to treat other people and how to live as a better person. But that is not what makes Christianity relevant. What makes Christianity relevant is Jesus died on the cross to forgive us of our sins so we can walk in the way of peace through our own death. You live in the shadow of death and the only thing that deals with that is Christianity. And so I ask you to come back next week because, we want to continue to see the relevance of Christianity. Next week, we will ask the question “Is Jesus relevant?” Please, come back to learn more.