**Fear God, Not Men**

Luke 12: 1-12

Key Verse 4-5 “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But **I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him**.”

Last week we learned about the sign of Jonah, which is repentance. Jesus challenges this generation to repent and to become Bible-believing people, instead of seeking miracles. In today’s passage we learn about Jesus’ stern warnings and wonderful promises. They apply first to his disciples who would later become the future leaders of God’s flock. Jesus’ warnings and promises apply to us today as well. If you desire to become or are a Bible teacher or a leader of men, or if you just want to know God more, then God is speaking to you this morning.

As Luke chapter 12 opens up, Jesus is surrounded by many thousands of people. As it often was when Jesus spoke, there was much pushing and jockeying for position. People were knocking each other over. They were trampling on one another. Can you feel the energy and sense the excitement of the crowd gathering to hear Jesus? The disciples were dealing with this huge crowd pressing around them. But before Jesus addressed this crowd, he turned his attention to his disciples and began to speak first to them. They were the future leaders. You see, they would begin their own ministry and serve the great work of God. What did Jesus teach his disciples?

**1. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees**

Look at verse 1b: “**Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy**.” Here Jesus raised an issue that became a temptation to the disciples: hypocrisy. The word hypocrisy comes from a Greek word that means “the acting of a stage player.” Hypocrisy is pretending to be. Efforts to maintain popularity easily lead to hypocrisy. Jesus compared it to yeast or leaven, something every Jew would associate with sin or evil. Like yeast, hypocrisy starts very small but grows very quickly, working through the whole batch of dough. Jesus warned his disciples not to follow the example of the Pharisees. Actually, the Pharisees played role models in their society, particularly in their moral and religious lives. Unfortunately, most of them ended up as symbols of hypocrisy. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy as recorded in Luke 11:37-52. Let me summarize some points from the passage Luke 11.
(1) Hypocrisy focuses on the things people can see and forgets that God can see everything about us. The Pharisees appeared to be clean on the outside while having greed and wickedness on the inside. Their hypocrisy was their self-righteousness, giving them the appearance of holiness while concealing sin in their hearts (11:39-42). (2) Hypocrisy worries about what others may think or say, and wants people’s recognition and approval (11:43). (3) Hypocrisy adds rules and regulations to God’s law and does nothing to help others keep these new commandments (11:46). (4) Hypocrisy brags about the great traditions and heroes of the past, but rejects repentance of present sin and obedience to God (11:47). (5) Finally, hypocrisy prevents people from becoming genuine believers and entering the Kingdom of God (11:52).

This is what Jesus warned his disciples about. All followers of Jesus must beware of hypocrisy. One of the biggest dangers in our lives is becoming “professional Christians.” What started with sincerity and humbleness can rapidly become showy and proud. There are hypocrites in every walk of life; people who try to impress others in order to hide their real selves. Hypocrisy is highly deceptive and tricky. It is the worst sin in terms of Jesus. How can we defeat hypocrisy?

Look at verses 2-3. “**There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs**.” The inner rooms indicate the innermost location of the house. We might think that we have moments of privacy when no one sees what we do or knows what we think. That may be true with people, but that is not true of God. God’s eye penetrates every locale and every thought. Even what is whispered will be known. Nothing is concealed. We cannot hide our sins from God. Everything will be disclosed before God on the Day of Judgment (Rom2:15). “He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God (1Cor4:5).

Recently I asked my daughter, “Am I a good dad?” She answered: “You are too strict. But I got used to your style.” Then I realized that I’ve given her too many regulations without helping her. I rebuke my daughter for wasting time even though she is a hard worker. This passage teaches me to repent of my unbelief instead of pushing her. I quickly became a hypocrite trying to appear spiritual instead teaching myself. May God help us to beware of hypocrisy!

**2.** **Fear God, not men**

Look at verses 4-5: “**I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him**.”

Here, Jesus calls his disciples “friends.” It is an expression of confidence (Jn15:14f). Jesus did not consider them hypocrites. They were immature and often made mistakes, but they had repentant hearts and followed Jesus with undivided hearts. So Jesus called them “friends.” But they were in danger of being fearful before men. Fear of people is the root cause of hypocrisy. It stems from living to please people ahead of God. It is easy to fear what people say about us or can do to us, especially if they have power over us, like bosses or supervisors or professors. Fear comes from lack of confidence in our provision or protection. We must know that the power of people is limited. At most, they could kill our body. Actually, Jesus was not afraid to die and went the way of the cross to the end. He tells us, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.”

And verse 5 says: “**I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!**” Jesus shows us how to not fear people. We should fear God above all. Why? It is because God is the Judge, who has the power to send us to hell. “What good is it to gain the whole world and lose one’s soul?” (Lk9:25). God can condemn the soul to hell. He is the final Judge.

However, “to fear God” does not mean to be frightened of God. To fear God means to have holy reverence and awesome respect for God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and discipline (Prov1:7; 9:10). The fear of God can keep a man from sinning (Ex20:20). The remedy for hypocrisy is to forget what people may say or do, and fear God alone! The fear of God cures all other fears because he who fears God fears nothing else.

Why does Jesus address the issue of whom to fear? It is because we Christians face the world’s rejection when we identify with Jesus. Once Peter disowned Jesus before a slave girl because he was afraid of people. But later he repented and had fear of God, and he proclaimed before the Sanhedrin, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts5:29). The apostle Paul was a man with fear of God. He confessed: “**Am I trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ**” (Gal1:10). All of us have at one time or another faced peer pressure and the feelings of wanting to be accepted by our friends. Teens especially want the approval of their friends. The same pressure continues through college and even into adult daily life. We are facing the peer pressure of secular society. Christians in some countries even have to risk their lives. But no one in our church in St. Louis has been killed while inviting students to Bible study on campuses. The worst thing that can happen to us is being told, “No,” or receiving a wrong phone number. May God help us not to be afraid, but to proclaim Jesus boldly on all St. Louis area campuses! May God give us God-fear to serve the upcoming Summer Bible Academy!

Jesus showed us God, who is to be feared. God is the final Judge. Jesus also wants us to know the love of God and to believe God’s sovereign guidance upon our lives. Look at verses 6-7. “**Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows**.” This is an encouraging promise of God. God knows and sees all the details in the world. He cares for birds that are sold for a few small, cheap coins. God has even numbered the hairs on your head. Unless you are bald, you surely do not know how many hairs are on your head. But God knows. He knows before and after you comb your hair how many hairs are on your head. It is amazing, isn’t it? More importantly, God doesn’t just know, but he cares. Are you going through trials? Trouble at home? Difficulty at work? Or maybe you’re a Bible teacher with no one to teach the Bible to. Maybe your health isn’t so good or financially you’re struggling or you have no idea where your life is headed. While facing difficulties in our life of faith, we might ask, “Has God forgotten me?” But Jesus said, “You are worth more than many sparrows.” We should not be afraid because we are precious to God. Let’s have the absolute trust in God. Our lives are in the hands of God!

**3. Speak up for Jesus before men**

Look at verses 8-9. “**I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.**” Jesus wants His disciples to proclaim to all men that He is the Savior and Lord. Jesus knew that His disciples would be persecuted for doing so. Jesus promised that whoever acknowledges Him before men will be acknowledged by Him before the angels of God. St. Stephen boldly proclaimed that Jesus is the Lord and Savior before the Jewish ruling council. As people were stoning him, he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” The Lord welcomed him to heaven as a victorious witness of Jesus Christ. And Stephen’s martyrdom was the catalyst in the conversion of Saul, who changed from persecutor of the church into an apostle of Jesus.

Polycarp was a student of the apostle John and at the age of 86 was told by the Romans to declare “Caesar is Lord” and his life would be spared. He responded like this: “86 years I have served Christ, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” Even before being burned at the stake he preached the truth of the gospel and became a victorious witness of Jesus Christ to the world.

Verse 10 can be encouragement for us gospel workers. “**Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven**.“ We have the message of salvation. We are God’s instruments that spread the gospel that brings eternal life or eternal punishment. Our job is to testify to the good news of Jesus. Blasphemy against the Spirit means persistent rejection of that message of salvation. Saul is a good example. He had spoken against Jesus, but ended up not rejecting the Spirit’s call to believe in Jesus. So we just need to speak up for Jesus, depending on the authority of the gospel.

We do not need to worry about what will happen in the time of persecution and trials. God will be with us through the Holy Spirit to reveal His glory through us (12:11-12).

Today’s passage asks fundamental questions about our identity. Will we fear God or people? Do we try to win the approval from God or men? From time to time we face rejection from others. In such moments of pressure, our faith is being examined. Jesus teaches us: Fear God, not men. Genuine discipleship is about living in the fear of God by the help of the Holy Spirit. When we fear God we do not need to be afraid of anyone or anything else. We can preach the gospel boldly in this dark world. May God bless us and our Summer Bible Academy as our testimony to Jesus!