

Fear God, Not Man
Luke 12:1-12 (12-15-19)
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Christmas is a most wonderful time of the year. Trees, lights, candy canes, stockings, snowmen, gifts, and family gatherings. Neighborhoods are transformed for a few weeks in dreary December. All because of the birth of Jesus. The angels cried out, "We bring you glad tidings of great joy for all the people."

Jesus is good news and brings great joy. We heartily sing out one of the most popular Christmas hymns, "Joy to the world!" However, did the earth receive her King? Did every heart prepare Him room? Have sin and sorrow ceased? Do thorns no longer infest the ground? Have wars and murders ceased? Is the world submitting to God more and more? Bad guys are still shooting and raping and stealing. Atheists and God-haters still fill the academic chairs of the institutions of higher learning spouting their hostility toward Christianity. False religions and cults still draw followers by the millions. The reality is, when Jesus came the first time, He came into a world of woe. Even His own people rejected Him.

No sooner was He born in that lonely stable, than Herod sent his soldiers to Bethlehem to kill Him. No sooner had he begun his public ministry, than the people of his own hometown tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:29). The religious leaders dogged his trail every step of the way to destroy Him. They charged Him with being demon possessed and empowered by the devil. So while we love Christmas and all the bright lights, Joy to the World by Isaac Watts based on Psalm 96, 98, and Genesis 3, sounds more like the second coming of Christ when He comes to rule the world with truth and grace and make the nations prove the wonders of His love. Until then, we live in a world hostile toward Christ and the biblical message. Many of God's people have sailed through bloody seas since Jesus launched the church in the first century. We are blessed to have the religious freedoms we have. But don't take them for granted!

That brings us to Luke 12. Remember, Christ unmasked the hypocrisy of the religious leaders over lunch. They are thoroughly steamed at Jesus. Now Jesus is going to launch into a message that will take us through Luke 12 into Luke 13. A huge crowd of maybe more than 10,000 people has gathered to hear this popular preacher who is willing to call out their leaders. So thick is the mob that they are even stepping over one another, determined to hear what Jesus has to say.

Luke 12:1a, Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another...

Jesus turns to His disciples. In verse four He'll call them His friends for whom He has a tender, affectionate care. And He is preparing them for what is coming. Following Him will not be easy in this world of woe, of hostility, even possibly martyrdom. He wants you and me to keep some truths, some facts clearly in mind when we face hostility. How are you to handle it when they drag you to court for standing for the truth of the Word of God? He gives five truths to strengthen us and give us courage to stand when the hostility comes.

First, God will expose all hypocrisy – vv. 2-3.

Luke 12:1b-3, He began saying to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. 3 "Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops.

Beware of these Pharisees. They are puffed up with hypocrisy, just like leaven or yeast puffs up and fills a piece of dough. They claim to be God's leaders, the religious authorities, but they are liars, they are fakes, they are playing a role, they are wolves in sheep's' clothing. Their hearts are far from God. They do everything to be noticed by other people. That's hypocrisy – playing a role, putting on a show. They schemed and plotted in the inner rooms where they thought they couldn't be heard. There they were,

whispering and discussing in their hatred how they could catch Jesus in some kind of heresy. They don't care about the truth. They only care about their position and power. And Jesus is threatening that, so they whisper under cover in the inner storage rooms.

But fear not. God will expose them and all hypocrites. He will uncover what they cover and broadcast their secrets publicly. Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 4:5, "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God." How would you like all your secret criticisms, gossip, and slander, your compromising truth just to please people to be displayed on this screen this morning? A bit scary, right? This is convicting and we should all take it to heart. God will expose all hypocrisy that is not repented of. No one will fake their way into heaven. Matthew 24:51 says hell is populated by hypocrites. Thank God for the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

Second, God will bring all evil to justice.

Luke 12:4-5, "I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. 5 "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!"

Here is the answer to hypocrisy – fear God more than men. How can you handle it when they have the sword to your neck or gun to your head? What does Jesus tell you? "Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but have no power over the soul." Every martyr for Christ throughout church history has had to believe that. You may recall the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999. Reportedly one of the shooters, Eric Harris, asked Cassie Bernall, "Do you believe in God?" "Yes," she answered. And he pulled the trigger. If that account is true, her fear and love for God was greater than her fear of man or of death.

Fearing God is the one fear that cancels out all other fears. John Knox feared man so little because he feared God so much. Only God has jurisdiction over the soul on the other side of death. He's the one we should all fear. Should believers fear God like this? Yes! Yes, we should love God, but a love for God without a healthy fear, a strong reverence for God, will not keep us strong. We know God is holy and will punish all sin. We know Jesus bore God's wrath. We know God will bring us to Himself. But remember, God will cast every lost person into hell. Jesus believed in hell. The word for hell here is Gehenna. This was the trash and garbage dump outside Jerusalem which was continually burring and smoking. It's the same area where Israelites in the Old Testament sacrificed their babies to Molech. Jesus used this place as a symbol of eternal hell.

God will bring all evil to justice. All hypocrites and liars and Christ-deniers will face the terrible judgment of God. Speaking of the lost man who refused to bow to Christ in the tribulation period John wrote:

Revelation 14:10-11 He also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.

Let the fear of this God who saves His people but will judge His enemies, let this fear fill your heart along with a deep and fervent love for Him who loved you first and redeemed you from your sins.

Third, God knows exactly what you're going through – don't fear!

Luke 12:6-7, Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows."

Whether you're in the middle of persecution for your stand for Christ or just suffering the common hurts and pains of living in a fallen Genesis 3 world, here are some of the most comforting assurances in the Bible for God's people. You may wonder where God is in your life. You may think God has forgotten you. Life is hard, you've got family problems, work problems, relationship problems, an enemy somewhere is slaughtering Christians wholesale – where is God? Why is He letting this go on? Jesus says think about sparrows and hair.

God remembers even the almost worthless, bony sparrows sold in the market. This reminds me of the chicken feet we sold in the Philadelphia market for next to nothing. Not one of those chickens was forgotten by God. What kind of God is this? If He remembers bony sparrows, He certainly knows you, whatever your circumstances. He knows where you are, who's behind you at the light, or sitting beside you right now. Five birds for two cents! Nothing is too insignificant for God. He designed the microscopic DNA strand of information in each of your cells. He planned for your nose and your toes, your eyes and your ears. All divinely determined and enacted at your conception. He hasn't forgotten you. Not one of His people is insignificant to Him.

And then consider your hair. God has them all numbered. For some, that's not too hard. We lose about 100 hairs a day, so God knows each one that leaves the follicle and swishes down the drain. Red-heads have about 90,000 hairs, blondes 110,000, and brunettes 140,000. But God knew this all along.

What's Jesus' point? No matter what your circumstances, even being imprisoned or persecuted as a believer, or forgotten by friends, God has His mind on you. You are not forgotten by the Almighty. He has not lost track of you. No matter how hurtful or discouraging humanly speaking, you have a personal, powerful, loving, and sovereign God who has you in His heart! "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear not evil." Why? "For You are with me!" God hasn't forgotten you for a moment. So do not fear! Jesus knew we would struggle with fear and doubt and sometimes wonder if God has forgotten us.

Fourth, God calls everyone to publicly confess His Son.

Luke 12:8-10, And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; 9 but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. 10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.

When they brought Peter and John before the Sanhedrin and commanded them not to speak or teach in Jesus' name, Peter confessed boldly, "Whether it is right before God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge. We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:18-20) That's confessing Christ before men. The threat of persecution, rejection, ridicule or anything else from this world cannot stop us from confessing Christ as our Savior.

You may not face severe or bloody persecution in your lifetime, but are you unashamed to confess Christ before men? Don't be ashamed to let men see and hear of your love for Christ, that you believe in Him and care more about pleasing Him than pleasing men. Maybe you've secretly become a true believer but have never told anyone. Let someone know, maybe a friend, a co-worker, maybe at lunch, maybe at home. Paul told Timothy, "Don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." He assured him, "God hasn't given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7-8)

Jesus warns that if you continually deny Him, He will not own you as His before the angels in heaven. This is why Romans 10:9-10 calls you to confess or own or identify publicly that Jesus is your Lord, along with believing in your heart that He arose from the dead. Then He will confess you as His before the angels of heaven. We are here to glorify Christ by our faith and loyalty to Him, even when it's hard. He

obviously doesn't mean if we deny Him under a moment of duress, He'll deny us. Peter caved to the pressure of the hostile world and not only denied his Lord, but even cursed in denying Him saying, "I don't know the man!" But this wasn't Peter's final word.

This takes us to verse 10. To speak a word against Jesus under duress isn't unpardonable. But there is that unpardonable sin of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. Have I committed the unpardonable sin? That question has troubled many a sincere, concerned soul. Let you encourage you with this. If you're concerned about committing the unpardonable sin, no, you haven't committed it. This is why. To blaspheme or speak against the Holy Spirit is a determined rejection of the saving grace of God in Christ. If you have no determined rejection of Christ's saving grace, you have no unpardonable sin.

God forgives when there is repentance. But the people in verse 10 will not repent. This unpardonable sin of blasphemy may even attribute the work of the Spirit to the devil. These people are so hardened and settled in their sin that they have no sense of guilt or desire to be forgiven. So they die in their sin, unforgiven. What a horrible prospect. These religious hypocrites were guilty of this very thing. They said Jesus was doing His miracles with the power of Satan. Stephen charged them in Acts 7:51 with being stiff-necked and always resisting the Holy Spirit, "You are doing just as your fathers did."

Fifth, God will provide what you need when you need it.

Luke 12:11-12, "When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

Now this isn't a promise saying you don't have to study for that final this week because the Holy Spirit will give you the answers. No, this promise is for when they take you to court for being a Christian. But how do you know you'll stand up to the interrogations and accusations? Will you know what to say? "Don't worry about it," says Jesus. In Matthew 6:34 He said, "Don't worry about tomorrow." God isn't going to give you what you need ahead of time. His grace is fresh each day and tailored for your need. When Corrie ten Boom worried about having the grace for the future her father wisely counseled her, "When we take the train to Amsterdam, when do I give you the ticket?" "Why, just before we get on the train." "Exactly, and Our Father knows when we are going to need things too. When the time comes to die, you will find the strength just in time."

That's exactly what Jesus is saying here. God isn't going to forsake you in your hour of need. Sometimes the Holy Spirit brings verses to your mind unexpectedly. How often have you been talking with an unbeliever or a believer and these verses you've memorized come back to your mind to help that other person. You need to treasure God's word in your hearts. Memorize verses. Review them. Then at the needed time, the Holy Spirit will quicken your memory and bring them to the front of your mind. Don't worry! Jesus assures us that we can live with confidence, knowing God will provide all we need to be fearless and sincere while serving Him in this hostile world.

SO WHAT?

Beware of hypocrisy. Fear God, not man. God will never forget you. Confess Christ fearlessly. God will provide what you need. Don't worry.

Whatever your future may bring, may God help you to stand strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Be patient. And sing heartily, "Joy to the world!" The day is coming when the whole earth will receive her King and He will rule the world with truth and grace. That's what the good news of great joy in Bethlehem is pointing forward to. But first, this baby Jesus will grow to manhood and die on a cross to purchase salvation for sinners.

Has Jesus come to you as good news of great joy, bringing forgiveness and eternal life? Have you bowed your heart to Christ and in faith repented of you sin? Are you unashamedly confessing Him as your Lord and Savior?