

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **Have No Fear**

*Luke 12:4-7*

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# Have No Fear

## Scripture

Jesus had completed his ministry in Galilee and was on his way to Jerusalem during the final few months of his life before his crucifixion. During this time Jesus gave his followers some very important teaching regarding discipleship. Commentator William Barclay says, “When we read [Luke 12] we are reminded again of the Jewish definition of preaching – a *Charaz*, which means *stringing pearls*. This passage, too, is a collection of pearls strung together without the close connection which modern preaching demands. But in it there are certain dominant ideas.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus’ unifying theme was to call his disciples to trust God at all times, regardless of circumstances.

Let’s read Jesus’ warning about whom to fear in Luke 12:4-7:

**<sup>4</sup>“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. <sup>5</sup>But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! <sup>6</sup>Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. <sup>7</sup>Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:4-7)**

## Introduction

The phrase “Be afraid, be very afraid” is a tagline from the 1986 horror film, *The Fly*. Fear is a common human emotion. But what people commonly fear is not always what *should* be

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 190.

causing that spike of adrenaline. Here are some examples:

Are you afraid to fly? You have a 0.00001 percent chance of dying in an airplane crash. On the other hand, the car insurance industry estimates that the average driver will be involved in three or four car crashes in his or her lifetime and the odds of dying in a car crash are 1 to 2 percent.

Are you afraid of heights? It is the second most reported fear. Your chance of being injured by falling, jumping, or being pushed from a high place is 1 in 65,092. The chance of having your identity stolen is 1 in 200.

Do you fear being killed by a bolt of lightning? The odds of that happening are 1 in 2.3 million. You are much more likely to be struck by a meteorite – those lifetime odds are about 1 in 700,000.

How about dogs? Their bark really is worse than their bite. Your chance of suffering a dog bite is 1 in 137,694. On the other hand, your chance of being injured while mowing the lawn is 1 in 3,623.

How about sharks? You are much more likely to be killed by your spouse (1 in 135,000) than a shark (1 in 300 million).

Won't ride a roller coaster? If you have the patience to stand in the line, the chance of a roller coaster injury is 1 in 300 million. But if you play with fireworks on the Fourth of July, you are really playing with fire. The chance of injury is 1 in 20,000.<sup>2</sup>

We are each fearful of different things, aren't we?

Jesus recognized that his disciples struggled with fear. And so he addressed the issue of fear in their lives.

## **Lesson**

The analysis of the concept of whom to fear as set forth in Luke 12:4-7 teaches us that God cares deeply for Christian be-

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2014/june/3062314.html>.

lievers.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Proper Fear (12:4-5)
2. Preserving Fear (12:6-7)

## I. Proper Fear (12:4-5)

First, let's look at proper fear.

The common New Testament word for fear (*phobeo*) means "to frighten, to be alarmed, to be in awe of, to revere, to be afraid, to fear, or to reverence."<sup>3</sup>

The Bible describes fear in a number of different ways. For example, God's people are told *not to fear other gods* in 2 Kings 17:38, where God said, "And you shall not forget the covenant that I have made with you. *You shall not fear* [i.e., reverence] *other gods.*"

Jesus speaks about the *fear of judgment* later on in Luke's Gospel. He said in Luke 21:25-26, "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, *people fainting with fear* and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

But in Luke 12 Jesus teaches his disciples two very important principles with respect to fear.

### A. Do Not Fear People (12:4)

First, Jesus teaches: do not fear people.

Jesus said in verse 4, "**I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.**"

Notice that Jesus addressed his disciples as **my friends**.

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<sup>3</sup> James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 76.

Jesus was speaking to them with keen affection. He wanted them to know that they were not merely acquaintances or followers but they were his **friends**.

Jesus went on to say to his friends, “**Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.**” Jesus was aware that his friends would struggle with how they were viewed by the religious leaders of their day. Jesus was popular with the people but not at all popular with the Pharisees. The Pharisees controlled the religious life of the people, and so the people did not want to lose favor with the Pharisees.

Do you remember the story of the man who was born blind in John 9? Jesus healed him and restored his sight. The Pharisees were incensed that Jesus healed the man. So, they brought the man’s parents in and questioned them about the healing of their son.

His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself” (John 9:20-21).

Then John added the following parenthetical comment, “His parents said these things *because they feared the Jews*, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22).

Jesus urged his friends not to fear people. He urged them not to fear even those who could **kill the body**. You see, one person’s power over another is strictly limited to the body. We need to remember that we are fundamentally souls who have bodies. The body they may kill, but no human has power over the soul.

In the First World War the well-known magazine *Punch* had a famous cartoon in which it showed the German emperor saying to King Albert of Belgium, “So now you have lost every-

thing.” Back came Albert’s answer, “But not my soul!”<sup>4</sup>

Albert understood that the German emperor could take everything from him, even his life, but only God has power over a person’s soul.

*B. Do Fear God (12:5)*

And second, Jesus teaches: do fear God.

Jesus said in verse 5, **“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!”**

Jesus wants his disciples to have a reverential fear of God. Why? Because God has authority not only over the body but, more importantly, over the soul as well. It is God, and God alone, who has **authority to cast into hell**, because of our sin against him. Therefore, God is the one of whom everyone should have an appropriate and reverential **fear**.

When Martin Luther first stood before the Diet at Worms, which was a formal deliberative assembly, something like an ecclesiastical court, John Eck, the Archbishop of Trier, asked him, “Martin Luther, do you recant of the heresies in your writings? . . . Do you defend them all, or do you care to reject a part?”

Luther gave the quiet answer, “This touches God and his word. This affects the salvation of souls. Of this Christ said, ‘He who denies me before men, him will I deny before the Father.’ To say too little or too much would be dangerous. I beg you, give me time to think it over.”<sup>5</sup>

Luther asked for twenty-four hours to consider the situation. Eck and the whole assembly were amazed. How could the supreme intellectual leader of this movement ask for more

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<sup>4</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 191.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (New York, NY: Times Mirror, n.d.), 141.

time to think? Was he succumbing to fear? Roland Bainton, the great Lutheran historian, answers, “Anyone who recalls Luther’s tremors at his first Mass will scarcely so interpret this hesitation. Just as then he wished to flee from the altar, so now he was too terrified before God to give answer to the emperor.”<sup>6</sup>

That night Luther and his colleagues passionately called out to God in now-celebrated prayers. With the rising of the sun another, larger hall was chosen, and it was so crowded that scarcely anyone except the emperor could sit. Eck spoke long and eloquently in the flickering candlelight, concluding, “I ask you, Martin – answer candidly and without horns – do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?”<sup>7</sup>

Luther spoke *contra mundum*, and his voice rang. He spoke first in German and then in Latin:

Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.<sup>8</sup>

At that towering moment Luther’s massive fear of God freed him from the smaller fear of men!

Commentator Kent Hughes says, “Fear of God is desperately needed in today’s church.” He is right.

King Solomon concluded his prologue to the book of Proverbs by declaring, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (1:7). Solomon saw *the fear of the Lord* as the key

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<sup>6</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 142.

<sup>7</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 144.

<sup>8</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 144.

to all living – and it is. Believing this implicitly, Joseph Bayly defined *fear of God* by saying:

“Awe: Emotion in which dread, veneration, and wonder are variously mingled, as: (a) a profound and humbly fearful reverence inspired by deity or by something sacred or mysterious; (b) wondering reverence tinged with fear inspired by the sublime” (Webster’s). Biblical use: “Let all the earth fear the *Lord*; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him” (*Psalms 33:8*, NASB).<sup>9</sup>

Then he added:

“Awe was damaged in the churches, destroyed by the electronic church. Awe has been replaced by good feelings toward oneself and God, by a happy-face image of God.”<sup>10</sup>

How we need this wholesome fear that Jesus commended to his disciples. We need Moses’ fear before the burning bush when with trembling hands he removed his sandals and “hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3:6).

We need Isaiah’s fear who cried out, “Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips. . . and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty” (Isaiah 6:5). He then rose to answer gallantly, “Here am I. Send me!” (v. 8).

We need a fear like Luther’s – the grand liberating fear of God! It is a liberating day when we see God’s awesome purity and holiness and our own sin and finiteness – and tremble before God as earth’s fears flee.<sup>11</sup>

When the Scottish reformer John Knox was lowered to his grave, it was declared: “Here lies one who feared God so much

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<sup>9</sup> Timothy Bayly, *Out of My Mind: The Best of Joe Bayly* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 168, 169.

<sup>10</sup> Bayly, *Out of My Mind: The Best of Joe Bayly*, 169.

<sup>11</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 39–40.



that he never feared the face of man.”<sup>12</sup>

So, two principles we glean from proper fear are that we must not fear people and that we must fear God.

## II. Preserving Fear (12:6-7)

And second, let's look at preserving fear.

Jesus teaches that a proper fear of God is in fact a preserving fear. He gives us two wonderful principles about how God preserves his own.

### A. *God Cares for Sparrows (12:6)*

First, God cares for sparrows.

Jesus said in verse 6, **“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God.”**

Jesus said in Matthew's Gospel, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?” (Matthew 10:29a). But Luke recorded Jesus as saying, **“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?”** There is no contradiction between the two Gospel authors. Like every itinerant evangelist, Jesus preached a similar message on many different occasions. Jesus sometimes noted that if you were prepared to pay the extra penny you got not four, but five sparrows. One sparrow was thrown into the bargain as having no value at all.

But, not even the sparrow thrown into the bargain without real value is forgotten before God, because Jesus said, **“And not one of them is forgotten before God.”**

So, God cares for every single sparrow.

Jesus then argues from the lesser to the greater. If the lesser is true, then how much more is the greater true as well. Notice how Jesus puts it in the next verse.

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<sup>12</sup> Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, 164.

*B. God Cares Far More for Christians (12:7)*

And second, God cares far more for Christians.

Jesus said in verse 7, **“Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”**

Commentator William Barclay said:

The very hairs of our head are numbered. It has been computed that a blond person has about 145,000 hairs; a dark-haired person, 120,000; and a person with red hair, 90,000! The Jews were so impressed with the individual care of God that they said that every blade of grass had its guardian angel. None of us needs to fear for each can say, ‘God cares for *me*.’<sup>13</sup>

Jesus was saying that God cares for sparrows. But he cares far more for his children. Therefore, **“Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”**

Do you know how many hairs on your head? I assume that I have around 120,000 hairs. But God knows the *exact* number of hairs on my head. Why? Because he cares deeply about me! And he cares deeply about you too!

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of whom to fear as set forth in Luke 12:4-7, we should trust God always.

Bill Hybels analyzes what he calls “destructive fear,” the kind of fear that tricks us into believing, beyond what is reasonable, that the world is an ominous and dangerous place. Hybels writes:

History is filled with men and women who said *no* to destructive fear and changed the world. But imagine if they had

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<sup>13</sup> Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, 191.

given in to the paralyzing effects of fear on their lives. Imagine the apostle Paul, fearing resistance or rejection, choosing to stay home rather than embarking on the missionary journeys that took the message of Christ throughout the known world.

Imagine Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. giving speeches filled with gentle hints about the evils of segregation, because he feared pushing too hard. Instead, King championed the civil rights movement against racial segregation in the United States.

Imagine Rosa Parks, during that same era in American history submitting to the bus driver's command to give up her seat to a white person.

Imagine Nelson Mandela looking the other way when he witnessed and experienced apartheid in South Africa, because he didn't want to make a fuss. Instead, he spent twenty-seven years imprisoned and brought apartheid onto the world's radar, helping end the centuries-old regime of oppression.

Imagine Malala Yousafzai passively quitting school, because she was too frightened by the death threats she received from Taliban extremists, who abhor education for girls. Instead, she became even more vocal about the educational rights of children and women, survived a 2012 assassination attempt, and was a Nobel Peace Prize nominee in 2013 and 2014. [She actually won the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize.]

Imagine yourself, fully aware of the mission and vision God has placed in your heart to advance his kingdom in this world, yet held hostage to phobias, irrational worries, and destructive fears of failure, harm, or rejection. If you don't fulfill the mission God assigned to you, who will?<sup>14</sup>

Jesus urged his disciples to fear God and not fear people at all. The reason we can do that is because cares deeply for those who belong to him. The gospel is that good news that Jesus paid the penalty for all our sin. Now we have nothing to fear because God cares for his own children. So, trust God always. Amen.

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<sup>14</sup> Bill Hybels, *Simplify* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2014), 148-149.



# **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FredFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FredFritz)

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**PRAYER:**

O Lord our God, thank you for the teaching of Jesus.

He taught us that we are to have a proper fear of God. We are not to fear people at all.

And Jesus also taught us that when we properly fear you, you preserve us. You demonstrate your care even for the sparrows. And because of that demonstrable care, we can be confident that you care for every single child of God who has been purchased by the blood of Christ. Thank you so much for all that you have done on our behalf.

Helps us now to trust you always.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!