

# **KINGDOM DISCIPLESHIP 101:**

## ***KNOWING GOD***

### **LUKE 12:1-21**

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In our passage from Luke 12:1-21 Jesus teaches his disciples about the character and nature of God. In contrast to what the Teachers of Israel taught the people in their misunderstanding, Jesus teaches his disciples more “Kingdom Discipleship 101” as he with understanding reveals to them about knowing God and understanding how to live in light of God’s clear revelation in creation and redemption. In other words, Jesus brings a reformation to the disciples thinking about God and how to shape and reorder their lives in light of this reality as servants of the Living God.

According to Jesus, knowing God is understanding Him as the Knower and Revealer of men’s hearts (12:1-3), the Judge of All Things (12:4-5), the Sovereign and Caring One (12:6-7), the Holy Trinity (12:8-12), and the One to whom all men must give an account (12:13-21).

As Jesus continues on his journey to Jerusalem to die (9:21 ff), he is mainly concerned to instruct his disciples to prepare them for their mission after his death and resurrection. In the next few sermons (sermons on Luke 12:1-13:9) Jesus is focused on preparing the disciples for his death with special revelation about God and how they should think about their lives in light of this revelation. As Professor Joel B. Green wrote: “Jesus’ instruction is permeated by his vision of God, who has ultimate oversight in the unfolding of earthly events” (pg. 479).

As Jesus teaches his disciples the Pharisees and Teachers of Israel “lie in wait” to capture and trap him (11:53-54). Dr. Green wrote: “No longer would they simply scrutinize [Jesus’] practices in light of the law; from now on they would actively stalk him” (pg. 477).

#### **I. *God the Knower and Revealer of Hearts (12:1-3)***

- a. Pharisaical hypocrisy like leaven

*<sup>ESV</sup> Luke 12:1 In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*

While Jesus had been speaking rebukes within the Pharisee’s home (last sermon, 11:37-54), the crowds had been gathering to hear (and see!) more about the Kingdom from Jesus. In the next portion of our text recorded for us in Luke chapter 12:1-21, Jesus

teaches his disciples more but in the presence of the crowds, so that they can hear too (cf. 12:41, 56).

Jesus is still extremely popular with the crowds, but we must be reminded that this does not mean that they are following him as disciples through faith in him. Although the many thousands of people are trampling one another [τῶν μυριάδων - μυριάς, ἄδος f group of ten thousand, myriad; countless thousands], there is still mass unbelief within the crowds of people.

Jesus addresses his disciples first about the leaven of the Pharisees, or hypocrisy. The implication here is that Jesus is teaching the disciples “first” (v. 1b), but he is doing it before the crowds and particularly before the Pharisees and scribes so that others can hear him.

As we learned in the last sermon, the imagery of leaven is what works its way through dough so that the whole batch of dough or loaf is affected. Hypocrisy is like leaven in the church, it works its way through the whole congregation of people.

Hypocrisy is a word that literally means the “wearing of a mask” or perhaps we might say acting one way in front of people and being another way within one’s heart. As I said in the last sermon: ***It is essentially pretending to be someone or something you are not really in actuality.***

The Pharisees sought purity above all things (11:38), but Jesus taught them that true purity, cleanliness and righteousness come from God by faith in Christ alone- -not mere external observances of the law, or merely trying outwardly to be religious (see last week’s sermon).

Using the imagery of leaven, Jesus reveals to his disciples that there is always a constant threat to Christ’s people to be affected by the leaven of hypocrisy whenever the gospel is undermined, denied, or not clearly made known to the people.

b. All things are known by God and will be revealed

<sup>2</sup> ***Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.***

Jesus soberly makes us all aware that whatever we try to conceal from the world in our true thoughts from our hearts, this reality in us that is hidden by masks will eventually be revealed for what it is. Any kind of hypocrisy is foolishness because it will be revealed for what it is (perhaps not in this present age) at the Judgment Day of God.

If we are unbelieving hypocrites just “play acting” at Christianity, then this will be revealed at Judgment Day. Jesus will separate the sheep who belong to him from the goats who do not (Matthew 25:41ff). I am reminded of Augustine’s saying about the visible Church that there are many sheep without and many goats within.

The hypocrisy of the Pharisees and teachers of the law was acting pious and religious merely externally while being full of dead men's bones from within (11:37-52). They were unbelievers full of darkness (11:34-35) who denied God's only salvation-hope in Jesus who were play acting at being true religious folks who served God.

<sup>3</sup> *Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.*

Whatever had been said in the dark or whispered sinfully in private rooms shall be revealed with full disclosure on Judgment Day. Jesus is saying for all men to repent now of their sinful hypocrisy so that hearts will be changed by God's grace and people will not be ashamed before God and man when he returns. We all must be on our guard against hypocrisy- -Jesus warns the disciples because it is a temptation for all.

Arthur Conan Doyle who authored many excellent mysteries in the Sherlock Holmes series spoke about hypocrisy. He told a story where he sent a letter to twelve friends who were admirable men with good reputations and considerable position in society. In the letter he would simply write: "Fly at once, all is discovered." Doyle said that within twenty-four hours all twelve had left the country (this is probably an apocryphal story, at least the twelve men's response, but it serves well to illustrate all of our temptation to hide the truth of our hearts from God and man).

<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!"*

The hypocrisy of the Pharisees shall be revealed for what it is. The ultimate reason for any kind of hypocrisy is the fear of man. That is why Jesus says in verses 4 and 5 that we are to fear God rather than man. Many in the crowds also out of fear of the Pharisees (fear of man) were not willing to acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior and follow him as a disciple.

We are to fear God in a healthy way, understanding that our only hope is found in submitting to him humbly and seeking the forgiveness for our sins. Hypocrisy is the result of men wanting to be seen as religious or holy or to be respected, but they do not fear God who sees the hearts of us all.

We should fear God as Moses and Isaiah when they considered their condition before a holy God:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Exodus 3:6** And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." *And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 6:5** And I said: *"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"*

We should fear God as Solomon taught in the Wisdom Literature of the Proverbs:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Proverbs 1:7** *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge*; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

## II. *God the Judge (12:4-5)*

In contrast to the fear of man that the Pharisees exemplify, the true disciples of Jesus are to fear God in a healthy manner, especially as He is Judge. Rather than merely fool others by their outward appearances, they are to live their lives *Coram Deo* before God's face by His grace as they look forward to the Day of Judgment and vindication when God will make all things right.

True disciples will experience persecution and suffering even unto death (Rom. 8:18ff; John 16:33), but they are not to fear those who can merely kill the body.

- a. The true fear of God
  - i. Because He is God
  - ii. Because He is God *the Judge*
- b. The counterfeit fear of man and death

Men may be able to put Jesus and the disciples to death, but they are not the ones to fear. Rather, we are to fear God who has the right *as God* to sentence unbelieving mankind to hell!

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 12:5** *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!*

The word for hell is in Greek *τὸν γέενναν* "Gehenna" and is named after the Ge-Hinnom or "Valley of Hinnom" near Jerusalem where refuse and corpses were thrown to be burned by fire. The valley was constantly kept burning and it became a symbolic place to refer to the everlasting punishment of the wicked.

As the Old Testament taught the people:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Deuteronomy 32:39** "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Samuel 2:6** The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

## **Hell in the Bible**

In the Old Testament, Sheol, the dwelling place of the dead, was associated with fire:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Deuteronomy 32:22** For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.

In Jewish traditions the abode of the sinners after death is described as a lake or abyss of fire in which the wicked are punished (Judith 16:17; 1 Enoch 10:13; 18:11-16; Jubilees 9:15). In the New Testament *Gehenna* is a place of punishment in the next life, or “hell”:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 5:22** But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 10:28** And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Mark 9:43** And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

Although being associated with Jesus (“my friends”- v. 4) will cause all disciples or followers to experience persecution, suffering, and even martyrdom (see Acts 7:51ff), but true disciples are not to fear these people who can only kill the body, because there is nothing more that they can do with regard to eternal judgment or our real relationship to God himself.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 12:4** *"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.*

### **III. God the Sovereign and Caring One (12:6-7)**

The true fear of God however is not a fear of God as a slave; the true fear of God is a reverence and awe of God because one is made a child or a son. The true fear of God is to acknowledge God *as God* but to also understand his fatherly care toward his creatures. In the next batch of sayings in Dr. Luke’s gospel, Jesus emphasizes sovereign omnipotence and omniscience of God that also reveals He is a caring Father.

Understanding God as Creator and Father of all things in the sense that he has created and takes care of all things, helps us to better understand the more intimate Fatherly relationship we have covenantally because of Jesus Christ.

<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.*

Jesus argues from the less to the greater: “If God remembers the sparrows how much more does he remember you as my disciples? ”. He says that “Five sparrows are sold for two pennies” and this means that five sparrows in Jesus’ time cost only two *assaria*. A *assarion* (singular) was a Roman copper coin which was worth about one-sixteenth of a denarius, which was one day’s wages as a laborer, which translates into one hour worth of work (Beale and Carson, pg. 327).

Jesus tells of the infinite, sovereign and omniscient knowledge of God. He knows intimately the sparrow as well as every hair on our heads. We are his creatures and much more important than birds. Sparrows were known in Jesus’ time as the least of the birds and they were part of the diet of the poor.

We would think that if God were the sovereign and omnipotent and omniscient one that he would have no interest in weak creatures like we, and especially like small significant birds like sparrows or other animals. But on the contrary, God places significance upon them because they are his creatures and this reveals his fatherly kindness, goodness and mercy. As Isaiah the Prophet described God’s love for his creatures:

***ESV Isaiah 49:15-16: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.<sup>16</sup> Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands...***

This describes God’s great love for his people no matter how many difficult circumstances come their way- particularly persecution or martyrdom because of the testimony of Jesus Christ! Though some men have power to kill the body, God intimately loves us!

***“Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”***

Jesus is teaching that sparrows can be bought and sold and Christ’s disciples can be persecuted for their faith but not apart from the sovereign will and intimate knowledge of a loving Father. Christ’s disciples can rejoice because their suffering, persecution or martyrdom is not happening outside God’s care but part of his redemptive plan for his people.

In the Scriptures there is a perfect balance between God’s transcendence and his immanence with regard to his creation.

God is indeed “high and lofty or lifted up”, that is he is the Transcendent Sovereign King and Creator of all things and distinct from his creation; but he is also revealed as the Immanent One who is close to his creatures in that although distinct from his creation, he cares for each person and thing that he created by the word of his power. Isaiah 55 captures the balance between God’s transcendence and immanence:

***ESV Isaiah 57:15-17: For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.***

Jesus teaches us here that God cares for even the smallest things, such as the very hairs on our head that are numbered by God (v. 7).

There was a common saying in Israel at this time concerning total deliverance in a situation of potential danger where one would say that they escaped without one hair falling to the ground (v. 6b; Matthew 10:30). We also hear this language in the Old Testament:

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Samuel 14:45** Then the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Kings 1:52** And Solomon said, "If he will show himself a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die."

Having this biblical and balanced understanding of who God is prevents Christ's disciples from being hypocritical. Christ gives us prevention from hypocrisy here! How?

Think about it: If we do not fear man, then we can be "honestly sinful" before God and man. We do not have to put on a mask and pretend to be pure, clean and righteous when we know we fall short of God's grace. We will not fear man because our trust will be in a loving and caring Creator and Father who is dedicated to making us holy and loving and ridding us of our slavery to fear of man and to our own sins.

If we fear God, then knowing that he is loving and kind and even the smallest things in our lives matter to him, then we can be "honestly sinful" before him avoiding masks before him, and deceiving ourselves that he does not see our own hearts. Rather, in Christ we will seek to draw closer to Him knowing that he loves us and cares for us.

Jesus is teaching us here that as his disciples no matter what persecution may come our way we can be encouraged that God has not forgotten us—and he has certainly not forsaken us. Rather, he is sovereignly orchestrating the events and in his infinite wisdom we do not have to fear no matter what he allows to come our way because our names are written in heaven!

***May we never judge situations in which we find ourselves because we confess Christ by our limited perspective, but may our perspective be enlarged by Our Great Sovereign and Loving God and Father.***

<sup>ESV</sup> ***Luke 10:20 "...Rejoice that your names are written in heaven."***

#### **IV. God the Holy Trinity- Father, Son and Holy Spirit (12:8-12)**

<sup>8</sup> "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, <sup>9</sup> but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. <sup>10</sup> And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

a. Acknowledging Christ before God and man (12:8-9)

Jesus promises that those who acknowledge him as Lord, the Son of Man will acknowledge them publicly before all creatures, even the angels of God. Those who deny him will also be publicly denied. This is part of our identity as disciples: publicly acknowledging Christ as the person he says he is the very Christ of God (cf. Luke 9:20).

Jesus is enlarging the vision of his disciples by saying that we not only confess our discipleship in the endurance of our persecution, suffering, and martyrdom, but our confession is cosmic in scale! As we confess Jesus before man in word and deed (in enduring whatever God allows to come in our lives even from our enemies), we are acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord and God before the Heavenly Court itself ("before God and the very angels of God in assembly before Him)!

We see the reality of this acknowledgement before God and man in the account of Stephen in Acts 7:51-56:

*ESV Acts 7:51-56: "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. <sup>52</sup> Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, <sup>53</sup> you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." <sup>54</sup> Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup> But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."*

Jesus is telling the disciples that when they are persecuted and possibly martyred to continue to acknowledge His Lordship knowing that they will be vindicated on the Day of Judgment by none other than the Son of Man revealed in Daniel 7:13-14:

*ESV Daniel 7:13-14: I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

Jesus then makes a distinction between his ministry and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is important to note the distinction in their respective ministries. Jesus might be blasphemed and someone forgiven, but never a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. What does this mean?

Jesus Christ is united in hypostatic union (or personal and permanent union) to God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. He is therefore equal with the Holy Spirit, who is

the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. But Jesus Christ is distinct from the Holy Spirit as he is distinct from the Father (cf. John 1:1-3, 14).

Jesus Christ as the “Son of Man” (vv. 8, 10) is a description our Lord used of himself to make clear his humanity, and it particularly is used in contexts where Jesus speaks of his death for sinners (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:22, 18:31). The Second Person of the Trinity took upon himself human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary and lived, died, and was resurrected to save a people (cf. Hebrews 2:10-18).

This is not the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Holy Spirit as our Lord teaches clearly in John 14-16 has a ministry of taking from Christ and making him known. Jesus says:

*Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.<sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:<sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;<sup>10</sup> concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer;<sup>11</sup> concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.<sup>12</sup> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."<sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.<sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.<sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to guide the disciples into more knowledge of the truth revealed in Jesus Christ, and His ministry is to glorify and exalt the Person and Work of Jesus Christ; His ministry's emphasis is NOT on himself!

#### b. The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (12:10)

As Jesus teaches his disciples who to fear and to stand confident in their confession come what may, he now also addresses those who do not believe in him by teaching on the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. This has been misunderstood in the history of the Church, and causes some to stumble theologically, so it is wise to rely on other Reformed commentators as to what this means.

We should first acknowledge the Old Covenant or prophetic background to this statement found in Isaiah's “Gospel”:

*<sup>ESV</sup> Isaiah 63:7-11: I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.<sup>8</sup> For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely." And he became their Savior.<sup>9</sup> In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.<sup>10</sup> But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.<sup>11</sup> Then he remembered the days of*

*old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit?*

In the passage from Isaiah, God has clearly revealed his love and salvation to the people and had become their Savior and Redeemer. But the people rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. Even though they were the people who enjoyed God's Spirit in their midst, they rebelled and grieved the Spirit (thus they blasphemed His Name and Person).

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God's Saving and Redeeming love and mercy and to reject the work of the Holy Spirit that is climactically revealed in the fullness of the times is to damn oneself permanently because those who do not believe (particularly Israel) are against resisting, rebelling and grieving the Spirit of God by denying Christ.

Jesus as "Son of Man" has been revealed before Israel and many in the crowds as the suffering servant and in his outward appearance he appears as a mere human being (Phil. 2:4-11: "The form of a servant" language). Men can look at Jesus and merely see a human being, or a "son of man".

The Holy Spirit does not take on this kind of physical manifestation and union with humanity and so His work is unmistakably divine and holy. To mistake Jesus for a mere man is forgivable, but to mistake the Holy Spirit's work as diabolical or unholy is to blaspheme God in such a way that is unforgivable- -because His work and ministry are undeniably from God.

Biblical professor Dr. Impeta wrote: "The sin here referred to by Jesus must consist in a conscious, willful, intentional blasphemy of the clearly recognized revelation of God's grace in Christ through the Holy Spirit, a revelation which nevertheless out of hate and hostility is ascribed to the devil (quoted in Geldenhuys, pg. 352).

Biblical professor Herman Bavinck wrote ingeniously that this sin was a sin against the Gospel in its clearest revelation. He wrote: "This consists not in doubting or simply denying the truth, but in a denial which goes against the conviction of the intellect, against the enlightenment of conscience, against the dictates of the heart; in a conscious, willful, and intentional imputation to the influence and working of Satan of that which is clearly recognized as God's work, i.e. in a definite blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, in a willful declaration that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit from the abyss, that truth is a lie, and that Christ is Satan himself....

For this reason the sin is unforgivable: although God's grace is not too small and too powerless for it, yet in the kingdom of sin there are laws and ordinances placed there by God and maintained in him. And this law in the case of this particular sin is of such a nature that it excludes all repentance, cauterizes the conscience, obdurates and hardens the sinner once and for all, and in this way makes his sin unpardonable (*Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. III, pg. 157).

c. The teaching of the Holy Spirit (12:11-12)

*<sup>11</sup> And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, <sup>12</sup> for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."*

Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit's ministry will guide you as He speaks and teaches. As disciples we have a full Trinitarian revelation of God's character and love. We have a revelation of the Father's grace and mercy to us down to the smallest things in our life. We have a revelation of Christ Jesus as the very Christ-Messiah-Anointed One of God who we are called to acknowledge before men. We have the revelation of the Spirit of God who teaches us as Christ's disciples and ministers the grace and knowledge we need from Christ in order to remain faithful.

Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit is the believer's helper made manifest particularly in situations of persecution and opposition to God's Kingdom. We see this clearly illustrated in Acts 4:8-13 later in the Apostle Peter's life after Jesus' resurrection and ascension to God's right hand:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 4:8-13:** *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." <sup>13</sup> Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*

## **V. God and the Parable of the Rich Fool: God the One to Whom All Men Must Give an Account (12:13-21)**

### **a. Warnings against greed or covetousness (12:13-15)**

*<sup>13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." <sup>14</sup> But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." <sup>16</sup> And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, <sup>17</sup> and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' <sup>18</sup> And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' <sup>21</sup> So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."*

A man in the crowd recognizes Jesus' authority because he asks him to "tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me" (v. 13). Although the man recognizes Jesus' authority, he does not recognize the Kingdom of God that Jesus' authority was given to reveal to all who had eyes to see.

Jesus responds with a rebuke to the man (v. 14) because he realizes that this man's confession is shallow with regard to love for God and man and actually reveals the man's covetousness or greed. The heavenly Kingdom of God is being revealed in Jesus Christ and this worldly-earthly-minded man is focused on his own kingdom-building! Jesus' Messianic-Mission was to make God's Kingdom known NOT to serve as judges and arbitrators between inheritance disputes.

Jesus tells a short parable about a man who was covetous or persistently greedy throughout his life and desired to gain the whole world. For security reasons he stored up for himself all of his possessions, continued to collect them, then he built bigger barns to store them. What he failed to notice was that there was a bigger issue of security- -one involving his eternal security before God. The man did not think of his being held accountable before God and that he should have stored up his treasure being rich toward God.

Jesus addresses not only hypocrisy in our passage but another great sin of mankind: covetousness and greed. Both hypocrisy and covetousness have fear as its foundation. Both hypocrisy and covetousness reveals an unbelieving heart that does not rightly fear God and keep his commandments.

In fact, the man described in this passage is a perpetual life-long breaker of the Tenth Commandment which says:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Exodus 20:17** "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

To covet or to be greedy means that you are not satisfied with God has provided for you and you constantly want more- -even at someone else's expense.

#### b. Building bigger barns (12:16-19)

This parable reveals the folly of being a covetous, self-centered, materialistic person without a care or concern of your standing before God and your well-being in light of God's judgment upon sin.

This man in the parable is a "self-sufficient" man who has worked hard and gained many possessions and whose only goal is to be "fat and happy" so that he has enough goods laid up so that he can "relax, eat, drink, and be merry" (v. 19). This might be a consistent attitude of many Americans in this world who seek only to be happy in this present age, but it is contrary to those who are seeking a kingdom that is not of this world, where Jesus Christ is their hope and desire, where sin and folly shall be removed, and God will restore all things and will dwell with his people in communion and sweet fellowship (cf. Rev. 21:1-7).

In our culture we are bombarded with advertisements and worldly philosophies that tempt us to hoard all that we have so that we can “retire” and “relax, eat, drink, and be merry” - - but this is to misplace the goal and the reason for which we serve daily in our lives. Our goal of service to God and neighbor no matter how old we are is to do this in order to build Christ’s Kingdom. Our ultimate goal is not retirement and merely being able to retire to be hedonists, but our ultimate goal in our daily service is Christ’s recognition on Judgment Day of “Well Done, my good and faithful service.”

This is not to say that retirement is bad or that we shouldn’t slow down at one point in our lives, it is to say that retirement is spoken only here in the entire Bible, and it is taught as a warning against covetousness, greed and relying on oneself for security –not knowing when your life will end.

In fact, all of the man’s retirement dreams of being able to “relax, eat, drink, and be merry” that had been advertised to him at his local bank collapse suddenly and his dreams crumble and fall all around him when he realizes that what he sought so earnestly in his life was not what he was created to seek by God. In fact, God holds the man accountable for his sins and transgressions of living covetously and self-centeredly.

#### c. Man’s accountability to God

Every man is accountable to God for how they have lived. Every man is accountable to God for how they have used his resources, and how they have lived with regard to his true existence.

No man is able to say that he did not know that all he has comes from God. No man can truly even deny God’s existence because he has made himself known clearly so that all men are without excuse. Romans 1:18ff:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:18-25:** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. <sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

But sadly, sinful, self-centered man seeks a kingdom for himself! This too is folly (v. 20). The sinful, self-centered man who is covetous seeks to lay up treasure for himself rather

than being rich toward God. This is his great sin in trespassing upon God's creation and not giving God the worship, praise, and glory that he deserves!

Jesus does not condemn worldly wealth in this parable; this too is a blessing of God. He does condemn a trust and hope that is covetously placed in the worldly wealth. His point is that you cannot serve God and money ("mammon") as he says elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 6:19-24).

Two important principles here that we learn further from Matthew's Gospel:

- 1) "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,<sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.<sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. – Matthew 6:19-21.
- 2) "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. - Matthew 6:24

Because all mankind will be held accountable before God for what they have done with their knowledge of the Savior as well as with their possessions, we must give God all the glory for his provision in salvation as well as with all that he supplies us daily as our "daily bread". God is to be glorified and serve, he is to be "enjoy" as the first question of our catechism teaches us by seeking God and His Kingdom first!

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