

June 9, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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CONFIDENT IN THE TRUTH Luke 12:1-12

Confronting hypocrisy can be a painful experience, whether it is our own hypocrisy or that of someone else. Jesus' life at this point illustrates for us the adverse reaction that is not unusual when we uncover the truth about a hypocrite. Jesus had been eating with a Pharisee who had invited Him to dinner. The context of the story indicates that other Pharisees and especially lawyers were present. By the time Jesus was finished uncovering their hypocrisy, those religious leaders were determined to have Jesus for dessert.

Jesus walked away from that very tense uncovering of hypocrisy and the hypocrites began to press Him hard with questions in an effort to trap Him in His answers. This was just part of the ever-deepening rift between Jesus and the religious hypocrites.

In that setting, Jesus taught us a very important lesson. Sometimes, someone speaks the truth and uncovers our own hypocrisy. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is kind and gracious to quietly uncover our inconsistencies. That hurts. It should. We should stand ashamed before God when we realize that we have been saying one thing and living another. Our Savior, who knows us better than we know ourselves, desires for us to know His truth, love His truth, and live His truth. It is always best for us to speak and act according to truth because eventually the truth is revealed.

If it is true that we have been duplicitous, it will one day become obvious—even if it is not until we stand before Christ our eternal Judge. At the same time, if we have endeavored to live and speak according to the truth of the gospel, that too will become obvious. Sometimes the fact that we are all about the truth puts us in a spotlight we would prefer to avoid. Jesus promised the apostles that

one day they would be dragged before authorities because they lived and spoke truth.

We, too, might very well repeat that experience one day. But for now we can be put in uncomfortable circumstances because we stand for truth. We might lose friends, be challenged, be maligned and lied about because we insist that God is true. How will we respond? Will we be afraid of peers and cower in silence? Or will we fear God and trust Him to sustain us by His grace? Jesus taught the importance of trusting God, relying wholly on Him, and embracing and declaring His truth regardless of the resulting circumstances.

Truth Will Become Obvious (vv.1-3).

Jesus taught the importance of knowing, saying, and doing truth because, at some point, untruth will become known (vv.1-2). This was part of the Lord's instruction in a chaotic setting. *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 (v.1a).*

The broader setting was that Jesus had left a Pharisee's house. The Pharisee had invited Jesus to dinner. The meeting became very tense as Jesus unloaded on the lawyers and Pharisees, who were apparently present, because of their hypocrisies. After the meal the hypocrites continued to pester Jesus. This may have become the norm nearly all the time until they crucified Jesus.

Again, as was typical for much of Jesus' ministry, crowds gathered. This time they numbered in the thousands. There were so many people that they began trampling on each other. This popularity would have agitated the religious leaders even more. As a result, from this time on, Jesus was in genuine danger. He was in danger because He continued to tell the truth. The big question in our text is whether the followers of Christ would also tell the truth? If they did, would they be in danger too? Yes, which is why Jesus desired to instruct His closest followers. In that setting of chaos, Jesus seemed to ignore the thousands of clamoring fans in order to address the followers who were closest to Him.

He warned them that the Pharisees' leaven is hypocrisy. *"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (v.1b).*

The first danger Christ's followers face is within our own souls. That danger of spiritual lethargy or, worse, spiritual deception is like leaven. Though we do not know it by this word, we are all familiar with leaven. Leaven is yeast which permeates the dough and causes the entire lump to rise. Jesus warned that hypocrisy, like leaven, is unseen, almost unnoticed, as it works to impact the heart of a person. Sometimes the picture of leaven in Scripture is positive as in the influence of the Kingdom of Heaven (Luke 13:20-21). Most of the time, the picture of leaven in the Bible is the bad influence of sin.

Jesus' warning is necessary because it is so natural for us to embrace the Pharisees' leaven. "Pharisaism is a subtle leaven which the natural heart is always ready to receive. It is a leaven which once received into the heart infects the whole character of a man's Christianity" (J.C. Ryle, p.58).

The Pharisees had a reputation of being the best of the spiritual people, the ones who kept God's law. In reality though, their hearts were dark with the sin of pride and self-righteousness. It is so easy for us to fall into that trap, especially if we compare ourselves with all the out-and-out sinners of the world. It is so easy for us to pretend to be something on the outside that we are not on the inside. We very easily adapt to saying the right things, praying the right words, wearing the right clothes, and singing the right kind of music even while sin festers within our hearts. Someone has well said, "Reputation is what people think you are; character is what you really are."

And being full of hypocrisy is going to result in real shame and embarrassment one day. Jesus warned that one day the truth will be revealed. "*Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known*" (v.2). This theme is very important based on the number of times Jesus taught it. "*For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light*" (Luke 8:17, Mark 4:22). "*So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known*" (Matthew 10:26).

The same theme shows up in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. According to Solomon, it is an underlying principle of eternity. "*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil*" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Jesus

promised that in the last day exposing the secrets will be part of His judgment against sinners. "*For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done*" (Matthew 16:27). According to Paul's teaching, even believers will face exposure of truth in a good way as we are rewarded. "*Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God*" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

It is quite important for us to know truth, tell truth, live truth because eventually truth will be validated (v.3). "*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*" (v.3). Here Jesus warned that it is important to say and whisper truth. The argument is two-sided. On one hand are the hypocrites who speak and act righteously but inwardly are unrighteous. On the other hand are followers of Christ who often think noble thoughts and do noble deeds that are never noticed. Both will be exposed.

That is why Jesus warned His followers not to be like the hypocrites. One day, what you say will be proclaimed. In time, the deepest of secrets will be revealed. The reference to the *private rooms* speaks of the inner-most room in the house. It was away from the external walls of the house. Thieves could break through the outer walls and steal precious possessions. Therefore, the most sensitive things, the most personal things were kept in the inner room.

With these words Jesus pictured the most secretive, sensitive words (or thoughts) kept hidden and protected. He warned that we must be careful about what we put in that room, because one day the house will be torn down and the contents of the "safe room" will be exposed. This kind of thing can happen at some point in life. We have plenty of examples of leaders or non-leaders who lived like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. One day the secret side of life catches up with them and they are exposed as frauds. But ultimately, this will happen at the final judgment seat of Christ. On one hand, He will open the books and judge sinners by their works (which includes thoughts and words). On the other hand, at a different time, Jesus will reward His

servants for their faithful service. Paul reminded us to be careful, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil”* (2 Corinthians 5:10)

It is important for us to say the same thing about our sins that God says and have them forgiven so that we will not have to face them later. Knowing that the truth will be revealed in the future can be a scary thing. But the prospect of telling the truth of the gospel can also be a scary thing in some settings (like some Islamic or Communist cultures).

Fear – Fear Not (vv.4-7).

On one hand, Jesus warned us not to fear mere mortals (v.4). He warned us of this even though it is true that humans can kill. *“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body”* (v.4a). Not being afraid in such cases sounds like a good theory that is very difficult if not impossible to do. How do we not fear when facing a firing squad or someone about to behead us? Jesus gave us the answer to that question in all the things He taught. We will not fear if we remember that Christ is our friend. Instead of being afraid, remember that Christ is the author of eternal life. Remember that Christ walked through the valley of the shadow of death before we will need to. Remember that our bodies are temporary even in the best-case scenario.

This is a very difficult principle for us to even imagine because we experience almost no persecution. However, we have brothers and sisters in Christ who live in a very large geographical part of the world who must regularly think about someone killing them because of their faith. At the very least, they can be and will often be persecuted. Of the 7 billion people in the world, less than one third would claim to be Christian. And let’s not forget that in the past it was people who claimed to be Christian who burned our spiritual forefathers at the stake.

There is a high possibility that within the next couple of decades true followers of Christ will face serious persecution in America. This culture that was founded on Christian principles is now the culture that aggressively rejects sexual purity, a baby’s right to life,

and even conservative politics. Because the majority of Americans reject God and His Bible, they must at some point reject Christ’s followers. Will you fear them when they come after you?

It is true that fellow humans might (and have) kill those who follow Christ and speak for Him. But the good news is that humans have no authority in eternity. Jesus warned that they might kill *“and after that have nothing more that they can do”* (v.4b).

It is good for us to think with an eternal perspective because the fear of peers can be paralyzing. Fear of fellow humans forces us to cower in obscurity for fear of making what they call a mistake or doing something that is not acceptable to the “in crowd,” or doing something that tempts others to criticize us. There is no doubt that people can be unkind, malicious, even violent toward us. They might even kill us. But that is the worst they can do. And if we view this passing pilgrimage as temporary, what difference does it make?

However, if this life on earth is the most important thing, we will be afraid. Jesus’ argument should force us to stop and think about what or who we really fear. Do we fear circumstances arranged by people? We will not if we truly fear God. That is what Jesus encouraged us to do. Fear the Judge (v.5) because the eternal Judge has ultimate authority. *“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell”* (v.5a). Only God has the authority to cast an eternal soul into hell. But notice also that Jesus attributed execution to God (*after He has killed*). The power of life and death, both physical and eternal, is in God’s hand. *“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”* (Deuteronomy 32:39).

Therefore, fear Him! Or as Jesus put it, *“Yes, I tell you, fear him!”* (v.5b). If we really believe that God has the power over physical life and eternal life, we will fear Him. Jesus said emphatically, “You ought to be afraid of God” for good reason. The power of your physical life is in His hand. He makes alive and He kills. And your future eternity is in His power. And your sin offends Him mightily. And He has made it clear that He will not allow anyone who offends Him to be with Him in heaven. And that ought to strike fear into everyone’s heart.

If God desires for us to fear Him so much, why do we read next “Do not fear” (vv.6-7)? We have awesome respect for God, but we do not fear the circumstances of life. That is because God is aware of every detail. Jesus questioned, “*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered*” (vv.6-7a). This is not a promise for people who have sin unforgiven. Their sin offends God and because of that they ought to be terribly afraid of Him.

But this promise is for people who are God’s children. These people have trusted God to forgive their sins and cover over their sins with the blood Jesus Christ, God’s beloved Son, shed on the cross. Through faith in Christ, we are brought into the family of God. At that time He becomes our Heavenly Father. Our Heavenly Father knows every detail of the universe and cares about my life. He cares about the plight of the little bird that flew into your window and died. He cares about even the smallest physical detail of your body.

So stop fearing. “*Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows*” (v.7b). Yes, we are characterized as fearing God in that we esteem Him highly and respect Him awesomely. But because we have such respect for Him, we do not fear the circumstances that come from being in His family. We do not fear negative responses as we represent our Savior in truth.

The argument up to this point looks like this: The Pharisee-kind-of-people are hypocrites who harbor much sin and deception. The truth about them will be known. The truth about all of us will be known. Therefore, know the truth, tell the truth, live the truth. And do not be afraid of powerful people who react adversely to your telling the truth. They have no power over your eternal state. Rather, trust and respect God who loves you, cares for you, and determines your eternal condition. Therefore, we should speak the truth.

Speak Truth (vv.9-12).

Jesus warned that sinners can blaspheme the Holy Spirit (vv.8-10). But at the same time, a sinner’s denial of Christ can be forgiven. In all of this, the great need is for confession of Christ. Jesus warned, “*And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God*”(v.8) To

confess is to “say the same thing.” Followers of Christ have come to the settled conclusion that He is God the Son. His followers have agreed that He alone is the Savior from sin. We say this same thing and live this same thing as a testimony before others.

But in contrast to our lifestyle and our eternal promise, denial of Christ results in condemnation. Jesus taught that He will acknowledge His people because we confess, “*But the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God*” (v.9). At issue is the truth about Jesus. Is He, as He asserts, the Son of God co-equal with God the Father? The Pharisees and hypocrites denied this truth. That is still the important issue at hand. The vast majority of the world is willing to acknowledge that Jesus was a good man who taught good things and set a good example. But they reject the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh.

But what constitutes denial of Jesus? Most obviously, denying that He is God the Son as He said. But to refuse to embrace Him as Savior by faith is also denial. Repentance reverses the consequences of denial. Jesus promised, “*And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven*” (v.10a). It is possible to spend many years denying, speaking against Christ. But by God’s grace, God opens our spiritual eyes to see the truth and we confess it and our sins are forgiven.

However, unlike denying and then confessing Christ, denial of the Holy Spirit’s work cannot be forgiven. “*But the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven*” (v.10b). It should be obvious from Jesus’ statement that the work of the Holy Spirit is critical. Scripture teaches that He convicts of sin. He reveals the truth of the Bible. He regenerates. He seals the regenerated believer for eternity. The word *blaspheme* means to speak against or to talk down on someone. To blaspheme the Holy Spirit then is to speak against Him and the work that He does. Therefore, it only stands to reason that anyone who denies these works of the Holy Spirit speaks against the Holy Spirit. That person who denies the regenerating work all the way through the sealing work of the Holy Spirit cannot possibly be born again.

However, the people of God, the followers of Christ, who have been saved through the Holy Spirit’s power rely on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. His work compels true speech (vv.11-12). Jesus

taught how His followers would need to speak. “*And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities*” (v.11a). Jesus’ warning here was not a hypothetical “if” but a promise of “when.” The warning foretold that His followers were going to be apprehended and threatened. We know that this happened almost immediately. Ultimately, Jesus’ closest followers were killed. Knowing that is a possibility could cause a bit of fear and trepidation.

Not to worry. Christ’s followers depend on the Holy Spirit. Jesus encouraged His followers, “*Do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say*” (vv.11a-12). We can understand that a follower of Christ, knowing he was being dragged before the authorities, might wonder, “What should I say?” Jesus promised that the ministry of the Comforter would give the right words. Which is not a promise regarding poor sermon preparation.

The promise can apply to us as we depend on the Holy Spirit’s leading in unplanned for conversations. As we read and study the Bible, we put knowledge in our memories. At the right time, the Holy Spirit brings those truths to our minds.

This text reminds us that there are plenty of religious hypocrites. Sometimes they will react negatively when we tell the truth. Tell the truth anyway because one day our Eternal Judge will reveal who was telling the truth and who was not. And even when we are threatened, we need to continue to tell the truth while depending on the Holy Spirit to lead us.