

Whom You Should Fear

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[0:00] Well, last Sunday we heard about how Jesus was invited to the house of a Pharisee for dinner. And after foregoing the ritual washing, to the surprise and scorn of the Pharisees, Jesus began to rebuke the Pharisees and to call them out for their hypocrisy.

And we saw Jesus respond to them with very passionate and strong words.

Then we heard a little bit about what happened after this. When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to beseech him with questions.

Waiting to catch him in something he might say. So after saying those things, Jesus exits the house and out come the hornets. And they are mad.

Can you imagine them besieging Jesus with questions? And they weren't even looking for the answers. These were attacking sorts of questions.

[1:23] Probably they weren't even giving Jesus hardly a chance to respond or to answer. They were just sort of piling them on and maybe in an attempt to humiliate him. Or to get him to trip up in his words.

Maybe twisting some of his replies. And as this is happening, the crowd of witnesses begins to grow. People passing by stop to watch and to listen.

Some of the crowds of people that maybe left off of Jesus so that he could go in and have dinner with the Pharisees begin to return. And the number of people, Luke tells us, grows into the thousands.

Luke 12 verse 1. Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples.

So can you imagine this? Can you picture it? Everybody wants to get closer to see and hear what's going on. So much so that they're stepping on each other.

[2:32] They're knocking each other over as they push in towards Jesus. According to Luke, Jesus begins in this moment to speak to his disciples.

I guess the conversation with the Pharisees was going nowhere. They aren't really there to listen or to learn. And so Jesus now turns to his disciples and begins to speak to them.

And the first thing that he says is this. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

So Jesus has already been rebuking them privately about this in the house. Now he's doing it publicly. It's not behind their backs because they're there.

And now he is warning his disciples not to follow or become like the Pharisees. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

[3:41] Now why the metaphor of yeast or leaven? And I think there's two characteristics of yeast that factor into Jesus' meaning.

First, yeast spreads. It multiplies. As the Apostle Paul says in Galatians and in his letter to the Corinthians, a little yeast leavens the whole lump.

And if you've ever made bread, it's quite something, isn't it? It doesn't take much of those little yeast pellets. But that whole loaf, that whole batch of dough is soon affected by it.

It begins to rise as the organisms multiply and give off gas. So yeast is potent stuff. It spreads. And then the second thing about yeast is, once it's mixed into the dough, it's invisible.

You can't even tell the difference between a leavened lump of dough and an unleavened lump of dough right after the moment it's been done. It's a thing that happens behind the scenes, slowly and gradually.

[4:56] And I think these are maybe the things Jesus is emphasizing about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Their hypocrisy has the same characteristics. It's contagious.

It spreads as people imitate them and follow their teaching. And it's subtle. It's insidious. There's things going on that are hidden beneath the surface. It's kind of what we heard Jesus talking about last Sunday when he said that they clean the outside of the dish. The part that people see, they polish that. But inside, what's hiding in there? They're full of greed and wickedness, said Jesus.

So hypocrisy can be insidious. It's kind of like the solid oak bed frame that I bought one time off of Kijiji. The pictures weren't all that clear online.

[5 : 58] But it looked good. Well, after examining it more closely, it was actually just a thin oak-like veneer on particle board.

Don't be fooled by them, says Jesus. Don't be sucked into following their ways. Don't do as they do. Their religion of rules is a show of external righteousness.

Meanwhile, on the inside, they do not love God. They're neglecting what is just. What is right. They're doing things that look righteous, but it's only for the attention and for the praise of others, for the benefit that it brings to them.

Be on your guard against that attitude, against that kind of behavior. It's tricky. It's subtle.

[7 : 09] But its effect is powerful. Don't let yourself slip into the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. And then Jesus gives us this very sobering truth to help us see why faking our religion is utterly foolish.

Let me just read it all in one go so that we can get the flow of thought here. He says, Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

What a powerful and sobering truth. It's very proverbial the way Jesus says it. It's kind of got that poetic parallelism that we're used to seeing in the book of Proverbs.

There's nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

[8 : 46] All the secrets we try to keep, all the things we try to hide, they will all come out in the end. They will all be known eventually.

And the first application of this, I think, is to the Pharisees themselves. Jesus is basically saying, whatever they're hiding with their hypocrisy, they won't get away with it.

It's all going to come out. But then the second application is for Jesus' followers, the ones that he's talking to right now, the ones he's warning.

He's saying to them, and by extension to us as followers of Jesus, don't be like the Pharisees in their hypocrisy, because anything you try to hide or keep secret is going to come out in the end. And the way Jesus says it, it's powerful. What you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the rooftops.

[10 : 05] That word for inner room was used to describe the storeroom of the house. And so you almost get this picture here of someone pulling another person into the storage closet to whisper some things to them, closing the door, speaking in a hushed voice so nobody else inside can hear what's being said.

But then imagine that as you do this with someone only to find out that somehow somebody heard everything that you said, and then they proceed to shout that out loud for everyone to hear.

There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. The attitude and the behavior of the Pharisees was, I'm going to call it religious fakery. And Jesus is saying, don't be like them because your fakery will eventually be exposed.

In fact, in reality, God already sees and knows the things that we are hiding and the secrets that we are keeping.

[11 : 27] Listen to these words from Hebrews 4, verse 13. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

So in a manner of speaking, there is a recorder recording everything that we do and say. Even the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts, God is taking it all in.

And one day we will have to answer to him for all of it. He knows, he sees all that we try to hide and keep secret.

Everything we think, everything we do, even in private. and according to Jesus, it's just a matter of time before God brings all those things to the full light of day and goes public with them in a spectacular way.

In Jesus' words, they will be proclaimed from the rooftops. That's a pretty sobering thought, isn't it? And as we've said, it's first a warning to those who are engaged in religious fakery, but it's also a motivating truth for us who are Jesus' disciples.

[13 : 20] Jesus is helping us see that if we choose the way of religious fakery like the Pharisees, it's not going to work out for us in the end.

there's going to be a massive public exposing of all that we work so hard to hide to our great shame and embarrassment.

And if we are wise, we will listen to Jesus' warning and we can be spared all that. We can choose the way of sincerity and integrity and true faith.

Of course, the timing of this great public exposing is the final day of judgment. Jesus isn't saying here that most of the time people will get caught and their secret sins will become known.

No, it's bigger than that. It's far more certain than that. Jesus says there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed.

[14 : 36] Everything we have thought, said, or done in secret will come out. And here's where this is going.

Because this is true, Jesus is essentially in a way saying you need to stop caring so much about what other people see and think of you as in trying to impress them or be liked by them or be respected and praised by them.

And you need to start caring about where you stand with God. Listen to how Jesus says it in the next verses.

He says, I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear.

Fear him who after your body has been killed has authority to throw you into hell. yes, I tell you, fear him.

[15 : 53] Now there's a lot in these words. We're going to unpack it. Some of you are maybe shocked that I just read this in public, said the word hell out loud in public. Others of you are maybe shocked and wondering if God is cruel or if Jesus is insensitive to be talking about throwing people into hell.

But let's just sort of unpack this. Let's take it from the top here. The first question is why might some of Jesus' disciples fear being killed?

So he's talking about do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. Why might some of Jesus' disciples fear being killed? Well, Jesus, the one that they're following, he just lambasted the Pharisees and the religious lawyers.

The disciples of Jesus see how angry they are becoming. How furious they are. They know that given the right opportunity they would kill Jesus.

And so the temptation for the disciples of Jesus is to compromise, to submit to the Pharisees and their teachings.

[17 : 20] Otherwise, the way things seem to be going, they fear not only that Jesus will be killed, but that they'll be next for following him. And Jesus says, don't be afraid afraid of them.

The worst they can do is kill your body. But there is a far worse thing that can happen to a person, says Jesus.

I will show you whom you should fear. There is one who after your body has been killed has authority to throw you into hell.

he's the one you should fear. Jesus basically says, don't worry about what those hypocrites might do to you.

Worry about what God might do to you. If you should live for their approval. If you should live wickedly as they do.

[18 : 30] And by this point, I think it's pretty clear that Jesus is talking about judgment day. That's the time when all the hidden things, when all the secret sins will be revealed.

God will be our judge and Jesus says he has authority to throw you into hell. Jesus had no problems speaking the truth about hell.

In this moment, he's surrounded by a crowd of thousands and he's not afraid or ashamed to warn people of what truly awaits if they persist in ignoring God.

God is the judge and he has authority says Jesus to throw you into hell. hell. Let's talk about hell for a moment.

What is hell? Hell is a place of punishment. It's the ultimate place of punishment. And God doesn't throw people in there because he is cruel.

[19 : 46] Hell exists because God is just. It exists because God is good. he will not allow evil to go unchecked forever.

He will not allow people to just get away with the wrongs they have done or to persist in doing evil because he is good. People who have done wrong, which is all of us, will either have their sins atoned for by receiving the merciful gift of salvation that God offers through Jesus, or they will receive what their sins truly deserve, which is to be thrown into hell, that place of ultimate punishment after being judged on judgment day.

We as human beings sometimes criticize God for sending people to hell. hell. We think or even say that hell is too harsh.

But when we say things like that, basically we're setting ourselves up as judge over God. We're saying that we know better than he does the seriousness of our sin and what punishment fits the crime.

well that's ridiculous. That's us, the creature, criticizing the creator.

[21 : 26] That's us finding fault with him when the only fault is with us. no, God is just.

He ensures in his justice that the punishment fits the crime. If we do not receive his forgiveness and mercy which is the way out of that punishment through Jesus, then God ensures that we are judged fairly for what we thought, did, and said.

And God sees to it that we get no more than we deserve and no less. According to God, hell, a place of terrible punishment, is what our sins deserve.

What we often fail to understand is that any rejection, any rebellion, any disobedience against our glorious creator is unimaginably evil.

And so hell is the fitting punishment for our sins. The good news is that this story of Jesus goes on from here until he offers himself as a sacrifice on the cross to atone for our sins, to take away our guilt.

[23 : 07] And so God, because he is a loving and merciful God, has provided a way of escape from hell. And it's through receiving Jesus. It's through repenting of our sins and putting our faith in him.

But let's get back to Jesus' point here. All of what he's saying here is aimed at a particular point.

Why is he telling us about hell?

Because Jesus wants his followers, he wants us, to fear God. We really have only two choices.

We can fear man, or we can fear God. we can care so much about what others see in us and think of us, or we can care so much about what God sees in us and thinks of us.

We might be tempted to compromise, to avoid persecution, or to avoid becoming unpopular. But Jesus wants us to be stirred by this truth, that there is something far worse than being persecuted, far worse than being unpopular, and that's getting what we truly deserve from God for our sins.

[24 : 37] Do you fear God? Do you fear God? Do you fear God?

Some of you may feel convicted by the Spirit of God in this very moment, to the point that you're even now admitting to yourself, no, I haven't been fearing God. I haven't been taking Him seriously.

Others of you might be wondering, I think I fear God, I agree with this, I know that's the right thing to do, but how do I know if I truly fear God? And the Bible's answer to that is kind of simple.

Are you making a conscious, daily effort to walk in obedience to God's commandments? Obedience is the evidence that the fear of God is present in your heart.

It's kind of like fire. if you have a genuine fear of fire, then it changes how you behave around it.

You're careful near it.

[25 : 55] You won't just plunge your hand into the flame. Neither will you make a fire in your living room, because you fear it. You know what it can do when it gets out of control.

And that reality, it controls you, it influences you in a good way. way. It's the same with God. If we really fear Him, the reality of who He is controls us.

It influences us in a good way. We become careful to obey Him, because we believe the truth of His word. That doing otherwise would be dangerous, there would be consequences.

I'll just switch over to this. back to the question, are you making a conscious, sincere, daily effort to walk in obedience to God's commands?

Do you fear God? If your answer to that question is no, then hear these words of Jesus again.

[27 : 13] You need to change that. You should fear Him, says Jesus. He has the authority to throw you into hell.

will you continue to disregard Him? Or will you submit yourself to Him?

This teaching of Jesus is heavy, and it's hard. And so, it might surprise us what Jesus says next. Jesus turns on a dime, actually on a penny, and He begins reassuring His followers of how much they mean to God.

Look at the next couple verses. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.

Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows. I love these words.

[28 : 26] It's like Jesus is saying, don't come to the wrong conclusion here. You should fear God. He does have authority to cast you into hell, but that doesn't mean He doesn't care about you.

He cares about you a lot. And Jesus gives this analogy of sparrows. What's a sparrow worth? You can buy five of them for two cents. There's not a whole lot of certainty about why sparrows were even bought and sold in the first place.

Some are suggesting that it wasn't really sparrows, but another type of small bird that poor people would eat. They would buy it and sell it in the marketplace. But it's implied here by Jesus' statement that the birds were so small and worth so little that you could get five of them for two of the smallest coins in circulation.

And so if we do a little bit of math, each of them was worth less than half a penny. And yet Jesus says not one of those little birds is forgotten by God.

[29 : 46] God takes notice of every single one of them. Think about that the next time you look out the window and you see a little sparrow hopping around. But now what's Jesus' point here?

If God cares that much about each of the smallest, most insignificant little birds, how much more does he care about each one of us?

human beings specially made in his image. In fact, says Jesus, God cares so much for you that he pays attention to the number of hairs on your head.

Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. even we don't know or care about ourselves that much.

But God does. He knows even the littlest details about us. He cares about those things. When you take a hat off where you brush your hair and a hair comes out and falls to the ground, God notices the change.

[31 : 11] That's how precious and valued we are to him. And so after telling us to fear God, like we have never heard it before maybe from Jesus, Jesus does this crazy thing and he says the very opposite just a moment later.

fear. He says don't be afraid. He says fear not. You are worth more than many sparrows. Now we might see that as a contradiction.

Fear. Don't be afraid. But it's probably more of what I'm going to call a relational complexity. Some relationships are complex and ours with God is one of them.

We should fear him and yet at the same time we don't need to be afraid. It's right to fear him and yet because of his love and care for us, so long as we're walking closely with him in obedience, we don't need to be afraid.

A guy named John Piper gave a great analogy of this and I'm actually going to just take steal from him the core element of it and tell it differently, but a German shepherd is a fearsome creature, especially if we do things to provoke that German shepherd.

[32 : 41] Maybe we've all heard or seen stories of police dogs chasing down the bad guys, just sort of running after them, jumping on them, sinking their teeth into them and taking them down to the ground.

If you do what is right, then you have nothing to fear from the police dog. That German shepherd might even jump into the lake to save you if you're out there in trouble.

But hit the officer in the face and that dog will be all over you, growling, barking, biting, until you're curled up like a little ball on the ground.

Our relationship with God is kind of like that. If we ignore him, if we defy him, if we provoke him, doing what we know is wrong, then watch out.

He is the God who will bring justice and has authority to throw us into hell. But if we listen to him, if we draw near to him, if we humble ourselves before him and submit to him, then we have nothing to fear.

[34 : 00] He is the God who loves us deeply and notices even when a hair of our head falls to the ground. And so I want to leave you with this question today.

Where are you at in your relationship with God? Whatever your answer is to that, let me encourage you.

Draw near to him. Come close to him. Listen to him. Humble yourself before him. If you've got sins, if you've got even secret sins, like we talked about earlier, we have all sinned.

confess those things to him. He is merciful. He is eager to forgive. The day of judgment is coming. We can't get away with faking it. And God loves us dearly. So why shouldn't we give ourselves completely to him?

[35 : 11] Let's pray. God God in heaven, thank you for your word. I pray that you would open our hearts wide to it.

Stir in us that right and good fear of you. Let it influence us. May our lives change because of it. But I pray also, Lord, that you would take our fears away.

As we remember your grace and your kindness that you have shown through Jesus to us. Please stir in us a right response to your words.

We ask in your name and for your honor. Amen.