

Fear God Not Man

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Preacher: Ricky Njoto

[0 : 00] And the other day, Hanna and I and Kai, our son, were walking the dog near Jackson Court Shopping Center. Hanna and I were eating ice cream at the same time, and Kai and the dog were just sitting next to us.

As Kai saw that we were eating ice cream, he pointed at the ice cream and shouted, Ah! He wanted it!

And we said, No, Kai, this is full of sugar. This is not good for you. We said that while eating the ice cream. And we realized, why do we have such a low standard for ourselves and such a high standard for the child?

So, what we said and what we did were two completely different things. And that's basically what hypocrisy means, right?

An unsynchronized life. What we say might be different to what we do, and what we do might be different to what we believe or what we think. Something in our life just doesn't match.

[1 : 16] And that's what our passage today talks about. Though, not about hypocrisy in eating ice cream, but rather hypocrisy in being disciples of Christ.

So, in verse 1. Oh. Okay. Let's use the Bible again.

So, in verse 1. So, in verse 1. Meanwhile, when the crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying, Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

So, our passage starts with the word, meanwhile, which indicates that it continues from last week's passage. And remember, last week we were talking about the hypocrisy of the religious leaders.

So, now Jesus warns his disciples, and us too, if we call ourselves Jesus' disciples. He warns them not to be influenced by the same hypocrisy.

[2 : 30] And this is a good time to warn his disciples, because, as the verse says, A crowd of many thousands had gathered. They were popular. And temptation to be hypocrites arises as popularity or public image becomes a thing to pursue or a thing to maintain.

We have seen last week how the Pharisees become hypocrites, because they love important seats and respectable greetings. They love to be popular, so they become hypocrites to maintain that public image.

Now, this happens all the time, right? Especially now, as the young people are playing with social media. For example, in February 2021, in the middle of the pandemic, this guy, who's a social media influencer, and that means they get paid to be on social media and to influence people.

This guy was paid to go to the Super Bowl, the American Football Grand Finals, and to promote a lemonade drink, which is that thing in his hand.

Now, at the same time, because he has 40 million followers on social media, he was also posting pictures of himself telling everyone to stay inside.

[4 : 04] Hypocrisy, right? You see, popularity pulls people towards hypocrisy, because there's a certain public image that they have to maintain.

And the disciples might be feeling that pull as well as they are becoming popular. As thousands of people follow them, they might be tempted to be hypocrites.

Notice there that Jesus uses passive tense.

It's what we call the divine passive.

The implication is that it's God who will disclose the truth about a person's heart. What Jesus is saying here is that it's useless to be hypocrites, to maintain some public image, because God knows everything.

[5 : 22] God's knowledge penetrates every location and every thought. Even what is whispered in the innermost part of the house, the most private location is known by God.

And on the last day, when God judges us in front of His throne, He will disclose every hidden motivation.

So, if popularity pulls people towards hypocrisy, because they need to maintain a public physical image, then the solution, which is what Jesus gives here, is to tear apart that physical material reality, to see that behind the curtain of the physical lies the spiritual reality.

And in that spiritual reality is God who knows everything. Friends, to see this spiritual reality is the only thing that helps us to look past material popularity and therefore saves us from hypocrisy.

Now, if popularity might pull the disciples to hypocrisy, threat to their lives might push them to hypocrisy.

[6 : 50] So, verse 4, I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that can do no more. Now, the background of this warning comes from last week's passage.

Remember, in chapter 11, verse 49, Jesus says, God in His wisdom said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill, and others they will persecute.

So, on the one hand, there's the temptation to be hypocrites, because they might be enchanted by popularity. On the other hand, there's the temptation to be hypocrites, because if they don't do or say the right thing in front of the religious leaders, in this case, saying that Jesus is Christ is the wrong thing, then they might be killed and persecuted by the religious leaders.

So, there's that temptation to hide what they believe, and that's hypocrisy, too. Hypocrisy can manifest in a variety of ways.

Sometimes it manifests in saying one thing and doing another. That's what the Pharisees do.

Sometimes it manifests in holding others to higher standards than we hold ourselves.

[8 : 14] That's what I do to Kai. Sometimes it manifests in hiding our true thoughts and feelings, so that we might become acceptable to others.

And that's what the disciples will face as they are threatened with death. Because later on, in the book of Acts, which is the second episode to the Gospel of Luke, this threat will be made real in the lives of the disciples.

They will be asked not to say that Jesus is Christ. And when they do, some of them, like Peter and John, will be captured and flogged.

Some others, like Stephanas, are killed. So there's temptation to be hypocrites and to not say what they believe.

Throughout history, the disciples of Christ, in various places, have been facing the same threat. And currently, there are Christians in Syria, in China, in various parts of Africa, or other places, that are facing the same threat.

[9 : 35] When I was about 10 years old, I was living in Surabaya, in Indonesia. And there was a new kid in our neighborhood who was just a bit older than me.

Perhaps he was 14 or 15 years old. But he was different. He looked different. He spoke a different language. But later on, we found out that he had come from the Malukan Islands in the east of Indonesia.

And that he had lost his entire family. He told the story of how they were his entire family was caught by the Islamic authorities because they were a Christian family.

And one by one, they were asked, whose follower are you? And one by one, they said, I'm a follower of Christ. And each one of them was killed in front of this boy.

Except for him, who was miraculously saved and was alive to tell the story. Can you imagine yourself in that situation?

[10 : 50] temptation. The temptation to hide our true belief and to be a hypocrite is immense. So, what's the solution?

What would you need if you were in that situation? Again, the solution that Jesus gives is to look past the physical and to focus on the spiritual in verse 5.

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. So, the solution to fear of physical death is fear of spiritual death, which is permanent.

So, Jesus substitutes one fear with another and then on top of that fear he adds comfort in verse 6 and 7.

[11:53] 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. Again, the solution to hypocrisy is to look beyond what we see physically and to look at God.

And, on the one hand, God is the only one whom we should fear because he has the power and authority to kill even our souls. But, on the other hand, God cares about us.

Sparrows, during that time, were cheap food for poor people. And yet, God cares about each one of them. How many sparrows do you think were killed and eaten during that time?

Yet, it says that not one of them is forgotten by God. He cares about the death of each sparrow.

[13:05] How much more does he care about us, do you think? His children, the citizens of his kingdom, whose hairs he counts.

Do you know how many hairs you have on your head? I don't. God does. That's how much he cares about us.

That's what our first passage in Isaiah says. I, even I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mere morsels? Human beings who are but grass that you forget the Lord your maker who stretches out the heavens and who lays the foundations of the earth.

God is the sovereign God in whose hands are the heavens and the earth. Even if people want to kill us, if God has further plans for us, we are invincible.

God is the one we should fear, but he's also the one who comforts us. Unless we adopt and truly deeply believe in this spiritual reality and use that as our lens through which we see the world, unless we do that, we will always be afraid of those who kill the body and be tempted to conform and be hypocrites.

[14:39] sinners. But notice that Jesus doesn't portray God as a Savior who always saves his people. Though sparrows are not forgotten by God, they die too and they get eaten.

But the point is that they are known by God and their death falls within his sovereignty and their death happens not in a way that disrupts God's plan.

So the point is not that God will save us every single time. Those Christians in Maluku in my story died even though they trusted in God. The apostles died from persecution.

The point is that God can count what we cannot and he chooses to know about and count the death of every disciple of Christ.

Sure, it doesn't make persecution any less hard to face. It doesn't even enable us to understand suffering better. But it does give us a greater viewpoint that helps us to trust in God because he can count what we cannot.

[16:01] He knows what we don't. And we know that he cares. The death of each saint is not in vain because every death is worth counting and God will use persecution for his good purposes.

And we know that Jesus too was persecuted and was killed. So he cares and he feels what we are feeling. And Jesus warns the disciples further in verse 8 and 9.

I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God.

The term angels of God there brings to mind an image of the courtroom of God where God sits on the throne in judgment and the angels surround him.

Now this is similar to the image that we get from verse 2 and 3 where God uncovers the truth of someone's heart in the last judgment.

[17:24] So the disciples will be judged in human courts and if they deny Jesus publicly in those courts because they want to be popular or because they fear death, then Jesus will also deny them later in the last judgment in the divine court.

And I think that's a scary thought. Anson, a theologian who lived who lived in the 11th century, he said this when he consoled dying people.

He said, while life still remains in you, in Jesus' death alone place your whole trust. If you die now and the Lord your God judges you, say, Lord, between your judgment and me, I present the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, no otherwise can I contend with you.

And if God says you're a sinner, say, Lord, I interpose the death of Jesus between my sins and you. And if God says you deserve condemnation, say, Lord, I offer the merits and holiness of Jesus for those which I should have but don't.

so on the last day, when everyone is judged in front of the throne of God, and all our thoughts and words and deeds are uncovered, and all our sins and mistakes are laid bare, like what it says in verse 2 and 3, we who have Jesus and we who confess him and who don't deny him in this life, will be declared not guilty because Jesus will say, Father, they're with me, I've paid for all of that.

[19 : 25] But can you imagine if Jesus at that time denies us because we have denied him in this life? Can you imagine if Jesus says like in Matthew 7, I never knew you, away from me, you evil doers.

What hope do we have if that happens? It's a scary thought. But, like what he's been doing in the earlier verses, in the midst of warning, Jesus also gives us some comfort in verse 10.

And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. forgiven. But anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

What's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Well, one of the things that the Holy Spirit does is convicting people of the need for repentance and accepting Jesus.

So, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit here talks about persistent resistance and hardening of hearts to the Holy Spirit working and therefore not repenting.

[20 : 46] When that happens, there's no forgiveness. Of course, without repentance, without asking for forgiveness, we don't get forgiveness. But when we do repent and return to Christ, we do get forgiveness.

So, verse 10, even though it's a warning, it also gives us comfort. Even those who speak bad things about Jesus and even those who fail to acknowledge Jesus publicly still have hope if they follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit and repent.

Their failure to acknowledge Jesus publicly in the past does not have to define the future if they repent now in the present.

if they repent, they will be acknowledged by Jesus on the last day. An example of this is the apostle Peter, who denies Jesus three times publicly when Jesus is about to be crucified because he's afraid of death.

But because he repents, Jesus accepts him back. And so in the last two verses, Jesus gives us some more encouragement in verse 11 and 12.

[22 : 14] When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.

So again, here Jesus looks forward to the book of Acts, where there comes a time, at that time it says, when the disciples will be persecuted.

In the Gospel of Luke, it's mainly Jesus who's persecuted, but later on, at that time, in the book of Acts, the disciples will inherit Jesus' conflicts against the world.

We too now live at that time. So here's the encouragement from Jesus. Even though we inherit Jesus' conflicts against the world, we are not alone.

The Holy Spirit is right next to us, teaching us. As we face questions about our faith, and even threats to our faith, the Holy Spirit enables us to defend ourselves.

[23 : 33] What does that look like? Well, this defense doesn't only come on the spot when we are asked about our faith, and we spontaneously know what to say that exact moment.

I mean, I've had those moments where I suddenly know what to say to questions that are asked to me, and I'm like, where did that come from? Well, the Holy Spirit.

But it's not only that. Like we've seen, the phrase at that time means a period of time after Jesus left. So it doesn't only refer to the exact minute or the exact hour where we are judged because of our faith.

And so we get answers not only on the spot spontaneously, but also through teaching. That's what it says there. The Holy Spirit will teach you.

It doesn't say inspire you, although that's also included. But the teaching of the Spirit can also come through experience like what the apostles have to go through in the book of Acts.

[24 : 45] And it can also come through the teaching of the church because the testimony and the teaching of the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And that's an encouragement that as we learn about the truth of the gospel at church, week in, week out, day in, day out, as we attend Bible study with our friends, as we keep listening to the prompting of the Spirit, we are constantly being taught by the Holy Spirit. and we are being prepared so that when threats or temptations do arise for us to be hypocrites and abandon our discipleship to Christ, we will know what to say.

If you're scared of what you might face if you talk about your faith openly, this is some comfort. friends, as disciples of Jesus, we face threats and temptations to be hypocrites and to deny Christ. Even though in Australia we might not be killed for Christ, but we face threats nonetheless. Threats of being excluded from friendships, threats of losing our job, threats of breaking relationships, and even temptations, temptations to be accepted by the society if we deny Christ.

[26 : 25] as Jesus says in this passage, what helps us in these circumstances is a spiritual perspective. Tear apart this physical reality and to see, to look at God as the one who is sovereign, all-knowing, and he cares about us.

We need to truly adopt that spiritual perspective. At Ridley College is this wall, we call it the Ridley Wall.

Now Nicholas Ridley was an Anglican bishop who was put on a stake to be burned and when he was asked to recant the gospel, he said this, so long as breath is in my body, I will never deny my Lord Christ.

And then he was burned. perhaps when we truly have that spiritual perspective that God is sovereign and that he cares for us, even when we are threatened because of our discipleship to Christ, we'll be able to say along with Ridley, so long as breath is in my body, I will never deny my Lord Christ.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for reminding us of the great truth of your sovereign care.

[28 : 03] Help us through the Spirit's work in us to always see the spiritual truth behind what we see physically so that when the time comes where we are asked to answer for our faith, we may not deny Christ with our lips, and so we are assured that you will welcome us to your throne on the last day.

In Jesus, the sustainer of our faith, we pray. Amen.