

Luke 12:4-7

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[0 : 00] Well, hello everyone. It's wonderful to be with you this morning. If you don't know me, my name is Aaron Roberts. I'm one of the ministers on staff. We are week two into our deep dive into a single chapter of Luke 12. And today we're looking at just these four verses, verses four to seven. These are the words of Jesus, and they are awesome words. We're just going to jump straight into it with the first couple of verses, which basically say, do not fear those who can kill the body, but fear the one who, after he has been killed, has the authority to cast you into hell. You could summarize it like this, these first couple of verses.

You could summarize it like this. Learn the fear that makes you fearless. Learn the fear that makes you fearless. You see, there's a type of fear that is a necessary part, a necessary ingredient of the Christian life. But there's another fear. And this other fear actually sabotages your life. It sabotages your witness. These verses, they compare these two fears. So the first fear is a good fear. It's the fear of God. And it should be a fundamental part of the way we relate to God. And we'll define that shortly. But let's move on to this other fear, the second fear, the one that cripples us. It's the fear of what people might do to us because we believe in Jesus. Here Jesus says, if you follow me, people are going to want to kill you. Don't be afraid of them. Now today in the West, it's extremely unlikely we're going to be martyred for our faith. But we might be afraid of what people think of us or say about us. We might be afraid of the scorn or the ridicule. We might be afraid of being on the wrong side of history.

And of course, we want people to think well of us. We want to be liked. We really, really want to be liked. So what do we fear? We don't fear so much death as Christians in the West.

We fear disapproval. We fear, to borrow a currently much overused phrase, we fear being cancelled because of our faith. You step out of line when it comes to sort of, you know, predominant cultural narratives and socially, sometimes vocationally, it could be all over for you. And here's the Christians. Christians are not the only people in danger because the standards of purity now are so high. Anyone that says anything slightly off-piste, you're in trouble. Things you said years ago can come back to haunt you. For those of you who don't read Teen Vogue, Teen Vogue magazine, it's not the stupid, dumber version of the adult Vogue magazine. I'm told it's a fairly sophisticated publication. Globally, it's very popular. It's not just makeup tutorials, but they're likely to sort of tackle things like voter fraud. Well, anyway, the chief editor very recently was just forced to leave her job because of an offensive tweet she wrote. Here's the thing, a tweet she wrote when she was 17. The editor, a woman of colour, was forced to leave her dream job because of a tweet she wrote when she was a child. A tweet that she, you know, apologised for years ago. Here is what a New Zealand journalist said about this story. And this journalist is a young female liberal journalist.

On commenting on this story, she said, and she's talking about her own generation, she says, her generation are opting to say nothing or totally condemn her. That's the chief editor of Teen Vogue.

[4 : 19] Either because we've given up on the concept of redemption or because attempting to argue for it risks us looking like we agree with her comments, which we don't. Older people have held these vital conversations about change and forgiveness and how they are necessary for a functioning society.

But our silence has been terrifying. So this journalist goes on, she says, it confirmed the creeping fear I've had for the past few years about how woke culture and the wider youth culture it heavily influences has an empathy gap. We seem to have a sinkhole where our nuanced public discussions should be. The type that occurs when you get sucked into chasing ideological purity, not practising the messy hard labour of everyday compassion and redemption. All that to say, in our current cultural climate, there's a lot of people fearful of saying or thinking the wrong thing or being perceived to be out of step with culture because it could be all over for you.

We all desperately want the approval of those around us. So sometimes, as Christians, we opt for silence. Now, is this how we want to live? With our witness muted due to fear, afraid to speak up on topics of public interest, afraid to speak up on moral issues. Is this how we want to navigate our lives? Of course not.

So how do we become vibrant, fearless ambassadors for Christ, unafraid of what others might think of us, unafraid of what others might do to us? What's the solution? Well, Christ gives it to us here. We must replace our fear of people, our fear of people disapproving of us. We must replace our fear of people with a fear of God. Now, let's get back to our passage. So as we said at the start, back in the New Testament times, you say the wrong thing, you align with the wrong people, you could be killed. So that was the threat the disciples of Christ lived under. But Jesus says, don't fear. Why? Because all they can do is kill you, which does, you know, I mean, that's obviously fairly bad. But look at Christ's argument. He's building a case that he's making an argument.

[7 : 06] Let me read the passage again. Do not fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing more they can do to you. They have nothing more they can do to you after that. Now, naturally, we're going to fear someone who can kill us. But Jesus is after they kill you, they can't do anything else to you.

The power they had over you doesn't extend past your death, does it? They can't do anything else to you after you have died. Now, remember, Jesus is building an argument here, okay? Look at verse 5.

But I will warn you whom to fear. Fear him who, after he is killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. So Christ says, fear God, whose power extends beyond the grave. Fear the one who holds your eternity in his hands. Now, for some of you, alarm bells are going off. We're talking about fearing God and we're talking about hell, but let's just, let's dig into it. What does it mean to fear God? Well, look, simply put, it just means we take God seriously. Fear means taking God seriously. Now, I spent way more time in the ocean in New Zealand than I have in Canada. New Zealand is a very water-focused country. We love the ocean, but we fear it. We respect it greatly. So when you swim or surf or sail in the Pacific or the Tasman, you can't treat it like a paddling pool. You know, the ocean has tremendous power over you. So you love it, but you rightfully, you fear it. You take it seriously. This is what the passage means by fearing God. Fear doesn't mean that we try and get away from God as far as possible.

It doesn't mean we hide quivering in a corner from God. It's understanding that God's power extends past our death into eternity. It's understanding that God has power over your soul.

[9 : 21] So it makes sense that we fear God more than we fear people. It makes sense that we desire God's approval more than the approval of people. This is the argument Christ makes.

We need to learn the fear that makes us fearless. Learn the fear of God so you will not be silent about him with others because of what you think they might do to you. Because the approval of God is infinitely more important than the approval of people. Which takes us to the second couple of verses and more quickly here. And these verses say, we already have the approval of God. Look at verses six and seven. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God?

Why, even the hairs on your head are numbered. Fear not. You are of more value than the sparrows. I preached this at the 8am outside communion service this morning. And when I said, you are of more value than the sparrows, there was all these birds around me that started freaking out. It was the funniest thing. All right. So what does this all mean though? Okay. So in New Testament times, sparrows were actually sold for food. They were the cheapest food you could buy in the market. They were the street food for the poor. Yet not one of them is forgotten before God, Christ says. Do you see what that's saying?

Whenever you see a sparrow, you see something that is known by God individually. God takes an interest in the tiniest details of his creation.

Even the hairs on your head, Christ says, are numbered by God. All the things that you are unconscious of, God knows about. God knows more about you than you know about yourself.

[11 : 24] And it's not just that he knows about us. He sees you and he values you. Fear not. You are of more value than many sparrows. He values you so much. He sent his son to die for you. So we have more than God's approval because of Christ. We have his delight in us.

So this is where your self-worth should be. In that God loves you and delights in you. Your worth is not in what others think of you.

Life playing to the gallery, trying to say all the right things to all the right people. How exhausting. No, you can put that aside and you can say, I matter because I matter to God. It's a very freeing thing. Now, let me finish up. Now, you live your life before God and before people. You have the approval of God because of Jesus. Don't exchange that for the mere approval of people.

[12 : 44] That will enslave you. You are worth so much more. You are called to so much more. So let your right fear of God deliver you from lesser fears.

Fears that stop you from being a vibrant ambassador for Christ. Amen. And now I'm