

Luke 11:53 - 12:3 (PM)

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[0 : 0 0] All right, well, happy Easter, everyone. We've entered a new season and a new series in the book of Luke, and this means a big shift in style. And so we're going from this poetic, philosophical book of Job to Luke's direct, action-packed gospel.

And so within Luke, we'll be looking at just one chapter, chapter 12, one chapter over 10 weeks. I think our previous pace was about 10 chapters every one week, so this is a lot slower. And we'll have lots and lots of time to marinate in all the goodness that we find here. Now, since we're going to drop right into the middle of Luke today, we're going to start with a bit of an orientation, talk about how this chapter fits into the bigger picture of Luke and the three main groups of people that Jesus is going to address in this chapter.

And then we'll zero in a little bit further, talking about Jesus' warning to the disciples that they need to beware of this love unto the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy, and instead put their hope in Christ. So let's get oriented. It would be great for you to pull out a Bible, because we'll be flipping around a little bit in the book of Luke. So if you have a Bible, get a Bible, open up to about chapter 11.

[1 : 1 1] And we'll start with Luke 19, actually. In Luke 19, 10, it says, Jesus came to seek and save the lost. And this mission is clear in everything that Jesus does and says.

It's clear in his teaching and in his healing. It's most clear in his death, where he wins forgiveness for sinners. Luke writes so we can know this with full assurance, that by Jesus' death, he has sought and saved the lost, which is us.

Jesus came to do lots of important things, but the cross is at the very center of it. And so in chapter 9, he tells his disciples that he has set his face to Jerusalem, where he goes to suffer and die for our sake.

Everything that happens after chapter 9 in the book of Luke is a stop on the way to Jerusalem, and the cross that is waiting there for Jesus. Jerusalem is the religious center of Israel.

And so it's not surprising that as Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem, towards this mission that he has, that he comes into intense conflict with the religious program that is already underway there.

[2 : 1 7] Jerusalem is led by religious groups like the Pharisees and the scribes, and they definitely do not think that they need to be sought out or saved. And so Jesus' ministry, his challenge to them, is like a brick through their stained glass window.

And in chapter 11, just ahead of our passage, we see this happen. He just publicly trashes them. And if you thought social media knew how to trash religious people, wait until you see what Jesus does in chapter 11.

He says, your leadership, your religious leadership of God's people, well, you look clean on the outside by keeping the rules, but your inside is filthy with greed and wickedness.

It's pretty strong. He says, you're punctilious in the smallest details. You make sure you give a tenth of cumin seeds, and there's other little things. But in all the big things, like actually loving and serving your neighbor, having mercy for people, you don't do it at all.

You completely neglect it. You want honor, but you're like a tomb. You look nice and fancy on the outside, but inside you're full of dead bones. So he's saying to the Pharisees, you not only have failed to help people to know God, you've actively blocked them from knowing God.

[3 : 3 0] These leaders are in love with their religious system. They love being gurus, their guru status, but their hearts are far from God. And Jesus says, you are frauds.

And this is where we pick up in our reading today. And we see the three groups of people that Jesus is going to address in chapter 12. So he's going to speak to the Pharisees, this group that he just addressed.

He's going to speak to the crowds and the disciples. All these threads are going to go through chapter 12. So if you look there in verse 53, it says, as he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard, to provoke him to speak about many things, lying and wait for him, to catch him in something that he might say.

So Jesus leaves this Pharisees house where they had this big throw down. He's thrown the gauntlet down to the Pharisees and they're like, you started it and we are going to finish it.

And these verses describe their ongoing hatred for Jesus. It's only going to amplify and intensify as he makes his way to Jerusalem. Their strategy we see in these verses is to destroy him.

[4 : 39] It's to entrap him. And their tactic is to interrogate him about politically sensitive things until he made a mistake and they could catch him. Now this hatred is going to extend beyond Jesus and it will extend to his disciples as well.

So much of the teaching in chapter 12 is meant to prepare the disciples for what they're going to do when the religious establishment hates them and persecutes them. Okay, so we have this group of angry, plotting religious folks.

That's the first group. Then we have the second group that is introduced and that is the crowds. And so it says, in the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another.

So meanwhile, so as Jesus had this epic throwdown with the Pharisees and the scribes, this stampede of people is gathering around outside the house to see and hear Jesus.

They are clearly not social distancing. Dr. Bonnie Henry would be quite upset with them. And we might think, this is fantastic. There's all these people here to see Jesus, but Jesus is not at all impressed.

[5 : 43] So back in chapter 11, when the crowds first started forming, Jesus said, you're just here looking for a sign. You're looking for a show. But all you're going to get is the sign of Jonah, my death and my resurrection.

So Jesus is saying again, I have come to seek and save the lost. I haven't come to entertain you. It's not enough actually that these crowds show up to see Jesus. They need to choose the actual Jesus and his mission.

So this is our second group and we'll see more of them later on, the fickle crowds. Oh, the third group is the disciples. Now think about the situation here.

There's, you know, Jesus has just denounced the leadership of the nation of Israel or the people of Israel. He stepped out of the house into this stampede, this chaos. And the first thing that he does is he just kind of stops and he pulls his disciples in and he's like, listen, I need to tell you something. And this is what he tells them. He says, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known.

[6 : 52] 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. Beware. So this is a serious warning. This word and the urgency of how Jesus gathers them immediately reveals this is critical instruction for his disciples.

And what are they to watch out for? The leaven of the Pharisees. So you may have become an amateur baker during the pandemic. I know many people have.

And so you'd be familiar with this style of leaven that he's talking about. It's the same thing as sourdough starter. So you take a little lump of old dough and it's alive. It's full of yeast and bacteria and all this stuff.

And you add it to this new lump of dough that you're putting together. And what the leaven will do is just colonize that entire lump of dough. And the idea here is that leaven is catching.

It's invisible. It's small. But once it gets a hold of something it's going to inevitably make its way through the rest. Watch out for the Pharisees' leaven. It is infectious.

[7 : 55] It is hypocrisy. Now, Jesus doesn't say don't be hypocrites. It'd be great if he had just said hey, disciples, don't be hypocrites.

Because that is a message that has some legs for us. There's nothing better than a story about hypocrites. Right? I mean, recently there have been some MPs and senators that have been flying to Hawaii and Mexico and their constituents are at home under lockdown and the hypocrisy.

We just love it. It fits right in with the prevailing message of our time that the most important thing that you can do as a human is be authentic to yourself. But the primary issue here between Jesus,

his disciples, and the Pharisees is not authenticity.

It's that the Pharisees are enemies of God. Their hypocrisy is saying that their actions are driven by obedience and love for God when they are not.

Their hypocrisy is proofing like a loaf. It's swelling up and giving evidence to the leaven that is within it. And the leaven within them, within their hearts, is that they have rejected God. They have covered their rejection and hatred of God with a veil of religiosity and self-righteousness.

[9 : 10] It's important to know exactly what this is because it's deadly. We are also hypocrites ourselves so we should kind of get to the root of what's happening here.

And I want you to know I'm not endorsing hypocrisy here. I mean, as we grow up in Christ we should strive to grow in integrity. And we do this in part by creating conditions that are inhospitable to hypocrisy.

So we focus on the word of God. It calls us back into alignment with the truth. We live in Christian community. It's a way of calling ourselves back to account. We practice confession.

It calls us to humility. Of course, we should prioritize all these things that help us to be honest, to be people of truth. But keep in mind the real danger here is not hypocrisy itself, but its source, the thing that stands behind hypocrisy, which is all the stuff that Jesus addressed in chapter 11.

The reason the leaven of the Pharisees is so dangerous and so deadly is it cuts them off from the only one that could help them, the Son of Man who came to seek and save the lost. So all of the things that they do, the Pharisees claim that they're the ones that are speaking for God, and yet they try to silence Jesus.

[10 : 24] They claim to do justice and love mercy, and yet they try to use God's law to stop Jesus from doing acts of mercy. They say their rules like hand washing are going to help people to love God better, but then they try to use those rules to abuse Jesus.

Hypocrisy is not going to cause the spiritual death of the Pharisees because they are already spiritually dead. There's no amount of outward spiritual activity that can resuscitate a heart that is dead to God.

Only Jesus can do that, but their leaven is to hate and reject him while pretending like they love him. This is what these warnings are about.

The covered will be revealed. The hidden will be known. Things whispered in the dark will be shouted in the light. There's a sense of natural law to this. Yes, frauds tend to be found out, but it's much, much more than that.

It's a promise. The God who sees all, the God who knows all, will one day judge all. He's not fooled by our spin or our pretense. He looks right to the heart to see if we are joined to Christ or not.

[11 : 35] Christ is the one that was covered in humility, but will be revealed in glory. His lordship was hidden. It will shine brilliantly. And as we'll see next week, it's not what people think of us that ultimately matters or what we think of ourselves, but what God thinks of us.

So, how do we beware, how do we watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees? Well, it's not just by trying harder. It's not just by, ah, this week I'm just going to be an authentic Christian.

That's not how we do it. It's about clinging to Christ. In chapter 13, Jesus says that there is another kind of leaven that is at work in the world. He says this, to what shall I compare the kingdom of God?

It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until all was leavened. The real question isn't if you are a hypocrite or not.

You are. The real question is whose leaven is at work in your heart? Is it the leaven of spiritual death by self-righteousness or the life of Jesus Christ who came to seek and save the lost?

[12 : 45] Place your trust in Jesus. His life will grow in your heart until all is leavened. Amen.