

Luke 12:1-12 - Bridge Out Ahead!

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us. If you'll turn with me this morning to Luke chapter 12, Luke 12.

We've heard Jesus address the Pharisees and the lawyers in the last couple of weeks. Pretty strong words for them that also have convicted us in many places.

But as we turn the page to chapter 12 of Luke's gospel, Jesus speaks in the midst of very large crowds directly to his disciples.

To those apparently following him. And in just the same few verses, Jesus will issue some of the most serious warnings that he ever gives to his disciples.

Right alongside some of the most comforting words he ever speaks. This is God's holy word, which speaks to his followers truthfully, clearly, and unequivocally still today.

[1 : 09] Luke 12 at verse 1. 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, 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. 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.

I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear. Fear him who after he has killed has authority to cast into hell.

Yes, I tell you, fear him. 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.

Fear not. You are of more value than many sparrows. And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God.

[2 : 20] But the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. But the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself for what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

Pray with me. Father, this is your word. And your word is living and active. It's sharper than a double-edged sword.

It pierces to divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It cuts to our hearts. So, Father, we ask that it would do that by your Spirit this morning.

Even if it hurts, even if it challenges us, Father, might it show us our hearts and might it show us our Savior.

[3 : 26] Search us, O God. Know our hearts. Try us. Know our anxious thoughts. See if there's any wicked way in us so that you may point us back to the way everlasting.

We need Him. We ask it in His name. Amen. If you are heading somewhere and you see one of these signs, it's not good.

You know to be careful. There's danger ahead, right? Any number of things might happen. If you continue on the path that you're currently on, you might merely slip and fall.

That wouldn't be too bad. You might run into a very unfriendly dog. Perhaps you've done that before. It's not good. Could be even worse. The bridge could be out.

And there's no way to go forward. You can't stay on the same path. You could be facing even, one of the signs I hadn't personally seen before, danger of death.

[4 : 30] Yes, I'm not sure how, but stay away from that area. Don't keep going down that path, right? Jesus this morning is speaking to those of us who are on or considering the path of following Him.

And He's saying, danger, warning, look out. And it's not just that you might get hurt, but Jesus is warning us of eternal dangers.

He's raising the stakes beyond even these signs. And He's challenging us to consider seriously some eternal realities that are not merely matters of life and death, but are matters of eternal life and death.

And let me remind you, these warnings are not for someone else. They're given to people like you and me. They're not for someone else.

The audience of these warnings as Jesus speaks here to His disciples would be found in church on a morning like this. Would be hanging out, looking around, inquiring about Jesus.

[5 : 41] Jesus, we dare not treat these clear warnings lightly. They are tailor-made for us. People just like us. So first, Jesus says, warning.

Religious pretense will be exposed. Look at verse 1. 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. Therefore, whatever you've said in the dark shall be heard in the light. And what you've whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy. That thing that the world tells Christians that we're guilty of all the time, right?

Perhaps so much so that you've kind of brushed it off. You don't really take that accusation seriously anymore. I'm not a hypocrite, right? But this time, it's from Jesus.

[6 : 51] Jesus says, beware of hypocrisy. He's been talking to the religious leaders about this danger of having your outward religiosity not match your inward reality.

Doing lots of good religious things, but not having a genuine reality in your heart. You remember last week we saw in chapter 11 several examples of this as he talked to the Pharisees.

Verse 39 of chapter 11, I think. Is that on the next slide? Verse 39. There it is. Now, you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you're full of greed and wickedness.

You fools, did not he who made the outside make the inside also? You see what Jesus has been challenging the leaders on, right? He does this repeatedly. The outside looks nice perhaps, but you're ignoring the inside.

Inside. And now, Jesus says, that two-faced, double-life struggle that they have can seep into all the people around them.

[8 : 03] It's a danger for anyone following Jesus. That leaven, that yeast works its way through the whole loaf of bread. It starts with the leaders and spreads into all of the followers.

Watch out, Jesus says. Be on your guard against hypocrisy. Why? Because one day everything will be known for what it truly is.

You're not going to get away with it. You may fool your friends. You may fool your business partners. You may fool your spouse or your kids.

But one day our ultimate commitments, what we truly value and truly live for, will be exposed for all to see.

So hypocrisy is very short-sighted. It won't get you where you want to go ultimately. Be warned.

Danger. Danger. How would you feel if everything you ever did or said was uncovered?

[9 : 08] Exposed? That makes you feel a little uncomfortable as it does me? Then you can see at least the seeds of hypocrisy sown in our hearts, right?

Maybe we don't think of ourselves as hypocrites. I mean, we're not the Pharisees, right? What should we watch out for as signs that the bridge is out ahead, so to speak, in our lives?

That we're not truly following Jesus? Here are some examples. Huntsville hypocrisy to consider in your own heart. Hypocrisy looks like saying God is sovereign and in control, but following your own feelings of what is best for your life, or trusting only your own plans for your life.

Hypocrisy looks like being kind and patient in church and at small group, but being insufferable and hateful and quick-tempered at home.

Hypocrisy looks like never missing time with God when others are watching, like right now. I'm here. But never making time for God in private.

[10:30] This leaven of hypocrisy, I don't know where it might show up in your life, but be honest with yourself. When that leaven starts to work its way in your heart, it's insidious, it's dangerous, it's devastating in our hearts.

My girls like to play pretend, to make up stories where they get to play a variety of different roles. In particular, they like to play mommy and have someone else be the baby.

And one time not too long ago, I was offering to play with one of my girls, and she wanted to make up a story. She wanted me to be the baby, and she would pretend to be the mommy, the one who is in charge.

And this was delightful for a couple of minutes, until what began to happen is she started to kind of believe this story, that she was really in charge.

And so what that meant was that I could only do what she told me to do. I couldn't quit playing the game and go do something else when I wanted to, because I was the baby and she was the mommy and she was in charge. Sit back down, Daddy.

[11:35] You see how quickly that happens for us? Sometimes if we pretend long enough, we begin to believe there's reality where there's not.

Sometimes the yeast does in our heart what it does to a lump of dough. What happens to the bread if you've ever baked it? It begins to expand and to blow up so that it looks bigger, but inside it's actually not as substantial.

There's nothing there. And so I play church and pretend to be religious for long enough that I begin to think, maybe I do know God.

Yeah, maybe there is spiritual reality there. I think I've got everything I really need. I've kind of figured this church thing out. You just kind of go enough times and wear the right stuff and make sure you don't say the wrong thing.

And yeah, there is reality there. And Jesus says, beware of the temptation to think. The outward religiosity creates inward reality.

[12:45] Watch out. Secondly, Jesus says, warning, warning, don't fear man more than God.

Verse 4. Next slide has verse 4. There we go. I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing more that they can do.

But I will warn you whom to fear. Fear him who after he has killed has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

What are you afraid of? Does it scare you to think of being exposed? Your hypocrisy being revealed so others can know the truth about you?

Do you fear failure? Criticism as a Christian? Are you afraid you will suffer physical harm for your beliefs? I've dealt with all of those recently as I consider traveling to India to preach the gospel in a country where many are less keen on that taking place than the place I usually am.

[14:04] And the fear of other people's negative opinions is a daily struggle for me. Perhaps the most consistently frustrating struggle throughout my life.

But Jesus says don't fear those temporary things. Rather, there's an appropriate fear of God we should have. An awareness of His awesome greatness.

And that before Him, we deserve not only physical harm, but eternal damnation when we see who He is. The Bible tells us one of the results of our sinfulness is that there is no fear of God before our eyes.

We don't consider the weight of His glory. We don't bow before Him quickly. We don't follow His commandments naturally. And as a result, there's a danger for all of us that as we stop fearing God, we become driven by other things we fear more.

Things like physical harm, loss of reputation, status with men, discomfort, whatever the things are that you fear. Jesus says don't let those lesser fears drive you.

[15:24] You must fear God. Have you taken a sober look at His perfect holiness, His righteous anger, His just wrath against sin, and realized you should rightly tremble before Him because of His awesome greatness?

Have you glimpsed just a little bit of His infinite majesty and seen yourself as finite? Perfect. Small. Vulnerable.

Before Him. See, most of us don't regularly face those who are intent to kill us as Jesus' disciples soon would.

And yet, we too find fear of man overwhelming our fear of God, don't we? Can you imagine what the temptation would be like for you if it actually was your very life that was threatened because of your faith?

You're already being driven by lesser concerns than that. What someone might think, what someone might say, how you feel about yourself, and those things are driving us.

[16:38] When you begin to see your life driven by fear, Jesus says, watch out. There's one whom you should fear and with Him consequences are eternal.

Not merely years of pain and embarrassment, but an eternity of torment and death. Which consequence is more fearful? He says.

Finally, Jesus says, warning. Warning. Again, watch out. Willfully rejecting Jesus will have eternal consequences.

You see how these three warnings are connected as Jesus continues that theme of what happens eternally by painting here a picture of the judgment seat of God.

That's the picture here in verse 8 that Jesus is giving for us. I tell you, everyone who acknowledges Me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God.

[17:42] But the one who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. That's the setting here. God's eternal judgment before the throne of God.

Whether or not one has embraced Jesus is the key to what happens before that throne. That's what it all hinges on. And Jesus continues, verse 10, everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven.

But the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Perhaps no more frightening warning in the world.

You can't be forgiven. What's the unpardonable, the unforgivable sin? Those words get our attention, don't they?

They got my attention when I was a kid. I remember reading them and going in tears to my dad, scared to death that I had committed the unforgivable sin, even though I had no idea what it would have been that I would have done.

[18:49] I just, I knew there couldn't be a worse place to find myself. Dad, what does this mean? Have I done it? I don't want to spend a lot of time on this verse, but two things to say about it briefly.

And the first is, what is it? This blaspheming the Holy Spirit? In the context here, this unpardonable sin seems to be persistent, willful rejection of Jesus.

The person, Jesus, that the Holy Spirit testifies to us is the Son of God and the Savior of sinners. It says we can say something against Jesus.

We might have a negative word to say about Him and be forgiven for that, but not against the Holy Spirit when we willfully and repeatedly shut our hearts to the truth of Jesus from His Spirit.

We're choosing to face death on our own. Secondly, have I done it? Perhaps it makes you feel as it made me feel when I was a child.

[20:02] I'll tell you what my dad told me. If you are worried about it, you haven't done it. Because of the nature of the sin described here and elsewhere in Scripture as this unforgivable sin, you can know that sincere conviction and concern not to be stuck in this sin is evidence that you are not stuck in this sin.

If there's a sensitivity to God's Spirit in your heart bringing conviction of some sin upon you, then keep listening to Him and let Him point you to the forgiveness of Jesus.

See, that's the whole point of this final warning in these verses is that eternity hinges on your active embrace of Jesus. You must be clinging to Him or you are standing on shaky ground.

If you are merely pretending religiously but don't truly know Jesus. If you are more afraid of earthly consequences than eternal judgment.

If you are denying Jesus before men, then beware when you stand before the judge of all the earth and your only hope is that Jesus speaks up to advocate for you.

[21:22] There is a judge. There is a heaven. There is a hell. And the determining factor for your eternal destiny is not what you've done or who you're associated with but whether you know Jesus.

The judge will either say, welcome my child or depart from me. I never knew you. To those of you here this morning still wondering about Jesus still trying to figure out what you would make of Him.

Let me encourage you fully to entrust yourself forever to Jesus. If He speaks on your behalf before His Father the judge that's all that matters.

It's all you need. I remember my childhood best friend his father was the head of the P.E. department at Memphis State University is what it was called then.

And so he and I could go and as little kids we could go into the practice gym where the Tigers practiced college basketball.

[22 : 39] It seemed incredible. I think it was just a normal court. But we could go in there after hours with all the lights off and we could flip a switch and go play basketball and man we felt like we were awesome.

Except every once in a while his dad had gone to his office and somebody would walk down and stick his head in and look at me like I was doing something I shouldn't be doing. And I felt very guilty.

I felt like I was being caught somewhere I wasn't supposed to be. And I'd look for my friend really fast. Hey Bill! Bill! And he would come up Hey! He's okay! He's with me! And they'd smile and wave and go off.

And I kind of hung next to him and thought yeah that's right with him I can be right here. I can come right into this place where nobody else gets to come where all these awesome basketball players are because I'm with him.

If God's son speaks on your behalf before his throne you're good. You're in.

[23 : 42] It's all that's required is for you to be connected to the son. In fact it's the only thing that matters. It's not what you've done.

It's not how you've failed. It's not even how hypocritical you've been that determines your eternal destiny at that point. It's whether or not Jesus acknowledges you.

His blood pays for your sins. His perfection replaces your failures and your eternity is secure. Nothing else is enough.

Nothing else matters. Nothing else is needed. So if you haven't embraced him don't be content dabbling with religion.

Don't be content playing around with church and showing up occasionally. Be all in on Jesus. Entrust yourself to Jesus forever as you do so.

[24 : 41] As we trust in Jesus the comfort offered to us is as profound as the warnings that we've been given this morning.

It's a comfort from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All of them together speaking comfort to us. First we see here your secure identity from the Son.

If you're headed towards a dangerous dog, if you're headed towards a bridge that's out ahead, the danger of death, and someone gives you a sign to let you know that, that's a friendly thing to do.

Right? Friends warn us of danger. Good friends say hard things to those they love, particularly warning them of danger in the path they're walking on.

These may be stern warnings, but Jesus speaks them as a friend and even reaffirms that intention in this passage. The one place in all the Bible where He addresses His disciples directly as friends.

[25 : 55] Verse 4, I tell you my friends. My friends, Jesus says.

There's a wealth of security in those words as Jesus warns those He loves. But listen, if you're with the Son, if by faith you're a friend of Jesus, the one who is by nature a friend of sinners, your identity is secure.

You're safe in the gym. Your relationship with God is settled. There's also comfort from the Holy Spirit in this passage.

At the end, verse 11, when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, 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.

The Holy Spirit with you, constant help from the Spirit, ever present, dwelling in you. Because yes, this passage speaks primarily of eternal dangers, but it doesn't overlook the earthly dangers, the trying situations we will face beyond our wisdom or strength to handle.

[27 : 17] Jesus says be comforted because the Spirit will show us how we can testify to Jesus. He will give us the words to speak before men that will proclaim our hope in our Savior.

What a great comfort that is for whatever the trial we will face, for whatever the situation we will find ourselves unsure of what faithfulness to Jesus will look like.

He gives us His Spirit for constant, unfailing help. But I think easily my favorite word of comfort in this passage is the assurance of our unchanging value from the Father Himself.

Look at verse six. 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. Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows.

[28 : 24] The very one who because of our natures we are told rightly to fear, because of our relationship we are told not to fear.

Verse five, fear Him. Verse six and seven, fear not. The one who because of what we're like and what He's like should be the one we would fear above all others because He's our Father, do not fear.

Have you ever considered putting a price tag on your children? Don't answer that if they're sitting next to you. How valuable are they to you?

Your heavenly Father says you are precious to Him. He cares about sparrows, about things that others overlook and devalue and are worthless to them.

He's interested in the minute, seemingly insignificant details of our lives. That's how much He cares. Some of you find it more amazing than others that He can count all the hairs on your head.

[29 : 39] I understand that. For many of us I'm told it's over a hundred thousand hairs. And He knows every single one.

The Bible tells us He counts our hairs. It says He counts our tears. You may have cried a lot. It says He calls us by name that He knows every activity we're ever involved in.

His eye is on the sparrow and so I know He watches me.

It's a great reminder, a great comfort. let not your heart be troubled. His tender word I hear and resting on His goodness I lose my doubts and fears.

Though by the path He leadeth but one step I may see His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.

[30 : 46] His eye is on the sparrow. I can't sing that part. And I know He watches me. Even though I only see one step maybe I don't actually know whether the bridge is out, whether there's danger ahead.

There's someone watching me who cares for me and it's the comfort of that beautiful song.

It's the one that Jesus is giving us here speaking about our value to His Father. That's the kind of comfort offered to every one of you this morning in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The warnings in this passage are clear that if we continue in our hypocrisy, if we shape our lives around the fear of man and deny before others the authority of Jesus, we do so at our own peril.

We find eternal safety nowhere else but in fully entrusting ourselves to Jesus. And the comforts tell us that as we trust our God, not just once but again today as you trust Him, we're His children.

[32 : 07] We always have His presence and His help and we are treasured and cared for by Him beyond what we could understand. And it won't stop.

He treasures us and cares for us forever. When you see the bridge out ahead, if you see that this morning, that the path you're on won't get you to God, cling to Jesus.

Find Him to be the bridge to the Father, the great Savior we all need. let's pray. Jesus, thank You for loving us enough to warn us.

Thank You for knowing that when we see those warnings for what they really are, we need Your comfort too. And so where we need to be shaken into seeing the reality of our hearts and lives, would You do that by Your Spirit?

And call us back to the only place of comfort. Call us back to clinging so tightly to You that we couldn't possibly stand without You.

[33 : 27] Might we trust You again today? Might we depend upon You every moment of this week? And might we then stand before our God confident because of our great Savior.

We ask it in His name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. views on overarching in thej Fam on