

Warnings for Life

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Date: 21 June 2009

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[0 : 01] Let's turn now to Luke chapter 12 and look at this section that we read. Luke chapter 12 from the beginning to the end of verse 12.

Just read at the beginning there, 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.

Now it's impossible for us today as we read the Bible to grasp the impact that Jesus' teaching would have had upon the crowds 2,000 years ago in Palestine.

There was virtually no section of society that wasn't affected or touched by it. As we see here, thousands were following him. The common people, that's what were the ordinary people, they were told they heard him gladly.

It tells us about that elsewhere. There were so many that were following for healing. There were the blind and the deaf, the dumb, the lepers. There were so many people that were following and were being taken to follow.

[1 : 19] There were so many people who were coming out of interest, out of curiosity, just to hear what he had to say. There were many who had begun to follow him and loved what they were hearing.

But of course there were others, and there were many of them. The Pharisees, the scribes, the lawyers, they were following with one purpose. They were trying to catch him out.

They were trying to trip him up in some way in order to get him, in order to destroy him. And so we find that there's this huge crowd of people. And at the end we saw last week of how Jesus was pronouncing the woes upon the Pharisees.

And they were, of course, they were becoming more and more incensed with his teaching. And they were trying to close in on him to get rid of him. Now the one thing that strikes you about Jesus' teaching is just how incredibly direct it was.

It was so to the point. You never find Jesus, as it were, beating about the bush. Or beginning to, or hinting at what he might be trying to say.

[2 : 29] Jesus was incredibly direct. What had to be said, he said it. And I think that's something we've got to take on board.

Because sometimes people accuse the church and they say that sometimes preaching can be too harsh or too hard. And they say, you know, you've got to preach.

You've got to preach love. You've got to preach the love of Christ. Be like Jesus in your preaching. Well, if we were to be like Jesus in our preaching, just what we looked at last week.

It was woe after woe after woe. Pronounced against who? Was it the people who were so irreligious? Was Jesus pronouncing these woes upon people who never darkened the door of a church or the synagogue?

Not at all. The woes were being pronounced against the religious leaders. Against the scribes. Against the Old Testament lawyers. Against the Pharisees.

[3 : 32] Jesus didn't spare anyone. If he felt, and remember, it was always for their good. Jesus wasn't just pronouncing woes in the way of condemnation. Jesus' ministry was always one of trying to help.

And sometimes, in order to help, we have to deal with the issues that they're facing. And where Jesus was seeing problems.

Jesus always went to the heart of the matter. Remember the rich young ruler who came to Jesus. And he was talking about eternal life. And Jesus, it tells us Jesus loved this man.

But Jesus identified straight away that this man had a problem. And he went straight to the heart of the problem. Which was money. This man had an obsession with making money.

Money was his God. Jesus said to him, you know, go sell all that you have and come follow me. And the man went away sorrowful. Because we're told he was incredibly rich.

[4 : 33] Rich, as it were, had become his God. And so, that's the way Jesus ministered. He went straight to the heart of an issue, of a heart of a problem. And he tried to.

And it was in order to help people. And so, we find Jesus here again warning his disciples. And he turns to them after pronouncing all these woes upon the Pharisees.

And he says to them, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. Which is hypocrisy. Now, we talk about besetting sins.

Sins that we might be more prone to than to others. Well, if the Pharisees had one besetting sin, it was hypocrisy. Because over and over and over again, we find Jesus hitting them on this very thing.

About the hypocrisy. And hypocrisy really is pretending to be what we're not. The actual word, this word, comes from a Greek word which means an actor.

[5 : 40] So, a hypocrite really is an actor. A hypocrite is somebody who is acting out in life. Pretending to be what they're not. It's a deliberate sham.

Now, a person may act in a hypocritical way without particularly meaning to. That is not the type of hypocrisy that Jesus is speaking about here.

It is where somebody is deliberately setting out. And in a spiritual sense, in the Christian sense, we would say that a hypocrite was somebody who was deliberately trying to deceive others.

To make out that they are spiritually better than they really are. People who are aware of just what's wrong in their own heart and their own life and their conscience.

And yet, outwardly, they're pretending to be so pious and so holy and so righteous and so good. And yet, inwardly, things are a mess. And we're deliberately doing that.

[6 : 42] Not owning up before God. But putting on this veneer for people. Trying to make out before people and saying, sort of, Oh, see how good I am. See how right I am.

See how righteous I am. See how holy I am. And inside, aware of this mess. And quite happy, trying to deceive people. That is the actor.

That is the hypocrite. And that's what the Pharisees were like. They were so preoccupied with the outward. They wanted people to speak well of them.

They would stand on the street corners praying so people would see them. They would make long, long prayers so people would say, Wow, did you hear? What an ability in prayer.

And they would get all puffed up. They were receiving their reward, as Jesus said. Their glory. This is what they wanted. The praise of people. But inwardly, Jesus said, and we saw, I'm not going through that, we saw it last week, where Jesus was exposing one fault after another in the life of the Pharisee.

- [7 : 46] So, Jesus is giving this warning against hypocrisy. And I believe that part of, Jesus is taking the situation and the circumstances into account.
- And he's giving this warning to the disciples to be careful that they are true to themselves, that they're not trying to be what they're not.
- And there's always a danger in that. The crowd had been trying, had been, we saw that, if we went back, had been asking Jesus for a sign.
- They were wanting something from Jesus. Well, Jesus wasn't there to perform for the people. You know, people were always wanting Jesus to perform. Now, Jesus performed many miracles, but he never did anything for sure.
- Jesus wasn't into this, doing things to make an impact so people would say, wow, did you see that? That was never his ministry or his mission.
- [8 : 50] It was always to fulfill the will of the Father. But it was a ministry of healing, a ministry of saving, a ministry of bringing good into people's lives.
- All the time. This is what Jesus was about. So he wasn't going to give a sign. He wasn't going to, as it were, wow the crowds by pandering to what they wanted.
- In other words, he wasn't going to do what they wanted in order to become popular. And I think this is one of the warnings that Jesus is giving with regard to the Pharisees and regard to his disciples.
- Don't try. And as it were, sell your soul to a certain extent in order to become popular with the crowd.
- And to have, and obviously with the scribes and Pharisees in mind, Jesus is warning against sort of not giving in to their way of thinking.
- [9 : 53] You see, there would be a real temptation for the disciples if they wanted to have a place and a standing in the Jewish community, then they would have to align themselves with the scribes and the Pharisees.
- And they would have to say, well, look, we're with you. And they would have to become the kind of people who dotted all the I's and stroked the T's. They would have to start adhering to these hundreds of man-made laws.
- And then the Pharisees would give them a pat on the back and they would say, yes, you're one of us. Jesus is saying, no, you don't do that. You don't compromise.
- You don't fit in and just sell yourself to people who are actually hypocrites. They're not real. On the outward, they appear so real, but inwardly they're not.
- And Jesus goes on to show that one day what they are will be revealed. Because hypocrisy will one day be outed. Jesus is saying that.
- [11 : 01] And that's why he says, beware of the leaven. It's like the yeast of the hypocrisy, the yeast of the Pharisees. Yeast, you see, hypocrisy can begin in a very small way.
- And the thing is, sometimes we might not identify it. We might not realize it's there, but it grows. And like yeast in baking, it works its way through everything.
- So we need to be on guard. And Jesus then moves on with this temptation, maybe to compromise, temptation to popularity.
- And then from verse 4 to 7, Jesus, and again, it's in light of the hypocrisy in relation to fear of man. Jesus mentions from verse 4 to 7 the word fear five times.
- You know, the fear of man, it's in Proverbs, it says the fear of, the fear of man is a snare.
- [12 : 07] And you know what a snare is? It's a trap. The fear of man is a trap. And that is so true. Fear of man is far more subtle than ever we realize it.

And I believe it is one of the great hindrances to people throwing in their lot with Jesus Christ is the fear of man.

How many people sit under the gospel week in, week out and are challenged by the gospel? And they're saying to themselves, you know, I should become a Christian.

And straight away the fear of man rises up simultaneously and says, oh, but if I become a Christian, what about? And you begin to think about maybe workmates or school friends.

You maybe think of a member of your family, people within the community neighbor straight away, and you say to yourself, ah, I can't face up to what they'll say.

[13 : 17] I'm not ready for the ridicule. That may come. fear of man is a snare, it's a trap. And so many people are taken away from the power of the gospel.

So many people challenged by the gospel, so many people say, I'd like to be a Christian, but the power of other people is greater.

You know, I think there are, you know, it's an amazing thing, there are people of huge courage, people who would probably storm a beach in a battle sooner than throw in their lot with Jesus Christ.

It's an extraordinary thing. I hope today, if there's anybody in here who is finding that that is a snare, that it's a fear of the reaction, how will people react if I begin to follow the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, Jesus goes on to say, there is some, while the fear of man is a reality, you shouldn't fear man, you ought to fear God.

[14 : 39] Because, you know, in following the Lord Jesus Christ, there can be difficulties. But may I also say to anybody in here who is wrestling with this whole thing, you know, many of the fears that you have in your mind beforehand, they will fade away.

They will never be realized. And I'm sure many Christians could stand up here today and give that testimony. The people that you feared, the people that you thought would ridicule you, didn't happen.

It didn't happen. You know this, there are many people who outwardly maybe are so critical of the Christian faith who deep down have different thoughts.

And I've seen that happen so often. You put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and he'll sort the rest out. Put Jesus first and you will find that things will not be the way you feared or thought they might be.

Well, Jesus is warning about the fact that following him there may be difficulties. There might be problems. We read about that further on in this particular chapter that it says when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities.

[16 : 01] So it shows that there can be more than just ridicule, there can be persecution. And that was true of the early church. And while Jesus says the fear of man is quite something, don't fear man.

Because Jesus gives quite a warning. He says, I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body. And after that have nothing more they can do. You see, if a person, and it happens in this world, there's many a person has been put to death because of their love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

But after a person has been put to death, there is nothing more that a human can do to the body. Once a person is dead, that is it as far as his world is concerned.

Jesus says, there you are, you're fearing men. Well, after a person dies, they can't do anything else, but God can. And that's what he tells us.

This is the awesome thing. I will tell you, Jesus says, whom to fear. Fear him who? After he has killed as authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

[17 : 14] Man at his worst can only go so far. God is the one who has all authority. God is the one who knows all things. Remember how it says in Revelation, I am he that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive forever more and have the keys of hell and of death.

And so it's little wonder that Jesus we find Jesus so often pleading to people to come to himself. You know somebody was saying somebody who knows all your secrets.

Somebody who knows your every secret. Even your every thought is somebody to be feared. You think about it.

Somebody who knows your every secret your every thought is somebody to be feared and that is God.

He knows everything. There is nothing hidden before him. And then on the other hand Jesus moves verses 6 to 7 to show that the fear of God and his presence can be a source of tremendous comfort.

[18 : 34] The Lord is so aware of us minutely everything that even the hairs of our head are numbered that even the sparrows the little sparrows that these little sparrows which are the tiniest of birds that not one of them is forgotten before God.

And Jesus' argument here is from the lesser to the greater and he's saying see that little sparrow flying through the air well if the Lord knows about that sparrow and has not forgotten about that sparrow which of you are to put in the order of creation and its way down there do you think he's going to forget about you who is at the very highest point of his creation that's really what Jesus is saying and so we've got to remember that this God who sees us and knows us is a God who is there watching over us to help us and to protect us and to keep us so this is what Jesus is saying and then in a snare he goes on to say to us in verse 8 I tell you everyone who acknowledges me before men the son of man will also acknowledge the son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of

God but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels as well see the importance of confessing Christ before men this is in the whole area of the fear of man it's in the whole realms of hypocrisy Jesus requires honesty and if you follow Jesus and you accept Jesus and believe in Jesus you make that known it is something that should be known not in a way where you remember this is one of the beautiful things about becoming a Christian suppose it's one of the things which makes the Christian different to all the different sects and all these different is that your own personality is still there your own character we don't become clones of one another that we don't just become all of us you know there's an incredible variety within the

Christian church you look at the disciples and they were all so different that's one of the beauties of the Christian church that is made up of so many different people who still retain their own identity their own character their own personality although God is working in that conforming yes always conforming to Jesus Christ to the image of Christ and yet still retaining their own particular character we're all different some are extroverts some are introverts that will remain as Christians some are so patient some are like Peter and they're so impetuous well we will be prone to that all our days although we are being refined and renewed and worked on all the time but we're still who we are that's why it's so important to be who we are as Christians it's a great battle it's a great antidote to hypocrisy is being ourselves and following the

Lord Jesus and saying Lord work in me make me an honest Christian in this life and so you see how important it is to acknowledge Jesus have you acknowledged Jesus because there's going to come a day when the role is going to be reversed Jesus is going to do an acknowledging as well there's going to come a time in this universe before a watching world before the angels where Jesus is going to make a public acknowledgement of all those who have acknowledged him isn't that an amazing thing and also there will be a denial as well where Jesus is going to deny knowing I never knew you that's one of the things we read elsewhere that Jesus will say and then Jesus promises and here we come to conclude Jesus promises that in the time when there might be persecutions and difficulties and people are brought before the authorities and the rulers

[23 : 18] Jesus says that we can rely upon God's guidance and God's enabling where the Holy Spirit will guide us and enable us that's what we read about there in verse 11 and when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities do not be anxious about how you will defend yourself or what you should say for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say you know some people have taken this out of context and they think that this means that a preacher shouldn't or doesn't need to prepare and I have heard people actually say the Holy Spirit when you stand up the Holy Spirit has promised that God has promised that the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say that's not what it says here now of course I fully believe yes we prepare but so often in preaching that's exactly what does happen that we find that our minds are being moved and that the

Spirit will take us maybe into different areas where we had actually prepared and new things will come to our mind that's happening all the time as we preach but we're still called upon to prepare and people quote this with regard to preaching and they say oh you will be given at the time this promise you'll notice is not for the pulpit it's for the courtroom somebody said this promise is for the dock not the pulpit and that's part of the problem with people so often they take scripture out of context Jesus says when you are facing trouble and when you have to stand up for your faith in difficult situations I will help you the Holy Spirit will come to your aid and will give you the words to say and finally the last thing that will say is that there's a verse here which has troubled so many people and everyone verse 10 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 the unforgivable sin yes there is an unforgivable sin people talk about it people say what is the unforgivable sin well it's not speaking it tells us it's not speaking against Jesus Christ we may think it might be but it's not give you one classic example of somebody who spoke incredibly powerfully against the Lord Jesus Christ in fact he hated Jesus Christ with such a passion that he tried to kill everybody who followed Jesus and that was Saul of Tarsus who became the apostle Paul and he was forgiven so it's not the person who speaks against Jesus Christ that will never be forgiven it's a person we see here who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit and what is that that is making light

I believe it's just very simply it is rejecting the witness that we have here the spirit witness of Jesus Christ because that's what the Holy Spirit does he reveals Christ and it is to reject that witness it is where a person is neglecting the salvation remember the question that's asked and there's no answer given how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation that's it there is how shall we escape there is no escape if we neglect it there is no escape that is the sin that is the unforgivable sin it's where a person continues to defy to reject to their death the witness of Jesus Christ by the spirit because after that there is no hope if you have ever or if you are concerning yourself and saying what if oh what if

I have committed the unforgivable sin let me say this if you're concerned about it you haven't if you're continuing to come under the word of God I don't believe you have those who have committed and are committing this are those who have pushed Christ away who have no concern do not want to know have rejected completely the Holy Spirit's testimony of Jesus and have said we will not have this man to rule over now people do say I will not have this man to rule over me and yet there has come a time when Christ has come to rule over them as we said the unforgivable sin is not speaking against Christ and that is saying we will not have you rule over but it is to go on and to go on and to go on to death rejecting the

[28 : 58] Lord Jesus Christ my friend you make sure that whatever you do that you come to believe in him and that's what matters that's what counts just believing don't have to make any great show about it all we have to do is to believe believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved let us pray oh Lord oh God we again give thanks for the word the word which is so light in itself the word which so challenges and the word which reveals to us such a different way to so often the way we think a word that doesn't let us hide anywhere a word that forces us to face up to who we are and where we are in relation to

God bless us we pray and do us all good take us all home safely and pardon our sin in Jesus name we ask it Amen