

Luke 12:4-12

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[0 : 00] This is the joy of the evening service, right? The further back you sit, the further forward I can come. So, it's good to have you all with us tonight.

I'm so glad you've joined us. We are continuing our series and looking at the theme of discipleship in the book of Luke. Thinking, what does it mean? What does it look like to follow Jesus?

And we are glad that you are here tonight. But, you know, as we look at our passage, we're looking at Luke chapter 12, verses 4 through 12, page 871 in your pew Bible.

We'll be reading that text in a minute. But as you turn there, it occurs to me that as we look at it, one of the big themes in it is what we're afraid of. And I think that, in fact, one of the things that's true of us is that what we're afraid of often tells us a lot about ourselves and who we are.

I don't know if you're, this is an old movie reference, but if you've seen Jurassic Park, right? The Richard Attenborough character, John Hammond, he's the creator of the whole thing, right?

[1 : 08] And throughout most of the movie, he doesn't get the fact that the dinosaurs are going to eat him. He doesn't seem to get that they're dangerous animals that are out of control.

He's living in this fantasy world. And what he, he spends the whole movie being afraid that his park is getting broken and that people's experiences are being ruined.

And he doesn't get the fact that there are these dinosaurs that are going to kill him. And it says something about what he really values in his life. And it says something about what he, what he really cared about.

And I wonder if that's true for all of us too. What are the fears in your life? What's behind it? You know, one of the things that's true about fear is that fear only arises in our hearts when something that is valuable and something that we care about is threatened, right?

So if I go up on a ropes course and I try to try, I hate heights, so this is a bad example, but I try to take that first step off the platform onto the rope, I'm afraid that I'm going to plummet to my death at the bottom of this ropes course, right?

[2 : 25] I feel like my life is in danger. That's a little example. But maybe there are other things that you feel like are, you easily become afraid of.

I'm afraid of getting sick. Afraid of losing my job. I'm afraid of not finding a place of comfort and security. I'm afraid of living alone.

There's so many different things that we might find ourselves afraid of. I'm afraid of being ignored or living a life that doesn't seem to have purpose.

I'm afraid of being unloved. I'm afraid of myself and the darkness that I see in my own heart and the way I behave sometimes. There's all sorts of things that we can be afraid of.

One of the things that we need to explore tonight is, how is it that those fears shape your life? And how is it that being a follower of Jesus can help us in this?

[3 : 30] Particularly tonight, one of the things we're going to recognize is that one of the greatest fears in humanity is, we fear what other people are going to do to us.

We fear how they respond to us and we give them. There's this great book out there, When People Are Big and God Is Small. And we'll come back to that at the end and talk about what that looks like in the reverse.

But when people are big and God is small in our lives, how much that warps us. How much that changes how we live and how we behave. What we want to do is look at this passage tonight and think about what it means to be a follower of Jesus in light of these fears.

And particularly in light of the fear of other people and what they might do to us. So, that's what we're going to talk about. Let me pray as we look at our passage and then we'll dive in for a few minutes.

Lord, tonight we acknowledge to you, Lord, that we are fearful. We acknowledge to you that, Lord, so often our hearts are ruled by it.

[4 : 37] God, we pray that tonight as we hear Jesus' words to us, Lord, that you would work in our hearts, Lord, to turn from fear to faith.

To see you in all of your glory and all of your goodness to us. And Lord, that in doing so, you would change us. Lord, the things that would rule our hearts would be different.

Because of our time tonight, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So, just if you remember, in the context of the book of Luke, we've been looking at it for a while.

In chapter 11, we've seen that Jesus has started to teach about what it means. And there's a long section where he's talking to the Pharisees and the lawyers. And he's basically rebuking them and provoking them, calling them out for their ungodly form of religion and the way that they are responding to him in particular.

Or, he rebukes them for their hypocrisy that they want to look good on the outside without actually being good on the inside.

[5 : 50] And without... And rebuking them ultimately also for their pride. For their wanting to perform religiously without actually having the humility to recognize how much they need God and his gracious work in their lives.

So, there's a strong sort of confrontation. And we see this in this whole section that we're preaching on in Luke. From chapter... At the end of chapter 9 all the way to chapter 19. Jesus has turned his face towards Jerusalem and he's going to the cross.

And what we see over this time is this increasing pattern of conflict with the religious authorities. It's this... It's this increasing... And so, Jesus is starting to exhibit some of those things.

And we even see the beginning of chapter 12 where he says, Beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Beware the way they are. He's warning his disciples, Look, what the religious leadership of the day in Judaism was was deeply problematic.

And a lot of it was because they were rejecting Jesus. They were saying, We don't believe you have anything to say to us. In fact, we think you are wrong. And so, they're denying Jesus' role.

[7 : 02] So, he's set up... So, we've sort of seen in the context a setup of growing conflict of if you're going to follow me, there are these other forces out there that you're going to have issues with.

And that leads us to verse 4, which is where we're going to start tonight. So, let's look at this together. 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 is 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 on your head are all numbered. Fear not.

You are 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.

[8 : 04] 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 or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

These are Jesus' words to us. They're strong. They're bold. They're sort of blunt. And we need to explore how we interact with them and basically breaks down into two sections.

The first one has to do with who you fear and the second one has to do with how you navigate responding to people in light of that. And so this is basically what we're going to look at tonight.

Verses four through seven. Did you see the word fear? It's there over and over again. And I have a confession to make. I've read the Bible for years and when I first read, when I first saw that this was a passage I was preaching on, I'm like, oh, this is about like, you need to fear Satan because he's the one who can destroy your soul.

[9 : 21] Right? And I don't know if any of you thought that. This might just be me because I'm a crazy man. But I just thought, well, okay. But then I read this and I thought, no, no, no, this isn't what

it. What he's saying is, what are you really afraid of?

Are you afraid of the person? And again, in this context, he's thinking to his disciples, are you afraid of the rulers and the authorities and the Pharisees and the leaders, the religious leadership who may oppose you to the point of putting you to death?

Are you afraid of them? Because they might kill you. And, you know, let's be honest. That's pretty normal. Being afraid when you think you're going to die is pretty normal.

It's pretty human. There's nothing, you know, it's understandable, right? We want to have, we want to understand, like, that's a very normal fear.

But Jesus says, why do you fear them? And he goes on, right? He goes on in verse, in verse eight, and he says, I will tell you who to fear.

[10:27] He says, don't fear that. And we're kind of like, what in the world? Why would we not fear it? Because there's something greater for you to fear. There's something more important for you to fear. And that's what he says in verse eight.

I will warn you who to fear. Fear him who, after he is killed, has the authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. And that's the part where I thought, oh, that's Satan, because he's the one who can destroy our souls and all that stuff.

No, no, no, no. It's not that at all. Because he's saying, who actually has the authority to judge us? Who actually has the authority to proclaim a final announcement on our eternal state.

It's God himself. And that's who he's saying. He's saying, you need to fear the person who will judge your spiritual state for eternity.

And that's the person who you ought to be concerned about. Not about these men who might kill your body. But rather, he's saying, there's something greater that's going on in your spiritual life with your soul.

[11:34] And whether you will go to heaven or to hell, whether you will be with God for eternity, or whether you will be apart from God and under his wrath for eternity, is the most important question that you will ever ask yourself as a human being.

This is more important than anything else. He's saying, that's what I want you to be afraid of.

Because I want you to understand the value of the soul, and I want you to know the person to whom you're ultimately accountable for. That's the one. That's what I want you to see.

And then he goes on, and he gives great encouragement. Because the very one who has the authority, the role of casting judgment upon you for your life, look at what kind of a person he is.

Right? This is what verses, verse eight, yeah, verses six and seven, sorry, verse six and seven are all about. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?

[12:44] He's talking about the most mundane things. Right? Can't you get, you know, a piece of bubble gum for 25 cents at the, at the, you know, corner store. Right? But God knows even those things, and he cares.

So if God cares about those little things, how much more does he care about you? And then he goes on, even then, he knows the hairs of your head, they are numbered. For you are more valuable to him.

And this is the thing that Jesus wants to tell them. Jesus says, you are precious in the sight of God. And your soul and your eternal state is the most important thing about you.

So what are you going to fear? What are you going to fear in that context? What are you going to be afraid of? Remember we talked about the fact that fear is when something that we value is threatened.

Part of what Jesus is doing in these commands is he's trying to help recalibrate for us what we value. Because when I step out on a ropes course, I'm thinking I'm putting my life at risk.

[14:02] Right? But it's possible following Jesus in the first century could mean I'm putting myself at risk of literally being stoned or burned at the stake or being imprisoned.

And there are lots of places in the world today where that's still true. That to claim the name of Jesus could result in the very end of your physical life.

And Jesus is saying the God who made you and who loves you and who knows you has said that your eternal soul is more important.

And that eternal soul and that eternal destiny is connected with following me. We'll pick up on that again at the end. But I want to simply say for you when you think about what do you fear from other people?

It's probably not getting killed. Maybe you do. I don't know. I don't know all of your life circumstances. But it's much more likely to be a rejection. People will make fun of you.

[15 : 07] People will think less of you. In our culture around here some people may think you're not very smart if you believe in Jesus and want to follow him. Other people for some of you it may feel like your reputation at work is at stake if you are known to be a follower of Jesus.

For some of you it may be a relationship with someone who you deeply care about. Your best friend, a boyfriend, a girlfriend. But to be known and identified as a follower of Jesus will put that relationship in jeopardy because you know that that person that you care about isn't going to respond well to it.

it may be that you will face serious consequences for claiming to be a follower of Jesus in your life. But Jesus says do you see there's something more important than even your very life even your reputation even those relationships whatever seems to be at cost here there's something greater value to be kept.

It has to do with following Jesus. Come back to that at the end. The second section in our passage verses 8-12 Jesus addresses the context a little more of this identifying with Jesus.

[16 : 37] Right? He uses these words acknowledge whoever acknowledge it's the same word that in other words is saying to confess or to profess faith in sometimes it just means agree with like I'm in agreement with Jesus I'm in his I'm in his tribe he's my he's he's my God however we think about it this is what acknowledge means it doesn't just mean like a a wave like oh yeah hi I see you you know embarrassingly from across the room it's like no no no that's my guy I'm going to acknowledge the son of man is what it means here right?

Jesus says I tell you everyone who acknowledges me before men so again the context is still how are others going to respond even more so here how are others going to respond who acknowledges me then before God before the angels of God which is a picture of that ultimate judgment and that ultimate throne room where even the spiritual heavenly beings will sit around and watch God proclaim judgment on our life right?

and if we have identified with Jesus then Jesus will identify us as his before in this in this spiritual global eternal courtroom he will say that's my that's my one he acknowledges me I acknowledge him but verse 9 whoever denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God then we get to verse 10 which I want to spend a few minutes on because it's one of those really tricky verses right?

you just go what in the world? and anyone who speaks a word against the son of man will be forgiven okay that sounds good because a lot of us have done that at one point maybe in our lives but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven whoa I thought I thought the whole message of Jesus was forgiveness and now there's this one thing that says no you can't be forgiven of this there's no hope well let me try to explain it to you give you a little hope a little bit of understanding it's very interesting when you look at the parallel of this passage you see it in Matthew verse 12 verses 31 and 32 and in Mark 3 verses 28 through 30 it's in the context where the Pharisees and the religious leaders are saying about Jesus that he is in fact filled with the spirit of Satan or Beelzebub because in order that that is where his power to heal is coming from that is where his power to do miracles is coming from that's actually the context in those other two places and it seems that in those other two places it's much clearer that this blaspheming of the Holy Spirit isn't just a momentary denial of Christ but it's a much greater thing here's a definition that I found from a friend of mine who's actually a seminary professor who said this it's a specific active and final choice to declare the person and the work of Jesus as being demonic in origin okay it's saying that Jesus is not God but a man who's being given power from spiritual forces that are in opposition to God it is a complete denial of Jesus claim to be divine to be the son of God to be perfectly sinless to have power and authority in and of himself given to him by God the father to play his role in this world of being the redeemer and savior of the world it is a denial and rejection of all of that and it's not just a momentary but it is a settled decided

[20 : 48] I will not change this opinion the same writer goes on to say this isn't to minimize the pinch and pain of these strong words of Jesus it's a valid extension to warn people of persistent hardness of heart in opposition to Jesus but this is a message not for the tender conscience or the stumbling believer but rather for the pseudo religious who stands over against Jesus in smugness the Peters and the Pauls and millions of other believers through history have failed and fallen and yet have found Jesus smiling welcoming face of forgiveness did you hear that think about Peter

Peter who on the night that Jesus was betrayed and arrested who followed him and around the fire in the courtyard outside the high priest's house they asked him do you identify with him he said no I'm not with him three times he did it three times he denied being connected with Christ three times he actually did what we see in verse nine he denied Christ and yet after his denial as the Holy Spirit worked in his life the cock crowed he realized what he had done he went out and he wept for his sin and when Jesus rose from the dead Peter was the one who ran to the tomb with John to see if this was true and when Peter saw Jesus on the beach at the shore he threw himself into the water so that he could go and be with him so if you're here and you're wondering tonight have I committed the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit here's what I would say if you are settled in your heart that

Jesus is not God if you think that the only way he ever could have done those things is because of spiritual other kinds of spiritual forces that have nothing to do with God the Father if you reject him and his work of dying on the cross for your sins and rising from the dead if you see all those things and you say that is not true and simply I think Jesus is just a crazy wacko spiritual guy then you are in danger and you need to hear this but if you're sitting here and you're saying I believe in Jesus but once I said something or I struggled with this or there was a time in my past when I did this friends be comforted and return to Jesus you will not be able to repent and come if this is true of you if you've blasphemed the Holy Spirit because it's a settled opinion so know the welcoming embrace of Jesus and return to him and experience the joy of his forgiveness forgiveness but getting back to the argument then what he's saying is look overall the pattern is if you acknowledge me before men then I will acknowledge you in that courtroom but if you deny me and if you persistently deny me and this is why it's in there if you persistently deny me you end up here in this place and there is no forgiveness where there's no confession of sin and repentance and faith in Jesus and he goes on in verses 11 and 12 and when they bring you it's fascinating he doesn't say if they he says when they Jesus is telling his people if they persecuted me they will persecute you also if you are a follower of Jesus you will face these places where it will be costly for you to identify with Jesus this is a part of discipleship and we need to own that and to embrace that that's a reality following Jesus is one of the most costly things that will ever happen in your life humanly because everything may be at stake potentially says 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 the very hour what you ought to say what he's saying is if you're afraid how am I going to respond in that moment if you're afraid and you're thinking maybe I just need to deny Jesus to get myself out of this God says no no no friends listen to me I am with you my Holy Spirit is in will be in you and I will enable you to walk through that trial I will enable you to suffer what you may suffer and I will give you the words to say in the midst of it and friends there are countless testimonies of this throughout history those who are on the brink of being put to death for their faith have given bold and courageous witness to the greatness of Jesus they have seen their spiritual reality they have known more clearly than ever what God has done for them in Christ and they have said what's the worst you can do to me you can kill my body but then

[26 : 55] I will go and I will be with Jesus and I will testify to the end of my life that he alone can save me and that's what it means to be a disciple of Christ to have that kind of clarity and to have that kind part of what Jesus is instructing his disciples in at this point is to say you need to know that this will both be really really hard and that God will really really be with you and he calls them to a kind of loyalty I want you to not fear man but to fear God I want you to acknowledge me identify with me say yes I'm with Jesus and Jesus is with me wherever we are and whatever we are doing and that's hard for us it's hard for us in our culture today we live in a culture that has been saturated and sensitized about religion so that even sort of mentioning the word of

Jesus can provoke all sorts of odd reactions we live in a time where identifying as an evangelical Christian has all sorts of connotations that we never mean and don't really want to be identified with in the minds of the broader culture the word evangelical is used in the New York Times usually in a way that I don't always identify with and yet and yet I'm a follower of Jesus and am I willing to say even if I misunderstood and even if I'm mistreated and even if people think less of me and even if my reputation suffers and even if I don't get a promotion and even if my girlfriend breaks up with me and even if I lose my job and even if I don't get the sale that I will follow

Jesus and of course friends we think how can this be true it's because of this broader context this broader context of Jesus who is instructing his disciples as he himself is headed to the cross he is

going to the place where he will suffer at the hands of men worse than ever he will suffer the worst thing and yet that very suffering that very death that he will die is meant to accomplish for us life because he dies not just because of the evil of man but he dies because of our own sin and he doesn't just suffer at the hands of evil man on a whim but it is God's predetermined plan that he would come and not just be an unwilling participant but he would offer himself up in our place to take that death that we deserve for our sin he himself endured the worst for us so that he might then turn around and say for all who come to me and confess my name that is confess their sin confess their need for a savior and confess that he alone can give it to us for those of us who confess his name we then become his and he gives us a new and a spiritual life that is for now and for all eternity he gives for us now a place in his family in his kingdom that begins now and will have such that even death no longer matters to us because if we die we go and be with

Jesus and friends it gives us great freedom because suddenly rather than people being big in our life and God being small when we see the enormity of what God has done for us in Christ in this work of achieving our salvation suddenly God becomes big in all the greatness of what he is and who he is and what he's done for us and when God is big in our hearts then people become small not in a negative way they just they become they shrink in our view of I just want to live my day every day that's why I can say I identify with Jesus I don't care if you think if I'm a Republican or a Democrat I don't care if you think that I'm a white man or a black man or I don't care about any of the other things of my identity nearly as much as I care about identifying with

Jesus that's the thing that I most want to do and I want to tell you about what he's done I want to proclaim to you what he's done and it may cause conflict and it may provoke a reaction that I don't want but when the greatness of what God has done for us is big then we know what Jesus is calling you and then we're free from fear then it doesn't matter what people can do to us because the thing that is most valuable to us our spiritual life our soul is secure before the one who can judge our souls because of what Jesus has done and that's the great hope that's why Jesus says fear not you should fear him but don't be afraid because he loves you he cares for you he who provides for you in all these ways he will provide for you most importantly your salvation and that's what it means to be a follower of

[33 : 17] Jesus let's pray Lord as we have looked at this tonight I even think of the words we just sang before Lord be thou my vision oh Lord of my heart not be all else to me save that thou heart Lord we pray that would be true Lord that you would fill our minds and our hearts and our eyes with your greatness and the greatness of what you've done for us in Christ and Lord in seeing that Lord you would free us from fear Lord free us to profess you and to proclaim you and to identify with you Lord help us we pray help us to see you and Lord to fix our hearts on you in these ways

Lord thank you for your promise that you are a loving God who cares for us and will provide for us in all of these things we pray this in Jesus name Amen