

The Danger of Religious Hypocrisy, Part 1

Luke 12:1

Turn your bibles to Luke chapter 12. Today's sermon is really going to be aimed at setting up this incredibly helpful chapter and so, so timely. Luke 12 is a chapter on discipleship. That is the theme, that's what's modeled here by our Lord. He is training his true disciples, those to, whom he, reflectively, affectionately refers to as friends in this chapter; it's a very unique reference to his disciples as friends. And he is training them to follow him as Lord in an environment of hostility, in an environment of hostility. And this hostility which has always been kind of below the surface, always we've been studying through Luke's Gospel, this hostility has become more pronounced, more open, more obvious.

As we've seen recently in our study and the immediate context, end of chapter 11, Jesus has just outed the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. He's exposed and deconstructed the unbelief of their most respected bible scholars, the scribes, the lawyers. And this, Jesus has really in that, in that meal time, he, he's looked past the smoke and the mirrors of pharisaic

religion. He's pulled back the veil so that everyone can see pharisaic religion for what it really is. It's a religion of harsh legalism, heavy burdens, and blatant, blatant, hypocrisy.

That's the only thing that can grow out of a soil of unbelief, bad religion, and hypocrisy. Wherever we find bad religion, in whatever form it comes, you can be sure that it will bear the poisonous, noxious fruit of hypocrisy and it is a religious hypocrisy, which is the very worst kind of hypocrisy. Jesus describes hypocrisy here in this chapter as leaven.

Verse 1 of chapter 12, look what it says, in the meantime when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to the disciples first, his disciples first, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy. He begins with a warning; the section ends with a cure. With a remedy for the insidious and pernicious sin of hypocrisy.

And because it's going to take several weeks to make our way through these verses, I'm going to give you the remedy up front. The remedy for religious hypocrisy is the fear of God. The fear of God is the remedy for religious hypocrisy. Fail to fear God and you will most certainly fall prey to hypocrisy and you will suffer greatly for it. Fear God and you will not only

not catch the virus, not only will you refuse to ingest the leaven, but you will enjoy the benefit and the blessing of God.

When you fear God, you are not only inoculated against hypocrisy but you come underneath the loving care of the Father, Luke 12:6-7. You enter into the fellowship of his son, verses 8-9. And you partake of the edifying ministry of the Holy Spirit, verses 10-12. We enjoy great benefit when we refuse to fear man and when we fear God instead. Our fellowship is with the triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Notice, we're going to read this right now, but notice the Trinitarian pattern in these verses as we read.

Starting in verse 1 of chapter 12 again, "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, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And who ever 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.”

What promise. All tied to Father, Son and Spirit. What strength in those words. If only we will fear God and not fear man. For today, we need to give our attention to the warning that Jesus gives against religious hypocrisy. Jesus here is alerting us to the danger of religious of hypocrisy. The danger of religious hypocrisy and its remedy. And I want to tell you that my hope and prayer for you, for all of us, has been this,

it's two fold, throughout this section, verses 1-5 in particular. First and most obviously I've been asking the Lord to guard us, to guard our church, to guard faithful churches, to guard true Christians, to guard us from the sin of hypocrisy in our own lives. Nothing more blinding, destructive, and for those who are characterized by hypocrisy, hypocrisy is eternally damning.

Those who live as hypocrites on this earth go to hell. Not those who are guilty of a hypocritical moment, here and there, as we are all guilty, right? But those who are characterized by hypocrisy. Beloved we need to be on our guard. The second aspect of what I've been praying, I'm asking the Lord to help us grow in discernment, to guard us from the hypocrisy of liars.

Because, beloved, we have been saturated in a world of hypocrisy. And like a fish swimming in water does not feel wet, so we too have a hard time, sometimes, noticing the hypocrisy of liars all around us. So I'm asking the Lord to give us discernment, and I'm asking the Lord to keep us from the sin of hypocrisy. To do that we need to start with Jesus' warning about this danger which is stark.

We're going to start with this point, a first point, simply put, religious hypocrisy is dangerous. Religious hypocrisy is

dangerous. Religious hypocrisy is dangerous and what I want you to do is go back to Luke 11 verses 53 and 54, we'll start there. Anybody who was paying attention may have noticed when I preached through Luke 11 and ended Luke 11 we just gave short, a short time to those two verses. And if you noticed and you're aching for more, well, here it is, okay?

"As Jesus went away from there," verse 53, "the scribes and Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say." All those terms there, press hard, provoke, lie in wait, catch, or it could be translated entrap, that is blatant hostility. That is, that is opposition that has been, that has come to the surface, and now it's angry hostility against Christ. The gloves have come off now and they are baying for his blood.

When Luke tells us here, the scribes and the Pharisees begin to press him hard, it almost sounds synonymous with the next statement, that they provoked him to speak; like they're pushing him and provoking him and that's not, that's not quite the sense of that first verb. The verb that the ESV translates, to press, actually, it refers to having hostile feelings towards

somebody. We might say, they have it in for Jesus. It's a good translation, they have it in for him.

Herodias, Mark 6:19, says "had it in for John the Baptist." Same word; what was the result? John's head on a platter. This is an attitude of bitter hatred, of rancor and malice, which is the precursor to all murder. These men had murder in their hearts. They were guilty before God of murder. Right here. Setting aside what they did to Jesus on the cross, they were guilty of murder here, at this moment.

The verb is strengthened with an adverb that makes this whole description mean something like to be very hostile to, to harass violently. Look at the second statement in verse 53, Luke tells us what form their violent harassment took, they began to provoke him to speak about many things. That's a, that's a verb that originally came from teachers. When they were instructing a young student in basics, and things that required memory and recitation, they required their young student to speak back and recite back to them precisely. They wanted an exact, repeta, repetition, reciting, of what they just taught their student.

So this is, this is a verb that means an exacting expectation, there is no margin of error allowed whatsoever. Just like a, like a harsh school master. Now when that verb is

uses in this context, in this sense, it means to question closely or to interrogate. And the purpose of this kind of interrogation, fueled by murderous hostility, it is not to get to the truth. The point is to catch the subject in an unguarded moment. It's to catch somebody making any kind of off handed comment that can be used to further discredit or accuse or malign. That's what these scribes and Pharisees are doing, in this attitude of murderous hatred they're trying to entrap Jesus. They're putting unanswerable questions to him and hoping to draw out of him some damaging discrediting statement.

The purpose of this false interrogation, this unlawful question, becomes very clear in verse 54. It's a conspiracy. They've all conspired here to ambush Jesus. Look what it says, "They are lying in wait for him to catch him in something he might say." That verb translated to catch him, it's a hunting term, these are hunters, ambushing the prey. Same verb Luke used in Acts 23:21 to describe a conspiracy then to assassinate Paul. More than forty men lying in ambush for Paul, they had "bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor to drink until they had killed him." They went on a hunger fast; they're not going to break until Paul's dead. I wonder if they kept it, because he lived past that incident. But it's the same verb here.

Listen, none of that questioning is sincere and honest, we all know that. It's the angry malice of religious hypocrisy and, beloved listen, it is dangerous. It's murder in the heart that's just waiting for the murder at the hand. Why all the hostility here? Because Jesus had just exposed them for what they really are, hypocrites, and hypocrites get real violent when they're exposed as hypocrites. They don't like being exposed, that's why they try so hard to put on and wear the mask. The scribes and the Pharisees resented Jesus removing their mask. And after that mask has been removed, after their cover has been taken away from them, there is nothing left to veil their evil heart. There is nothing left to mask their corrupt motives and so they go on the offensive and on the attack.

Oh, they could repent, couldn't they? Wouldn't repentance here, in verses 53 and 54, be a beautiful, beautiful way to read the text? Wholesale the Pharisees, the scribes, the lawyers, all the servants around the table, if they bowed before Christ and said sir, what must we do to be saved? Would that be a beautiful and glorious response to what can only be described of Jesus as a loving confrontation? He loved them enough to tell them the truth, but hypocrites, they have been masking an evil heart for so long, they have been practicing a false spirituality for such a long time, that they are blind to their hypocrisy.

They have learned to quiet their accusing conscience by calling evil good and good evil. They can't even recognize their gracious Messiah standing in their midst, they're so blind. There is nothing left in the conscience to respond to. No accusation coming forth. They are wholly justified, they believe, in condemning Christ. Titus 1:15 describes them as "both their minds and their consciences are defiled." Listen when you unmask hypocrites, they have nowhere to go but to go on the attack. And now that the mask is off, they are acting like the wolves that they really are. They are on the hunt, and they will not be satisfied until Jesus bleeds.

Listen folks. Just like the false religion of the Pharisees, growing out of the unbelieving scholarship of the scribes and the lawyers in the same exact way, the false religion of today's woke leftist rises out of these Marxist unbelieving scholarship and academics of the universities. And the fruit of this false religion, it is anger, it is hatred, and it is death. All hidden behind a mask. Hidden by their virtue signaling hypocrisy.

The government is really, really, concerned about protecting us from death by the coronavirus. Especially when it comes from the, comes to the most vulnerable among us. What

about the vulnerable little babies in the wombs of their mothers? It should be the most sacred safest place on earth; instead the womb is a crime scene. It's where the most violent heart wrenching murder of innocent life takes place, and on a massive, massive scale.

If you estimate there will be three million deaths in the U.S. this year, maybe a bit high maybe a bit low, one fifth of those deaths will be by abortion. Killing little babies in the womb. Do not tell me that government has our best interest, interest of life, in mind. That is hypocrisy. And it's kind of fitting isn't it that the symbol of state protection these days is a mask.

Now this is where, as we transition into a second point this is where we need to pay close attention because point two, religious hypocrisy is contagious. It's not only dangerous, point one, but point two it is contagious. Religious hypocrisy spreads, saturates, it affects the way we think, the way we behave, if we're not careful, if we're not on guard.

Look at Jesus' warning there in Luke 12:1, and it's stark. It starts this way just with Luke setting it up, "In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another," let's stop there

for a second. Luke wants, wants to make very sure that we keep this scene connected with the previous one.

Remember Jesus has left the home of the Pharisee now. He's offended his host. He's offended all the guests by exposing their hypocrisy, confronting their false unbelieving religion, and obviously word hard spread about what Jesus said and did in that setting. The servants who were there to assist the guests with ritual hand washing before the meal, which Jesus intentionally ignored, they were there they spread the word. Servants who served the food, who listened in on the conversation, who refilled the glasses, they were there, heard it, they spread the word. The scribes and the Pharisees themselves, they spread the word. All these people talked, all these people spread the word.

So thousands of people descended on this place to come to see the conflict brewing. It's like gathering around a burning thing in the city or seeing a fight. Everybody wants to come. The place is so jam packed with bodies that it was getting dangerous with people literally trampling one another, dangerous. So we get this multitude of thousands that are gathering now. And now notice the rest of the verse, "he began

to say to his disciples first, 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.'"

Just a quick contextual note. You see the word there, the verb, began, he began to say. Look back at Luke 11:53, you'll see the same verb used there, "the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard to provoke him to speak." By these two uses of the same verb, one right after the other, began to, Luke is signaling here a turning point in the Gospel narrative.

This is the pivot point, this is a hinge point. On the one hand the Pharisees are no longer interested inviting Jesus to share meals with them, that didn't go so well. No longer trying to figure him out, no longer walking around him like a fighter checking out the other fighter, measuring him up and down. They're no longer hoping that they can coo his popularity and use it to their own advantage, that's, that opportunity has passed.

As of now, as of this point, they see clearly there is no compatibility whatsoever. May we be clear enough with our Gospel, that the world can see that there is no compatibility whatsoever. That's what the Pharisees and scribes see, there's no compatibility so they began to, there's the use of that verb, they began to take an overtly hostile posture toward Jesus. As I

said the mask has come off, they're revealed for the wolves that they are and they go on the attack.

On the other hand, Jesus has for his part come to the same place. All of his teaching in the presence of the Pharisees has been gracious, has been loving. It has been the extension of amazing kindness and patience on his part to teach these people. He's tried to help them understand why he and his disciples eat with tax collectors like Levi in Luke chapter 5. He's explained to them why he allows the disciples to pick and eat heads of grain on the Sabbath. Why he heals people on the Sabbath, because he's the Lord of the Sabbath, Luke, Luke chapter 6.

He has taught Simon the Pharisee in Luke chapter 7, trying to help him understand that this sinful woman who keeps bowing before him, weeping, dosing his feet with tears, wiping off his feet with her hair, she is worshipping. She's been forgiven so much and so she loves much, and that's why she worships, worships without any restraint. Without any cognizance of the opinions of the people around her, she worships at his feet without any restraint. He's explained that, trying to teach Simon the Pharisee, this is why.

Chapter 10, he's taken time, he's taken a lot of time with this self-righteous, self-justifying lawyer, trying to show him

he didn't really love his neighbor as he thought he did. Look at the good Samaritan. He didn't really love God as he had thought he did. He's trying to help that lawyer come to the truth. Then as we've already said, Luke chapter 11, in the face of an evil generation that attributed his works to Beelzebul and demanded yet another sign he patiently teaches them through it.

He even goes to the, to the originators of that slander against him, the Pharisees. He goes to their house. He tries to confront and expose them to the truth. Even in the face of these self-righteous Pharisees and scribes, Jesus is still teaching them. He still loves them. And notice he doesn't love them by staying silent, he doesn't love them by just backing off. He doesn't, he doesn't love them by affirming all their good ideas and patting them on the head; loves them by telling them the truth. Knowing, knowing that the truth is going to hurt them. Well they've refused to humble themselves, they've refused to repent and believe, and so Jesus began to, that's the verb, began to take another approach.

And from here on out, his focus is going to be on teaching his disciples how to please God, how to walk righteously in the midst of a hostile world. Evangelism here in his ministry is taking a back seat to discipleship. He's still proclaiming the

good news, he's still going to evangelize, but it is ancillary to his training and preparing his men for the future. This is a chapter on discipleship. And Jesus here engages in discipleship in a context of hostility.