

The Danger of Religious Hypocrisy, Part 2

Luke 12:1

Turn your bibles to Luke chapter 12. 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.'"

Jesus, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the prophesied Messiah of Israel, he has come to his own people to fulfill God's promises of restoration and blessing and not only does the nation fail to recognize its Messiah, but because it's an apostate nation the leaders and the people alike they've become hostile and to a dangerous degree and Jesus not only acknowledges the hostility, but he seems to even in this chapter exacerbate it, pour fuel on the fire. First by offending all the leadership in Luke 11, but then he goes on to say things like this.

Look at verse 49, things like this openly and in public exposing hypocrisy. Look at verse 49 he says, "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!"

Verse 51, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on the earth? No, but I tell you rather division." Listen beloved, we need to come to terms with the fact that as Christians when we line up under a such a polarizing leader we are on a collision course with the culture. Jesus tells us here openly unapologetically that he has come to create division on the earth.

This is not we are the world, kumbaya, everybody light your lighters, this isn't everybody put our arms around each other time on earth. This is time for fire, this is time for division. This is time to call out and elevate his own people as distinguished from the rest of the world. He's come to create division on the earth, to remove peace, even to the point of setting family members, even good friends, setting them against one another, verse 52, verse 53.

May God give us an iron stomach, that we can stomach this. Because it's hard when your friends and family members turn away from you. Turn against you. Malign you. Ostracize you. It hurts. It's been done to me personally, and I know it's been done to so many of you. By calling us to obey a sovereign authority, Jesus demands a loyalty higher than any human authority. By calling us

into membership in his fathers' family he expects us to treat his family as more important than our natural families.

Spiritual relationships are deeper than physical ones. He's calling us to a loyalty that's thicker than blood. Our loyalty to Christ offends the people around us. This is only going to get worse in our day just as it did for the apostles in their own day. Just as it has for Christians throughout centuries of church history. As the centuries have gone by, of persecution hostility, America in this experiment stands out as an anomaly, a total anomaly.

We've had favor here in our country, that time in America is drawing to a close. It's time for us Christians in America to take our place along with our persecuted brothers and sisters in the rest of the world. To join the rest of them who have suffered so much, loss of property, loss of family, loss of friends, and loss of life. That has been the way throughout the annals of church history going all the way back to the Scripture.

So it's in this climate of hostility, in this environment of growing opposition that Jesus trains his disciples to follow him and to do so no matter what. When Jesus said back in Luke 9:23, "If anyone," anyone, "would come after me let him deny

himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.” You know what? He really meant that. This is where it counts. This is when it’s hard.

So he began to say to his disciples first. He knows the gathered crowd is going to overhear them. He doesn’t mind that. He’s not trying to pull them into a private place and speak in secret; he’s going to do it right there in front of them. Lesson number one, be, “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy.” Yes the rest of the crowd needed to hear that as well. If per chance any of them might be listening, might pay attention, might find salvation. This lesson is first and foremost with his disciples. Literally, it’s written this way, beware or be on your guard against the leaven,” comma, “which is hypocrisy,” comma, “of the Pharisees.

The leaven is not the people themselves. The leaven is what they do. The leaven is what they think, how they think, how they act. The warning, is not against sinners per se, but against their chief and characteristic sin which is hypocrisy. Leaven for all of you non-bakers out there, like myself, leaven refers to a single celled sugar eating fungi. Eww. I didn’t, I didn’t know that, but I ingest it all the time right?

An individual fungi, individual fungi cells are so small it takes twenty billion of them to weigh one gram of cake yeast, didn't know that either. This sugar eating fungus eats and digests sugar, and the byproduct of that, processing sugar in their little single cell, is carbon dioxide gas and ethyl alcohol. The ethyl alcohol causes the bread dough to ferment. And the carbon dioxide gas bubbles, they're unable to escape because the dough is elastic and so creates little pockets of carbon dioxide inside the bread. And that's what they refer to when they say the bread is rising. Such an apt picture of sin, don't you think?

Sin pursues what is sweet to the taste like sugar. It consumes and digests it, produces noxious byproducts that tend to puff us up. They make us empty but pretty darned proud of it. Like yeast, sin is persistent, it's strong, and at the same time it is not visible to our eyes and remains unknown until it's already spread. Until its influence has already had an effect. And so the proverb, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough," but goes deep doesn't, it in our thinking?

Leon Morris says, "leaven speaks of a penetration that is slow, insidious and constant." That's how the figure of speech, or the figure of leaven is used in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, the

spread of sinful influence throughout the church. Leaders need to be on guard against that kind of leaven. It also refers to teaching and conduct and false doctrine of the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 16:12. And leaven also speaks to the corruption of Pharisaic hypocrisy, our text.

And this is why in Israel's worship they were to offer unleavened bread to God. Because they wanted to come and picture a worship that is wholly untainted by sin. They're to have no leaven in the bread that they ingested during their worship as a reminder that they're to be attentive and diligent to root out all sin from their hearts when they come before God. So beware of, be on you guard against, watch out for, give heed to, the leaven, the spread, the infection, the influence which is the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. And Jesus said this to his disciples first. We need to hear this.

Why? Why beware? Why must we be on such guard against this? Is it because, as so many people seem to believe that Christianity, and Christian churches are filled with hypocrites. That line has been so widely disseminated it seems beyond dispute. But is that really true? Are Christians the greatest hypocrites of all?

As I am trying to show in this sermon, we need to set the record straight that it is the world, not the church, but the world with its many flavors of the same kind of man centered religion the world itself is rife with hypocrisy, not the church. Is there hypocrisy in churches, absolutely there is. But the world is super saturated with hypocrisy. Sure Christians need to be on guard, need to be self-examining, but as Jesus is making clear here the world and its unbelief is the spawning ground of all religious hypocrisy.

And Luke is pretty explicit here in setting up the scene, pointing out this massive throng of people in verse 1, the the word *myrias*, it's, it's the word, myriads, literally it means ten thousands of people in this crowd. I mean Luke, whether he's intending to be strictly literal about the number, or just telling us that countless thousands were present that day, the word can be used either way, he wants us to see that this crowd vastly outnumbers the much smaller band of Jesus' disciples.

This will always be the case for Christians in the world. That we are vastly outnumbered by the world around us, and true Christians are vastly outnumbered by those who pretend to be Christians and are not. False professors of Christianity vastly outnumber the true these days. So we need to be aware, we need



to beware, on our guard, against the overwhelming number of hypocrites in the world. And as we're seeing more and more in our own time, we cannot give the benefit of the doubt to the voices of the world. We cannot assume the best of their motivations and intentions. They're hypocrites wearing masks. They are unbelievers and yet they're still extremely religious in their unbelief.

I realize secularism temporarily created a vacuum of unbelief but that vacuum has quickly been filled by the wokeism that we have described earlier. Governing authorities mostly these days, most loudly these days with the liberal and democrat side of that, they've wholly bought into these doctrines, and they are dismantling and destroying our country. So, yes, we should hear them out. Yes, Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 apply to us.

1 Peter 2 we need to be praying, praying all the time for our leaders and for those in authority. We need to give honor to the king, to the governor, to the President, to the administration, to the law makers, and all the rest. But we need to do that with a healthy dose of skepticism. Christian skepticism. We need to apply what the bible actually tells us plainly about the world around us. They're dead in trespasses and sins, Ephesians 2:1. They listen to the voice of Satan,

verse 2, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that's at work in the sons of disobedience right now, do we believe that or not?

The world around us is trapped in the futility of their minds, Ephesians 4:17, because "they're darkened in their understanding," verse 18. They're "alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them. Due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous, have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity." That's the unbelieving world around us. And they're religious about all of this, very religious about it.

They are worshippers of false gods. They have bowed before the idols of cult of health wealth and prosperity. And so Jesus is saying here at the very, at the very least don't be fooled by that. Be on your guard about that, be discerning about these crowds. They're not on your side. They're not sympathetic to your cause no matter what they say. They are hypocrites through and through.

But there is cause here, in this text, especially in light of the next couple of verses, to pay close attention to our own hearts lest we ourselves ingest the same leaven, lest we become infected with the same virus of hypocrisy. Look at verses 2 and

3, "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known." Now that is just a principle stated plainly, look how he applies it. Therefore, verse 3, whatever you have said, who's he talking to? His disciples first, "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 house tops."

We'll get to this next time but that is both a warning and a comfort, isn't it? Because Christians in private, as they whisper in their rooms in the privacy of their own homes, they tend to say some very godly things, don't they? That will be proclaimed. Evil people, hypocrites, they tend to say some pretty evil things in their rooms, don't they? Oh they shine in front of a camera. Oh they put on the best face. They posture. They virtue signal. What are they saying in the, in the back room when the cameras are off, when the microphones are not turned on? That too is going to be proclaimed and for Christians that's a comfort.

But for us, why beware? First because hypocrisy is the fruit of all false religion, even today's secular religion. We need to be discerning Christians but secondly because hypocrisy

is a temptation for believers too. Listen even the, even the apostles struggled with this sin of hypocrisy.

I want to illustrate this just by, just for a couple of minutes, just turn to Galatians 2. We're wrapping up here but turn to Galatians 2. These apostles, pillars of the early church, they need, they themselves need to be wary of drifting toward hypocrisy and that's why Jesus is warning them here. The Pharisees had spawned disciples who infiltrated the early churches. They were called Judaisers, they were called the circumcision party. And the pe, these people claimed to accept Jesus as Messiah but they, they taught that faith in Christ was simply a doorway into obeying Moses.

Full salvation depended on Christ plus obedience to Moses, which starts with circumcision. All gentiles get circumcised, yes profess faith in Christ, but get circumcised, start obeying the law. It's a pernicious and subtle deception that faced the early church, not easy to recognize at first, hard to deal with, hard to root out, and that's why Paul wrote Galatians.

Galatians 2:11-13, Paul says this about his dear beloved brother Peter. "When Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James," those of the circumcision party, the Judaisers,

"Peter was eating with the gentiles but when they came he drew back, separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy."

Now listen, if beloved Barnabas, son of encouragement, if he can be led astray by hypocrisy. If, if the apostle Peter could actually practice hypocrisy, well then you and I folks we would do very well, wouldn't we, to walk with a little humility, to be circumspect, to pay very close attention to our hearts? Look what's at the, at the root of the sin of the Christian temptation toward hypocrisy, what is it? The fear of the circumcision party, fear of man, right? It strikes again.

We need to be on our guard against the fear of man. As I said, the remedy is the fear of God. Put off the fear of man in any form. Because the fear of man makes us vulnerable, susceptible, to hypocrisy and look how effective it is in, in really messing up that, that church. "The rest of the Jews," verse 13, "acted hypocritically along with him." Whenever you see fear of man and hypocrisy it divides the church.

Many faithful Christian pastors, elders, today have been pointing out a disturbing trend among other Christian leaders who are falling prey to worldly hypocrisy. All of this social

justice stuff has been difficult, admittedly. Critical theory, that's heady stuff. But you see even good Christian men doing things that are just, like, hard to understand.

Standing with the ungodly to take up their causes. Joining their protests. Affirming what is Marxist. Following worldly agendas, letting the world set the agenda for the church rather than the other way around. We've got Christians buying into this stuff. It is my belief that even among some faithful men, true evangelicals, friends of ours, solid reformation minded doctrines of grace teaching friends, I believe that they have failed to give due consideration to the false religion of the day. And are always having the posture of trying to, believe the best, as they would put it, they've ignored the fruit of the world's hypocrisy. They have not taken texts like this seriously enough.

And when they do that, when they lead in that way, when they speak in that way openly, they send very confusing messages to the world and they confuse sincere sensitive hearted Christians. They are blowing uncertain, unclear, trumpet sounds. And when we have so few Christians already mustering up and fronting up to fight the good fight of the day these leaders are

calling Christians away from that battle line to fight somewhere else. It does not matter. The real battle rages on here.

That's the warning Jesus gives, what's the remedy? As I said at the beginning, fear of God, we're going to unpack this next time, the remedy is to fear God. Verses 4-5, look at it there, "I tell you my friends do not fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing more than 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."

Coronavirus can kill, but it has no authority to send you to hell. Some rioter or protestor can throw a bottle aimlessly, hit you on the head, send you to your grave, but he too has no authority to cast your soul into hell. There's only one we need to really be concerned about isn't there? Jesus' warning here is stark. The remedy that he gives, "fear God, he can cast you into hell." Man that hits sensitive ears, it's stark, it's hard. But this is exactly the medicine that we need to drink deeply. This is what we need to hear, especially at this time and in this hour. Our Lord is so good to bring us what we need when we need it isn't he?

And the rest of this chapter Jesus just keeps unpacking the benefits of fearing God. Starting with this three-fold

trinitarian blessing of fearing God in verses 1-12, but then it flows throughout the entire chapter. Skip down to verse 32, notice with what tenderness our Lord speaks to his friends who fear God. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

What a promise. What safety there is in fearing the Lord. What protection. What blessing, what kindness. Proverbs 29:25 says "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe." That's a summary of the Gospel folks. That's the message of salvation in God through Jesus Christ. That those who leave this unbelieving world, who fear God by putting their faith in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. They have nothing to fear from God and nothing to fear from anybody else or anything else, Romans 8. Fear God, you'll fear nothing else. Do not fear God, you'll fear everything else. Well that's what we'll get into next time, let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you for sending the Lord Jesus Christ to be your exegete. To unpack the truth about you, about your ways. To tell us the truth with such love and boldness and he is so courageous in the face of such hostility, violent opposition. We are so grateful that we follow that one, that that one died for us, was buried, that you raised him from the dead that he



lives now. He ascended to your right hand and he intercedes for this church, for all of us by name. And every other faithful church and every other Christian by name, he prays for us.

Father hear his prayer, may our church be unified, strengthened, hopeful, and strong. Please help us to heed these warnings about the danger of hypocrisy. Help us to turn away from the world and turn our face completely fixed on Christ. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.