

The Remedy for Hypocrisy, Part 2

Luke 12:2-5

Psalm 32. David writes, verses 1 to 2 that "Blessed," blessed, happy, joyful, overjoyed, "is the one whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered." Oh, my friend when you grow in your understanding of the truth, when you grow in your understanding of what you truly look like before a holy God, you see your sinfulness. You see your great wickedness; you see that it goes deep down.

When you find out that transgression's forgiven, that your failure to love and worship God and fear him, your failure to love one another, love other people, that that's forgiven, your sin is covered, you are rejoicing! "Blessed is the man," verse 2 "against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit," there it is, "there is no deceit." What is that? The spirit of hypocrisy, isn't it? To deceive others.

If there's any sweeter inducement to confessing sin that can be found, I don't know of it. Our transgression forgiven. Our sin covered. Even the sin of hypocrisy and lies. What a

promise! But for any heart still deceived, still hardened by sin, still blinded by hypocrisy, consider what David says in that next section. "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as in the heat of summer."

I've spent some time in deserts. I've seen what the sun can do in baking things that really, well, like dead things. Things that, like us, like our bodies that are mostly water. Now what the sun does to a living being that's died in the desert and all the water is sucked out. And so what David is saying here, "My strength gone." It's like being baked in the desert. Yet verse 5. "I acknowledged my sin to you, I did not cover my iniquity," I did not play the hypocrite anymore; "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."

Isn't that good? If you go through a spell where you're staying away from the Word, not often in prayer, and you find this heaviness and groaning, you find you have no strength, you have no energy, you have no life in you. You find yourself actually getting more and more soured inside. Your speech is more acerbic; your patience wears thin quicker. Check yourself.

Ask some serious questions. Hmm, am I failing to acknowledge something to the Lord? Am I failing to confess sin?

Is everything I'm trying to do turning into ash and dust before me? Do I feel like the worlds against me, like everything's hemmed in, like the sky above me is bronze and my prayers aren't getting through? Think about entering into his gates with confession, thanksgiving. David knows, like all the godly know, that our hearts can be, for a time, deceived.

We can be, for a time, blinded in God, by his chastening grace for Christians, chastening grace, he allows our sins to rot us out on the inside. In order to move us to confession. Because he cares. Because he loves. That we might experience the loving grace of his free forgiveness. With God, there is forgiveness, Psalm 130, verse 4. "With God there is forgiveness that he may be feared." That he may be rightly worshiped for his mercy and his justice, that he might be worshiped for his grace and his perfect righteousness.

This is why the full exposure of all things provides both a warning and a comfort. It is a comfort for those who've confessed and forsaken their sin. Psalm 32, verse 10. "Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one

who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"

Listen, this is a comfort for us. Luke 12. Now here you can see Jesus' words in the context, more in the Bible's clear teaching that religious hypocrisy is based on a total lie. It is a fallacy. It's a very dangerous fallacy, very dangerous fiction. It is absolute folly to think that God is not going to expose our sins. One day there will be a merciless exposure and only believers who confess their sins, who refuse hypocrisy, will have all their sins taken away and forgiven, never to be exposed or brought up again.

The exhortation to confess and forsake sin only registers with those who fear God, right? Only those who fear God pay attention to this. This is the key. And so to promote the fear of God, Jesus gives us a fundamental reason for fearing God, religious hypocrisy is egregious. Egregious. E-g-r-e-g-i-o-u-s. Egregious means it's conspicuously bad. It's utterly offensive. Hypocrisy is utterly offensive to God. That's how he sees it. Which is why religious hypocrisy receives an even hotter wrath than just secular hypocrisy.

Jesus says, verses 4 and 5, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body," I might even put a parenthesis in

there. Those who kill the body or anything that can kill the body, including viruses. "Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more 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!"

Now we know here that Jesus does not explicitly say, "Hypocrites to go hell," but that is implicit, clearly implicit, in his warning here. Hypocrisy is such an egregious sin that it merits the penalty of eternal hell. You say, preacher, you trying to scare me? Listen, my job is to be clear. This text is frightening. I gotta tell you, it really does sound like Jesus is trying to scare you. You say, well, listen, using fear tactics, that's not gonna work. That's not good evangelism. Scaring people out of their wits never leads to sound thinking and good decision making. And I answer to you, well maybe you know better than Jesus, but it seems to me, Jesus knows what he's doing. He's intentional about this. This is not a flippant comment on his part. He does not intend here to scare us out of our wits, but into our wits. And sometimes we need a good scare, don't we? To realize danger.

He intends to scare us into our right minds so that we're thinking straight. Listen, he is not playing. As I said,

accountability only matters to those who think they will one day give an account. It only matters to those who think they're gonna give an account to someone they need to be afraid of.

I was talking with a non-Christian, recently, and asked him, "To whom are you accountable?" And he said, "To myself." In an age of autonomous self-worship, that's what everyone thinks. That they just owe no one but themselves and explanation. They just gotta live with their own consciences and that's the measure of the standard of their accountability, if they can live with themselves.

The self is the highest authority for the modern age. This false god worshiped in the cult of individualism, this cult of a secular liberalism. This is how everybody thinks. I am my own authority. I will give account to myself and myself alone. It's interesting because like everyone, non-Christians who think like that, they fear as well. They fear things. They just fear the wrong things. They don't fear God. They don't fear the one who truly matters. Physical safety means nothing when your immortal soul is at stake.

Four times in just two verses here, Jesus uses the word, the verb *phobeo*, to fear, to be afraid, to become frightened, to become alarmed. Once Jesus tells us who not to fear, once he

tells us whom we should fear, and in telling us whom we should fear, he commands twice, fear him. He commands. This is not the place to translate this verb as, reverential respect or awe or anything like that. Jesus is telling us to fear the one and the only one who has the power to put our lives in mortal and immortal danger. Fear him.

Now remember, Jesus is saying this, he's calling those to whom he speaks this word of warning. He calls them friends, friends. He's not threatening his friends. He's warning them. He's admonishing his friends. Because the consequence are so grave for those who follow the lies and the hypocrisy of false religion. Be warned, my friends. It's the friends who will hear the warning.

Those who are not his friends, they'll continue on their way. Matthew 23:15, Jesus says, "Woe to scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across the sea and land to make a single proselyte, when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." It's so dangerous. The thinking, the behavior, teaching, lifestyle, the infectious influence of false shepherds. False pastors. False elders. False church leaders. Our churches, they call themselves Christians churches across our landscape are filled with people like this.

And all of this is so dangerous, beloved. It gets at me, and it gets at all my pastoral and shepherding sensitivities because it's just like rubbing my nerves raw to watch people like lemmings follow those false shepherds off cliffs. And to hear even some people I dearly love, say, oh I know that church isn't all that, you know, but it's okay. But you know, at least they're getting religion. What?!

Beloved, stop that. This is for keeps. So Jesus admonishes his friends. True disciples. Real friends stay far, far away from that cliff and those shepherds and those influences. Get away from them. I often ask people especially in the context of pastoral counseling setting, what are you most afraid of?

Get all kinds of answers. Losing my job. Losing my wife. Losing my family. Losing relationship with my kids. Losing influence in their lives. Having an unhappy marriage. Failing to find meaning and significance. Not fulfilling expectations. Losing friends. These days in the context of the corona virus, civil unrest, radical changes in our political situations. All these fears are heightened about our physical safety, our comfort.

Dying is not the worst thing that can happen to you. Corona Virus infection, not the worse thing. A leftist democratic,



socialist, or even Marxist government is not the worst thing. All rights of the U.S. Constitution stripped away, property taken from you, job loss, and no more ice cream. That is not the worst thing. And death, not the worst thing. Not the worst thing that can happen to you.

And my concern is that many aren't even afraid of those things. They say when it comes to the big fights, I'll be there. I'll be ready. My concern is the people that succumb to a much lesser danger, the threat and the fear of being disliked, being unfriended, being de-platformed. Not being listened to.

Christians have caught a very nasty virus that makes them pander after the world's approval, makes them sensitive to all the world's criticisms. They've become approval seekers, people pleasers. They just can't let others down. It's an infection that's called cowardice. Beloved, losing friends, family, influence, that is not the worst thing either, beloved. And get used to it because it is gonna happen. Jesus came to bring a sword on the earth, to divide us. We talked about that last time.

So stand firm. Beloved, let your hearts take courage because we know the truth. We know it. The worst thing is that after dying, it's for a soul to be cast into an eternal hell.

Jesus says there in verse 5, rather starkly. He doesn't add any sugar to this: I will warn you whom to fear. "Fear him who after he has killed has the authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."

I'll tell you a bit about this place Jesus is describing because too few in our day seem willing to make people unconformable by talking about something as unpleasant as hell. And far be it from me from, after telling you we all need to be courageous, to back away from something difficult like the doctrine of hell. It's shortsighted and fundamentally unloving for us as Christians to back off of this doctrine. Because when we understand the horror of eternal hell, it's like preventative medicine. We don't like taking it, but we sure do need it. And so does everybody else.

The term translated here as hell, is *geenna* in the Greek. *Geenna*. *Ge* is the Greek word for land and *enna* is a transliteration for the Hebrew word *hinnom*. So *ge hinnom*, land of *hinnom*, refers to an ancient land marked by the Valley of Hinnom, the sons of *Hinnom*. Joshua called it the Valley of the Son of Hinnom in Joshua 15:8 and 18:16. And that valley was used to mark the boundary line between Benjamin to the north and Judah to the south.

The valley is located just south of the city of Jerusalem, south of the hill of Zion. It curves around to the west. It was originally, evidently, a very beautiful valley, one where people would get find rest and repose, shade. It's what one commentator describes as a fresh and pleasant valley to the south of the hill of Zion where were found in early times, the kings' gardens. Ancient kings in idol times visiting that valley for rest and relaxation let their hearts drift into idolatry.

High place was built there for idolatry. The valley became known as a place for the worship of the horrid, horrid god Molech. William Hendriksen writes this, he says, "The place was subsequently called, 'Tophet.' Tophet, meaning, according to some, a place of spitting out, or abhorrence. According to others, a place of burning. Either interpretation would fit well.

"It would seem that the top of this high place there was a deep hole in which," mud, "much wood was piled and that this wood was ignited by a stream of brimstone. The wicked," that's sulfur, like going up to Yellowstone and seeing the sulfur coming out of the earth. "Wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh actually made their children pass through this terrible fire as offerings to the gruesome idol, Molech." End quote.

To facilitate this horrid act of idolatrous worship, children passing through the fire, there was this monstrosity erected there, an idol, representing the god Molech. One author provides this graphic description. "Some archeologists say that the Molech idol and *Ge ben-Hinnom* was equipped with outstretched canty levered arms that extended a small platform on which an innocent baby was tied and slowly to the," patform, "platform would swivel, poured the consuming flames as the baby shrieked in helpless agony."

We're horrified by that description, aren't we? How could any parent do that? And then I think, oh, wait a minute. Abortion. This is what idolatry looks like. Killing babies, which is why the good king, Josiah, righteously indignant, he tore down these altars and destroyed the high places. Josiah then proceeded to ritually defile the Valley of Hinnom to discourage any other idolators from ever, ever returning there to their idolatry. How did he do that? Well he took this once beautiful valley, he turned it into the city's dump. He used it for sewage and trash and rubbish collection.

Plummer tells us there was refuse of all kinds including carcasses of animals. Carcasses of criminals thrown into this valley and consumed by fire, which was ceaselessly burning. From

Josiah onward whenever people came near to that Valley of Hinnom, they could see the flames burning the trash and burning the carcasses and, like we know here in Greeley, you could smell the rancid smell of burning carcasses and blood.

There's a Washington Post article entitled, *Hell on Earth*, written by Edwin Black. He shows this reputation of Valley of Hinnom, *Ben-Hinnom*, *Ge Hinnom*, *Gehenna*, has persisted all the way into modern times. He describes the place this way. Quote, "Below the old city walls in Jerusalem, there's a ravine that begins with a gentle grassy separation between the hills and then quickly descends south into the rocky earth. Eventually the ravine becomes a steep craggy depth, scarred on its far side by shallow caves and pits, pocked by hollowed out chambers and narrow crypts.

"Everywhere you see scorches and smolder from trash fires. Rivulets of urine trickle down from open sewers at the cliffs above, watering thorn bushes, weeds, and unexpected clumps of grass among the outcroppings. You smell the stench of decaying offal. The congealed stink of putrefied garbage and the absorbed reek of incinerated substances seared into the rock face. Crows circle low. Worms and maggots slither throughout.

"Listen, imagine," he says, "Some cannot help but hear the tormented screams of babies being burned alive, the macabre incantations of the idolatrous in gruesome celebration. The agonized cries of helpless victims and so many echoes of death and disconsolation that dwell here so pervasively, not even the centuries can silence them." End quote.

That's the picture of hell and Jesus says it's forever. Description in Isaiah 66:24, Jesus applied that to the Valley of Hinnom when describing hell. Mark 9:48 he says, "Where their worm does die, and the fire is not quenched." He's looking at that place. Everybody listening to Jesus knows that place. It's graphic. The Valley of Hinnom is a physical picture that portrays a spiritual, eternal reality of hell.

Take a deep breath. Now listen carefully. What I've been describing here for the past few minutes, it's just a picture. It's not the reality. It's just the picture of where sinners and particularly hypocrites will spend all eternity. Whatever the unbeliever, whatever the hypocrite thinks he's getting away with right now in this life, it's gonna catch up with him in the end. On that day, when according to my Gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus, Romans 2:16.

It's a warning. It's a warning for all who will receive it to stay far, far away from hypocrisy and the covering it provides for all sinful hearts. It's a threat to true hypocrites, because you do not fear God enough to heed this warning, you'll perish in this place Jesus described as the place where the worm doesn't die, where the fires not quenched. *Gehenna*.

And the fear of God is the dividing line, folks. Fear God, you'll heed Jesus' warning. Find refuge and safety from an eternal conscience torment of hell. Don't fear God and you'll suffer. And I just want to say at this point, my friend, you've been warned. It's probably a fitting way to summarize all that we've heard today by looking back to Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:13 and 14. He writes this, "The end of the matter; after all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man," and then this. "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing whether good or evil." Whoever does not fear God will fall eternally, never to recover, never to escape. "The executioner is the one who after he has killed, he also has authority to cast into hell." And so Jesus says, "Yes, I tell you, fear him."

And for those who will fear God now, the executioner puts away his axe, and he holds out loving hands of a loving Father and says, come near. And he embraces us with love and compassion and mercy and speaks to us tenderly. He sends his son to comfort us. He sends his Spirit to strengthen us. And he says, you have nothing more to fear. You fear me, you fear nothing else.

Let's pray. Father, I want to pray a special prayer of evangelistic interests. That anybody hearing me. Father, I just pray that you would show grace and mercy to those who, at this point, do not fear you. I pray that what Jesus says here would convict, would cut through this false idol of self-autonomy to bring them face to face with you in your justice, but also you in your mercy in Jesus Christ.

I want to pray that you would save those who do not know you, those who are sinners, those who are characterized by sin, or even characterized here by hypocrisy. I pray that you be gracious and save because such were all of us at one time. But you were gracious, but you sent Christ, but you opened our eyes, but you caused us to be born again by your Spirit and gave us eyes to see and ears to hear, hearts to receive the Word and understand and be saved.



I also want to pray that you would strengthen the faithful. All of us at one time or another gives way to cowardice, gives way to other interests. We're distracted by other things. We don't see things as clearly as we should and so need your grace to abide with us. We need your Word to saturate us, to renew our minds and make us think differently that we might behave differently and speak differently. So Father, please be gracious to us, your church. Please be gracious to all those who fear you. Father, we love you, we thank you for the grace, for the comfort of your Holy Spirit, for the prayers of Jesus Christ and most of all, for his saving work on the cross and it's in his name pray, amen.