

Jesus had just rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for their hypocrisy. Our text begins with “in the meantime” pointing back and connecting us to the woes pronounced on those two groups of Israelites whom many people admired for their religious show.

*<sup>1</sup> 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.* Luke 12:1 Luke describes the crowds as trampling on one another. That is exactly what would happen if anyone had the power and authority of Jesus. If you heard that He raised the dead and healed every illness and drove out demons, who would you try to bring before Him? As advanced as our medical system has become, we still have many people living with a chronic illness such as heart disease, arthritis, COPD, and the list goes on and on. There is no cure known to man. But occasionally the Great Physician will show He has authority over it all and will bring about a healing unexplainable by our understanding.

While the disciples were surrounded by this throng of people, Jesus warned them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. He was speaking of hypocrisy. I believe Luke mentions this with the thousands surrounding them because those who are famous are tempted to have a double life. The Pharisees loved the adoration and praise of men (Matthew 23:5a<sup>1</sup>). That is why they prayed long prayers publicly, sat in the front seats in the synagogues, and gave tithes in the temple with a flair for all to see (11:43<sup>2</sup>). "Look how holy that man is!" But in the last chapter, Jesus described them as unmarked graves (11:44<sup>3</sup>). They defiled all who came in contact with them. The hearts of the Pharisees were as greedy and self-righteous as could be (Matthew 23:25<sup>4</sup>). Their outward life and inner life were a complete contrast, and that is hard to hide, especially from family.

With all these thousands wanting to see Jesus, and with the disciples being the guardians of access to Him, they would be tempted to think they were above the crowds and should *act* holy. At the same time, they might be tempted to excuse any inner darkness in their own souls. Their egos may have been tempted to be prideful like the Pharisees. Beware of duplicity!

*<sup>2</sup> Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.*  
*<sup>3</sup> 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.* Luke 12:2,3 Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Lawyers in the last chapter. You can't hide what is in your heart forever. Situations will come, the pressures of life, and out it will burst in all its ugliness. I am shocked at my own words in certain situations and wonder how I avoided dealing with that ugliness within me. That's when we need to take the time in prayer to ask God to show us the root of our attitudes, whether it is pride or selfishness or unforgiveness or greed or anger - and ask Him to help us fully surrender it to Him.

Moses put it like this, *"Be sure your sin will find you out!"* (Numbers 32:23<sup>5</sup>). Sin, undealt with, is like a pet viper. You might enjoy feeding it and touching its silky-smooth body, but eventually it will kill you. The Apostle Paul said the end of it is death (Romans

6:16<sup>6</sup>). He said it enslaves us. Jesus said the same (John 8:34<sup>7</sup>). We sometimes don't realize we are slave to it until it is about to destroy our life.

One day all the secret thoughts of man will be exposed. Sometimes it happens in this life. It will surely happen in the judgment (Isaiah 45:16,17<sup>8</sup>). Deal with it now, for full exposure is coming! Own up to who you are and let God do His transforming work within so the outward and inward you are the same person (Romans 12:2<sup>9</sup>).

*<sup>4</sup> "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.* Luke 12:4 Jesus prefaces a warning by calling the disciples His friends (John 15:15<sup>10</sup>). It expresses confidence that they will hear His words and take them to heart. I trust you are His friends. This life is so short compared to eternity. While the crowds may have made them feel like they were on top of the world, Jesus knew it would draw the attention of those in power. There would be intimidation and threats. We see that during these last months before the cross and in the events that followed Pentecost. The church has been persecuted and threatened ever since.

Presently, northern Nigerian Christians are being killed by the hundreds every month. The president is from a Muslim tribe that controls the north. He says it isn't about religion but is merely a land dispute. If that is the case, why then are only Christians dying? Our American media is silent, and the internet foolishly echoes the president.

Christians are always a target, because we turn the other cheek and respond with love. We know the outcome of this spiritual war over the souls of men will not be determined by politics, or hate, or lies. The Lamb will end the failed governments of man one day, but not until every soul has had a chance to enter the kingdom of God (Daniel 2:44<sup>11</sup>; 2 Peter 3:9<sup>12</sup>). In Revelation 13 we are told that the believers in the tribulation will be slaughtered or taken captive, but that they must patiently endure (Revelation 13:10<sup>13</sup>). It helps to keep in mind that the wrath of man is nothing compared to the wrath of the Lamb. God will see us through whatever comes in this life if we will cling to Him, and that is why we need not fear. If we die, we go to our reward (Matthew 16:27<sup>14</sup>). **A Holy Spirit inspired fear of God results in a lack of the fear of man.**

In 1989 Mark Simo and Brian People started a shirt brand, No Fear! It was to tout extreme sports, those who take extreme measures in sports that most of us would think to be suicidal. I didn't know that, so I thought it was a Christian t-shirt company basing the slogan on this verse. I thought how great it was that so many people declared they did not fear man as Jesus instructed. Ignorance is bliss.

*<sup>5</sup> 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!* Luke 12:5 There is One to fear! He is the judge of all, and He will hold everyone to account (Romans 14:10<sup>15</sup>). If we do not have the righteousness of God through the sacrifice of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21<sup>16</sup>), we will face the justice we deserve. I am convinced there will be no one in hell who would be happy in heaven! They will have had every chance to humble themselves and turn but prefer to be their own god rather than to worship Jesus. Their knees will bow, not in adoration but rather because they cannot deny His authority and power (Romans 14:11,12<sup>17</sup>).

Many people object to this concept of fearing God, but the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7<sup>18</sup>). It causes us to seek salvation. It makes us

examine the evil within our own hearts. Godly parents can be loved and feared by their children. I feared mine but also knew that their love was unconditional. If I got out of line, that spanking I got was deserved. But it also broke my heart when they would cry with me and hold me afterward, and isn't that what our Savior does?

However, this verse is not just talking about discipline, but about the eternal damnation of those who refuse to respond to God's goodness (Romans 2:4<sup>19</sup>). Jesus is clearly saying in this verse that there is a place of judgment. In other passages He declares it is eternal (Mark 9:47,48<sup>20</sup>; Revelation 20:15<sup>21</sup>). People ask how a loving God could eternally judge His creation in response to a finite amount of sin? That's a fair question. Hell isn't a tit for tat judgment. It is a place of justice for those whose hearts are set against God and His goodness. The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, <sup>5</sup> *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.* Romans 2:5 It is the condition of the heart that is judged. It is open to the love of God or insistent that it will never be. Sin is a manifestation of that hardness.

<sup>6</sup> *Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God.* <sup>7</sup> *Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.* Luke 12:6,7 Jesus balanced His warning to fear God the judge with the loving care of God the Father over the details of each of our lives. If He cares for the lives of birds that are of so little value, how much more does He value and care for us who are made in His image? He knows the numbers of the more than 100,000 hairs on each of our heads. The expression was a Hebrews referred to God's supervision over the details of our lives (1 Samuel 14:45<sup>22</sup>). If He knows the ever-changing number of hairs on our heads, then He knows the concerns on our hearts, the temptations we face, and every detail of *all* our lives. He can guide our lives through it all. The psalmist said that all our days were written in His book before one of them came to be. He also said that He thinks on us all the time (Psalm 139:16-18<sup>23</sup>). John the Beloved said Jesus is the light that lights every person who comes into the world (John 1:9<sup>24</sup>). He loves us and does not want a single person to become so hardened that hell is the only place for that soul in eternity. But He also allows us to decide how we will respond to His goodness and love. We can harden our hearts, or we can receive His love (John 3:36<sup>25</sup>).

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, for it is the path to a hard heart. Pride in our religiosity while justifying a greedy and ruthless heart will so harden a heart that there can be no turning back, ever! That is why we should fear God's just wrath.

<sup>8</sup> *“And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, <sup>9</sup> but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.* Luke 12:8,9 Lowell told the men a story from his biker days. The biker group was meeting in a Denny's for a Bible study. One big burly guy in a beard and wearing leathers came in late and yelled out, "Any Christians in this place? Stand up!" Not a person stood. Then he sat down with the group and they brought out their Bibles. One man came over to their table and apologized for not standing. He was a pastor reviewing his sermon for the next day. Temptation to blend in, to fit in, or to

be safe is strong. But if that pastor stood, I'll bet you half the place would have stood up with him. Take a stand and you will help others to do the same.

Jesus knew what these disciples would face after He ascended (John 16:1,2<sup>6</sup>). I think He probably understood that most of them would die as martyrs. But the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church. The Jesus film project told of a Muslim city in Spain in which two Christians had been martyred centuries before. A Muslim man in that city had a dream of Jesus telling Him that He is the way, the truth, and the life, the only way to the Father (John 14:6<sup>27</sup>). That morning he went to a coffee shop in that square where the Christians were martyred so long ago. Over coffee he started telling his friend about the dream, only to find the friend had the same dream. Someone sitting nearby overheard their conversation told them he had the same dream. Turns out the whole town had the same dream. You won't read about that in the mainstream media! Consider what our witness can do in life and in death if we will lovingly take a stand for truth.

Someone emailed me and several other pastors a link to a blogger who was justifying compromise on a certain hot topic issue, saying the Bible wasn't clear on it and those who call it sin are turning people away from Christianity. He was justifying one of his favorite vocal artists who would not give a straight answer about what the Bible calls sin. The hashtag was God is Gray. My response was 1 John 1:5, *God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*. You can speak the truth in love and be hated for it, because darkness hates the light (John 3:19,20<sup>28</sup>). Speak with wisdom and love but never refuse to stand for truth. Do you want Jesus to acknowledge you or would you prefer to fit in with the world? The Apostle Paul tells us confession is necessary for salvation (Romans 10:9,10<sup>29</sup>). It's our choice to side with Jesus or the world. Everyone must decide! And if you decide for the later, don't expect Jesus to acknowledge you to the angels who guard the door to heaven.

*<sup>10</sup> 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.* Luke 12:10 This verse has been interpreted various ways by commentators. I understand people speaking "against the Son of Man" as those who misunderstand what Jesus represents and agree with those who criticize Him. Perhaps it includes those who have been offended by people who say they are Christians but don't act like it. They can be forgiven. But when the Holy Spirit draws a person to faith in Jesus' redemptive work for them, and they call that evil and reject it, even after the Spirit pursues them time and time again, they allow their hearts to become so hardened that they will never accept forgiveness. Forgiveness of sins is only possible through faith in the mercy and grace of God and made possible by Jesus' death in our place. That kind of rejection of the work of the Holy Spirit drawing us to Jesus is the unpardonable sin.

Do you know of people who have told you of a dream or miraculous incident and been drawn to Jesus, heard the gospel, been shown the love of Christ, seen God's intervention and yet they refuse to surrender their heart to Him? I believe that is what this verse is referring to. Instead of considering God's many attempts to show them His love, they excuse them as coincidences and justify rejecting it all. If you tell them it is the work of the Holy Spirit, they just laugh. There is nothing sadder.

*11 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, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.*” Luke 12:11,12 Jesus wanted the disciples to be prepared for what was to come. They had the idea that they would sit on thrones next to Jesus as He reigned over the nation (Matthew 20:21<sup>30</sup>). His words of warning must have sounded strange until the crucifixion. He told of three types of persecutors. First is the local synagogues. We read in Acts that this was the reason for Stephen's death (Acts 6:9-11<sup>31</sup>). He was the first martyr. Interestingly Jesus listed that first. The synagogue was the town center, or in Jerusalem a community center for people from a similar region or ethnicity. It was community. To be persecuted by it was to be ostracized from that community.

Next were the rulers. I think Jesus was referring to the religious leaders, the Sanhedrin. They would imprison Peter and John and sent Saul out to arrest Christians and bring them in to be tried for blasphemy (Acts 9:1,2<sup>32</sup>).

Lastly, Jesus referred to the authorities, the secular government. The second martyr was James the brother of John killed with the sword by Herod's decree (Acts 12:2<sup>33</sup>). Most martyrs would die at the hands of Roman authorities.

The same three, community, religious authority, and governments have persecuted believers since. In all three of these scenarios, the believer is not to be anxious about how to defend themselves or what to say. That is a difficult request. If you are being tried for being a Christian and if found guilty you will be thrown to wild beasts, imagine not being anxious about how you will respond. That takes faith that verse 12 is powerfully true.

In no way does this tell us we should not study for teaching or preaching the Word (2 Timothy 2:15<sup>34</sup>). It is not an excuse to be unprepared. Nor can this be used to defend our inability to answer questions of the unbeliever about our faith (1 Peter 3:15<sup>35</sup>). It is assurance for those who are being put on trial for their faith. There is no way to prepare. God will give us what we need in that hour.

When it happens the Spirit of God will give you the words (Acts 4:8-13<sup>36</sup>). You don't have to think it through. You can get a good night's sleep knowing that the best answer will come to you, and if that results in your death, God will help you through the process and you'll be with Him in glory! *10 If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.* Revelation 13:10 (NIV) If God wants to give you an answer that will confound the judge and cause your freedom, then He can do that just as well. That happened to brother Yun in one case. The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord and like rivers of waters He can turn it however He desires (Proverbs 21:1<sup>37</sup>).

Our passage today is full of warning and comfort. It warns us against religious pride and hypocrisy for all sin will be exposed. It warns us against refusing to take a stand and against hardening our hearts to the Holy Spirit. And it warns us that persecution is to be expected. But it also gives us great comfort and promises. We are loved and highly valued by God. He will acknowledge us if we acknowledge Him. He will give us the words to speak when on trial. Jesus is telling us we can live free from fearing man.

Jesus has presented us with an either-or scenario. We fear man or we fear God. Either our hearts are open to His Spirit or they are not. We have the freedom to choose between the two. Eternity lies before us. It is the most important choice we will ever make.

## Questions

- 1 What was Jesus' previous teaching?
- 2 What was He warning the disciples about?
- 3 Whom should we never fear? Why?
- 4 Whom should we fear? Why?
- 5 Why would a loving God send someone to hell?
- 6 Why should we not fear?
- 7 Why are pride and religiosity so damning?
- 8 Why is it so tempting to be silent?
- 9 How should we express God's truth on controversial issues?
- 10 What is the unforgivable sin?
- 11 What should we say when we are on trial for our faith?

### <sup>1</sup> **Matthew 23:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to be seen by others.

### <sup>2</sup> **Luke 11:43 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup> Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

### <sup>3</sup> **Luke 11:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup> Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."

### <sup>4</sup> **Matthew 23:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

### <sup>5</sup> **Numbers 32:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.

### <sup>6</sup> **Romans 6:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

### <sup>7</sup> **Romans 8:34 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

### <sup>8</sup> **Isaiah 45:16-17 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> All of them are put to shame and confounded; the makers of idols go in confusion together. <sup>17</sup> But Israel is saved by the LORD with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity.

<sup>9</sup> **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

<sup>10</sup> **John 15:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

<sup>11</sup> **Daniel 2:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup> And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,

<sup>12</sup> **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

<sup>13</sup> **Revelation 13:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

<sup>14</sup> **Matthew 16:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

<sup>15</sup> **Romans 14:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

<sup>16</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

<sup>17</sup> **Romans 14:11-12 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." <sup>12</sup> So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

<sup>18</sup> **Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

<sup>19</sup> **Romans 2:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

<sup>20</sup> **Mark 9:47-48 (ESV)**

<sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

<sup>21</sup> **Revelation 20:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

**22 1 Samuel 14:45 (ESV)**

<sup>45</sup> Then the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die.

**23 Psalm 139:16-18 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. <sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! <sup>18</sup> If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.

**24 John 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

**25 John 3:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

**26 John 16:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.

**27 John 14:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

**28 John 3:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

**29 Romans 10:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

**30 Matthew 20:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

**31 Acts 6:9-11 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. <sup>10</sup> But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. <sup>11</sup> Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."

**32 Acts 9:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

**33 Acts 12:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. <sup>2</sup> He killed James the brother of John with the sword,



<sup>34</sup> **2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

<sup>35</sup> **1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

<sup>36</sup> **Acts 4:8-13 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." <sup>13</sup> Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

<sup>37</sup> **Proverbs 21:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.