

LUKE

Part 48: “The Truth About the Fear of Man”

Luke 12:1-12

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Sunday, January 27, 2019 (Epiphany Season)

Scripture Reading

12 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. ² Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³ 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.

⁴ “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵ 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! ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷ Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

⁸ “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, ⁹ but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. ¹⁰ 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. 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.” ¹

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your gospel. May your Holy Spirit fill our heart and illuminate our minds so that we can experience the glory of Jesus as we study your words this morning so that all other fears and all other rivals would fade away. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus, your Son, and our Lord. AMEN.

Introduction

Once upon a time, Jesus was a simple rabbi who taught from synagogue to synagogue in the region of Galilee. But as word began to spread about Jesus powerful teaching and powerful working of miracles, the synagogues would no longer hold the crowds who came out to see him. He had to preach in the open air, on mountaintops, seashores, and even wilderness areas.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 12:1–12.

Now, here in Luke 12, Jesus is on his fateful and final journey to the city of Jerusalem, and as he travels south, people are beginning to go a bit crazy. It's like when the Beatles first came to the United States for their first North American tour. Jesus too is, in a sense, going on tour, and the nation is gripped with the first-century version of Bieber-fever. These *"...many thousands of the people had gathered together [and...] were trampling one another"* (Luke 12:1, ESV).

Now, you might be thinking, "Well, this is a good thing. Jesus is clearly the good guy of the story, and he is getting the recognition and attention he deserves"; almost as if Jesus were the little known local talent who is finally getting to perform on the big stage.

But Jesus knows better than to put his trust in what people are saying about him. The Gospel of John says it this way, *"...many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man"* (John 2:23b–25, ESV).

In our passage today, the word for "people" in verse one is the word "oklos" (ὄχλος). Most of the time it is translated as the word "crowd," but I think the better word would be the word "mob." Why? Because mobs are fickle and often mindless. They are not drawn to Jesus himself as much as at they are drawn to the hype and excitement surrounding Jesus.

In the gospel story, sometimes these "mobs" are attracted to Jesus. Sometimes they rejoice when they witness his power. But sometimes they are outraged and scandalized by him when he teaches them challenging things. Later in this story, they will come out to arrest him (Lk. 22:47), and they will even cry out for his condemnation before Pilate (Lk. 23:4). The same crowd that celebrates in a miracle today will soon be crying out for Jesus's crucifixion.

So Jesus takes the scene of frantic, excitable mobs of people to teach his disciples a very important lesson about life, ministry, and following after God.² When the crowds begin to grow, he knows there is a growing sense of temptation to play to what the crowd wants to see and hear. There is a temptation to enjoy the spotlight. But Jesus warns his disciples to not fall prey to the temptations of the fear of man.

Some of you might not know what that concept means, while others of you know exactly what I mean. For the sake of clarity, let me give you a clear definition of what I mean by "fear of man."

² "Luke wanted to show Theophilus that in contrast to the Pharisees and law experts, Jesus was popular among the masses. As Marshall notes: "The implication is that the crowds have increased in size since 11:29.... The situation is similar to that in the Sermon on the Plain and elsewhere (cf. 20:45) where teaching intended primarily for the disciples is given in the presence of the crowds who are thus taught what is involved in discipleship." Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 346.

The fear of man is the temptation to look to the approval of other people for our sense of purpose, validation, and significance.

And make no mistake, there is a certain allure about the fear of man. But it is a false hope that is dangerous and deadly. As Proverbs 29:25 tells us, ***“The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe”*** (Proverbs 29:25, ESV).

As we take a more in-depth look into Jesus’s words today, I want to show you three ways that Jesus is exposing *“The Truth about the Fear of Man.”*

Exposition

1.) The fear of man tempts us to create a false self.

Let’s take a look at our text: ***“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, ESV).

Jesus is fresh off of a recent confrontation with Pharisees and their false righteousness. He compares their pride and pretense to “leaven,” which it was and still is a substance you put in flour dough to make bread rise and puff up.³

And he refers to this leaven of the Pharisees with the word “hypocrisy” (ὑπόκρισις). At the time of Jesus’s life, the word hypocrite referred to a type of actor who wore a mask that displayed the emotion he was trying to convey. Jesus was the one who started using this word to convey the meaning of someone who conceals his or her real self behind a veneer of a self-created mask.⁴

Simon Peter is our youngest son, who recently turned three. When people ask me, now which one is that, I will say the one who always has a costume on, and they will say, “Oh yeah, that one.” Even at church today, there is about a 50/50 chance he is wearing a cape, costume, or mask of some sort. And there is a reason for this. Even though Simon Peter is a major rascal at home, he tends to get shy around big groups of people. When someone meets him for the first time, he will often hide behind his momma’s legs. However, if Simon Peter happens to be wearing a superhero costume, we are looking at a different situation. If he is in a Spider-man costume, for example, he will greet you with Spider-man poses and web shootings, instead of shyness. In other words, he suddenly becomes very confident whenever he puts on his mask.

³ “Leaven in Scripture is generally a type of *evil* which corrupts and spreads, disturbing, puffing up and souring that which it influences.” Alfred Plummer, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*](#), International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896), 318.

⁴ □ **πόκρισις, εως**, □ (□ποκρίνομαι; Hdt.+ = ‘answer’, then Attic ‘playing a stage role’) in our lit. only in a neg. sense **to create a public impression that is at odds with one’s real purposes or motivations, play-acting, pretense, outward show, dissembling.** William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1038.

Sometimes we too are insecure. We don't like to feel exposed and seen. We are tempted by the fear of man to create a mask that gives us an artificial sense of confidence. This mask is the false version of ourselves that we think will earn our acceptance and validation. It is a glittering image of what we think other people want us to be. We will present not our true self, but a version of ourselves that we will receive the approval of the people that we want to approve of us. But Jesus is warning us, beware of this temptation toward mask-wearing.

What are the masks we wear today? The projection that we have the Pinterest-perfect life? That we are put-together and have it all under control? That we are tougher or perhaps nicer than we really are? Do we at times exaggerate or downplay our relationship with God, depending on the environment?

Most often we put masks over the areas where we feel weak and wounded; we mask the very areas where we are most in need of healing. We cover up things that need to be addressed. And like an untreated wound that begins to grow infected, dark things grow in dark places.

But Jesus also teaches that this attempt to conceal the true self is ultimately doomed. Look at the next few verses: ***“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”*** (Luke 12:2–3, ESV).

Our true self will eventually be revealed; either now or in eternity. There is a coming apocalypse; wherein all things will be unveiled.

It is in light of this truth that we can look at the spiritual discipline of confession. *Confession is not a form of self-inflicted punishment that would earn our atonement, salvation, or acceptance. Confession is a gift that allows us to let go of our sin and false self and accept healing from God. Confession is a moment to recognize the true self we may have been avoiding so that we might experience the freedom and joy of being truly known and truly loved by God.*

The church needs to be an environment of open and honest confession, where the true self flourishes and find healing. We need not aim toward having a culture of wearing the right pre-approved masks, but instead, a culture of safety where grace can be displayed, received and given.

The world is not impressed with pristine perfection. The world is not impressed with masks. The world needs to find people who invite them into the freedom of taking their masks off.

2.) The fear of man tempts us to live for the temporary instead of the eternal.

What motivates fear of man? We desperately do not want to be judged, found wanting, and rejected.

We know we have flaws. We feel like frauds. We do have a created need to belong and receive validation. So if we are led by the fear of man, we will live largely reactionary lives wherein we desperately desire the approval of people, and we deeply fear being rejected.

Against this way of life Jesus has some pretty hard words: ***“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!”*** (Luke 12:4–5, ESV).

Jesus is saying, don't fear man. The worst and best that man can do is still *temporary*. Fear God. Only God can punish or reward you *eternally*. The ultimate answer to overcoming the fear of man is the fear of God.

The fear of God is a pretty big idea in the Bible. In fact, the first chapter of Proverbs tells us, ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*** (Proverbs 1:7, ESV).

But what is the fear of God? Is the fear of God paranoid looking over our shoulder for God to punish us or smite us? Does the fear of God imply an absence of the love of God? Does the fear of God imply a lack of joy or peace? No. Here is a working definition of the fear of God I would like to offer. ***The fear of God is a sense of awe-struck wonder at the glory and majesty of God that allows us to recognize that absolutely nothing else in the universe compares to him.***

And I believe with all my heart that both the fear of man and fear of God are postures of the heart that are often cultivated and stoked through our habits.

Habits that cultivate the fear of God

- Anything that increases our awareness of God's presence and glory; anything that reminds us of the story of creation and redemption in which we play a part
- Reading the word of God and prayerful meditation
- Singing songs in corporate worship, sitting under the authority of the preached word of God, receiving the Lord's Supper, serving

Habits that cultivate the fear of man

- Anything through which we seek validation through something other than God.
- We do this by turning good things turned into ultimate things: academics, sports, professional achievement.
- Social media has taken this into a whole other dimension. It is literally built for us to be addicted to and seek other people to like our self-projections.
- How many people thought my post was brilliant or my body was beautiful today?

- Not all social media is evil. But, beware, social media addiction can feed an appetite in your soul that is dangerous.

We have a creational need for approval, and we think the validation of people can meet this need. But the answer isn't fake validation – it is redemption and experiencing the love of God.

Look at the next few verses: *“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”* (Luke 12:6–7, ESV).

The people you are most concerned about think about you less than you think they do. They care about you less than you think they do. But the infinite God who created all things and is the most glorious being in the universe thinks about you cares about you more than you could ever imagine. His approval is infinitely and eternally more important than the approval of man.

3.) The fear of man tempts us to reject Jesus.

The fear of man is a false god that tolerates no rival. The fear of man will at some point push you into a choice of ultimate allegiance.

Look at verses 8 through 10: *“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 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 12:8–10, ESV).

The world changes in many ways in what it celebrates and in what it condemns. But what never changes is that the world is always opposed to Jesus in some way. So you must decide: God or man? Which audience are you playing for? Whose approval will you want?

That point is simple enough. But what is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and what does it have to do with the rest of this passage? Some will say it is rejecting the witness of the Holy Spirit to Christ, which is certainly true to some extent. But if we are going to define it in strictly in the way Jesus uses it, it is as one commentator says *“...attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan, charging the Spirit of God with association with evil, calling a blessing a curse, was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.”*⁵

So what are the real temptations to blasphemy today? Where are we most tempted to call evil good and good evil, for the sake of gaining the approval of the surrounding world? Where are we most tempted to be ashamed of the name of Jesus? Where is

⁵ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 161.

loyalty to Jesus costly for us? We have to learn to see such challenges from an eternal perspective.

I once attended a lecture by a pastor named J.R. Vassar, who planted a church in New York City. He talked about how he was trying to equip his congregation to engage the largely secular culture around them. He said this, and I found it very helpful: *"Honor or shame. You get one now and the other later, but the one you choose for later is yours forever."*⁶ If we choose shame for now, we will receive the honor of Christ for eternity. Our ultimate sense of worth must derive not from how our society values us, but rather how Christ will vindicate us.

When we stand for Christ, we will be rejected and judged. We may feel alone, but we are never alone. We are promised that the Holy Spirit will be an advocate and defender.

Look at the end of our passage: *"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"* (Luke 12:11–12, ESV).

There will be times when we experience great pressure to bow to the fear of man. The example of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego teaches us that we may stand in the fire, but we will never stand alone (see Daniel 3).

Conclusion

When Jesus talks about the fear of man, this wasn't just advice Jesus was willing to dish out. This is truth he lived.

In his lifetime Jesus disappointed his family, his hometown, his disciples, religious leaders, and the crowds. But He never disappointed his Father. Pleasing people was never his goal. Pleasing his Father was.

I can imagine Jesus, having been betrayed and abandoned by his disciples, standing in front of the Jewish high council, being judged and evaluated by them. It would have been so easy to tell them what they wanted to hear. It would have been easy to avoid the cross. But Jesus looked beyond the suffering, beyond the rejection, beyond the cross itself to the surpassing eternal weight of glory. And we too are to *"[look] to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."* (Hebrews 12:2, ESV)

We are to look to the cross where Jesus was rejected by men so that we could be accepted by God! We look to the cross with hope, knowing the One who was once judged by men will one day be the judge of all men. Knowing this glorious vision of Christ in our hearts is what will allow us to be delivered from the false promises of the fear of man.

⁶ Vassar, J.R. Acts 29 West Texas Area Quarterly. Redeemer Church. Lubbock, Texas. 13 Oct. 2013.

So Redeemer Christian Church, may we be set free from the fear of man by the fear of God. May we feel the liberty that allows us to take off all masks, and look toward a hope that is eternal and everlasting. AMEN.

Community Group Discussion Starters

- 1.) *Read Luke 12:1-12 and briefly summarize in your own words the themes of what Jesus is teaching in this passage.*
- 2.) *During Jesus's time, the word "hypocrisy" referred to a style of acting in which an actor would wear a mask to display an emotion. When Jesus uses this word, it means putting on a false pretense to mask our true self. What does the temptation toward hypocrisy look like today? What are the masks you are the most tempted to put on?*
- 3.) *What causes lie at the root of the fear of man? How have you been tempted to act differently than you should in order to gain the approval of people?*
- 4.) *In this passage, Jesus teaches that the fear of man can only overcome by the fear of God. Why is this true, and how can we cultivate the fear of God in our lives?*

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