



Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 12:1-12

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Staying True Through Difficult Times

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

One of the greatest challenges for Christians today is to stay true to our calling, especially during stressful times. The temptation to compromise is often strongest when the pressures of life are greatest. The world calls to us, offering counterfeit securities by the dozens. The flesh rears its ugly head and we find ourselves battling our fear on a moment to moment basis. And to top it off, the enemy is always nipping at our heels, prompting us to doubt God's goodness and the sovereignty of His plan. How difficult it is, at times, to navigate this terrain. Well, it should come as no surprise to you that the disciples of Jesus' day also struggled in much the same way. Same issues; different sets of circumstances. Just because they walked with Jesus on earth didn't exempt them from having to deal with pressures and stress and the inevitable temptations that follow. And so this morning we are going to look at how Jesus encouraged them to stay true in the midst of it all. Turn with me to Luke 12:1-12.

Luke gives us the setting for this passage in the first part of verse 1. He writes, "**Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first of all.**" Now let's just stop right there. In the scene before this one Jesus has been reclining at the home of a Pharisee. As we saw last week this was not your typical luncheon. Jesus wasn't discussing the effects of global warming or the rise in gas prices. As He sipped chardonnay and tasted the hors d'oeuvres, He never once speculated on the 49ers chances of going to the Super Bowl that year. Hardly! In this encounter Jesus dismissed all the cultural etiquette and basically ripped these religious leaders in scathing terms. He told them that, in the sight of God, their hearts were filled with robbery and wickedness. He then accused them (1) of losing their love of God and refusing to bring justice to the people; (2) of allowing their hearts to be so filled with pride that to sit under their teaching would be like walking over an unmarked grave, (3) of being responsible for the death of the prophets whom their fathers had killed because they wouldn't conform to religious doctrine; and (4) of hindering anyone who was truly seeking the eternal life they themselves assumed they already possessed.

So as you can imagine, when Jesus left these religious leaders were probably having a difficult time

digesting their food. They were most likely rustling through the medicine cabinets in search of the Tums or Roloids. Consequently, opposition began to heat up, like gasoline to a flame. They started grilling Jesus with questions, waiting to trap Him in something He might say. They had had enough! As my hero Popeye used to say "I've had all I can stands and I can't stands no more." And from this point onward they were committed to hunting Jesus down like some wild animal.

At the same time, Jesus' popularity was drawing vast and yet dangerously enthusiastic crowds. Luke tells us that the press of people was so great they were literally trampling on one another. And as we know, when large crowds become excited they often become unruly and even hostile. We have all heard of riots that have broken out at sporting events or concerts, where innocent people are hurt. I can remember watching the relief attempts in Indonesia on CNN after the horror of the tsunami. This sea of humanity, on the verge of disease and starvation, were literally trampling on one another to get to the supplies. This was, in a sense, what was happening here. These feverish reactions of the crowds coupled with the Pharisees' antagonism towards Jesus had the effect of making some of His disciples a little tentative about their relationship with Him. They were probably thinking, "You know, all this stuff about being publicly identified with Christ is pretty risky business. It might be a little safer to keep our faith a personal affair." This is what we often say as well. We say, "I really can't be candid about my faith. It's too costly. What would people think? I might lose that business account or my reputation." Or, as the disciples were tempted to say here, "My very life and security is being threatened." And so Jesus, in sensing their fear, gives His disciples four commands that, once applied, would help them stay true to their calling. I think we can trust that what He had to say still holds true today with undiminished force.

I. BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST HYPOCRISY.

The first of these commands comes in the second part of vv. 1-3. Jesus warns His disciples to "**Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly whatever you have said in the dark will**

be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops." Jesus is saying here that we should always guard our hearts against hypocrisy. Now hypocrisy should never really shock us. It's always been a part of our fallen nature. As Adam and Eve covered their nakedness after the Fall, all of humanity has been doing the same thing ever since. We are not always what we pretend to be on the outside. There is a tendency in every one of us to wear masks, to play a part and engage in pretense. A police officer pulled a driver aside one day and asked for his license and registration. The driver, who seemed a little irritated asked, "What's wrong, officer? Was I speeding? Did I go through a red light or what?" "No!" the officer replied. "But when I pulled up behind you, you were cussing at the Hummer who cut you off. Then I saw you pounding your steering wheel when the traffic came to a stop near that bridge over there. When I noticed the "What Would Jesus Do" emblem on your window, the "Follow Me to Sunday School" bumper sticker and the chrome plated fish on your trunk, I naturally assumed you had stolen the car." Ouch! Hypocrisy is the discrepancy between what appears and what is, between the way things seem and the way they really are. And it's often birthed as a result of bowing to the idol of other people's values, which are not really our own. So if the group we belong to, for example, defines spirituality as having green hair, a hypocrite will dye their hair green, knowing in their hearts that hair color has nothing to do with spiritual things. And because hypocrisy is a deliberate deception, God views it as sin. The Pharisee's hypocrisy lay in their elaborate ritual piety that served as a veneer for their toxic souls. But the pretense of the disciples had a different twist. For them it meant downplaying the level of their commitment to Christ. They were in danger of not acting in concert with who they truly were on the inside.

But regardless of its form, all hypocrisy functions on the principle of corruption: it sours the dough with which it's mixed, causing a swelling ferment. It works slowly and progressively, rotting the human spirit from the inside out. So Jesus warns His disciples, and it remains a warning to this day, **"There is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known."** Someone once said "if a man's inner thoughts were written across his forehead he'd never take his hat off." The Pharisees had developed a lifestyle of hiding their true selves behind a variety of religious masks without realizing that their deception would, eventually, be unmasked. In other words, they were really good at "doing" church but their hearts remained far away from God. So the Lord is warning His disciples in light of this, "If you think that in the sight of God you can cover up the reality of your hearts, you are greatly mistaken; for either in this lifetime or in the life to come, nothing will be

concealed."

Then He uses another great image by saying, **"Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops."** Well, that's encouraging news for those who hold their anonymity rights tightly. And the bottom line is this - there are no secrets in the sight of God. As David wrote in Psalm 139, **"Even the darkness is not dark to Thee, and the night is as bright as the day."** Furthermore, there is no place we can hide from Him. We sometimes like to think we can; that we have moments of privacy where no one can see what we do or what we think. This may be true with people, but not so of God. He sees into the inner rooms of the soul, even when the lights are out and no one is home. Does that thought bring you comfort or fear? I have to admit that, for me, this meets with mixed reviews if I see God only from the perspective of a Righteous Judge. Like the prodigal son there are areas of my heart that journey far away from Him at times. But when I take into account His grace; that He's also the covering of my soul; that He meets me in those secret places and delights in restoring me from the inside out, I find comfort. Still in the midst of the process and through the difficult times we are called to be true—to be authentic before God and others. Respect for His knowledge and our accountability before Him means that we will conduct our lives like an open book, with nothing to hide. So, be on your guard against hypocrisy. That's the first thing we need to learn.

II. FEAR THE GOD IN WHOM YOUR ETERNAL DESTINY RESTS.

Secondly, Jesus wanted His disciples to focus vertically rather than horizontally; to be God fearing rather than fearful of man. In verses 4-5, He says, **"My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!"** Jesus knew His disciples would endure difficult days as powerful forces would come against them and the lives of their families. I think this is a difficult concept for us to really put our minds around today. We don't live in biblical times where the threat of being stoned to death is of any real concern. On the contrary we enjoy much religious freedom; a freedom, I fear, we often take for granted. Now some may think we're "whacko" for believing what we do but at least we're tolerated, right? Our children aren't living in constant ridicule for praying over their sack lunches at school. Our families aren't threatened by fire bombs being hurled through our windows on a

daily basis. Praise God for that! But what we experience, in terms of religious freedom, is not normative for all Christians in other parts of the world. Nor can we afford to be lulled into a false sense of security when we're clearly warned in the scripture that "in the last days," we will suffer much persecution.

Recently, one of our missionaries in Albania was here with his wife and children. Great guy. Devoted family man. At one of our staff meetings he told a story about a colleague named Klodi. Klodi was ministering with Campus Crusade in Ankara, Turkey. And on this occasion he was asked to take an Albanian couple, together with their pastor and his wife, on a tour of one of the campuses. As Klodi was walking and praying with these two couples he became aware of a group of about 12 men, all dressed in black, coming towards him. He tried to go another way, but to no avail. And when he looked around he was surprised to see that the other two couples had disappeared completely. Klodi was alone with this menacing mob of men. The group took hold of his arms, walked for a while on campus and then stopped to form a circle around him. One of the men checked Klodi's backpack, asked where he was from, what he was doing in Turkey, and whether or not he was a missionary. Every Turk since a child is taught that missionaries are the scum of the earth; men and women without scruples who get paid really well to convert others to Christ. Klodi told them that if by the word "missionary" they meant that he was one who shares his faith, the answer is "yes." Immediately the group began to beat him within an inch of his life. As the fists and kicks struck him from every direction, Klodi found himself on the ground unconscious. When he opened his eyes he didn't know where he was. He looked around and saw groups of students walking and talking together. A police officer was standing just a few feet away as if nothing had happened. When he was finally able to assess the damage Klodi became aware that he was covered with blood. So he took his coat off, and with his body aching with every step, he staggered home, thanking God it was all for His name.

This is an astounding story! Not only because persecution is more commonplace than we care to acknowledge but also because of Klodi's response. He thanked God for giving him the opportunity to suffer as Christ had suffered. Our natural temptation, after experiencing this kind of beating, would be to get angry at God for allowing it in the first place. And the reason why the disciples feared men enough to hide their faith in Christ is that they could, and indeed would, be killed, like many of the prophets before them. Jesus didn't minimize the fact that many of them might die, but He does seek to put that death into perspective. He tells His disciples that physical death is not to be feared, but rather spiritual death—spending eternity separated from Him. Our fellow

man can only take away one's physical life, but God is the One who has the power to banish men to hell. So rather than fear man we should fear the God in whom our eternal destiny rests. This is what Jesus is saying. A proper fear of God will always free us from any improper fears about men. The primary thought here is that our God is an awesome and powerful God. A healthy fear is an attitude that recognizes this. It's fear in the sense of utmost respect and awe.

Sadly, in today's culture, I think we've lost our vision of the awesomeness, the majesty and glory of God. Recently my discipleship group has been studying the character of God, and we've all sensed that based on our reading we had a very shallow view of our awesome but loving Creator. Why is that? Well, I think there are a number of reasons, but let me take a stab at a few. First of all, we tend to think that God looks like we do. We form our own concept of Him. We tend to shape Him in our own image rather than allow Him to shape us in His. A number of years ago Spencer Marsh wrote a book entitled *God, Man and Archie Bunker*. The author shows how Archie Bunker's God acts and feels very much like Archie who, as we know, is a couch potato and typical racist. How far from the truth of God as revealed through creation, in the scriptures and most completely in Jesus Christ. Secondly, we often suppress God's revelation of Himself because we prefer to focus on what we can see. What God often reveals about Himself is too much for us to handle. The writer of the book of Hebrews says, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." We want something more manageable. Which brings us to the third reason—self-rule has to crumble before His glory. When we encounter the living God, all our myths concerning our autonomy are smashed to pieces. Despite any objections to the contrary we're not the final authority. In God's presence we are but dust and ashes. Every breath we breathe is a gift of His grace. How we need this wholesome fear that Jesus commended to His disciples. We need Moses' fear before the burning bush when with trembling hands he removed his sandals and "hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God." We need Isaiah's fear who cried out, "Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips . . . and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." And the point is, when we focus on the greatness of God's power, the expanse of His resources, then that which we fear tends to shrink down to its proper size.

The fear of God is also a secure fear as we see in the verses 6–7; **"Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable**

than many sparrow.” Here is another seemingly irreconcilable truth about God’s character. The One who is Holy Other is also concerned about every detail of our lives. The One who is to be feared is also the One who has a deep love and intimate concern for His disciples. He knows and cares about the sparrows, which have little value to man. He knows the very hairs of our head. We are made in His image. We are the apex of His created order. We are the objects of His redemptive love. Since God knows, at every moment, what’s happening to us, doesn’t it make sense that nothing can happen to us, even death, outside of God’s infinite knowledge and tender care. And since God has the keys, as it were, of heaven and hell, death can only usher us into His eternal presence. Victor Frankl, whose well known experiences at the death camps in Auschwitz are chronicled in *Man’s Search for Meaning*, concludes his story with these words, “We all said to each other in camp that there could be no earthly happiness which could compensate for all we had suffered. But for every one of the liberated prisoners, the day comes when, looking back on his camp experiences, he can no longer understand how he endured it all. The crowning experience of all, for the homecoming man, is the wonderful feeling that, after all he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear any more - except his God.”

III. CONTINUE TO CONFESS CHRIST OPENLY.

The third way we can stay true to our calling is to continue to confess Christ openly. In verses 8-10, Jesus tells His disciples, “**And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him**” (vv. 8-10). Here Jesus is probably focusing on the coming persecution and the reality that both Judas and Peter were among His disciples. He also knew that persecution would become life-threatening and wanted to warn all disciples in generations to come that actions taken on earth have eternal consequences for better or for worse.

There is the terrible story of Judas who in denying Christ, betrayed Him and then handed Him over to His enemies. Why would he do this? Was it because he valued 30 pieces of silver over his eternal security? Or perhaps Judas, though claiming to be a true disciple, never really bought into this Jesus thing hook, line and sinker. Whatever the reasons we can all appreciate the results—Judas hung himself from a tree. Then there is the story of Peter who denied the Lord three times. What prompted him, upon whom Christ would build His church, to reject the Lord in the manner he did? Some say that pride led to Peter’s fall. Others would point to the impulsiveness of his character. But I think we can look

back to what we’ve already discussed this morning—that the fear of man probably contributed to Peter’s denial more than anything else. Subsequently Peter’s life hung in the balance *until* he was willing to confess his sin. And, as we know, he was then forgiven and restored by the risen Lord along the shores of Galilee. You see, true faith always moves from the heart to the lips. On the other hand, a hesitancy to confess Christ before others may be a warning sign regarding the integrity of our faith. Maybe we’ve fooled ourselves and are not in reality what we claim to be, sold out for the cause of Christ. This is of great concern to Him. Jesus said, “whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory.” And the One who gave Himself for us is saying it again here. He’s saying, “Be careful, eternity is in view. Don’t compromise your faith because of some physical need, emotional pain or pressure. I haven’t denied you, so don’t you deny me.” So Jesus commands us here to openly confess Him throughout our lifetime, regardless of what influences us not to.

He then offered that famous and often misunderstood warning concerning blasphemy by saying, “**and everyone who will speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him.**” What does it mean to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit? Well, we know from an earlier passage in Luke that Jesus made this statement after the scribes and Pharisees accused Him of casting out a demon by the power of Satan. These Pharisees, despite all evidence to the contrary, were rejecting the work and person of the Holy Spirit. Their hearts had become so calloused that they could not, would not, repent of their ways. And if anyone refuses to repent and confess before God there is no forgiveness. This doesn’t mean that God has shut them out. But by virtue of their repeated refusals they shut themselves out. Oddly enough, the one person who is not in danger of committing the unpardonable sin is the one who fears that he has. For once a man has committed it, he’s so dead to God that he is no longer conscious of sin at all. Now it is possible, as Jesus tells us, to speak a word against Him but then repent as Peter did and receive forgiveness. But those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit by attributing His work and witness to Satan are eternally damned. Do you see the difference? Blasphemy is not so much the use of derogatory language, as many believe today, but a conscious and persistent rejection of the Spirit’s witness. It’s a steeling of the mind against the Spirit of God.

But, as Christ’s disciples in this world, we are all called to give an answer for the hope that we have. Our hope is in Christ—period—the name that is above all names. And that through His death and resurrection we

have new life. Our witness to the world comes from the staggering reality that, through the Cross, God takes us as we are. Sometimes He breaks us in order to remake us into the kind of people who can then reflect His character in all we do and say. This is our true confession. This doesn't mean that we are to knock on every door passing our tracks. But it does mean that, regardless of where God has placed us or the circumstances that surround us, we are candid about our allegiance to Christ. So regardless of how troubling the situation, continue to confess Christ openly. That is the third marker that Jesus is pointing to.

IV. FINALLY, DEPEND ON THE SPIRIT WHO EMPOWERS US.

Having given these chilling warnings regarding blasphemy against the Spirit Jesus wanted His disciples to embrace the great truth that the Holy Spirit is the believer's Helper. **"And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say"** (vv. 11-12). Of all the commands that Jesus has given us in this passage, for me, this is the most important. Because, bottom line, there is no way I can predict how I would respond if my wife or daughter's life were threatened because of my faith. All the faith that I could possibly muster would be utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit's provision in the midst of my weakness. We all face situations we could never prepare for. But we can rely on God's promise, that the Spirit's astounding grace will sustain us in those situations.

When Martin Luther first stood before the Diet at Worms, John Eck, the Archbishop of Trier, asked him, "Martin Luther, do you recant of the heresies in your writings? Do you defend them all, or do you care to reject a part?" Luther gave the quiet answer, "This touches God and His word. This affects the salvation of souls. Of this Christ said, 'He who denies Me before men, him will I deny before the Father.' To say too little or too much would be dangerous. I beg you, give me time to think it over." Luther asked for 24 hours to consider the situation. Eck and the whole assembly were amazed. How could the supreme intellectual leader of this movement ask for more time to think? Had he succumbed to fear? That night Luther and his colleagues passionately called out to God in now-celebrated prayers. He needed clarity. He needed the strength only the Holy Spirit can bring. So he poured out his heart to God well unto dawn. With the rising of the sun another larger hall was chosen, and it was so crowded that scarcely anyone except the emperor could sit. Eck spoke long and eloquently in the flickering candlelight. At last

he turned to Luther and asked, "I ask you Martin - answer candidly and without horns - do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?"

Luther spoke, and his voice rang true. He spoke first in German and then in Latin: "Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply. I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen." At that towering moment Luther's reliance on the Spirit's power and accountability before God freed him from the smaller fear of men!

So where are we at in all this? In what ways are we tempted to compromise our true calling in Christ? In whatever ways we are, we can rest assured that Jesus knows well our current circumstances and how difficult life can be. Furthermore, we will continue to be pressed in by various influences until He returns to reclaim His own. This shouldn't surprise us. There is no retirement from the spiritual life. So until His work in us is through, be on guard against hypocrisy. In other words, live your lives like an open book. Secondly, have a wholesome respect for God. When we give God His due, in the proper sense of the word, we fear nothing else. But when we don't we fear everything else. So keep your eyes fixed on Him. Thirdly, take every opportunity to confess Christ as Lord. Be careful in what ways you deny Him. The enemy prowls around like a lion seeking to usurp our integrity in Christ on a consistent basis. And finally, always depend on the Holy Spirit. As we avail ourselves to Him, all of God's resources are released in the midst of our weakness. And it's because of the Holy Spirit's ministry that Jesus could say with confidence, "Surely I am with you always." What a great promise!

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