**FEAR GOD, NOT MEN**

May 17, 2015

Luke 12:1-12

Key Verse: 12:4-5 “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”

In today’s passage, Jesus teaches the disciples to be watchful against the yeast of the Pharisees: hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is to lead a double life. It is a life that outwardly looks holy or good but inwardly enjoys unrighteous or wicked things. For example, with our lips we may speak the Word of God or righteous things but inwardly we love things of the world more than God.   
At church we may pray and praise God, but in our daily lives, our hearts are far from God and live in worldly way just like unbelieving people. In today’s passage, Jesus gives us solutions to avoid such hypocrisy so that we may live a life of discipleship that is acceptable to God. Let’s learn what Jesus teaches us in today’s passage.

Look at verse 1. “Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: ‘Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.’” Hypocrisy in Greek means “pretending”; it is derived from the Greek word, hypokrites, meaning “actor”. Thus, hypocrisy literally means playing or pretending to be someone or something that he or she is not.

In previous passages, Jesus severely rebuked and warned the Pharisees of their hypocrisy.

And here, he compares their hypocrisy to yeast. As some of the bakers in the room might already know, yeast is a kind of fungus often used to make bread rise. Specifically, once yeast is added, it quickly grows and expands so that what used to be a dense mass of dough becomes a loaf of bread. Hence, the peculiar quality of yeast is that even with only a small amount, the whole dough is changed. Jesus, thus, uses yeast as a metaphor for influence and warns his disciples to be watchful so as not to be influenced by Pharisees’ hypocrisy.

Now, after 2000 years later, while there are no Pharisees in our midst, hypocrisy is not foreign to us, to say the least. Indeed, the scary thing about hypocrisy is how insidious, subtle it can be in our lives. For instance, we could faithfully attend church while having no sincere love for God. Or, we can sing many hymns and praise songs while maintaining a wicked heart against another person. Whatever form it takes, hypocrisy is fundamentally an empty, selfish performance; without any authentic desire or heart for God, we busily engage in external, religious activities in Church.

Indeed, ultimately, to live as a hypocrite means to live only for ourselves, our own interests or benefits. Thus, we must discern what is hypocritical in our lives and remove it, because, otherwise, we will lose our spiritual saltiness as believers, our purity, dignity, or godly influence. Instead of reflecting Jesus and revealing Him to the people of this world, the church will become an object of distrust, mocking, or scandal to the world. Eventually, the church as a Body of Christ will deteriorate. For this reason, Jesus teaches us the timeless truth that we should know and hold—that those who want to grow as trustworthy disciples must be on their guard against any type of hypocrisy.

**First, nothing is hidden from God**. Look at verses 2-3. “There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed in the roofs.” When people lead a double life, a hypocritical life, they often think that no one knows what they are really doing. But this is not true. That is Satan’s lie. Hebrews 4:13 says, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” From people’s eyes, we can hide some unclean, wicked or unrighteous thing, but not from God’s.

At the Final Judgment, all that we’ve done will be out there for people to see. There was an interesting movie a while back called “The Truman Show.” The main character, played by Jim Carrey, was actually a subject of a 24/7 TV show. But he did not know it. That meant that everything he said and did was known to all. Most of us would be horrified if our life had any similarities to that. Yet the Bible says they do. So, you and I should live life as an open book.

Jesus says, “There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known.” This applies to both what is evil and what is good. The good things we do in perseverance and even tears of love may not be recognized or rewarded immediately but we shouldn’t be discouraged or tired because, Jesus says that everything will be made known in the end. There is a great promise of God in Daniel 12:3 which says, “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.” Here, wise men means those who fear the Lord (Proverb 9:10a).

**Second, fear God, not men (4-5)** Let’s look at verses 4-5. “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.” One of the main reasons that we fall to the sin of hypocrisy is our fear of men. People fear people because they think that their life’s success or achievement or destiny are very much in their hands. They think that if they displease people, they may lose something important; such as people’s recognition, their job, their future security, their friend, their family, or even their very life, etc. Realistically, this can be true. But the bigger problem is that when they fear people and try to please people rather than God, they can become hypocrites. And they lose incomparably more important things: God and eternal life.

Here, Jesus gives us perfect solution to avoid the fear of men. It is the fear of God. Jesus says, “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.” Men can kill at most our body only; they can’t do any more than that. But God can kill our body and after that throw us into hell. This would be our eternal destiny. Men cannot determine our eternal destiny but God can. Jesus wants us to have the fear of this God. Here, fear doesn’t mean a fear of punishment but a deep reverence, an attitude of profound respect and trust. When we consider and meditate on God’s power, his divine authority and infinite love, we cannot but be filled with profound respect, trust, and reverence.

According to verses 6-7, there are even more reasons that warrant our trust for and reverence to God. They read, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” These two verses teach us that God is not only powerful and of divine authority but also he is the Sovereign, loving, and caring Provider to all creation. Who would have thought that a single sparrow is cared by God? But Jesus says, “Not a single sparrow is forgotten by God.” Jesus says again, “You are worth more than many sparrows. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered by God.” This verse teaches us that God indeed knows all our situations and needs like a loving and caring father. Therefore, we really don’t need to be afraid for our life.

Are you going through any crisis, trial or difficult time in your life? Many young people feel lonely, not accepted, not loved. Many students have no idea where their life is headed. So they have anxiety and worry for their uncertain future. Everybody wants a decent job after graduation but can’t always find one. Some have trouble at home with family members; spouse or children. Some have difficulty at work. Some have financial difficulty or health problem. Missionaries or disciples may have difficulties in teaching the bible through 1:1. Maybe there can be something else. However, whatever it is, you and I are certain to face personal trials in our life that will tempt us to ask “Has God forgotten me?” In these difficult circumstances Jesus encourages us with his words “Don’t be afraid” and “do not worry.” We are not forgotten by God. Jesus said, “Not a single sparrow is forgotten by God. And we are worth more than many sparrows. And even the very hair of our heard are all numbered by God.” God knows all our situations. He loves us and cares us. This assurance fills us with true peace, joy and confidence.

Our confidence is best expressed in Hebrews 4:16. “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” When trouble comes, unbelievers worry and run around frantically looking for solutions. When trouble comes the people of God kneel down and pray in the confidence of God’s love. “Prayer is the key that opens the door to God’s solutions for every need or problem.” I pray, “May we not worry or be afraid when we are challenged by outside forces and Satan’s attacks. May we turn to the God who cares for us and pray.” You and I are worth more than many sparrows.

Then what should we do as his disciples while we are still living in this world?

**Third, speak up for Jesus (8-12)** Look at verses 8-12. “I tell you, whoever acknowledge me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.” When we fear God not men, consequently we become free from fear of men and hypocritical life and we can freely share about Jesus who brought us the kingdom of God. Of course, acknowledging and sharing Jesus before men is not always easy job, instead it may require us to pay the cost; even to risk our own life. But when we remember that we should not fear men but God alone, we can gladly risk even our very life for Christ. And Jesus promises, “Whoever acknowledge me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.”

Jesus gives another promise: when we have to face worldly authorities, the Holy Spirit will teach us what we should say. In the 21st century, postmodern, liberal democratic society, most of us haven’t had to be brought before worldly authorities such as the police or criminal justice system authorities for preaching the gospel. But aside from political or institutional forces, we may face cultural challenges when speaking about the gospel of Jesus. Humanities of modern academia often try to undermine the authority and relevance of the Bible to this contemporary age. Similarly, a culture of scientific skepticism often tries to discredit the Bible as an authoritative text, by projecting a mutually exclusive relationship between science and gospel faith.

However, in any moment of uncertainty, risk, danger or hardship, Jesus is with us together in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit teaches us what we should say in the particular situation we face. All we should do is be ready to speak up about Jesus, to share the gospel wherever we are, whether on campus, at work place, or at home.

In conclusion, in today’s passage, Jesus gave us clear solution how we can avoid hypocrisy and live pure and powerful life as disciples. It is to fear God not men and actively be ready always to speak up for and about Jesus Christ. And Jesus encourages us not be afraid for our life because God cares for us and loves us. Let’s remember that we are worth more than many sparrows. Amen.