

Who do you fear?

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[0 : 00] Let us ask God first for his help. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are never distant from us, but you draw close to us.

As both your heavenly citizens and adopted children, give us faith now to receive your word, understanding to know what it means, and the will to put it into practice through your Holy Spirit who lives in us.

In Jesus Christ's name we pray. Amen. Like it or not, fear is a factor in our lives. But that doesn't have to be a bad thing.

Now, of course, fear can be bad. It's how dictators operate. They extend their reign of terror by brutally punishing anyone with even a hint of disloyalty.

It's how harsh bosses and abusive spouses maintain total control by manipulating their employees and their partners.

[1 : 05] Fear can be bad. But fear can also be good. When it comes to crossing busy roads or being near a boiling stove, all parents want their kids to be fearful.

Without it, they might die. Or fear of imprisonment can cause someone to think twice before deciding to commit a crime. Fear can be good.

But the challenge is, how do we sort out which fear is good and which fear is bad? And once we've done that, how do we face our bad fears?

Well, that is where Jesus comes in. We're going to be in Luke chapter 12 for the next few weeks.

And in this chapter, Jesus is going to speak about our fears and do our fears.

And today, in particular, he's going to help us sort out our fears. He's going to put our fears in the right place.

[2 : 12] And the way he's going to do that is by giving us a right view of God. You see, the truth is, who you fear will affect how you live.

If you fear your parents and you particularly fear their disapproval of you, if you don't meet their expectations, you're going to make decisions and live life based on that fear.

Or, if you fear that, as a Christian, your friends are going to laugh at you or mock you or even end the friendship if you try to live out your faith, you will stay quiet.

You won't live out your faith. Who you fear will affect how you live. And so today, Jesus wants to get our view of God right because when that happens, all our fears will get sorted out.

And the way we'll see that today is by seeing how Jesus speaks of three kinds of fears. A fear we often overlook, a fear we might misplace, and a fear that is godly.

[3 : 28] And how God is relevant to each one. So let's listen to Jesus and look at each of those because when we get our fears in its proper place, paradoxically, we will no longer actually fear anything life can throw at us.

So firstly, a fear we often overlook. You might remember from last week that Jesus has just come from being a pretty awkward lunchtime guest.

But it doesn't seem to matter because he still seems to become more and more popular. Verse 1, thousands turn out to hear the man of the hour.

But as we know, if we've been reading Luke's gospel already, large crowds in themselves don't mean anything. It certainly doesn't mean everyone's faith in Jesus is growing.

In fact, the larger the crowd, the tougher it is to distinguish committed followers from casual onlookers. And so, verse 1, Jesus wants to speak first to his disciples before the crowds.

[4 : 46] You will see this as an ongoing pattern throughout chapter 12. He will speak to his inner circle first before the crowds. And, what does he want to tell them?

Verse 1 again, Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. So Jesus is saying, here is a fear we should have but we might overlook.

we should fear becoming hypocrites like the Pharisees. Now, what is hypocrisy? We saw some examples last week.

It's when we so focus on external action and nitpick over unimportant stuff as a way of covering up our wicked and ungodly hearts.

It's when we want to look so busy doing religious activity so that people will notice us and praise us such that it becomes for our glory rather than for God's glory.

[5 : 58] That's hypocrisy. And, it doesn't necessarily have to be religious. Perhaps, sometimes, instead of being so obvious about our religious activity, we actually want to hide our Christianity.

Why? Because, we don't want our friends to look at us weirdly or condescendingly. We are fearful of what they think.

And so, we quickly make sure that we change our outside to fit in more with them. That is another kind of hypocrisy and it is driven by fear.

But, Jesus says, fear being hypocrites instead. Fear being one thing on the inside and another thing on the outside.

Fear living a double life where you are Christian in one part of your life but not at all in another part. Jesus' teaching as always is challenging.

[7 : 10] And maybe some of you now have troubled consciences for you and I know that all of us don't always live in line with what we preach.

We are conscious that we don't always live up to the name of Christ. There is a sense in which everyone is a hypocrite. but Jesus isn't quite talking here about those of us who are trying to live for Christ but we stumble here and there.

Rather, he is talking about those of us who present ourselves as living for Christ but we are not. Not at all.

He is talking about those of us who want others to think of us as godly people when we are barely pursuing godliness at all.

And Jesus says, if that is you, be on your guard. Because such things are like yeast.

[8 : 20] What is yeast? It is the organism that causes baked goods to rise through the release of carbon dioxide via fermentation.

But here is the relevant detail. Yeast increases mass but not substance and weight. It produces an impression that something is more substantial than it is.

That's what hypocrisy often does. And yeast is something that can easily become infected. It then spreads poison slowly and secretly and incrementally to the rest of the loaf.

It's always trying to grow. It's like a virus in a body or weeds in a garden. If you leave it as it is without trying to treat it, it will just keep going and going until it eventually overwhelms your body or your garden.

It will destroy our souls. And so that's what we should fear, Jesus says. It is so easy to overlook but it can be devastating.

[9 : 44] And Jesus says we should also fear verse 2 because there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known.

So Jesus points us forward in time because there will be a day when everything will be discovered because there will be a day when everything will be exposed or our faking and pretending will one day be shown for what it is.

When the cancer keeps spreading through our body, it will one day become clear. Maybe in our sudden headaches or our arm becoming paralyzed.

Or when the weeds keep growing in a garden, it will one day become clear. There is too many of them. And one day, whether on that final day or even before then, God will expose any persistent hypocrisy.

It cannot be buried forever. We can be sure of that. But why do we do it then?

[11 : 10] Why is it appealing to put on a mask and be unconcerned that our outside doesn't match our inside? Because simply put, we think we can get away with it.

We fool ourselves. We convince ourselves that God can't really see and doesn't really care.

Perhaps that's why tragically the late Ravi Zacharias, the world famous Christian apologist, decided to leverage his reputation to abuse massage therapists in different countries.

No human was keeping him accountable, so perhaps he reasoned God weren't either. Or perhaps that's why Mike Bickle, the founder of the International House of Prayer, thought he could keep tricking young women to have escapades with him while presenting himself as an undisputed prophet and respected author.

But what does Jesus call his father as he prays to him in John 17 verse 3? The only true God. How does Paul describe God in the opening words of Titus 1? The God who does not lie. And what attribute of God does Job marvel at in Job 37 verse 16?

[12:48] He is perfect in knowledge. And so because God is perfectly true and perfectly knowledgeable, because he does not lie, he can and will expose all lies.

Even what is whispered in inner rooms, verse 3, and so that's the most secret part of the house, will be proclaimed from the roofs. Imagine a truck that has both a loud hailer on top of it and a giant LED screen attached to its side, driving around Kuching.

And imagine if it was broadcasting. Here are all the things Pastor Brian is saying and thinking in his heart. Here is what he's been up to when no one is looking.

I have to confess, the thought of that makes me very uncomfortable. And I think that is exactly what God wants for me to consider that kind of image, to become shaken out of my complacency and therefore to turn to him, to ask for forgiveness, to joyfully come to Christ again and thank him that he cleanses me and covers me with his blood and to fear the yeast of hypocrisy anew so that I will live rightly before God as the only audience that matters.

What about you? If God is beginning to convict your heart today, will you turn to him? Or will you think that you are clever enough to trick him?

[14:55] If we have that attitude, we are really like a little child who has jam all over his mouth and crumbs on his fingers while protesting to his mother that he really didn't eat the cookie from the cookie jar.

So fear the yeast of hypocrisy. If we know that is us, let us take action today.

Lay ourselves bare before God confessing our inner Pharisee. And when we genuinely turn to him, here is God's promise.

He will clothe our nakedness with Christ. He will take away our condemnation. He will turn our mourning into dancing.

So that is the fear we so often overlook but must not. But now Jesus wants to alert us to another kind of fear.

[16:00] So secondly, a fear we might misplace. You see, here is another reason we are so often tempted to be hypocrites. It's because we so often fear people.

We fear their disappointment. We fear their displeasure. We fear their retaliation. And so we think if we just put on a mask in front of them we'll be okay.

But Jesus now says verse 4 that that is a misplaced solution for a misplaced fear. I tell you my friends do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.

Look Jesus says human beings can be scary that that's true. They can shame you and really go after you.

Just think about how cruel people can be online in making all sorts of comments and even destroying someone's life. And yes people can even kill you.

[17:20] It's not that hard to take a knife and stab somebody in the heart as we tragically discovered in Sydney yesterday. So on one level it is absolutely natural to fear man.

That wouldn't just be theoretical for the disciples of Jesus' day. After all they can sense the growing hostility of the Pharisees. At the end of last week we know that they are beginning to plot to silence Jesus.

And didn't Jesus just mention last week how God's prophets tend to get murdered? And we know today there are still people who hate what Jesus stands for and they are out to get those on his team.

It is natural to fear man. But Jesus says don't be afraid of them.

Why? Because yes they can kill you but did you know death isn't the worst thing that can happen to you?

[18:37] last week was Wrestlemania pro wrestling's biggest event of the year and there was one spot where one of the most famous wrestling characters the undertaker appears in a cameo his character is meant to evoke and personify death itself and when he appeared the French

commentary team exclaimed there is no boss more final than death itself and so if that is true then we think that if human beings can send you to death they must be the final boss but Jesus says you've assumed wrongly there is a final boss beyond death death there is a final boss who has the authority to impose something worse than physical death and that is the

Lord that's whom we should fear verse 5 fear him who after your body has been killed has authority to throw you into hell and in case we didn't get it he repeats himself yes I tell you fear him and so the thing to really fear isn't someone killing you the thing to really fear isn't a cancer diagnosis the thing to really fear isn't an economic downturn it isn't the existence of evil spirits it isn't the disapproval of your friends no my friends the thing to really fear is that the Lord God alone has authority to send us to a place called hell and hell isn't just a nightclub the word for hell

Jesus uses here is Gehenna which refers to a site near Jerusalem where child sacrifice was once practiced and later turned into a rubbish dump where trash was burned continuously and it was used as a graphic image of judgment by the prophets and now by Jesus to capture what a terrible place hell is hell is not a joke and neither is the one who can send you there so who should you fear those who can at best send you into God's throne room to face judgment or the one who actually sits on the throne and decides where you go now let's be clear God isn't rubbing his hands gleefully at the thought of sending people to hell he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but when everything is made known if anyone is sent to hell we will see that

God is merely following through on his standards of justice it will be obvious he is completely fair that's why we should fear him but is it really right and proper for a Christian to fear God we might find that a little hard to get our minds around at best we might say maybe that's an Old Testament thing but surely in the New Testament we should not anymore surely it's just about love let's briefly explore this and here is the surprising thing the fear of God is definitely not just an Old Testament thing for God makes clear explicitly it is actually a blessing of the new covenant look at Jeremiah 32 verse 38 to 41 on the screen let me read it

God says they will be my people and I will be their God I will give them singleness of heart and action so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them I will make an everlasting covenant with them I will never stop doing good to them and I will inspire them to fear me so that they will never turn away from me I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul so there you go God wants to put a fear of him into us and it is a blessing because this kind of fear is not so much a fear of punishment but a fear caused by the realization of how

[24 : 08] God has used his immense power to do good to us it is what some theologians call filial fear when we stand in reverence and awe and yes a little bit of terror as well because we have just come to terms with who God actually is and what he's done and as we come to terms we realize he is the only safe place for refuge it is a point repeatedly made in Proverbs so look at Proverbs 14 verse 26 and 27 for example whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress and for their children it will be a refuge the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life turning a person from the snares of death or look at how C.S.

Lewis says it in a letter that he wrote the most striking thing about our Lord is the union of great ferocity with extreme tenderness this is the appearance in the human form of the God who made the avalanche and the rose he will frighten and puzzle you but the real Christ can be loved and admired as the door can't in other words Lewis's point is this could we actually stand in awe and reverence at something that doesn't scare us just a little bit that doesn't blow our minds you see we all make doors of what we think God is like but the Bible doesn't want us admiring doors of God the Bible wants us to stand in awe of the real God to fear him and so to run to him as the only refuge that will protect us from all other threats or as the line from the hymn amazing grace puts it was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relief and Jesus utilizes the same logic here he's just told us fear him the one with all authority to send you to hell but then he reminds us the one with such authority is your heavenly father the one with such authority is the one whose son calls you in verse 4 my friends so yes fear him but don't forget verse 6 are not five sparrows sold for two pennies and yet not one of them is forgotten by

God in human eyes the life of a sparrow is worth little it's worth one white rabbit sweet maybe or one copy but Jesus says you know what God doesn't think of them as disposable and if he doesn't think of them as disposable he certainly doesn't think of you as disposable who is worth many many many times more than a sparrow the God who has all power and all authority over heaven and hell

and the earth and the sky is the same God who never forgets you indeed he not only not forgets you but so knows you verse seven that he knows the exact number of hairs on your head my baby Linus doesn't have that much hair on him at the moment but whenever I carry him I always look at the hair on his head and I realize even though he doesn't have that much I still have no idea how much he has and then I think of this verse and then I say wow that's how deeply God knows us he knows even little things like the quantity of our hair no wonder we cannot hide anything from him and the thing is the hair is hardly as important as the heart physiologically speaking but God knows about it too and that's how much he cares about us as a whole so fear God and all our other fears will be sorted into the right places fear God marvel at his love and find our misplaced fear of man beginning to fade but what does fearing

[29 : 38] God today actually look like what does it look like to take refuge in a God we fear and that brings us to the third fear Jesus wants to discuss today thirdly a fear that is godly Jesus now shows us what exactly that looks like verse 8 I tell you whoever publicly acknowledges me before others Jesus says this is what fearing God today boils down to it comes down to your attitude towards Jesus it comes down to whether you truly trust him or not will you be willing to publicly say you are a team Jesus member will you be willing to take his side even when what he stands for might be unpopular or will decide not to you see this is really important to understand there is no such thing as a private

Christian being a Christian is not about having a private faith over and over again people keep telling us otherwise it's okay to practice your faith as long as you keep it to yourself but there is no such Christianity trusting Jesus means publicly acknowledging him and any Christianity that omits that is less than genuine so what can help us do that well it's interesting that Jesus calls himself the son of man here isn't it you see who is the son of man I have a look at Daniel 7 verse 13 to 14 on the screen in my vision at night I look and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven he approached the ancient of days and was led into his presence he was given authority glory and sovereign power all nations and peoples of every language worship him his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed this son of man then is the one who has the exact same God given authority as God himself he is worthy of all worship like God himself in other words he is to be identified with the same God we should fear in Luke chapter 12 verse 4 and 5 so actually it is his opinion we should care about the most and if we decide we are not with him verse 9 then Jesus will decide he is not with us so let us care first and foremost what Jesus thinks think about that final day at the end of time as we stand before him and the angels what would you like the son of man to say of you

Abang well done faithful servant Catherine do you see her so proud of her James he is definitely for me not against me isn't his stamp of approval what truly matters but maybe that has aroused a new fear in you because you are now thinking of all those moments when you have chicken out and you failed to stand up for being a Christian and you are thinking oh no does that mean Jesus is going to disown me fear not you see once again Jesus isn't talking about those who stumble he is talking about those who have decided definitively to reject Jesus that's what it means to blaspheme against the

Holy Spirit it is to decisively reject the Spirit's testimony that Jesus is Savior and Lord and if there is anyone listening here today who is in danger of permanently rejecting Jesus can I urge you to reconsider today before it is too late but for the rest of us here is the good news we are not beyond forgiveness what a relief that must have been to Peter do you remember what Peter did he denied Jesus not once not twice but three times after having boldly declared that he would never disown Jesus and recalling the words of Jesus in verses 8 and 9 must have struck fear into his heart but how relieved he must have been to recall Jesus also saying verse 10 whoever speaks a word against the son of man will be forgiven why because of what the son of man has come to do the one to whom has been given all authority is right now on his way to

[35 : 52] Jerusalem and with God's permission he will let wicked man kill his body he will suffer the hellish experience of God forsakenness on the cross and he did all that so that we can experience the new covenant blessing of forgiveness of knowing God as father and joyfully fearing him so today fear God and trust Jesus and here is the good news when you do that you don't have to fear anything else it's not that you won't ever have the experience of fear again but when you know the one who has the power to send you to hell says he is for you because he is your heavenly father

you suddenly realize all other fears look smaller by comparison so yes you and

I will still deal with all sorts of fears that is the reality we might find ourselves still fearing sickness or unemployment or exams or Satan we might find ourselves still fearing being single for life or marriage problems or our kids going wayward or increased persecution in the future we might find ourselves fearing many many things but whatever it is we can acknowledge them and then let the fear of the Lord become our refuge amidst all those fears draw comfort and strength from the fact that the one who can cast us into hell has used his authority to save us from hell and let that put all other fears into its proper place and let us speak of him to praise him and to share about him now of course sometimes that scares us because we are not eloquent and we are scared that we say the wrong thing and

God will somehow be so disappointed in us and that maybe Christianity will even collapse because of that one time we had a slip of the tongue but Jesus says to his disciples in verses 11 and 12 look one day you will be put on trial before the synagogues and religious officials that happen in the book of Acts but don't worry how you will respond and don't worry what you should say the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say at the moment when you need them and that same Holy Spirit now lives in every believer too so do not fear simply fear God trust Jesus commit yourself publicly to him let your inside match your outside and you will have nothing else to fear not even when you stand before

God on judgment day no on that day you will say hallelujah what a day that will be for at home with him my joy is complete that is the blessing of the gospel so let us thank God now and let us ask for his help to fear him let's pray father as we come before you we want to acknowledge that you are indeed the king of kings the lord of lords you are the God who in one sense is incomprehensible and unfathomable you are the one who has all authority even to send people to hell and father we thank you that you are our heavenly father you are the one who knows every hair on our head who knows the secrets of our hearts and you are someone who is utterly trustworthy we can trust you with those things even when we feel vulnerable so father so father help us to come again and trust you with those things to confess to you where we have sinned to run to you for forgiveness to praise you and help us to fear you with the rest of our lives and let that fear be our refuge we pray all this in the name of

Jesus Christ amen