

**THE RADICAL RABBI:
“A RADICAL AWARENESS”
(Luke 12:1-12)
6.26.22**

Description: *Following his confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus warns his disciples about the dangers of hypocrisy.*

INTRODUCTION

We are continuing a look at the sometimes uncomfortable subject of hypocrisy. Last week, Christ was dealing with it directly in an intense confrontation with the religious leaders — the scribes and Pharisees. He pointed out in unmistakable words just how false their lives had become. He was unmerciful and unyielding in his criticism — both because the religious leaders were meant to be the caring, compassionate shepherds of God’s chosen people, and they were the ones with all the education and training in the magnificent wonders of God’s word. But instead of teaching a God who was constantly reaching out to his people, the countless “traditions of the elders,” the oral commands that had grown up over the centuries, had become both a burden to the people and a very direct impediment to their knowing God as he truly desired to be known. While all this was going on, the religious leaders were enriching and fortifying themselves in their privileged positions. Jesus was guaranteed going to launch a full frontal assault on their arrogance — and their ongoing, living hypocrisy.

But now he has left the house where this confrontation took place. But as he leaves, a huge crowd had gathered. So while Jesus had words of caution for his disciples, many others were hearing his words as well. So as we continue in this moment in our radical rabbi’s ministry, let’s prepare to hear his words ourselves **with a moment of prayer.**

TEXT

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” — Luke 12:1.

As Jesus leaves the Pharisee’s house, there was a crowd of, in the Greek, “thousands upon thousands” intensely gathered around him. In fact, the crowd was so closely squeezed together that they were literally climbing all over each other. Kinda sounds like one of our contemporary “mosh pits.”

But there are a couple of distinct pressures going on that Jesus would want his disciples to be aware of. One is the almost constant, daily presence of crowds. Now certainly the Bible tells us that *Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person — John 2:24-25.* But the disciples would not have had that insight.

And crowds certainly are a rush. I have had the privilege, back when I was doing a lot of music, to have performed in front of relatively decent-sized crowds. I performed once with a gospel group called The Hawaiians. We did a show at the Roy Wilkins Auditorium in St. Paul; that was in front of 5,000 people. And I several times performed, either solo or in a band, in front of crowds that were routinely around 2,000-2,500 back in my college days. And I ain’t gonna lie; to hear the applause of a crowd that big is kinda cool.

But that’s nothing compared to the crowds Christ and his disciples were experiencing. And while it was Jesus the crowds came to see, the disciples were certainly part of all that. And if life becomes all about being an attraction, then you want to keep doing what keeps drawing the numbers; in other words, you want to keep pleasing the people.

The other pressure was one that was surrounding them in a very different way, the way that Jesus had just experienced — the deadly animosity of the religious leaders. They had made no secret of their desire to get rid of Jesus. And as time went by, their intentions became more and more threatening. So the disciples may have begun to experience the pressure that comes from wanting to avoid trouble. In other words, what can we do that won't get the religious leaders coming after us? And all of these things could have a diluting impact on the gospel message that was so necessary to be heard by so many.

So Jesus first warns them about the incredible power of a message that strays from the truth. He compares it to the impact just a little bit of yeast can have on a large quantity of dough, which Paul expanded on in his letter to the Galatians, telling them: ***“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” — Paul, Galatians 5:9.*** Sometimes it doesn't take a lot to impact a lot.

And hypocrisy is like every other sin. It often starts out as something small, sometimes barely even perceptible but, if left unchecked, will soon begin to impact more and more — first within an individual and then spreading out to impact others. Sin does that because that's how Satan operates. He gets us to believe something doesn't matter — maybe a behavior, maybe an attitude toward others. But if allowed to fester, we become desensitized to its presence, its impact in our lives. And then, slowly but surely, it becomes a larger part of who we are.

That's why Jesus told his disciples to be on their guard, literally to pay attention, to “hold the mind” toward any scheme or move of our enemy. I pulled a lot of guard duty during my time in the Marines. And one thing I learned was that, the moment I saw something that concerned me, react and respond. Don't wait until something little or initially unbecoming becomes something bigger and much more difficult with which to deal. As Paul said so clearly in his letter to the Ephesian Christians: ***[D]o not give the devil a foothold — Paul, Ephesians 4:27,*** literally, not the tiniest little spot in our lives.

Then Jesus continues: ***“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 the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:2-3.***

Hypocrisy thrives in dark areas of our lives, behind secrets and in hiding, as we try to project to the outside world a better picture of ourselves than who we really are. Trying to live a secret life is pointless, Jesus says, because there is nothing that can be hidden — not from God. Whether it be words or actions, someday everything about everybody will be revealed. Folks, nobody gets away with anything!

God knows everything about us, and sees everything about us, right now. Certainly the scriptures available in that day would have supported what Jesus was telling them; as the prophet Jeremiah recorded of God himself: ***“Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?” . . . “My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes” — God speaking, Jeremiah 23:24a, 16:17.***

And unlike the hypocrisy taught and lived out by the religious leaders, Christ's teachings were like a piercing light in a dark night. Why? Because his teachings contained absolute truth. That's why he declared to his followers to ***“let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” — Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:16.*** Lives grounded in the absolute truth of Christ's teachings need to similarly bring the light of the life of Jesus of Nazareth into a world desperately trying to blindly find its own way — both by proclaiming his words and living his life.

And then he goes on: ***“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 your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. 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”*** — ***Jesus Christ, Luke 12:4-7.*** Jesus mentions being “afraid” or having “fear” five times in these four verses. Why? Because a huge, fundamental reason for living a hypocritical life is fear — fear of what others may think of you or say about you, or even what they may do to you. So, to prevent that, we adopt a lifestyle that gains favor for our reputation. Unfortunately, such an effort never changes our character; in fact, it damages it — sometimes severely.

The fear of others was another area that the scriptures of Christ’s day would have addressed. We find this from the book of Proverbs: ***Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe — Proverbs 29:25.*** And the prophet Isaiah heard this from God himself: ***“Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults.” . . . “I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mere mortals, human beings who are but grass, that you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretches out the heavens and who lays the foundations of the earth?”*** — ***God speaking, Isaiah 51:7, 12-13a.*** Or to paraphrase what God is so wonderfully saying to all those who have surrendered their lives to him through his Son, whose lives are directed by his word, all those who have truly taken his instruction to heart: “Never fear — I AM (ALWAYS) here!” We can live our lives openly, truthfully, honestly, completely empty of hypocrisy, because our lives are founded, and secured, by the truth of God through Jesus Christ. Talk about assurance!

And how reassuring is it that Jesus called his disciples at the beginning of verse 4 “my friends.” In the Greek, part of the definition for the word “friend” is the phrase “actively fond.” I love that! No letting a relationship just sit off on the side not really doing much of anything. Instead, Jesus pursues us in an ongoing, active sense in which his fondness for us plays out through his interaction with us day after day.

And what about those ominous sounding verses where Jesus is telling his disciples and the crowd around them: ***“[D]o 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 your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him”*** — ***Jesus Christ, Luke 12:4-5.*** For Christians, this is actually a glorious verse. Why? Because it adds to the overwhelming sense of security we have as children of the King.

According to LifeWay Research, it is estimated that the world averages over 16 people a day who die simply for following Jesus Christ — meaning an annual total of over 5,800 people who die for their faith. But do they? According to Jesus, all that can happen to his followers is to have their bodies killed; in fact, according to the apostle Paul, those who die in Christ are merely ***absent from the body [while] present with the Lord — Paul, II Corinthians 5:8b (NKJV).*** In other words, they live on, eternally in the fellowship of life with their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Or to put it another way: Nobody dies! But who should be feared? According to Jesus, the One who ***“has authority to throw you into hell”*** — ***Jesus Christ, Luke 12:5b.*** That is none other than God himself. Only God has that authority. So obviously the only ones that need fear God are those who have chosen to have no relationship with him. Death and hell should strike enormous, unspeakable fear into those making that choice.

And then Jesus provides a wonderful picture of how intimately and deeply we are loved by him and cared about by him — and he used two pictures that everybody in the audience that day would have understood. First he talked about sparrows. These little birds were about the cheapest things a person could buy at that time. They were used in two ways: to be used as a sacrifice at the Temple — but that for only the

very poorest people — and as a very little portion of meat to eat. And yet these tiny little creatures were just as created by God as any other part of his creation, and he held them near and dear to his heart, so much so that, even the tiniest sparrow was not forgotten by God. In fact, according to Christ's words in Matthew, even when one fell out of a tree, God took notice. So Jesus is saying that, if God is so concerned over something we view as insignificant as a tiny sparrow, don't you suppose he is so much more concerned about you? He is. In fact, according to Christ, God is so connected to us that even the very hairs of our heads are numbered. He knows each hair on our head. Now that's intimacy; that's connectedness. At a time where the worth of the individual was almost nonexistent, such a message from this rabbi would have been particularly radical. And that message continues right on down to this day — we all have incredible value!

So now he shares what should result from being so valued and so secure in his love: ***“I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever disowns me before others 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” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:8-10.***

So then, after all the promises of being loved, valued and watched over by God, there should be no reason to be influenced by the threats or intimidations of the world. And we are talking about proclaiming, verbalizing, the truth and reality and testimony in our lives about Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote: ***[W]hat does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame” — Paul, Romans 10:8-11 (quoting Isaiah 28:16; Deuteronomy 30:14).***

And what a promise of being faithful in the midst of any and all opposition: To publicly proclaim Jesus will be acknowledged by Christ himself in the halls of heaven, where the very angels of God will hear of the faithful witness of the followers of Christ. But whoever denies Christ, disowning any connection with him or even acknowledging who he is, will be equally denied and disowned in those same halls of heaven; as Jesus said: ***“Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you’” — Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:23a.*** Jesus is really wanting to make what he is asking of those following him very, very clear. There is no neutrality when it comes to Jesus Christ; as he said, again as recorded by Matthew: ***“Whoever is not with me is against me” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 12:30a.***

So what does Jesus mean when he says that speaking against the Son of Man (the most frequent way he referred to himself) would be forgiven? It means that rejecting Jesus as he was — even as God in human form — was forgivable. The Bible gives us a couple of prime examples of this being true:

- 1) Christ's own earthly brothers: According to the gospel of John, ***even his own brothers did not believe in him — John 7:5.*** Yet their unbelief was forgiven; we know this because, following Christ's return to heaven, Luke records that ***[the disciples] all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers — Acts 1:14.*** Eventually two of his brothers wrote letters that became included in NT canon — James (who also became the leader of the Jerusalem church) and Jude.
- 2) Paul: As he related to the Galatian church: ***[Y]ou have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it — Paul, Galatians 1:13.*** And we know he was continuing this path when one day he was stopped; Luke tells us: ***As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied — Acts 9:3-5.*** Pretty obvious who Paul was directing his venom at. Yet years later he

was able to write: ***Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus — Paul, I Timothy 1:13-14*** — so abundantly, in fact, that he planted churches all over the eastern Mediterranean basin and wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.

And, in addition to this, during the time of Jesus on earth, some of the religious leaders on multiple occasions in opposing him attributed the power of his works — the miracles of healing that he performed — as being the demonic work of Satan versus the divine work of God. It is arguable that even that sin may have been able to be forgiven as we have this word from Luke regarding a period of time after Christ's return to heaven: ***So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith — Acts 6:7.***

But once Christ returned to heaven, his presence on earth was fueled by believers filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was now the means of revelation of God. So to reject the Holy Spirit was to reject the ministry, presence and power of God's working on earth. That rejection ultimately means rejecting the Holy Spirit's overtures to a person to yield themselves to the call of Jesus Christ to enter their lives. And that sin, that rejection of God, Father and Son, in the person of the Holy Spirit, was and is unforgivable. And the ultimate outcome of this sin of course is that all those found guilty of committing that spiritual "felony" will have their names missing from the Book of Life — meaning that their future will ultimately be as unforgiven lives forever condemned to the lake of fire.

And then Jesus closes this section: ***"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" — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:10-12.***

As Jesus is talking to his disciples and other followers, he knows their future, a future that is going to include being brought before synagogues — meaning religious leaders — as well as rulers and authorities — meaning civic or government leaders. Opposition is going to come in all forms, and opposition is going to come for sure. Notice that Jesus doesn't say "if" you are brought before opponents but "when." And when that happens, his followers are not to worry about how they are going to respond, because the Holy Spirit will provide — promised and guaranteed — exactly what God wants them to say. Also notice that this promise does not come with a guarantee of any kind of freedom from persecution or even death. He only says that, when his followers have opportunity to speak, God's message, the perfect words for those moments, will be there.

APPLICATION

There is so much richness in these verses, so much to be aware of. Here's some of what these verses need to look like today:

First off, we should always, always, always have a radical awareness when it comes to false teachers. It does not take a lot of false teaching to impact a whole lot of people — and the damage can be so long-lasting. That is one reason why I encourage you all to pay attention and take notes to anything and everything I am preaching and teaching. Be a Berean; remember those guys? Paul encountered them during his second missionary journey in Greece, and this is what Luke wrote about them:

Now the Berean Jews . . . received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true — Acts 17:11. Do exactly the same thing — whether it be something you hear from me, or on the radio, or that you read, or whatever. Examine the Scriptures to see if what is being presented is Scriptural truth. Nothing is more important than for us to maintain the Biblical truth of our preaching and teaching.

Next, as Paul said to the Ephesian church, don't let Satan have the tiniest spot in our lives. We need to have a radical awareness that sin matters and, while pretending it doesn't exist in our lives is exactly where Satan wants us to go, God already knows the sins in our lives. One of the most colossal wastes of time that we can ever pursue is to live lives of hypocrisy. We need to truthfully acknowledge and confess our own sins — to God and to each other — and remain sensitive to his desires over our own. That's why we continue to seek out his word, because his word tells us how to live by telling us what pleases him. And that's why we continue to pray for each other, that we would remain strong in the strength of his word and his might as Satan tries to bring temptation into our lives and our church. And that's why we should seek out somebody in our church as that special someone to go to when we are struggling, somebody we can confide in. The church was created for ministry — not just outwardly to the world but also inwardly to each other. That's one reason we have the "prayer net" — an intentional means of reaching out to and praying for each other. Please don't neglect that very necessary ministry one to another.

And alongside that, proclaim Christ to each other. Proclaim how you've seen Jesus in action. Proclaim how the Holy Spirit directed you at a moment in your lives, or how you were directed while in prayer or in devotions. The more we exercise our spiritual eyes and ears in seeing and hearing God, the better at it we will become. A great way to acknowledge Jesus Christ before others is to do that before your brothers and sisters here, in church. Not only is it for real, but it is also great practice for doing that out in the world.

CONCLUSION

And, as we close, one final thought: This story came to me from Lee Strobel via David Jeremiah. It seems that there was a guy by the name of Clay Jones. He became a Christian at the age of 12 and, over the course of his life, became convinced that God wanted him in ministry. He married his sweetheart and became a pastor and professor. But then, a bolt out of the blue: He was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of cancer. When they got the news, he said, "My wife and I held hands, wept, and prayed." But then he realized something marvelous in the midst of this seeming tragedy; as he tells it: "This is going to sound strange, but I wasn't afraid of dying. . . . Yes, I mourned that I'd be leaving my wife. But you see, I had a robust view of heaven — and *that's* what made all the difference." Now it turned out that the initial diagnosis was in error, and he was successfully treated for a milder form of his cancer. But he's never forgotten the peace of knowing that to live is Christ and to die is gain!

Why do I bring this up? This week brought seismic change to the American cultural and moral landscape. Abortion was terminated as a perceived constitutional right. But in a recent poll, double-digit percents on both sides, conservative and liberal, said that violence was an acceptable form of political protest — and such protests have already been promised.

Bluffing? False bravado? I don't know. What lies ahead for our country, and for Christians in this country, I do not even pretend to know. But I know Christ's words: "***[D]o not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more***" — ***Jesus Christ, Luke 12:4***. All Christians should pray for an increasingly clear picture, and increasingly deeper desire, for heaven. That needs to be the greatest radical awareness of all! That is our home; that is where we are going to be spending eternity — with a mind and body that can never be hurt or damaged or killed or destroyed. Jesus already secured our future the moment he walked out of that tomb outside of Jerusalem. He won — over sin and death and the power of Satan. So have we!

For Christians all over the world, living with more profound threats than we could ever imagine, their faith is fueled by their focus not on this world but on the world of Jesus that is on its way. That is the promise they claim, and that is the promise we can claim as well. Let's pray!