

Jesus Teaches His Disciples

Lesson #1 – How to Keep Hypocrisy Out of Your Life

Luke 12:1-12

“In the meantime” (v. 1) seems to indicate that while Jesus was speaking at the Pharisee’s dinner, a very great multitude gathered. Some believe that this was the largest group assembled at one time during His ministry! But instead of addressing the whole audience, Jesus first spoke to those who were his “disciples.” This begins a long instructional passage (Luke 12-13:1-21) of teaching to His faithful followers and a gentle, pleading invitation to those who were still undecided concerning the person of Jesus.”

I. Hypocrisy – Understand What it is

“In the meantime, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trod (Lit. - trampled; stepping; crushing; treading) one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” Luke 12:1

“In the meantime, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people” – This teaching event is definitely connected to the Pharisee’s dinner. While Jesus was inside delivering the “Six Woes,” the crowd outside was growing to perhaps the largest number ever seen during His ministry. Remember the two feedings? Over 4,000 and 5,000 men, plus women and children, were in attendance. In this passage, the Greek wording is different from how these large feeding crowds were usually described. It’s not a “great multitude”; instead, we read “innumerable multitude.” Other translations have recorded “many thousands,” “tens of thousands,” “thousands upon thousands.” When Luke recorded the Feeding of the 5000, he simply used the word multitude. So, looking at this wording, most Bible teachers believe this was one of the largest crowds ever. Strange to think that while the Pharisees were so busy discrediting and bashing Jesus, the crowds were growing despite it! Please note that as this crowd grew, it was becoming an almost dangerous situation. We haven’t talked about the crowds that surrounded Jesus for a while. There were at least four reasons why people would travel to see Him. Let’s review the different levels of faith and understanding that would have been found in these crowds. They were a mixed group:

- 1) His faithful followers who knew He was their Messiah. This was always more than just the Twelve.
- 2) Those who were sincerely considering whether Jesus could be their Messiah.
- 3) The curious and needy were always among the crowd.
- 4) The loud unbelievers, ready with accusations and questions to cast doubt and intimidation on all the others.

But how does Jesus react when He sees the crowd? He teaches!

“Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” – The Scripture tells us that He first speaks to His followers, that first group, about their need to be careful, be watchful, be cautious, separate yourselves from the leaven of the Pharisees, **which was hypocrisy**. Jesus had left the dinner-gone-bad at the Pharisees' home and, once outside, brought up the Pharisaical sin of hypocrisy again with a desire to instruct His followers.

“leaven” – Leaven is yeast. Yeast is best known for its properties in making bread! I made homemade pizza crust the other night. Flour, oil, a little salt, sugar, water, and yeast! After I mixed it all together, I set it aside and fried the Italian sausage, onions, and peppers while the yeast slowly penetrated the flour mixture and fluffed up the dough. After about 15 minutes... boom... a nice, soft, easy, yummy pizza crust was in my bowl!

In the Bible, leaven is most often associated with **evil**. And that is what Jesus is warning His followers about, the slow, penetrating yeast-like evil influence of the Pharisees.... **hypocrisy!**

“hypocrisy” – **A hypocrite is one who is playing a part or trying to be someone they are not.** In their case of the Religious Leadership, they were trying to play the part and convince the people **they were righteous**, highly religious, and favored by God. The reality was that, as Jesus had just said inside the Pharisee’s home, they made “clean the outside of the cup and the platter,” but their hearts were full of covetous love of money and hatred toward others; they were power-hungry impostors! They looked good on the outside, but they had filthy hearts! They were **doing** all the right things, but were not **being** who God intended them to be! They were hypocrites! And it affected everyone around them. Jesus had already taught this before, found in Mark 8:15, “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.” It was a very important lesson for His followers; the power the Pharisees held over the people by their words and actions was great! People assumed that they were observing what righteous, godly living looked like in these pious men. They respected and upheld them as examples. This was dangerous because it was not a true picture of God’s desire for them! Yet, there were some who saw through them and rejected Judaism altogether, and tragically, with it the Scriptures and God altogether! And please realize, this is a very real danger for all of us today! We, too, can have the appearance of religious respectability when our hearts are far from God! And it can negatively affect others; our husbands, children, grandchildren, church family, and our ability to witness to unbelievers, even driving them away from considering following Jesus by our hypocrisy! “Lord, help us to be aware of hypocrisy in our lives! Help us not play a part of a godly Christian or try to be one when our hearts are far from you! Forgive us, Lord, and help us by your power.”

II. Hypocrisy – Realize it’s Foolish and Futile

**“For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.
Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.” Luke 12:2-3**

Notice the contrasts here! There are no secret sins with God!

Actions and Attitudes! “For there is nothing covered,...neither hid” → “that shall not be revealed;...that shall not be known.”

Words! “whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness....that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets” → “heard in the light;...be proclaimed upon the housetops”

We can become so self-deceived! “I have a secret from God!” we think! How arrogant! Oh, we might not say it out loud, but our hypocritical actions and attitudes live it! Again, this is not the first time Jesus has given these statements to His disciples. In Mark 4, Jesus said this in a series of parables. Then He said the same thing just before sending them on their solo mission back in Matthew 10. Jesus needed them and us to understand that everything will be revealed and known to God. The Pharisees that day were living double lives. But Jesus makes it very clear that not only will their faults be revealed one day, but so will those **of all** who try to conceal sinful actions and words. But in reality, this is a principle of God found elsewhere in the Bible (Ecc. 12:14; Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:4-5)

III. Hypocrisy – Understand What Causes it Now, Jesus gives us the greatest cause of hypocrisy, and its cure! Listen carefully and see if you can discern them!

“And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear : Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. ⁶Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? ⁷But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.” Luke 12:4-7

FEAR

“Be not afraid of them that kill the body” – Fear of man, we often call it peer-pressure when talking with teenagers, but I am convinced we all have pressure from peers, regardless of our age. It might be fear of what siblings, parents, grandparents, people at work, or even at church think of us. Of course, Jesus’ statement here is talking about more than smirks, smart remarks, or even ostracizing. He is talking about martyrdom: “Be not afraid of them that kill the body.” His point is that that is all they can do, kill you! Their power does not reach beyond the grave! Boy, that seems harsh and odd, “Don’t fear them that can kill you,” but I want you to notice, Jesus didn’t start with that statement, He started this way, “And I say unto you my friends.” Jesus first called them “my friends.” Those who were listening that day and following Jesus were counted as His friends. And please realize that it is the same for us today. You are His friend if you are a follower, a believer, a Christian! How can we fear, when Jesus calls us His friend!

HEALTHY FEAR

“Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell”/“yea, I say unto you, Fear him” – But then He tells His listeners twice Who they should fear! **God Himself, the One who holds eternity in His hand, the sovereign One, who has the power of judgment and hell!** That is the proper, healthy fear! A believer in Jesus has the assurance that physical death won’t alter their ultimate destiny and their place in the love of God! **Rom. 8:35-39** There is an old saying that goes, “If you fear God, you will have no one else to fear.”

Here is a wonderful truth: That this same God whom they should fear because of His power to judge, also tenderly cares for and watches over each of His children.

FAITH

Examples of God’s Knowledge: Jesus will use two simple, everyday examples of His Father’s great knowledge of small details to demonstrate how worthy He is of our faith!

- Sparrows – You don’t have to be around me very long before you know I love birds. The long winter is gone, and Spring is sprung here in Wisconsin, and I am enjoying the sounds of birds returned to nest and fill the skies. God loves birds, too, and often uses them to remind or teach us of great truths. Here, He uses the common sparrow. Did you know that the House Sparrow is a bird in both Israel and Wisconsin? Actually, after a little research, I found that the House Sparrow is the most widespread wild bird in the world! Isn’t it wonderful that Jesus used this bird to connect with His followers through the ages! In this passage, Jesus talks about the economic value of these little birds! They were sold in the markets as food for the very poor. Go to **Matthew 10:28-29**. There their price is two birds for one farthing. A farthing was the smallest valued coin in the Roman currency. It was worth about ½ hour of common wages. But notice here in Luke 12, we find a **bird special deal** going on! Five sparrows for two farthings! One extra

bird is being thrown in! But don't miss the point of Jesus' words here, God, in His great knowledge, love for His creation, and care, **doesn't forget even one of these little creatures!**

- **Hair** – Jesus used two examples of God's knowledge and love that day: sparrows and hair. Hair comes in all kinds of lengths, thickness, color, volume, and textures! Some people have more hair than others! And this is what is being referred to here, the number of one's hair! But I discovered something about the statement, "the very hairs of your head are all numbered," that I didn't know before. It is not said that God knows how many hairs each person has on their head, but get this: He has every hair strand numbered, and if one falls out, He knows what number it was! Do you understand the detailed knowledge our God holds? So, with those two examples.....

Jesus simply finishes with....

FEAR→FAITH

"Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows" – If God remembered little common, cheap sparrows, and has the hair strands of every person carefully numbered, the value of His own children would be obviously so much more! What an encouragement to know! Many in the crowd that day were full of fear as they were considering that Jesus might be their Messiah. They realized the Pharisees' power and hatred of Him. At this point, they may not be fearing death, but they feared loss of life as they knew it – being thrown from the synagogue, loss of financial support through business dealings, lack of education for children, etc. These were very real fears. But the day was coming, after His ascension, when the persecution of Jesus-followers would be death. Jesus used the word "fear" five times in these verses. He is saying, "Don't fear man, even in death, but realize God's great love and knowledge of you, His dear children! Have faith in Him!" If they fell a martyr, it was in the knowledge of God, not because of His neglect! Jesus' desire for them was courage and faith in spite of strenuous opposition. And it is the same for us!

IV. Instead of Hypocrisy – Confess Christ Openly

"Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: ⁹But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. ¹⁰And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven." Luke 12:8-10

"confess me before men" → "him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God" – How one reacts toward Jesus determines how God will reward them in eternity. Many listening that day were considering Jesus. They had to decide how they would respond to His person. A public acknowledgment of Jesus as Savior is the first step in confessing Jesus. Shortly before Jesus' death, we read this in John 12:42, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue:" It is wonderful to remember that there were some of the Religious Leadership who later confessed Jesus, along with thousands of common people after the ascension and during the preaching of the apostles in Jerusalem those early days! They will confess Jesus as their Messiah and Savior!

“denieth me before men” → “shall be denied before the angels of God” – Jesus is saying that denying Him will have an eternal consequence that is far worse than the persecution they sought to avoid. As the angels of God look on, those who remained quiet and hid their faith will find their rewards few.

These next phrases must be kept within the context of Jesus’ teaching. We find a stern warning to those who would not receive Jesus as their Messiah.

“whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man” → “it shall be forgiven him” – **Believers** who speak hasty words or cowardly hide the fact that they are Christians will be forgiven. Like Peter’s denial of Jesus while around the fire during His trial. One cannot lose one’s salvation.

“blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost” → “it shall not be forgiven” – This speaks to **unbelievers** who live in open, deliberate, ongoing rebellious rejection of the drawing work of the Holy Spirit. At this time in Jesus’ ministry, we are seeing this among the hard-hearted Religious Elites. They were stubborn in their opposition to Jesus and to the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing truth to them. Holy Spirit power is the only power that can change lives, and as they rejected Jesus, they rejected the only power to bring them to Him. They had cut themselves off from hope. Jesus had said this to scribes over a year before, found in Mark 3:28-29, “Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.” Their fathers had rejected the prophets; they had rejected John the Baptist; while they should be bowing before Jesus, they were plotting His death; and in the near future, they would be hunting down and persecuting the early church. They were blaspheming the Holy Spirit and would not seek the truth! Realize, people can do the same today. They can hear the truth of the Gospel and reject it. This is true blaspheme of the Holy Spirit, and unless they turn from their self-righteousness, repent of their sin, and commit to Jesus as their Savior, they too are “in danger of eternal damnation.”

V. Instead of Hypocrisy – Depend on the Holy Spirit

“And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: ¹²For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.” Luke 12:11-12

Don’t be tempted to misinterpret these verses as an excuse for Bible teachers or preachers who are lazy in their preparation or have poor study habits. The context is persecution because of their faith in Him before religious or governmental leaders.

The power of the Religious Leadership was very strong and evident to Jesus’ feeble followers. While unbelievers rejected the power of the Holy Spirit, **these believers needed to depend on it!** Notice the words, “when they bring you.” It was going to happen, and Jesus is saying, as persecution comes, the Holy Spirit will give them the words to say to their accusers. They would not need to worry. They were promised divine assistance! Later, Peter gave the early church this admonition to be ready, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” (1 Peter 3:15) These early saints had a personal tutor in the Holy Spirit, knew the Old Testament, and been taught by Jesus Himself. And ladies, we can have the same confidence today! As believers in Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit, and as we study and learn the Word of God, He will bring those truths to our minds in times of persecution and difficulty.

Believers' Application:

Fear of opposition or ridicule can weaken our witness for Christ. We can find ourselves denying Him and our relationship with Him! In hypocrisy, we often cling to peace and comfort, even at the cost of our walk with God and testimony before others. Jesus tells us to fear God, not man or temporal consequences.

We deny Jesus and our relationship with Him when....

1. We hope no one will think we are a Christian.
2. We decide not to speak up for what is right.
3. We are silent about our relationship with Jesus.
4. We blend quietly into society.
5. We accept our non-Christian culture without resistance.

We confess Jesus and our relationship with Him when....

1. We live morally and upright before others.
2. We look for opportunities to share our faith with others.
3. We help others in need.
4. We stand for justice in our society.
5. We love others.
6. We acknowledge our loyalty to God.
7. We use our lives and resources to carry out God's desires.

God desires us to shine as lights, not hide ourselves away! And fear is the issue that keeps us hidden and quiet! In Proverbs 29:25, Solomon got it right when he said, "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust *{faith}* in the Lord shall be safe." Safe here means secure! Why, because the all-powerful God knows and cares. He holds you!

Jesus was seeing the massive crowd that day at a crossroads of decision. A few were faithful followers, but most were weighing the threats of the hypocritical Religious Leadership against Jesus words and works. Their eternal destiny depended on what they did with Him – receive Him as their Messiah or reject Him and keep their religion as normal! And that is the same for all of us today. **Romans 10:9-11** says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Many of us know that verse, but let's look on, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Finish with **Isaiah 51:7, 12-13, 15-16**.