

Acknowledge Jesus Before Men

Ever since I became a Christian at a very young age, I have wondered if I truly had what it takes to be a follower of Jesus Christ. As Christians in America, we rarely, if ever, really have our Christian faith put to the test. Oh, there may be times where we might be ridiculed or lose some kind of benefit or promotion because of our allegiance to Jesus, but rarely is it much more serious than that. But what if I lived in a place where making my faith in Jesus public was a punishable crime? What if I were arrested, would there be enough evidence to convict me? What would I do if I had to be questioned for my belief in Jesus under the penalty of torture or death? Would I confess that I know Jesus and that I follow Him and His teachings? What would I say? What would I do? Would I trust Him, in that moment of trial, to be with me, even in death? Or would I deny Him and save myself, saying that I never knew Him?

Maybe you are thinking this morning that all such talk is a little over the top. After all, this is America. We would never have to face such persecution here. Well, perhaps you are right. But at least try and put yourself in the shoes of the disciples as Jesus prepares them for the persecution that this wicked and evil generation is about to pour out again on the prophets and apostles that God has sent to it (cf. Lk. 11:29, 49). Their response to the preaching of the Kingdom of God will be like that of their ancestors: murder and persecution. But Jesus assures us that the plan and purpose of God's redemption of His elect, along with the restoration of the whole fallen creation, will go forward and the gates of hell itself will not be able to overpower it (Matt. 16:18). The most comforting thought Jesus has for each of us this morning is that, unlike what Jesus experienced in His time of persecution, you will not be alone in your time of testing. There is something that each of you will have when you are called to suffer for His name's sake (cf. Lk. 6:22, 23; 21:12; Jn. 15:21; Acts 9:16) that even Jesus did not have at the very moment He was called to bear your awful load of sin – you will have **Emmanuel** at your side – God will be with you; He will **never** forsake you! When Jesus sent us forward into the world, armed with Word and Sacraments, empowered by His Spirit, He provided us with those most comforting words that have ever been spoken – “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). As the LORD sent His Son into the world armed with these words, so Jesus now sends you forth into the world with the same words of His promised presence (cf. Jn. 17:11, 18):

¹⁰ ‘**Do not fear, for I am with you**; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand’ (Isa. 41:10; 43:5; Jer. 1:8; cf. Ps. 23:4).

“**Do not fear, for I am with you**” - armed and empowered with those words what could the world, the flesh, or the devil possibly throw at us that we cannot endure **in Him** - for ³¹ “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* [or, what does it matter who] against us”? (Rom. 8:31).

But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves just yet. Jesus has just finished His most stringent and hard-hitting rebuke of the Jewish leadership and from all appearances it seems they remain completely unfazed before their LORD (Lk. 11:53-54). The word translated here "to catch" also means "to hunt" (v. 54). The scribes and Pharisees are hunting and watching for Jesus to make the slightest mistake, ready to pounce on their prey, so that they might finish Him off. It is difficult to imagine being in the presence of God Almighty, who has come in our common flesh in order to save us, and remain unchanged by His divine presence. And yet, no humility, no remorse over the blasphemies they uttered in the presence of the promised Messiah, no godly sorrow before they do something much worse to God's Son (Lk. 20:13-14). In fact, this interchange between Jesus AND the scribes and Pharisees partially explains why, when He finally arrives in Jerusalem, "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed" (Lk. 9:22, 44, 51).

The present-day leadership in Israel is just like their forefathers who infamously killed the prophets God graciously sent to them (Lk. 11:48-51). And like them, this present wicked generation (Lk. 11:29) will continue their fathers vile plan to attempt to extinguish the true and greater revelation of God. After they manage to get their hands on "the beloved son" of the owner of the vineyard to kill him (Lk. 20:13-14), they will then systematically remove each of the leaders of the true Israel God is building by persecuting and killing those whom Jesus will send into the world carrying the message of God's greatest plan of redemption yet. The book of Acts will record this continuing blood-lust of Israel against God's prophets and apostles as they seek to put to death Peter, John, Stephen, James, the church as a whole, and Paul.

Beware of the Hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Lk. 12:1)

This is why Jesus now turns from the scribes and Pharisees, turns from the pressing crowd that continues to grow (Lk. 12:1 – **one would think that when the crowds are growing that it would be time to celebrate**), and turns to His own disciples, His friends (v. 4), **to warn them** of the leavening hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees (12:1). Let's first run through the list of what the scribes and Pharisees are preparing to do and then we will come back full circle and explain Jesus' charge of hypocrisy.

All That is Done in Secret Will Be Exposed (vv. 2-3)

First, though the Jewish leaders will **conspire in secret** against Jesus and His disciples, nothing will remain hidden in the dark forever (vv. 2-3). Hypocrisy will never work because all is revealed in time. There are no secret places where God is concerned. For Elihu rightly said:

²¹ "For His eyes are upon the ways of a man, and He sees all his steps. ²² "There is no darkness or deep shadow where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves (Job 34:21-22).

Or David:

¹² Even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and

light are alike *to You* (Ps. 139:12; cf. Jer. 23:24; Dan. 2:22).

The author of Hebrews declares:

¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him **with whom we have to do** (Heb. 4:13).

And David again says:

¹ O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*. ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. ³ You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all (Ps. 139:1-4; cf. 33:13-15).

It was because David knew of God's perfect knowledge that he warned his son before he died:

⁹ "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; **for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts**. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever (1 Chron. 28:9).

And Solomon in response declared:

³ The eyes of the LORD **are in every place**, watching the evil and the good (Prov. 15:3).

In the context, it is clear that Jesus means something both negative (Lk. 12:2) and positive (v. 3) here. **Negative** in the sense that whatever the scribes and Pharisees are doing in secret, along with all of Satan's minions, attempting to thwart Jesus and His gospel, will one day all be exposed. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees will one day be evident for all to see. Everything done inside will be proclaimed outside. God says in response to the heart of rebellious man who says

⁷ They have said, "The LORD does not see, Nor does the God of Jacob pay heed." ⁸ Pay heed, you senseless among the people; And when will you understand, stupid ones? ⁹ He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see? ¹⁰ He who chastens the nations, will He not rebuke, *Even* He who teaches man knowledge? ¹¹ The LORD knows the thoughts of man, that they are a *mere* breath (Ps. 94:7-11; cf. 10:11; Job 22:13-14).

But, on the **positive** side, whatever Jesus' disciples truly confess about Him in those secret places where the Jewish leaders will persecute them – when they acknowledge Jesus before men (v. 8), will be made known – will be **preached** from the housetops - and revealed for all to see and hear. The most private of acts and utterances will become the most public. Nothing escapes God's eye and mind.

What does Jesus mean? While the scribes and Pharisees appear to love God and His Word, instead what they really love is THEIR FOLLOWING of God AND they love their teachings about God's Word far more than God's Word itself. They are zealots for their own zealotry (Rom. 10:2; cf. Acts 22:3; Gal. 1:14) – they are masters of the Talmud instead of the Tanakh, worshipers of buildings of stone and traditions of man rather than **the God** who does not dwell in buildings made with human

hands; they are sons of their true father, the devil (Jn 8:44). In Jesus's day, very few could see this. Remember what we said last week about how the crowds greatly admired the scribes and Pharisees. But one day – and it may not be until the final day of judgment – but one day all will be laid bare by God for all, including this wicked generation, to see. Jesus said of them:

⁴² “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. ⁴³ “Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴ “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ “But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. ⁴⁶ “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? ⁴⁷ “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God” (John 8:42-47).

There will come a day when even this hypocrisy of the Pharisees will be laid bare for all to see. Until then we are to entrust ourselves and our accusers to God. Peter reminds us:

²¹ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²² WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, **but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously** (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

The reason that those who conspire against God's servants in secret have **not** yet been arrested is because the books are **not** yet opened (cf. Matt. 16:27; Rev. 20:12-13). But you can rest assured that that day will arrive on time (cf. Rev. 6:9-11). Paul told the Thessalonian Christians to remain faithful a little while longer because:

³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows *ever* greater; ⁴ therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith **in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.** ⁵ *This is* a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. ⁶ For after all it is *only* just for God **to repay with affliction those who afflict you,** ⁷ and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸ **dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.** ⁹ **These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,** ¹⁰ when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed (2 Thess. 1:3-10; 1 Cor. 4:5; Rom. 2:16).

God will one day open up the books in which He has recorded every deed done by man, every thought that has ever passed through the mind of every man and woman, every word that has ever been uttered, whether in public for all to hear or the smallest whisper in the most secluded inner room of the house (Lk. 12:3) – NOTHING is hid from God! The real question before every man and woman who will walk the face of the earth is

Are you prepared to stand before the unapproachable light of God Almighty (cf. 1 Tim. 6:16) -- who sees not only every thing you have ever done AND hears everything you have ever uttered, BUT reads your very thoughts -- and act as your own defense attorney in hopes that maybe you alone just might be able to give that one reason for why you should not have to answer for your rebellion against God”?

Abraham Lincoln once remarked, “He who represents himself has a fool for a client.” That will never be truer than for all those who will try and defend themselves before God's impenetrable light of perfect holiness and justice. One day, all will be made evident for all to see.

Fear God, Not Man (vv. 4-7)

That is why Jesus instructs His disciples – His friends (v. 4) - Who it is who we should ultimately and truly fear (vv. 4-5). How foolish are Jesus' followers who fear those who can kill the physical body and nothing more? What if Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah would have simply fallen down and worshipped the golden image of King Nebuchadnezzar out of fear of being cast into the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:4-7)? What if they would have never uttered these words to the King out of fear of what he might do to them:

¹⁶ “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷ “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ “But *even* if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Dan. 3:16-18)?

Would Nebuchadnezzar ever have uttered these words?:

²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ “Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way” (Dan. 3:28-29)?

Do you see how foolish it is for us, as God's children, to be more afraid of man than we are of God? How would Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah ever faced God after denying Him to Nebuchadnezzar knowing that they were about to stand before Him? Further, if we give up those God-ordained opportunities in life where God specifically places us to be a beacon of light for His glory because we

are too afraid of what man may do to us, then we choose to give up a moment to do what is most important in all of life – the very reason for which we were made – to bring glory to God's name. Do you remember the LORD's prayer where we were taught to pray, "Father, Hallowed by Your Name"? In a moment of great crisis for our nation, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, our 32nd president of the United States, took to the platform in his first inaugural speech (March 04, 1933) in hopes of calming an anxious people. He wanted to assure the frightened republic that the only hurdle the nation had to overcome was merely material things and that they had every right to hope that it was possible to get the nation back to work again. To point to the only thing that would prove fatal in this effort, FDR said,

This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that **the only thing we have to fear is fear itself** – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

If only that were true! In the face of such popular optimism, Jesus helps us to see far more clearly that there is something much greater to fear than fear itself: **the FEAR OF GOD ALMIGHTY!** It is not that we have lived in a day of irrational fear – or, misdirected fear – or even too much fear. The truth is that we live in a day – and have always lived in a day ever since the Fall of Man - in which we are not afraid near enough! How can we be so foolish to merely fear those who can kill our bodies and do nothing more, when there is ONE in the universe before Whom we must all appear who has the power not only to kill our bodies but who can destroy our soul in Hell?

12:5 – We don't hear much about "Hell" these days. "Hell" is our English translation of the Greek, *Gehenna*, or the Hebrew, *Gehinnom*, which is a small valley on the southern slope of Jerusalem, known as the Valley of the Son of Hinnom (cf. **Josh. 15:8; 18:16**). Traditionally, Gehenna has been presented as the place where the citizens of Jerusalem would burn their garbage, along with the bodies of dead criminals, where the constant rising of smoke and the stench of rotting refuse symbolized the fiery torment and punishment of the damned. Though that may be true, that is only part of the picture. The real story behind Gehenna is far worse. In ancient Israel, the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, or simply the Valley of Hinnom, was the horrific site where the two Judean kings, Ahaz and Manasseh, sacrificed their own children as burnt offerings to Baal-Molech (**2 Kin. 16:3; 21:6; 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:1-4; 33:1-9; Jer. 32:26-35**). The prophets then picked up on these well-established, grisly images of death and destruction and used them to image the most ghastly and dreadful depictions of divine judgment (**Jer. 7:30-33; 19:1-13; 32:34-35; Isa. 31:9; 66:24**). Jesus then, rooted in the great tradition of the OT prophets, picked up on this awful and hideous image of God's indignation towards such horrendous sin and made use of it as the greatest, most fearful image of something every human being would want to avoid. Basically, Jesus is trying to impress upon you, in the most terrifying words possible, "You Don't Want to Go There!" And it's really not the place that is most terrifying, although to live for eternity in a place that continually reminds you of the most horrific terrors and evil our world has ever produced like the sacrificing of children to false gods – i.e., for no purpose at all! - has to be the most terrifying thought that could ever pass through our minds.

If you rightly fear the One who is at the top, the One who truly reigns supreme over all other authority underneath Him, then there is no one else you have to fear. Hopefully you see by now how foolish it would be for Jesus' disciples to cower in fear of the scribes and Pharisees who could only kill them on earth rather than rightly fear Him who can judge them after death.

Now, what does the fear of God look like (vv. 6-7)?

Confess Jesus and Do Not Blaspheme the Holy Spirit (vv. 8-12)

NOW, come back to 12:1 – What is hypocrisy? Why will it never work? Why do we do it?

Leaven – spreading like cancer