

Luke 12A

- Two weeks ago we ended Chap 11 with Jesus declaring woe on the Pharisees and lawyers
 - Woe is an expression of eternal judgment, which we understood meant that Jesus was condemning these evil men for their hypocrisy
 - And as we move into Chap 12 this week, we'll begin with the last two verses of Chap 11 because of how they form a transition to the next discussion

[Luke 11:53](#) ¶ When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects,

[Luke 11:54](#) plotting against Him to catch *Him* in something He might say.

[Luke 12:1](#) ¶ Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first *of all*, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

[Luke 12:2](#) "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

[Luke 12:3](#) "Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops.

- At the end of Chap 11 and the beginning of Chap 12 there are thousands of people around the Jesus
 - The word for thousands, *urias*, is translated *myriad*, which literally means 10,000
 - And like we've seen before, they're pushing and jostling to get close to Jesus
 - They were stepping over one another
 - The word for stepping *katapateo* which means *trampling*
 - This is a very excited and anxious crowd – not sitting patiently
 - Then we're told that "under these circumstances" Jesus began saying...

- The circumstances are important because the disciples were beginning to feel the pressure that they would become accustomed to feeling in the future
 - Their message would bring excitement and confusion
 - And it would bring powerful enemies
 - Look at the end of Chap 11, the Pharisees were even more anxious to trap Jesus
 - Trapping was a serious thing – it meant death
 - The Pharisees had real legal power within Jewish society to prosecute violators of the their law
 - And the penalty could be death
 - This is eventually how the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to death
 - And these disciples were beginning to feel the heat that came with being associated with Jesus
 - And so they had the officials hating them and waiting for them to saying something they could use against them
 - And then there was the crowd of thousands waiting for Jesus to do something dramatic, encouraging Him to break the Pharisees' yoke
 - It's under these circumstances that Jesus begins to teach the disciples
- Jesus begins by telling the disciples to beware the Pharisees leaven, which is hypocrisy
 - It's interesting that Jesus doesn't say beware the Pharisees
 - He doesn't warn them to be worried about the men
 - Only beware of their bad influence, the hypocrisy
 - Jesus says avoid the hypocrisy, which He compares to leaven, or yeast
- Yeast or leaven is often used in scripture as a symbol or picture of something bad that contaminates

- Now yeast itself isn't a bad thing in real life
 - It's quite useful, in fermentation and for making dough rise
 - But in the Bible it's commonly a picture of sin in some form
 - And just like when I add a small amount of yeast to dough, over time it reproduces itself rapidly and spreads throughout the dough
 - Likewise, sin – or in this case, hypocrisy – starts small but it spreads and infects everyone eventually
- Hypocrisy in this context, by the way, is simply pretending to be something you're not
 - For the Pharisees, hypocrisy meant pretending to love God and God's law and pretending to honor God, while at the same time remaining an enemy of God
 - Their true purpose in what they did was to glorify themselves and win the praises of men
 - The hypocrisy of the Pharisees meant they were condemned to hell because they never repented of their sin

[Prov. 28:13](#) He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

- They never repented of trying to earn heaven on the basis of their works – on the contrary, they thought their works would ensure them heaven
- But what worse, the Pharisees set themselves up as the gold standard among the Jews
 - So other unsuspecting Jews saw everything the Pharisees did as worthy of being mimicked
 - So the unsuspecting Jewish man or woman who desired to reach heaven spent their lives trying to copy the absurd lifestyle of a Pharisee and obey their commands
 - The Pharisees would naturally give birth to a thousands of little Pharisees among the people

- Just like leaven spreads throughout the dough
- I wish I could say that hypocrisy was a phenomenon unique to the Pharisees in first century Palestine
 - Hypocrisy has always existed in the church and it exists today

[Gal. 2:9](#), James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

[Gal. 2:10](#) They only *asked* us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.

[Gal. 2:11](#) ¶ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

[Gal. 2:12](#) For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

[Gal. 2:13](#) The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

[Gal. 2:14](#) But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?

- Paul got upset at Cephas (Peter) because Peter was practicing hypocrisy
 - Peter knew that the gospel put an end to the law
 - And Peter had begun to put aside the requirements of the law, allowing himself to eat with Gentiles, which he should
 - But when men from James – Christian Jews from Jerusalem – came to visit Antioch, Peter reverted to his prior habits of observing the law and shunning the Gentiles
 - And eventually the other Christian Jews in the Antioch church began to mimic Peters behavior causing a split in the church between gentile and Jew
 - Even Barnabas followed Peter’s lead
- Can you imagine how frustrated Paul must have been?
 - He says when he saw that they were not being straightforward with the truth, he confronted Peter in front of everyone

- Paul shamed him to correct his behavior
- This is a great example of how hypocrisy works
 - It begins with someone wanting to look like something they are not
 - Peter wanted to look like a good Jew to the Jewish men from Jerusalem, even though Peter had already abandoned the Jewish practices under the law
 - So He begins to act in a hypocritical manner
- Then his bad behavior draws other with him, like Jesus said.
 - It's like leaven spreading throughout the dough
- But how do we fix hypocrisy?
 - Do we hide the truth? Do we shrink, back to avoid confrontation
 - We shouldn't – we should do as Paul and root out hypocrisy
- Because the same danger exists today as it did in Paul's day
 - If we don't stop hypocrisy whenever it rears its ugly head, it will infect a church body and drag it down
 - But one day, all that falseness will be stripped away and the truth will be known
- And that's what Jesus reminds the disciples about
 - Jesus starts by saying there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed or made known
 - Jesus has said this same thing to the disciples once before, immediately after the parable of the sower and the seeds
 - Listen to it again from that chapter

[Luke 8:16](#) ¶ “Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light.

[Luke 8:17](#) “For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor *anything* secret that will not be known and come to light.

[Luke 8:18](#) “So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him *more* shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.”

- Seeing that statement in this context helps us understand what Jesus is talking about here as well
 - Back in Chap 8 Jesus was reminding the disciples to commit themselves to maturing in their faith and producing seed, meaning reproducing their faith in others through the Word of God
 - And Jesus says that they understand that they are working toward a greater reward in eternity,
 - For they can't forget that in the day of judgment everything they have done will be brought to light – both the good and bad
 - And they can expect to be rewarded on the basis of what they have done with what God has given them
- So here again Jesus uses that phrase, but now from the negative perspective
 - That everything the Pharisees have done in hypocrisy – hiding their true nature while pretending to be the most holy men around – will be shown for what it is
- Then Jesus moves beyond that thought into verse three and says that what they are too afraid to speak except in private, they should be willing to proclaim boldly from housetops
 - Matt's gospel puts it this way

[Matt. 10:27](#) "What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear *whispered* in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.

- In other words, Jesus is encouraging them to speak boldly what they know to be true – especially in the face of the Pharisee's hypocrisy and opposition
 - And just so they know they can do so without fear, look at what Jesus says next

[Luke 12:4](#) ¶ "I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.

[Luke 12:5](#) "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

[Luke 12:6](#) “Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God.

[Luke 12:7](#) “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

- These verses are so tender and encouraging
 - In fact, this is one of the few places in the Gospels where Jesus addresses the disciples as friends
 - He’s speaking to them as a friend telling them something they can trust in and be comforted by
- Jesus tells them not to fear those who would kill the body, but fear God
 - Why is it important not to fear those who can kill us?
 - Isn’t it natural to be afraid of someone who can harm our body?
 - Yes it’s natural but it’s damaging
 - Here’s why...fear leads us to do stupid things
 - Whatever we are most afraid of will usually determine how we act
 - For example, if a person was faced with a choice of arriving to late for work or getting a speeding ticket trying to race to work on time, they would probably choose to arrive late to work because they are more afraid of the speeding ticket
 - Unless this the 4th time they’ve been late and they’re sure they’ll be fired if they arrive late this time – so they speed and take their chances at getting a speeding ticket
 - Whatever we fear the most, will rule our behavior
- Knowing that, Jesus tells the disciples to fear God not men
 - Because though men might kill the body, but that’s the limit of their authority
 - But God, after He has taken your earthly life Has authority over your spirit as well

- That's the one you should fear
- Let His ways and His expectations rule your behavior and not men's
 - This is what we mean by fearing God – respecting His power and authority so much that nothing on earth can rule our behavior
- I like the way Jesus puts this statement
 - He says fear the One who after He has killed the body, can cast you into Hell
 - He reminds us that the death of the body is actually under God's control
 - So even when we are tempted to fear men, we need to remember that it is God who holds the power of life and death
 - And we won't die until God permits
 - So we have no reason to fear men
- Now if Jesus' words don't strike you as very comforting just yet, well let's remember the rest of the verses I read
 - Jesus tells the disciples that even something as a sparrow, as little as a sparrow is worth, God does not forget even one of them
 - Can you imagine that?
 - How incredible is God's power? How could we ever hope to understand it?
 - There must be billions of sparrows on the earth, and yet God knows all of them
 - And if He knows all the sparrows, He knows all the other billions of animals on the earth and in the sea
 - And all these were created for you and I to enjoy and benefit from
 - So certainly God knows each person

- More than knowing each person, He knows each hair on the head of each person
- So don't be afraid to serve Him and do as He asks, because you have nothing to fear if God knows you and cares for you
- Are we all living like that? Are we living the way Jesus is telling His disciples to live?
 - Do we ignore outside pressure from the world so we can be free to follow the Lord's leading in our lives?
 - And by outside pressure, I mean the pressure to succeed, to make a good living, to save for retirement,
 - Would it challenge you if I proposed that trying to fit into the suburban lifestyle that typifies the American dream – a good income, two cars, 2.5 children, IRAs, 401Ks, etc., etc. – would it bother you if I suggested that this is exactly what giving into fear looks like
 - It certainly isn't fear of God that produced this pattern, because it's exactly the same pattern that the unbelieving world follows
 - So either we're doing it too because God just happened to ask us to live a life that looks very much like the unbelieving world
 - Or, we're living in fear of what the world fears rather than living in fear of God
 - Because if we truly feared God more than what the world feared, wouldn't our lives look radically different?
 - Wouldn't we be doing crazy things in the world's eyes?
 - Like not spending time so much time worrying about retirement or trying to accumulate more wealth
 - Or by not being afraid to set aside careers to follow God's direction on our lives
 - Or maybe not being afraid to stand on a street corner and declare the gospel to strangers who pass by

- You see, that's what Jesus was most concerned about for the disciples
 - He was concerned that the hypocrisy of the Pharisees would slowly creep into their own view of the world
 - And the next thing you know, they're living just like the word, mimicking the Pharisees and the rest of the world
 - Rather than risking death so that they might spread the good news in face of fierce opposition by the enemy
 - So to spur them onward, Jesus reminds them who to fear and who to serve
- Then Jesus says

[Luke 12:8](#) ¶ “And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God;

[Luke 12:9](#) but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.

[Luke 12:11](#) “When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say;

[Luke 12:12](#) for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

- The reason Jesus wants these men to stand firm and do the work of the ministry despite opposition and despite fearful circumstances is because the stakes are so high
 - Those who confess Christ will be saved and those who deny Him will be condemned
 - And these men had been given the privilege and the responsibility to carry that message to the world
 - And just as we have studied earlier, those in Jesus day who stood with the Pharisees and accused Jesus of being Satan, we're never to receive a second chance to believe
 - Rather, they had blasphemed the Holy Spirit and could not be forgiven
- These were the stakes

- And to make sure the disciples understood how serious things would be for them in this mission, Jesus ends with this sobering comment
 - They would be persecuted
 - They would be accused by the Pharisees
 - They would be dragged into court
 - And they would be condemned to death by these evil men
- But the Holy Spirit will give them the proper words, according to God's purpose and His will
 - So don't fear men – but serve God
- The stakes are the same for us today – truly
 - I'd love to say you won't be hauled into court for the sake of Christ, but I can't – not even in the US – not any longer
 - But regardless of whether the kind of persecution we face is different or not, I can tell you that we are no different than the apostles in terms of the mission we have been given
 - If we don't appreciate that we are expected – we are required – to carry the message of the gospel far and wide continually in all we do
 - Then we are guilty of fearing men more than fearing God
 - Because that is Christ's expectation for His church, that we would bring the good news to the world
 - We are not in control of who believes, but we are accountable for what we did in this life with the gifts and calling God gives us
 - And as Jesus told the disciples, when we encounter difficult moments because of efforts to spread our faith, the Holy Spirit will guide us in what to say
 - And we can trust God who has numbered the hairs on our head to care for us according to His will for our lives