

The Parables
Luke 12:1-34
(The Rich Fool)
“To Fear or Not To Fear”

Introduction

We know from reading scripture that Jesus possessed very little in the way of material wealth. He was homeless (**Luke 9:58**). He had no money even to pay the required temple tax. So, He commanded Peter to catch a fish with the money in its mouth to pay their taxes (**Matthew 17:24-27**). But, just because The Son of God had no real earthly possessions, that did not stop him from teaching about them. Jesus talked about money more than He talked about heaven or hell. Eleven of the thirty-nine parables of Jesus are about money. And, one out of every seven verses in **The Gospel of Luke** talk about money. If the possession of material things mattered so little to our Lord, then why did He speak about them so often? The answer is that a great deal can be known about a person, simply by observing the way that they manage their finances. For Example, a person who spends everything that they make on themselves the instant that they make it is a person who lives for pleasure, a hedonist. While a person who lives a miserly lifestyle, while hoarding all that he earns is greedy. You can really tell a lot about people by watching what they do with their paychecks. In fact, you can determine a person's true god by spending just a few moments looking at their checkbook. Money matters. There is nothing Biblically wrong with having money, but it is most definitely a sin to “love” your money (**1 Timothy 6:10**).

Luke Chapter 12 begins with a riot and ends with a parable and message about the Godly perspective of financial stewardship. It speaks to those who are anxious about the uncertainties of life, alongside the vital importance of honoring God above all else. Jesus gives us specific instructions about what we should fear and what should never be feared. In the previous chapter, He took the Pharisees to task concerning their hypocrisy. The rebuke that he gave them was so very intense that they wanted him dead afterwards (**11:53-54**). **Chapter twelve** begins immediately following this confrontation, with a mob gathering to watch the fight and choose up sides! Jesus doesn't back down. He warns the people to beware (*examine closely* in the Greek) the “leaven” of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (**vs. 1**). The word “*hypokrisis*” in the Greek was a term that was used in Jesus' day to describe play actors upon a stage. Often in Greek theater, the actor would put on a “sad face” mask to portray sadness, or a “happy face” mask to portray joy. Even in our own time, we often see examples of these masks displayed on posters for drama classes and other theatrical events. Jesus accused the Pharisees of “wearing masks” of piety and holiness, all the while being consumed by the evil in their hearts. In other words, they were just putting on a show. They were, in fact, the worst of sinners underneath their facade of spirituality. When He exposed them, their true natures came to the surface. They were nothing more than petulant children, filled with murderous rage. There was nothing “Holy” about them.

The main cause of hypocrisy comes from being overly concerned or worried about what other people think of us. Jesus described this fear as “leaven”, because just like yeast, if allowed to remain within us it can and will take us over just as leaven thoroughly permeates a lump of dough. There is no real advantage for us to pretend to be someone that we are not just to keep up appearances. Jesus explained to his followers that one day all truth would be exposed into the light of day, so there was no real wisdom in pretense (**vs. 2-3**). It doesn't really matter what people think of us, it only matters what God KNOWS about us! Christ wanted His disciples to understand that while there are things that we should be afraid of, there are many other things that we should never fear. The words, *worry* and *fear*, are mentioned several times in this passage. I don't know about you, but I can be really good at worrying, even though I know that worrying can do no good. Are you a worrier this morning? Do you have fears? Jesus wants you to know about some things that His

followers should never fear. Don't fear PEOPLE; Don't fear PERSECUTION; and Don't fear POVERTY nor PROSPERITY. God is in control, therefore, worry has no place in the life of a child of God.

Don't Fear People (Trust God's Promises)

As I stated earlier, hypocrisy is born out of the fear of what people will think of us. We pretend to be something that we are not, so that those around us will look up to and admire us. The Pharisees made a show out of everything. They always prayed in public. They gave their alms in public. They even wore ornate flowing robes in public to be seen and admired by men. According to Jesus, the admiration of men was all the reward that they would ever get for their efforts (**Matthew 6:2**). The problem with hypocrisy is that although you can fool people, it is impossible to fool God. Jesus tells His followers not to be afraid of what men think (**vs. 4**). The worst thing that one person can ever do to another is to murder them. God, on the other hand, not only has the power over your life and death, but He has the power over where you will spend eternity, in heaven or in hell. Jesus tells us not to fear the opinions of men, but rather fear the opinion of God. He, and He alone, has the final judgement of our thoughts and deeds. We can fool people, but He knows our hearts. He knows the motivation behind every thing that we say and do. On the day of judgement, He will expose the secret things that we thought no one knew (**vs. 2-3**). Now THAT my friends is something to be afraid of.

Jesus goes on to explain that this same God who knows the hearts and minds of His children, also knows everything there is to know about them. I was once on staff with a fellow pastor who did not believe in the omniscience of God. He thought that God just sat up there in heaven and reacted to everything that happened. Wrong! God IS all-knowing. There is nothing that catches Him by surprise. Jesus tells us that he even knows every sparrow personally (**vs. 6**). In those days, sparrows were sold at the market so that poor people could buy them for meat. Five sparrows could be purchased for the equivalent of two of our pennies in modern times. Think about that. These birds that people could purchase ten for less than a nickel were individually known by God. Now THAT is omniscience! Jesus goes on to say that God knows us so well that He even keeps a record of how many hairs we have on our head. In my case, that gives him less and less to keep up with each day. Still, it is an awesome thought. God knows all that there is to know about each of us. He has promised that if we honor Him, then He will take care of us.

And just how do we honor Him? By honoring His Son (**vs. 8**). **For God so love the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but will inherit everlasting life (John 3:16)**. Do you want to honor God? Then you must honor The Son. The Pharisees wanted Jesus dead. This would serve to disqualify them from being accepted by God, even though they prided themselves on being in His favor. They pretended to be so very holy, but they were rejected by God the Father because they had rejected His Son (**vs. 9**).

If anyone ever says to you that the trinity is never mentioned in the scriptures, show them **verses 8-10** of this passage. Jesus clearly defines the trinity for us here. To honor The Father, one must honor The Son; and to honor The Son, one must believe in the message of The Holy Spirit. It is The Holy Spirit who bears witness to our hearts concerning our sin. It is The Holy Spirit who convinces us that only Christ is the answer to forgive our sins. (**John 16:13-15**). To reject the message of The Holy Spirit is to blaspheme against God. This is the unpardonable sin, because when we reject the message of The Holy Spirit, we miss the only opportunity that God has offered to forgive us. Jesus is the ONLY way to God (**John 14:6**). To believe in the message of The Holy Spirit is to accept Christ as Savior and then to be reconciled to God The Father. When we do that, God has promised to declare us as righteous in His sight. All sins are forgiven. That is His promise to us. When we accept the promise of God's salvation, we no longer need to put on a front because we are worried about what people think of us. If a person is right with God, then who cares what

people say? Don't fear people. You don't need to put on a show for them. Fear God and trust His promises. He Who knows every sparrow by name has placed a great value upon you. He, and He alone, is the only one you need to please. For the believer, there is no more hypocrisy, only acceptance from a Holy God!

Don't Fear Persecution (Trust God's Protection)

We must not forget that this particular set of instructions were given at the scene of an angry mob. Jesus warns His disciples that these hypocritical Pharisees would one day persecute them for preaching His message to the people. He told them that they would be brought up in front of magistrates and synagogue rulers to give an account for their teaching (**vs.11-12**). Simply put, He was warning them ahead of time, that these same phonies, who were accusing Him of blasphemy, would in turn do likewise unto them (**John 15:18-25**). Jesus tells His followers that they need not worry about what they will say when persecution comes. The Holy Spirit within them would give them the exact words that they needed when the time came.

Notice, that Jesus is telling them in advance that they would be persecuted. Being a Christian doesn't mean that everyone will love us. After all, they didn't love Jesus, and He was a whole lot better at this than we will ever be! They despised Him, and HE was perfect. How much more then, do you think the world will despise us? Being hated is just part of being genuine followers of Christ. If everybody loved us, then that would mean we were doing it wrong. But do not fear persecution. The Holy Spirit will give you exactly what you need to speak your case and glorify God.

I have heard some preachers use this passage as an excuse not to study for their sermons. May I go on record here and say, that is absolutely NOT what this means. Jesus is talking about being arrested for your faith here, not sermon preparation! If a pastor doesn't know what he is going to say until five minutes before he steps into the pulpit, then he can rest assured that no one will remember what he said five minutes after he sits back down. The Bible tells those of us who are teachers to: **"study: to show ourselves approved" (2Timothy 2:15)**. So.... sorry to all you "lazy preachers" out there. You don't get a pass on sermon prep. However, if a teacher ever gets arrested for preaching the gospel, then don't worry. God will protect you. Don't fear persecution, but rather trust in God's protection. That being said, I've heard a few sermons in my day that should have been grounds for arrest, due to the lack of prayer and study time that went into them, but I digress.

Don't Fear Prosperity, nor Poverty (Trust God's Provision)

In the middle of this whole conversation, some poor guy in the crowd thinks that this might be an opportune time to get Jesus to do him a favor. He cries out for Jesus to command his brother to share their father's estate with him. Talk about your bad timing award. While it was common in those days for rabbis to settle property disputes, this poor guy certainly picked the wrong topic at the wrong time. I suppose he came to it when Jesus was talking about being on trial for one's faith. Perhaps this made the poor man think of his lawsuit against his own brother. Whatever the reason, The Lord lets him know in a hurry that he has no interest in aiding him in his pursuit of fortunes lost. He warns the man against greed and then proceeds to give a parable to illustrate His message of living a life that honors God.

Jesus begins the parable of the Rich Fool by telling of a farmer who was faced with a problem that most of us will never face. He had acquired so much wealth that he didn't have enough storage space available to hold it. Most of us are familiar with running out of money before we run out of days in the month, but this man had run out of days in the month and still had money leftover! The most striking thing about the farmer in Jesus' story is that it never even crosses his mind to say a prayer of thanks for his bountiful harvest. He never thinks that such an abundance might have

been granted to him from above in order that he make a difference in someone else's life. His thoughts are only of himself. He never looks up, nor does he ever look around to see those who might be in need. Instead, he formulates a plan for his own retirement. He decided to tear down his old barns and build new ones to hold his great surplus. The time had come for him to live the life of ease, or so he thought. What he didn't realize was that he would never see another sunrise, and that the "good life" that he had envisioned for himself was mere hours away from its end.

Sadly, many people today live just the way this foolish farmer did. They view life as just an opportunity to enjoy it while they can. With no regard for eternity, these people are just here to live it up, before their time is up. What a tragic waste of the time and resources that God provides for us to use for His glory. If this life were all there was to it, then by all means, we should live it up while there is still time, but this life is only a drop in the proverbial bucket compared to eternity (**1 Corinthians 15:32**). Jesus wants us to live in a way that uses the here and now as an investment for the hereafter. He wants us to be wise stewards of the time and wealth that we have been given in order to reap an eternal harvest. The farmer in the parable died and stood before God empty handed, with all his great fortune being passed down to someone else. His tragic story should serve as a word of warning for us to reevaluate our own stewardship of God's provision while there is yet time. Even though the farmer was blind to this fact, everything that we have has been given to us by God (**James 1:17**). He expects us to use those things to invest in His kingdom (**Luke 19:11-27**). If we live our lives with this mindset, then Jesus promises that He will personally see to it that we will have everything that we need (**vs. 21-34**). There is no need to fear poverty, nor prosperity, for the child of God who has dedicated their life to doing "kingdom work". We don't have to worry about having enough. God will provide for our every need, not our every "want" mind you, but NEED. Pay no heed to the televangelists who proclaim their "prosperity gospel" that promises great wealth to every true believer. Jesus will grant to us exactly what we need to carry out the work that He has set us apart to accomplish. It's not about us, it's about HIM. We are here to be His servants, striving for His glory, to build a kingdom that is without end (**Luke 1:32-33**). The servant who truly understands this concept will learn to be content with whatever resources that he has been given (**Philippians 4:11**).

After telling the parable, Jesus turns to His disciples and tells them to "take no thought" (KJV) for the things that they need, for if God can feed the birds, then He can certainly feed them. The word that he uses that is translated "thought" in the text is "*merimnao*" in the Greek, and it means *to be anxious or to worry*. Our Savior doesn't want His followers to worry for anything. He wants us to replace our worry with faith. I love what He says in **verse 32**. It has become one of my favorite verses. **"Do not be afraid little flock; for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom."** That verse pretty much says it all for me. It tells me that God loves to provide for my needs. Think of the context here. Jesus is speaking to a small group of his true followers surrounded by a mob. He is speaking only to them, as if no one else is there. He calls them "little flock". They are His, and no matter what turmoil was going on around them, they could rest assured that He was there for them and overjoyed to be their shepherd and provider. Have you ever thought about the fact that God was pleased to be able to take care of you? When I consider that, it causes me to get a little emotional. Why should I fear, when God's pleasure is to take care of me?! This might be a good time to pause and say a prayer of thanksgiving.

Some people read **verses 22-34** and think that Jesus is telling us never to save money, make plans for the future, or even work for that matter. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible must be interpreted in light of its own context. In other words, one scripture cannot contradict another. The Bible actually commands that we work, save, and provide for our children. What Jesus is telling us here is that working and saving should never be the primary focus of our life. Loving God should be the primary focus. So exactly how do we prioritize the way we handle our finances. Please allow me to explain using the letters W.A.G.E.S. as an acronym:

- WORK - The Bible requires us to work to make our living. We are never commanded to stop working to allow others to provide for our needs. Laziness is NOT a Godly trait.
"...if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat either."
(2 Thessalonians 3:10)
- AQUIRE - As a result of our labor we earn our living.
"He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who pursues worthless things lacks sense." (Proverbs 12:11)
- GIVE - We acknowledge God's provision by tithing on what He provides us, and by generously giving to others (**Matthew 5:42**). In this we show that we honor God.
"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. 'Test me on this,' says The LORD, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be enough room to store it." (Malachi 3:10).
- EARMARK - After you have worked, earned, and honored God with your income, THEN you should put some away in savings. **"In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil. But a foolish man devours all he has"** (Proverbs 21:20).
There is nothing wrong with saving money, as long as it is done in the proper way; by honoring God and others before yourself.
- SPEND - After you have worked, acquired, honored God by you giving and saved some for the future, then spend your earnings to buy what you need. Always remembering that God is the source of all good things (**James 1:17**).
Seek first the kingdom of God; and all these things (food, clothing, etc.) will be added to you (Luke 12:31).

There you have it. This is the proper way to manage your finances while honoring God. Do this, and you will not need to fear. Do not fear man. Do not fear persecution, and do not fear poverty, nor prosperity. **"And my God will meet all your needs, according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 4:19).

So do not be afraid little flock; for your Father has gladly chosen to give you the kingdom (12:32).

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!