**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**BATTLING HYPOCRISY**

**Luke 12:1-12**

**INTRODUCTION**

One of the things people often do at the beginning of a new year is they reflect on the memorable events of the previous one. There’s no question that 2017 was a memorable year. Donald Trump was inaugurated as President of the United States. Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria devastated parts of Texas, the Caribbean, and Puerto Rico. Millions paused to take a look at “the Great American Eclipse”, a total solar eclipse in wide swaths of the US. These were all massive events, and yet, the phenomenon from 2017 that a lot of people are talking about these days is something else entirely.

It started in October 2017, when the New York Times published an article reporting that more than a dozen women had accused celebrated film director and producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment and assault. What followed was a stunning fall from grace for one of Hollywood’s long-time darlings. Weinstein went from one of the most well-known and respected names in Hollywood to a man who has been stripped of his honours in the film industry, fired from his job at the company he founded, divorced by his movie-star wife, and the subject of criminal investigation.

What turned this into a massive event, however, is that it didn’t stop with Mr. Weinstein. The spotlight then turned to several of Hollywood’s leading men, including James Franco, Kevin Spacey, and Dustin Hoffman as several women accused them and others of sexual misconduct as well. This has led to a viral cultural phenomenon known as the “#MeToo” movement, a movement that has led to some of the most revered figures in popular culture to be named, shamed, and abandoned for the broken idols that they are.

Men who have been implicated in the #MeToo movement have been accused of many things, but today I just want to highlight one of them: hypocrisy. These men are accused of saying one thing and doing another. In public, they present themselves as champions of feminism, but in private, they’re abusing their female colleagues.

Jesus has a lot to say about hypocrisy in the Bible. In fact, in the last text we looked at in Luke 11, Jesus spent a long time criticizing the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Jesus said that, outwardly, they did all the right things. They observed all the religious laws, they even gave away their money. But inwardly, they were full of greed and wickedness. Jesus warns them of the eternal judgment to come, because inward corruption trumps external works every time.

That leads us to our text today in Luke 12. Jesus is done speaking to the Pharisees and is about to minister to thousands of people. Before they arrive, however, Jesus shares a private moment with his disciples, and what he does next is striking. He doesn’t continue bashing the Pharisees. He doesn’t gossip behind their backs. Instead, he turns the conversation about hypocrisy back on the disciples and says, “You could be just like them, hypocrites who are clean on the outside but dirty on the inside. I don’t want that to happen to you, so I’m going to tell you what you need to know and believe to make sure you don’t become hypocrites like them.”

This is the topic of our text today, and it is a sobering one. It reminds us that, when we see the hypocrisy of others, one of the first things we need to do is fight against hypocrisy in ourselves. It’s a hard fight, but with the help of Jesus, it’s a fight that we can win.

**Read Luke 12:1-12**

The title of this message is **Battling Hypocrisy.** My aim today is to show you that **Freedom from Hypocrisy Comes From Fearing God.**

We will have three points today:

1. The Fear of Hypocrites
2. The Remedy for Hypocrites
3. The Hope for Hypocrites

(1) **THE FEAR OF HYPOCRITES**

Luke begins our text today in verse 1 by telling us that Jesus’ popularity had ballooned to incredible proportions. Thousands of people had gathered together to see Jesus, and they were so desperate to see him that they were trampling one another. Jesus was getting the kinds of results that any missionary or church-planter would crave. And yet, he doesn’t take a moment to bask in the success of his labours. Instead, he takes a moment to give a sobering warning to his disciples.

“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy”, Jesus says in verse 1. Leaven was a substance used to make bread dough ferment so that it would rise when baked. These days we use yeast, and if you’ve ever baked bread before, you know that you don’t need much yeast to make the whole loaf of bread rise. A little package of yeast is all you need in order to make a big loaf of bread.

Jesus is saying that hypocrisy works like that in our lives, and in our communities. If we open our lives to even a little bit of hypocrisy, it very easily begins to characterize our entire lives. We may start our hypocrisy with something like how we use our time. Perhaps you squander your time away at work on games and online browsing, but whenever the boss comes around you get busy. That’s hypocrisy. That’s projecting yourself to be something you’re not. You want your boss to believe you’re always hard at work, but in reality you’re slacking.

You may think it’s harmless as long as you get your work done, and that may be true, but only partially so. Your hypocrisy may not be harming your company, but Jesus is telling us that it’s definitely harming your soul. Open the door to even a little hypocrisy, and before you know it, you’ve become a hypocrite about all sorts of things. How you use your money. Your sexual purity. The health of your marriage.

What’s more, hypocrisy tends to beget hypocrisy in other people. We saw that happen to the Pharisees, where the culture of an entire religious group was infected with it. I think this is what happened in Hollywood, where the problem of two-faced men who say one thing and do another wasn’t confined to one or two people, but was part of the culture of how many men tended to operate. Hypocrisy is pervasive, subversive, and deadly, and therefore, Jesus tells us to beware.

But why does Jesus bring up this topic of hypocrisy now? As he and his disciples prepare to meet and teach this massive crowd of thousands, why does Jesus take his disciples aside and warn them about the leaven of the Pharisees? You might expect him to repeat his teaching about how the harvest is plentiful, or about how they must seek God for the Spirit’s filling, but he doesn’t. Instead, he warns them to beware of hypocrisy. Why?

It’s because the root of hypocrisy is the fear of man. We become hypocrites because we’re afraid of what others will do to them. They might hurt our feelings. They might not like us as much. They might even hurt us. So we put on fake faces, hypocritical faces, to protect ourselves from others.

We see this connection between hypocrisy and fear of man in verse 4, where Jesus begins to give the remedy to hypocrisy by saying, “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who can kill the body and after this can do nothing more.” Jesus is talking about the fear of man here.

So we see that the reason why people say one thing and do another is that they’re afraid of what other people will think about them if they truly knew them for who they are. They think, “If my co-workers knew how lazy I am, they wouldn’t respect me anymore”, or “If my friends knew how bad my family life was, they wouldn’t love me anymore.” And so, rather than live with integrity, they make sure they say and do the right things in front of other people while keeping their true character hidden in the shadows.

We can put it another way. Hypocrites are people pleasers. They feed off the approval and applause of others. They live off of it and depend on it so much that they feel that if they don’t have approval of others, they’ll be worthless.

This is why Jesus warns his disciples about hypocrisy at this moment in their ministry when their popularity seems to be at its highest. Jesus knew that the more popular he and his disciples got, the more they would be tempted to become people pleasers, because once you’ve tasted popularity, you don’t want to give it up.

But Jesus exposes hypocrisy as a foolish, short-sighted, self-deceived lifestyle starting in verse 2 when he says, “Nothing has been covered over that shall not be revealed and is hidden that shall not be made known.” Do you hear what Jesus is saying? There is *nothing* that is hidden that shall not be made known, or to put it positively, *everything* that is hidden *shall* be made known.

Jesus is appealing not only to God’s omniscience (that God knows everything), but to God’s justice (that God will make everything known). Nothing is hidden from God now, and nothing will be hidden from others later. On the Day of Judgment, all the secrets and hypocrisy of men and women, of you and me, will be exposed. As verse 3 puts it, the things that we said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and the things we whispered in private rooms shall be preached on the housetops.

Hypocrites are tragically short sighted. They may be able to hide their secrets for a time, but the time is quickly approaching when all their secrets will be made known.

We need to believe this if we’re going to guard our hearts from hypocrisy. We need to know, deep in our souls, that there’s no point hiding our sins and pretending that we’re people that we’re not, because one day, all our sins will be made known.

(2) **THE REMEDY FOR HYPOCRITES**

In order to fight against hypocrisy, we need a perspective change. The key to keeping hypocrisy out of our lives is thinking less about this life, and more about the life to come. Jesus continues with this theme as we get to our second point: the remedies for hypocrisy.

Let’s look at verse 4 again: “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who can kill the body and after this can do nothing more.” If our perspective is rooted in this life, then verse 4 is a preposterous statement. We’re not supposed to fear those who can kill us? How can that be possible? Isn’t being murdered by someone the worst thing that could happen to us?

If this life were all that there was to our existence, then yes, being murdered would be the worst thing that could happen to us. We would be right to be very afraid of those who could kill us. But Jesus takes our perspective beyond this lifetime and into the life to come when he says in verse 4 that, *after* they’ve killed us, they can do nothing more.

Jesus couldn’t be clearer. There is an afterlife, a life that comes after this one, and it is a life so much greater than the present one that it makes the worst thing that could happen to us in this life seem trivial and insignificant. Why is that case? Because unlike this life, that life never ends.

Therefore, we do not fear those who can kill us, or hurt us, or reject us, or disrespect us in this life, because after this life they can do nothing more. The most powerful tyrant in the world can’t harm a fly in the world to come, let alone a person made in the image of God. But there is one who can harm us in the world to come. It’s God. He is the one Jesus calls us to fear, because as Jesus says in verse 5, “after he has killed, (he) has authority to cast into hell.”

I’m sure that some of you are squirming a little right now at the mention of the “H” word. Our culture doesn’t talk about hell very much, and when it does, it’s joked about and trivialized. Even Christians can find the topic uncomfortable, especially if they bring a non-Christian friend to church. Yes, we say we believe in hell, but we’d rather not talk about it, lest people discover that we actually believe in it.

But the reality is that we have to talk about it. Why? Because if you’re a Christian, then you’re a follower of Jesus. He’s your Lord. He’s your Master. You take your directions from him. So if Jesus spoke about hell without shame, and without embarrassment, then we have to speak about it in the same way. But if you’re listening to this and you’re not a Christian, then you have another reason entirely to talk about hell: you’re at risk of going there. I need to warn you. You must talk about it. You must talk about it honestly, and you must talk about it often.

Jesus doesn’t tell us much about hell in verse 5, but he tells us enough. The Greek word used for hell in verse 5 is *gehanna*. It was a reference to a notorious garbage site where people would frequently go to burn their trash. The site was so filthy that even the corpses of executed criminals would be brought there to be burned. It was such a popular disposal site that its fires were never extinguished.

This is the picture Jesus wants us to have of hell. It’s a place of unending flames reserved for the worthless things of the world. And here in verse 5, Jesus confronts us head on with the fact that God, as the Judge of all humanity, has the authority to cast people into hell, where they will suffer the torment of a person burning to death forever.

Jesus is telling us that this is the remedy for hypocrisy. The only way to stop fearing man is to start fearing God. The fear of man that leads to hypocrisy can only be conquered by a greater fear, the fear of God, a fear that only comes to us when we truly grasp what God can do to us. He can cast us into hell forever.

But what does it mean to fear God? My son Athan once asked me if God was scary. Part of me wanted to say, “No, of course not! You have nothing to fear when it comes to God”, but I knew I couldn’t say that and be faithful to the Scriptures. Over and over again, the Bible tells us about how terrified people were when God revealed himself to them. The Israelites were so afraid when God manifested his glory on Mount Sinai that they begged Moses to speak to God on their behalf so that God’s glory would not consume them. When Moses spoke to God at the burning bush, he was so afraid that he hid his face. When the apostles saw Jesus calm the storm in the Sea of Galilee, Luke told us that they were afraid. If anyone is scary, it’s God.

When I told Athan that God was scary, he started to cry. He said, “I don’t want God to be scary.” Maybe that’s what you’re thinking right now. We don’t want God to be scary, because we think that everything scary is bad. We think that, if God is scary, then he’ll come after us like a supernatural monster to harm us. But that’s not true. Not everything that’s scary is bad. God may be scary, but that doesn’t mean he’s bad. In fact, he’s the exact opposite. He is perfectly good, and he never does anything wrong.

Jesus reminds us of God’s goodness in verses 6-7 when he says, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.” Do you see what Jesus is saying? He said “Fear God” in verse 4, but “Fear not” in verse 7. We are to fear God because he can cast us into hell, but we don’t need to fear that he doesn’t care for us. He does. If he cares for sparrows, how much more does he care for you, a man or woman made in his image to be in a personal relationship with him?

And so, Jesus shows us how to stop fearing man and to start fearing God in the right way. We don’t keep hypocrisy out of our lives by living in terror of a spooky god. We keep it out by becoming people who care more about what God thinks about us than what people think about us. And the only way to become people like that is to remember God’s justice without forgetting his mercy. God will hold us accountable for our actions, our words, and even our thoughts, whether they were done in the light or in the shadows. But God is also willing to show us mercy, because he is good and he cares for you.

(3) **THE HOPE FOR HYPOCRITES**

There’s one piece missing to this puzzle of fearing God and being freed from hypocrisy, and it’s this: how can a just God who knows every single one of our sins show us mercy while still being just? Justice requires that sins be punished. Mercy calls for the punishment to be stayed. How can both be upheld? The answer to this question is found in the last part of our text, leading to our final point: the Hope for Hypocrites.

Jesus answers our question right in verses 8: “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God.” Jesus is painting a picture here of God’s heavenly courtroom, where the angels stand in witness as God pronounces judgment. They wait silently for the verdict. Will he welcome the person into heaven? Or will he cast the person into hell? Verse 8 tells us that God’s judgment will depend on how the person responded to Jesus. If you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then he will acknowledge you as his own.

You see, our salvation doesn’t ultimately depend on us. It depends on Christ. God will not determine our eternal destination by how well we battled hypocrisy, or how many sins we committed. He will determine our eternal destination based on one factor, and one factor alone: how did we respond to Jesus?

Jesus made it possible for God’s justice and mercy to be upheld. God’s justice demanded punishment. God’s mercy demanded relief from that punishment. So Jesus took our punishment upon himself on the cross so that we could receive relief. This is how God can look at our deepest, hidden sins and yet show us mercy. Christ has paid the penalty for them all. And if we trust in him as our Lord and Saviour, believing that the only way we could be forgiven was through his perfect life, sacrificial death, and physical resurrection, then God forgives our sins as a free gift of his grace.

But if you deny Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then Jesus warns you that he will deny you as well. You will stand in God’s heavenly courtroom facing eternal judgment and look for an advocate, someone to speak up for you, someone to tell you that everything’s going to be alright, but you’ll find no one. You will stand there all alone with no one to stand with you as the one who has authority to cast you into hell will do just that.

So will you acknowledge Christ? Or will you deny Christ? Christ will acknowledge those who acknowledge him, and he will deny those who deny him.

A few weeks ago we were at my aunt and uncle’s house for Christmas. My uncle told us that his small group recently discussed what they would do if a man burst into their church with a machine gun and directed everyone who was a Christian to stand up so that he could kill them. His small group considered how they would respond. Would they remain sitting? Would they hide? Or would they stand?

In response, my older brother insightfully said something to this effect, “Well, I suppose how you would respond in that situation would largely depend on how you responded to similar challenges in the past. If you spent an entire lifetime acknowledging Christ, even when it was difficult, even when it caused you loss, then I expect that you would stand. But if you always hid your faith, then I suppose you would hide it there as well.”

Acknowledging Christ doesn’t happen in a moment. It happens over a lifetime. The same applies to denying him. Just because someone denied Christ once, doesn’t mean that they will always do so.

I think this is what Jesus is getting at in verse 10, which is where we find the well-known “unforgiveable sin”: “And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.” What does this mean? Some people fear that verse 10 is speaking about a single sin that you could commit that God would never forgive. You could live all your life following and trusting Christ, but then you have a really bad day, you commit the unforgivable sin, and that’s it. You’re done for. You can never be forgiven. You are destined for an eternity in hell.

That’s not what verse 10 is saying. Jesus isn’t talking about one sin that you commit at one moment in your life. He’s talking about a heart so hardened against God that it rejects Christ over an entire lifetime. This heart is so hard that it not only rejects Jesus’ miraculous works as evidence of his divine identity, but attributes those works to the devil. When people label the works done by Christ in the power of the Spirit as Satanic, they’re blaspheming the Holy Spirit. They’ve shown that they’re so hardened against Christ and the gospel that they will never turn to God to be forgiven.

This doesn’t apply to those who have a moment of weakness and deny Christ. After all, the Apostle Peter denied Jesus three times and yet he was forgiven. Before he became a Christian, the Apostle Paul persecuted the church and hated the name of Christ, and yet he was forgiven. I think these are instances of what Jesus means when he says that those who speak a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. There may be times in our lives when we fail to stand up for Christ as we should have, or perhaps even say things that do not honour him for who he is. There’s no doubt that that’s sinful. But if we return to Christ, confessing our sin and turning away from it, then there’s no doubt that he will forgive you. The cross was sufficient to pay the penalty of all our sins, including the sin of denying our Lord himself.

But there is hope, not only that we will be forgiven of our sins, but that we will be freed from our sins. Jesus says in verses 11-12 that, when we are presented with the opportunity to either deny Christ or acknowledge him before the political forces of this world, we don’t have to be anxious about how we will respond, because the Holy Spirit himself will teach us what to say. In the moment of greatest trial, when we are tempted to deny Christ, the Holy Spirit himself will give us words that will empower us to remain faithful to our Lord.

**CONCLUSION**

As I close, let me ask you a question: are you a hypocrite? Do you present yourself to be one person, while in reality you’re someone else completely? Stop fooling yourself. You can only hide for so long. Be honest about your sins with yourself and with others. That doesn’t mean that you need to tell everyone exactly how you’re struggling with sin. But it does mean that you should tell some. And just as importantly, it means that you must not project yourself to be fine and dandy when in reality you’re not.

Don’t fear man any more. Fear God. Care less about what others can do to you, and care more about what God can do to you. But most importantly, care about what God *has* done for you in Christ. All your sins are paid for, and there is no more shame or embarrassment. We are all sinners saved by God’s grace to us in Christ. So let’s stop presenting multiple faces to the world and live in the integrity of one, that God may be glorified in us.