

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

But what does it mean to fear the Lord?

When we hear the phrase "fear of the lord" we might think of it like our regular fears.

Like how I am afraid of the heights, needles, or very crowded spaces.

But fearing the Lord does not mean we shake in terror and cry like a child seeing something scary.

It means that our reverence, respect, and fear of God changes how we live.

My fear of heights means that I am much more careful in high places.

My fear of needles means that I close my eyes when I get all my vaccines.

Likewise the fear of the Lord should inform and transform how we act.

We should act differently in our lives because of our fear of the Lord.

This morning in Luke 12:1-12, Jesus is going to talk to us about how to fear God.

He will tell us about three different areas of our life that should be transformed by our fear of the Lord.

My hope is that by the end of our time this morning we will have a better idea of what it means to fear God.

The first reason you should fear God: **Fear God in the dark (v. 1-3).**

We should live in reverence and respect for God even when no one is watching.

We should obey God even in the dark of night.

Because the light is coming.

All of our deeds that have been done in secret will be revealed.

Let us look at our story.

It begins with Jesus in the midst of a crowd.

"In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, He began to say to His disciples first, 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.'"

Everyone is surrounding Jesus.
Thousands are coming and are pressing into each other.
They are so close together that people are in danger of falling down and being trampled.

In this context, Jesus speaks.
First He speaks to His disciples.
He warns them of **"the leaven of the Pharisees."**
Leaven in the Bible is symbolic of sin and evil.
Because it is invasive and at times hard to see.
But once evil gets in it spreads and can't easily be stopped.

Jesus wants His disciples to be wary of the influence of the Pharisees.
And their leaven is **"hypocrisy."**
When you look at their life in the light,
 That is their normal public circumstances,
 Everything looks good.
They appear to be righteous holy people.
They obey God and have the right values.

But if you look at their lives in the dark.
 That is in their private life.
Who they are when no one is around and no one is watching,
Everything is not good.
They are hypocrites who talk a lot about righteousness,
 But who never truly live it.

They are like a traveling marriage expert who gets paid thousands to lead conferences on how to have a healthy marriage,
But if you saw him at home, then you would see that he is a horrible husband and his marriage is nothing you would want to emulate

Jesus does not want that to be true of His followers.
His disciples are to live privately as they do publicly.

The warning continues in verse 2 **"Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known."**

What day will this be?

This day will come when Jesus returns to rule and reign in victory.

After Satan and all evil are defeated everyone will stand before the white throne.

You can read about it in Revelation 20.

Every single secret will be revealed.

The books will be opened and everything you have ever said, thought, or done will be read aloud.

There is nothing you have done that God did not see.

There is nothing you have hidden that God cannot find.

One day the hypocrite will be exposed.

The lies of the Pharisees will be found out.

The politician who thought they covered up their insider trading will be caught.

The murderer who thought they buried all the evidence will be found out.

The pastor who used their position to prey on women and children will be exposed.

Every dirty secret of the powerful will be read aloud.

All hypocrisy will be discovered one day.

No one will be able to escape God's justice.

On one hand this should bring us comfort.

It should remind us that we worship a God of justice.

It should also change how we act in private places.

"Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops."

The warning is for us.

Since the light is coming, we should act like it.

We should speak as if others will hear us.

We might want to talk badly about someone because they are annoying or even horrible to other people.

But we wouldn't do so if we knew they were standing behind us.

Jesus tells us that we should be so careful all the time.

We should speak as if our conversations were being recorded and going to be played later.

We should act as those who fear God.

We should ask ourselves how we live in the dark.

How do you talk when you think others will not find out?

What do you look at late at night on your phone when no one is around?

Do you live as someone who fears God?

Do you live like someone who knows God sees?

Because everything done in the dark will be exposed one day.

This knowledge should change how we live.

But it should not lead us to despair and terror.

It does not need to make us fall to our knees in shame.

Every secret thing will be revealed yes.

All of your sins will be exposed.

But if you have put your faith in Jesus.

If you have repented of your sins and asked Christ for forgiveness, there is nothing to fear.

All of your sins have been forgiven.

God will not read from the book of your sins.

Because your name is found in the book of life.

There is an escape from your sin and shame.

It is not found in trying harder.

It is not found in trying to imagine that God is always watching.

It is found in the gospel.

It is found in the body of Christ broken on the cross for you.

He died in your place.

He bore the weight of all your sins, the secret and public ones.
He took all the punishment for you so that you do not have to.
So come to Him and ask for mercy.
And you will find it.
You will be welcome and embraced not judged or rejected.
You will find a greater love than you have ever known.
And you will have nothing to fear when the light comes.

Second **we should fear God in death (v. 4-7).**

Death is something that comes for all of us but we avoid it.
We don't like to speak of it in polite company.
We pretend as if death only happens to other people.
But death will be all of our fates one day.
And we are to live in fear of God even when facing death.

Verse 4, **"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more they can do."**

Jesus tells them that they are not to fear those who can kill them.
They are not to fear their Roman masters.
They are not to fear the Pharisees and religious rulers.
They do not need to fear those with the power to kill them.

Why not?

Well, Jesus says death is the worst they can do.

Yes, they can kill you.

Yes, they can make you suffer before it happens.

But what about after that?

"After that they have nothing more they can do."

After your body dies you will be beyond their power.

There is nothing more to fear.

This is why we need not be afraid of the world and its power.

I frequently hear Christians afraid.

They consume news designed to make them afraid and then fear.

They fear the rise of evil in the world.
They fear when they see failure and hypocrisy in the church.
And they fear what could come if the worst happens.
Jesus wants His disciples to imagine the worst case scenario.
He wants them to imagine that for following Jesus they could be killed.
It is about the worse fate you could imagine.
But what then?

Even if your darkest fears about the world came true.
Jesus says the worst they could do is kill you.
And after that their power is over.
But death is not the end.
And we should not fear those with the power to kill you.
There is someone else we should fear instead.

Verse 5, **"But I will want you whom to fear: fear him who after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!"**

We fear those who might be able to kill us.
But God has more power than that.
Because after you are dead no man can touch you.
But God can.
God can punish us even after our deaths.

Because death is not an escape.
Some believe that because they have spent their lives with no interference from God they are free.
They believe they have eluded His grasp.
But they are wrong.
God has the power to cast us into the fires of hell.
To take our souls to a place of eternal punishment and suffering.
That is what we should fear.

We should fear God more than we fear man.

We should fear the one who can kill our souls more than we fear those who can kill our bodies.

That should change the way that we live.

The God who made you does have that authority.

Hell is not very popular these days.

Some believe it is antiquated.

Or they believe that a loving God could never do such a thing.

But if He is a God of justice, then He must.

Sin must be punished.

The wicked cannot get away with their sin.

But He is not a cruel God.

We do not have to crawl on the ground in fear that our every move might make Him strike us dead immediately.

The God we are to fear is a God who loves us.

Look back to verse 4, **"I tell you, my friends,"**

Why does Jesus address this to His friends?

Because this is meant to encourage them, not make them scared.

And this is not just Jesus calling them His pals.

I believe this is a Greek reference they would have caught.

It is a reference to those who would be called "friends of Caesar."

Because the "friends of Caesar" are under his protection.

Anyone who threatened or mistreated them would face Caesar's wrath.

But Jesus says to His disciples and followers,

He says that they are friends of Christ.

They are under His protection.

I don't think this is Jesus preaching a fire and brimstone sermon.

He is trying to comfort His disciples.

He wants them to know that they have nothing to fear from Caesar.

They should not live in fear of his goons or those with power.

Caesar should live in fear of Christ.

And this is a needed lesson.
Because all of the disciples are going to have to face death.
They will be beaten, tortured, and martyred.
They will be asked to deny Christ.
And they must fear God even in the face of death.

I think this message is supposed to be comforting to them because again look at the context.

Verse 6, **"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God."**

Jesus wants them to consider the birds.
They are particularly supposed to consider sparrows.
A sparrow is a common bird.
Nobody seems to think highly of them.
In fact you can buy five of them for only a few pennies.
They are eaten by the poor.
They seem to be basically worthless in Israel.

Yet, these birds that no one cares for.
More and more of them are bundled together so they can be sold.
They are viewed no higher than an annoyance or a pest.
Yet, **"not one of them is forgotten before God."**
God cares for every single sparrow.
He does not see them as an annoyance or a pest.
Every single sparrow you have ever seen.
Every single sparrow that has ever lived.
Every single sparrow ever killed by a child practicing with a slingshot.
Every single sparrow eaten by the poor in desperation.
God remembers every single one.
He remembers their names.
He remembers the first moment they each emerged from their shells.
He remembers when they first tried to fly.
Not one of them has faded from His memory.
God bore witness to their lives.

Because He loves them and cares for them.

Now if that is true, how much more does God love us?

Verse 7, **"Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are more value than many sparrows."**

God loves you more than the birds.

You mean so much more to Him than sparrows.

He notices every hair on your head.

Now some of us might have lost some hair over the years.

God knows exactly how many.

And He knows because He cares.

Because He pays attention to you and because He loves you.

God has seen every moment of your life.

He knows every part of Who You Are.

And that God loves you.

Why would you care about the approval of those in the world?

Why would you be afraid those who can kill your body?

When you should live and respect for the God who loves your body and your soul.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus is not just telling His disciples something that He will refuse to live.

Jesus tells His disciples that they do not have to fear those who can kill them.

Because Jesus does not fear those who will kill Him.

In fact, Jesus came in order to give up His life for us.

He came in order to be killed and to die on our behalf.

Jesus speaks about that which He knows.

And He suffered that death for us in order that we do not have to perish.

He died so that when we die we can have eternal life.

If we believe in Him.

We should fear God in death because death does not have to be the end of our story.

In fact, death is not the end of our stories.

All of our lives will live on even after we die.

The question is will your life live on with Jesus and eternal life
or it will you live on without Him in Eternal death?

But if we put our hope in Jesus,
if we believe in Him then we get eternal life.

Then we do not have to fear death.

Then we can face the reality that all of us will die with no fear.

Then we can get the news from the doctor that the cancer is progressed too far and there's nothing they can do without fear.

Then we can enter into the arena like Polycarp a Christian from the first century.

Who was burned alive because he would not deny Jesus.

And he went towards his death with no fear.

Because he knew the hope of the Gospel.

That those who put their faith in Jesus have nothing to fear with death.

This is why Jesus says fear not.

You do not have to fear because God loves you.

You do not have to fear because eternal life is available to you if you want it.

And if you receive it you can look death in the face.

You can stare down Satan and his horde of demons.

And you can declare do your worst because all you can do is kill me and my God has already defeated death.

We should fear God even as we die.

Because all of us are going to die one day.

But fear not because you are worth more than sparrows.

Point number 3: **Fear God in trials (v. 8-12).**

We should fear God not just in our impending deaths but through all of the sufferings and trials that will meet us on our way.

We should live in respect and fear of God in the daily challenges that appear.

For the disciples one of the main challenges that they will face is whether they are going to live and acknowledgment of Jesus or whether they will deny Him.

Whether they will acknowledge Him with their words and with their lives. Or if they will deny Him with their words and deny Him with their actions.

Verse 8, **"and I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God,"**

So what are these trials?

There are a number of different ways that we can face times when we can choose to acknowledge Jesus or to deny him.

The primary one that might immediately come to mind is when someone just asks are you a Christian?

That's a very straightforward you have a chance to either acknowledge yes I am a follower of Christ or no I am not.

And we might think of them and circumstances like the disciples will face. And like many of the Believers in the first centuries of the church will face. When they will be brought before the Romans and leaders and asked do you worship Christ or Caesar?

I think Jesus is talking about those circumstances.

Because that is what is immediately relevant for His followers at that day. For us our trials do not look the same.

It is unlikely that we will have to face Roman torturers and be asked if we will make sacrifices to Caesar or not?

For us most of the trials that we face are much smaller and we feel much more often.

They're the times when we have a choice whether we will live as a Christian or live as someone who does not know Jesus.

When we are wronged will we turn the other cheek as Jesus commands or will strike back?

When we see a neighbor in need will we give to them as Christ commands or will we hold back in our greed?

When we encounter our enemy will we love them as Jesus calls his followers to do or will we hate them instead.

Sometimes we might be tempted to daydream or romanticize what we might have done or might do if we were ever put in the circumstance where we had the life or death choice to acknowledge Jesus or to deny him.

And we would probably hope and pray and think that we would have enough faith in the moment to acknowledge Jesus.

But the reality is often we are far too comfortable denying Him in the words that come out of our mouth and the things that we do with our hands in much smaller trials.

And those of her brothers and sisters in the faith who endured to the end and who acknowledge Jesus even though it led to their deaths.

I don't think they did so just because they were supernaturally filled with the Holy Spirit.

Think that they did so because they acknowledge Jesus in a million other small ways first before that day came.

The blessing that Jesus promises is this, if we acknowledge God before men then Jesus will acknowledge us before the angels.

The image that Jesus is giving is this.

If you acknowledge and confess Jesus Christ as Lord not just with your mouth but with your actions and with your life here now,

Then one day when you stand Before the Throne of God.

And all of the angels and the Heavenly Creatures and the cherubim and the seraphim are there watching.

And as your fate hangs in the balance.
Jesus will stand up and acknowledge you.
Jesus will point to you and say yes come to me my son, come to me my daughter, come to me my child.

But the reverse is also true.

Verse 9, **"but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God."**

Those who do not accept Jesus.

Those who do not confess Christ as Lord.

Those who do not call in Jesus to be their savior.

When they stand before that heavenly throne Jesus will not acknowledge them.

In Jesus will turn His back on them as they turned their back on Jesus.

We might fear.

You may think of the many times that you have denied Jesus in your life.
And sometimes this can cause even those who have been Christians for a long time to wonder am I really saved?

I want you to hear the promise in verse 10, **"and everyone who speaks a word against the son of man will be forgiven,"**

Jesus promises that there is forgiveness for deniers.

There is forgiveness for backsliders.

There is redemption offered even for those who curse the name of Jesus.

Even for those who speak against him.

There is redemption available to them.

There is forgiveness that they can receive if they ask for it.

But not everyone will be forgiven.

The rest of verse 10 is probably the most challenging part of the entire Passage.

"but the one who blasphemes against the holy spirit will not be forgiven."

Now what does that mean?

Because it appears as if God is saying there's some sins that God cannot forgive.

For the record this is the only one in all of the scriptures it says that God can't forgive.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

But what does it mean to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit?

There are a couple of different options of what this could mean.

The first option would mean assigning the work of the Holy Spirit to Demons.

Saying things like the Pharisees did in chapter 11 that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub.

That could make sense.

And I find it strange to say that we can speak ill of Jesus and be forgiven but we cannot speaking of the Holy Spirit and be forgiven.

If God really is the Trinity and one God and three persons I'm not sure that this one best explains it.

They're also those who will believe that just saying the words "I blaspheme against the Holy Spirit."

Now that is dangerous, and wicked, I don't think that's quite what this means.

I think blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a refusal to listen to the holy spirit's call.

As it seems like this kind of blasphemy is not a one-time event.

It appears to be something continuous.

Because the Holy Spirit calls and invites Sinners to come to Jesus and to find forgiveness and Redemption.

But not everybody answers.

Not everybody who hears the gospel preach to accept.

Not everybody whose heart is convicted by the word of God and drawn by the Holy Spirit comes.

So I think those who ignore the Holy Spirit's voice who stuff it down and ignore it over and over and over and over for the rest of their lives or the ones who blasphemy against Him.

That's the best explanation I think for what this means.

And I think if you are afraid that you might have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit then you don't need to worry.

Because you're very concerned that you might have sinned and grieved the Holy Spirit shows that you're being attentive and listening to his voice.

I think the main point of this verse is meant to be the Forgiveness that is offered not the things that can't be forgiven.

After all the Apostle Peter is forgiven by Jesus.

Three times Peter was asked "are you a follower of Jesus?" "Did not I see you with him?"

And three times Peter says no I have nothing to do with him.

The man who proclaimed that he would die for Jesus less than 24 hours later as tonight and three times.

And yet, Jesus forgives Peter.

And yet, Jesus empowers Peter to be one of the founding Apostles of the church.

And later Peter will be crucified upside down having endured his trial and not denying Jesus again.

Again these verses are meant to be encouraging Look what Jesus says in verse 11, "**and when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and authorities, to not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the holy spirit will teach you in that very hour what you want to say.**"

Notice that Jesus says when this happens not if it happens.

They are to expect trials.

They are to expect moments when following Jesus is difficult.

To expect to be put on a public trial in front of powerful people who will press in all around them like the crowd threatening to trample them calling for them to deny Jesus.

But Jesus says when that moment comes don't be anxious.

Don't fear.

Don't be afraid.

Don't worry.

Oh and don't feel like you need to write up your defense.

Don't huddle up and figure out the best strategy for how to argue your way out of this.

The Holy Spirit will come he'll tell you what to say.

And He will teach you the very hour what you are to say.

Notice this means that they don't have to have it all together beforehand.

They don't have to have held mock trials where they decide what they will say if they ever have to.

They could have never thought about it or considered this was a possibility before ever in their minds.

Jesus will give them all the prep that they need.

This also is true for you and for us.

There will be moments that you will be put on trial.

Not in the synagogues maybe not in front of the authorities and the rulers.

You don't have to fear about what you'll say.

When the trial comes the Comforter, the Spirit of Christ and Spirit of God the Holy Spirit will be there with you.

And he will teach you what you need to say.

So you have nothing to fear.

We do not need to be afraid of trials in the Christian Life.

Indeed we should expect them and know that they are coming.

And we should know that the Holy Spirit is coming and He is bringing help.

He will teach us exactly what we need to say and what we need to do.
So we can be at peace.

In conclusion, This morning we have seen that we should fear God in the dark, fear God in death, and fear God in trials.
Our fear and reverence for God should transform every part of our lives.
It should change how we act, speak, and think.
Because we serve a God who loves us more than sparrows.