

Pardon for Sin and a Peace that Endureth
Luke 12:1-12

With your Bibles opened to Luke 12:1-12, would you stand in honoring God's Word as I read our passage for today.

Having addressed the crowd and the religious leaders in chapter 11 Jesus now turns His attention to the disciples giving them some warnings to heed in their endeavor to follow Him. What can we learn from His conversation with them?

We learn that the knowledge of God prevails.

We learn that the compassion of God prevails.

We learn that the salvation of God prevails.

We learn that the Spirit of God prevails.

In fact, we see that in all things God is sovereign.

He is sovereign in His justice.

He is sovereign in His judgment.

The warnings He gives in this passage are meant to direct us to follow Him instead of following man-made or self-righteous religions. With these warnings there also comes encouragement, encouragement that keeps us going on the right path even when there is persecution, encouragement not to be afraid because God is with us through His enabling, empowering and equipping Spirit. So don't give up! The disciples will need this advice. We need this advice, too.

There are four ideas I want us to see from this passage.

There is a dangerous path

There is a dreadful place

There is a deplorable position

There is a defensible practice

I. THERE IS A DANGEROUS PATH – v. 1-3

Chapter 12 is a continuation of the events that occurred in chapter 11. Considering what He has just said to the crowd and the religious leaders, Jesus is now going to turn His attention to the

disciples. In 11:53 we note that after Jesus had left that place, meaning He was walking away, we see from verse 1 that a large crowd began to assemble around Him. They had heard the commotion caused by the Pharisees and Scribes who were outraged by what Jesus said about them. In their fury they began to aggressively oppose Him. As this was taking place our text tells us that many thousands had gathered. It literally means there were 10's of thousands assembled.

George Whitefield was at the forefront of the Great Awakening in both Great Britain and America in the mid-18th century. It is estimated that during his life he preached more than 18,000 sermons. At one meeting there were over 30,000 who came to hear him preach. He was one of the best known and widely recognized preachers during that time. Thousands attended his meetings to hear him preach as revival broke out in New England.

Thousands and thousands had gathered to hear Jesus and each was trying to get as close to Him as possible. It turned into a mob scene with people literally trampling each other. There was pushing and jostling and pulling. Sadly, they weren't there seeking spiritual truth, only seeking physical help.

In the chaos Jesus began to speak to the disciples. He talked to them about a dangerous path. It was the path of hypocrisy. Jesus exhorted them to be on guard of the Pharisees and their hypocrisy. We dealt with that extensively last week so I will only touch on it here. Jesus used the term exclusively in speaking about religious hypocrisy. We understand the term to mean pretending to be something you are not. Jesus warned the disciples to be wary of them because while pretending to be righteous their very actions and teachings were leading people away from the truth and away from God.

Sir Francis Scott wrote:

O what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practice to deceive.

That's the Pharisees. Here's the thing about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, they really thought they were honoring God.

Jesus likened their hypocrisy to yeast or leaven. Throughout the Old and New Testaments yeast is symbolic of sin. During the Passover as they celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread every bit of yeast was to be removed from the home. The fermentation process from yeast was seen as a corrupting agent in the dough. Yeast became a symbol of the corruption that we are supposed to remove from our behavior. Anything that was decaying was considered unclean and so it became symbolic of sin. Anything therefore that had a corrupting influence in the life was thought to be just like yeast. Like yeast, hypocrisy starts small but permeates all the dough and grows quickly. Just as yeast affects all the dough, so hypocrisy affects the whole person.

Warren Wiersbe writes "Hypocrisy does to the person what yeast does to the dough, puffs it up."

I Corinthians 5:6-8 "Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth."

As the body of Christ, we are called to get rid of sin, live lives of holiness, pursue godliness and we cannot do so if we are hypocritical – living one way with one group of people and living another way when away from that group or with others. Peter calls us to a life of holiness, because God is holy.

The disciples were called to be on the lookout for the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who taught one thing but didn't live up to their own standards.

Jesus then went on to say that what is concealed will eventually be revealed, inferring that the real life of the hypocrite will become known. We may think we do something in secret. We may think that even our thoughts are hidden, but Jesus is telling us that even what we consider to be the most secret of places, what we do and what we say will be revealed.

Because many houses were made of clay it was easy for robbers to dig through the wall and steal something that might be stored in the wall. Many homes had an inner room that was secure. It's where they would put their valuables. Jesus said that even if you went into that inner room, the place you believed to be most secure and whispered something in secret there, it would be exposed. Psalm 139:1-4, 7-10, 13-14

Because of God's omnipresence and God's omniscience, because God knows us and knitted us together in our mother's womb, if He knows us that intimately and sees wherever we go, it stands to reason that He knows all our thoughts and actions. Jeremiah 32:19
Jeremiah 23:24-32

Are we so naïve to think that we can conceal our thoughts, our words, or our actions from the all-knowing, all-seeing God? Everything will be brought to light. What was born in darkness will be revealed by the light of God's truth. Hypocrisy is futile because it will eventually come to light.

Jesus warns them of the danger of the hypocritical Pharisees who try to conceal their true identity. Jesus says they will be exposed. Hypocrisy is a dangerous path they were to avoid and they were warned about it.

Jesus then warns them of a dreadful place.

II. THERE IS A DREADFUL PLACE – v. 4-7

The natural result of following someone who is leading you astray is ending up at a place you don't want to be.

The world has been horrified by the news this past week of the repulsive act of ISIS burning alive a pilot from Jordan. If beheadings weren't barbaric enough, they sank to a new low by taking this young man and setting him on fire. Caged like an animal and doused with flammable liquid it was ignited all in an attempt to inflict fear on any who would oppose them. The global public outcry is for justice to be brought to bear on this terrorist group. They want us to fear them, to be afraid of what they will do to fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers. They want us to cower under their boot.

Many a nation and leader has attempted to instill fear in its people by suppressing them in some way, any way even if it is death in an effort to control its people, especially Christians. Yet even in those countries where aggressive attempts are made to eradicate Christianity, the church is thriving. Why? It's thriving because the church of Christ will not be squashed.

I was given this little booklet, Iran 30. It's a prayer guide on how to pray each day for the nation and people of Iran. It is not any secret to the world that even though they claim to allow some religious liberties for groups other than Muslims, there is a national effort to eliminate Christianity. The director of this ministry writes "as prayer increased, so has persecution. Since 2009 hundreds of believers have endured arbitrary arrest, solitary confinement and interrogations. And in those dark places, supported by your prayers, these believers have witnessed for Jesus Christ."

By inflicting fear on believers they hope that many will recant their faith and embrace Islam. One of the early church fathers, Tertullian, wrote "the more you cut us down, the more in number we grow."

In essence what Jesus is telling the disciples is to prepare for persecution. Get ready for opposition, but don't fear those who can only kill the body. They can snuff out the physical life, but they cannot do anything to the soul. For the believer that is forever safely kept in the grip of the Father who will not lose one who has come to believe and accept His offer of salvation through Christ. But Jesus continues by also noting that instead of fearing the person who can only kill the body, we ought to fear the one who is able to destroy the soul as well and He names the place of destruction. It is hell. In the Greek it's the word Gehenna and was the town dump where a continual fire burned.

Prior to the reign of King Josiah, the detestable practice of child sacrifice was performed in the valley of Hinnom just outside Jerusalem. The Israelites offered child sacrifices to the Ammonite god Molech there in the valley. When Josiah became king he instituted reforms that brought an end to this detestable act. As an act of defiling the site for future sacrifices it became the city dump which burned with a perpetual fire. That place became the symbol of what hell will be like. It is a place described in Scripture as an eternal fire, the place of final punishment, everlasting darkness, and perpetual torment.

That is the destination and final judgment of those who reject God and that is why God should be feared. He is the one who stands in ultimate and sovereign authority, He is the one in whose presence we should be in awe of, He is the one we should trust if we are to escape the punishment of hell. Why should we trust Him? We see that answered in verses 6-7.

Jesus then gave an illustration of just how much we are valued by God. Here we see His compassion. Sparrows were cheap food. For two cents you could buy five sparrows. Even though they were of little value on the market, God knows every one of them. So the logic goes that if God knows every

sparrow, God knows all about you. Nothing escapes God's knowledge. Not sparrows. Not even the number of hairs on your head.

Someone had a lot of time on their hands when they decided to count the number of hairs on a head.

They say that the average middle-aged man has about 100,000 hairs on the head and loses about 75 per day. They also say he has about 30,000 hairs in his beard. Maybe Art would volunteer to test out the beard theory. God knows each one. In God's estimation, each hair is distinct from the next. They are all labeled.

That hell is a dreadful place is certain, but God has told us that we are worth exceedingly far more than sparrows. You are of infinite value to Him. So don't be afraid of what man can do to you, God in His compassion has made it possible for us to escape that most dreadful place. If today you do not know Jesus Christ as your Savior, you need to fear God because your destination is that place reserved for those who reject His Son.

Revelation 20:11-15

Hell is a dreadful place.

There is a deplorable position.

III. THERE IS A DEPLORABLE POSITION – v. 8-10

Years ago F.F. Bruce wrote *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*. This passage is among those he includes. There are a number of differing viewpoints even among conservative scholars. I will do my best to explain how I understand the passage, but I want you to know that I am not the definitive answer on the subject. There may be some of you who hold a different view on this issue and that's okay. At the end of the day it's not going to shake my faith, nor will I question my salvation. The issue I am talking about is what has been called the unpardonable sin. We'll consider it when we come to verse 10.

Jesus has just told His disciples not to be afraid of anything man can do to them. Taking Judas Iscariot out of the picture since in time he will voluntarily betray Christ, of the 11 remaining disciples, John will be the only disciple who does not suffer martyrdom. The other 10 disciples listening to Jesus will all be put to death for their faith. Like the others, though, John will be persecuted, imprisoned and even doused with boiling oil and exiled to a penal colony as a prisoner of the State. These disciples will suffer persecution of varying degrees all because they acknowledged Jesus as the Savior. They went from abandoning Jesus on the night of His trial and crucifixion to boldly proclaiming Him.

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God.” Think of it, you'll be introduced to the angels as someone who wasn't ashamed of telling others you are a Christian. Acknowledge refers to recognizing Christ as Savior and the only way of salvation. It is the idea of agreeing or saying the same thing about. To confess or acknowledge Jesus is to agree with Him about who He is, what He has done, and what He has said. Peter did this when He confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. We do it when we confess with our mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9-10).

“But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.” Does that mean Peter won't be in heaven? Let's be honest and admit that each of us on one or more occasions remained silent when we had an opportunity to acknowledge Christ and didn't. The word deny or disown depending on your translation is the same word used to describe Peter's actions before the rooster crowed. I believe then that disowning Christ is understanding who Jesus is but rejecting Him as Savior anyway.

I John 2:22-23 “Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the

antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”

I John 5:11-12 “And this is the record that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in the Son. He that hath the Son hath life, He that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

If you confess Jesus as your Savior, you have life. If you deny Jesus as Savior, you don't have life.

Verse 10 then summarizes for me what Jesus just said in verses 8-9.

“And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.”

Let's understand first the meaning of the word blasphemy. It is simply a defiant, irreverent, willful degrading of what is holy.

In Matthew 12 it is in the context of Jesus denouncing the Pharisees who claimed that His ability to cast out the demon was done in the power of prince of demons, Satan himself, rather than attributing the act to the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees would not acknowledge that Jesus' authenticating miracles were done in the power of the Holy Spirit, an admission that would have recognized Jesus as the true Messiah. Instead, they claimed it was done in the power of Satan.

Before we go any further I want to share several views about the unpardonable sin.

1. It is a sin that could only be committed while Christ was on earth because it was specific to the miracles He performed that authenticated His being the Messiah.

2. It is a sin of unbelief that continues to the time of the person's death at which time there is no more opportunity for repentance.

3. It is a sin of serious apostasy committed by genuine believers. They believe that only those who are truly born again can commit this sin.

4. It is a sin of unusually malicious, willful rejection and slander against the Holy Spirit's work attesting to the authenticity of Christ as Savior, attributing His work to Satan.

5. It is the sin of accepting the mark of the beast in the tribulation period prior to Christ's return.

Now, let me say two things up front here.

1. A Christian cannot commit an unpardonable sin. It would simply fly in the face of the promise in I John 1:9 that if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

2. Anyone who thinks they have committed the unpardonable sin, has not because they still have a conscious awareness of their guilt as I believe it is a willful, prolonged, deliberate rejection of the Holy Spirit's convicting work in the sinner's life. That they think they have committed such a sin indicates that they are still consciously aware of sin and the Holy Spirit's conviction.

Wayne Grudem writes regarding the Matthew 12 passage: “The context indicates that Jesus is speaking about a sin that is not simply unbelief or rejection of Jesus, but one that includes a) a clear knowledge of who Christ is and of the Holy Spirit working through Him, b) a willful rejection of the facts about Christ that His opponents knew to be true, and c) slanderously attributing the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ to the power of Satan. In such a case the hardness of heart would be so great that any ordinary means of bringing a sinner to repentance would already have been rejected... The sin is unpardonable because it cuts off the sinner from repentance and saving faith through belief in the truth. It is then a willful rejection and slander

against overwhelming evidence of and conviction by the Holy Spirit's testimony regarding God's grace in Christ."

Theologian Charles Ryrie adds: "To misunderstand the power of the Holy Spirit was unforgiveable since the Spirit's power and ministry was well known from Old Testament times...Wickedness of heart is unpardonable if it persists in rejecting Christ. (He concludes) No sin is unpardonable as long as there is breath to ask forgiveness."

Titus 3:5

Louis Sperry Chafer states "An unpardonable sin and a 'whosoever will' gospel cannot co-exist. Were there an unpardonable sin possible today, every gospel invitation in the New Testament would have to exclude specifically those who had committed that sin."

Charles Stanley writes "There is no pardon for a person who dies in unbelief. The Bible refers to this in terms of having a hard heart. The hardening of the heart is not a onetime act. It is the result of a gradual progression in which sin and the conviction of the Holy Spirit are ignored."

Author Mark Taylor notes "It is an ongoing, willful, and active rejection of the testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning the truth about Christ, and can only be committed by an unbeliever."

Finally from F.F. Bruce "If some people looked at the relief which He was bringing to the bodies and minds of men and women and maintained that He was doing so with the help of their great spiritual oppressor, the prince of demons, their eyes were so tightly closed to the light that for them light had become darkness and good had become evil. The light is there for those who will accept it, but if some refuse the light, where else can they hope to receive illumination?"

Romans 10:14 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

I have given you a number of quotes related to the unpardonable sin. As my title suggests, there is pardon for sin and a peace that endures. But there is no pardon for someone who continually rejects the convicting work of the Holy Spirit who brings about the regenerating work of salvation in the penitent sinner. That person understands who Jesus Christ is but they refuse to accept Him as Savior.

I have shared this story before but it bears repetition. My college theology professor told of an unsaved man who attended his church and at the close of the service when the invitation was given he could see the convicting work of the Spirit in the man's life and week after week the man resisted the wooing of the Spirit. Finally on one Sunday when the invitation was given the man was under so much conviction that he paced in circle resisting the Spirit's call. After that there was no more evidence of the convicting work of the Spirit in his life. He had resisted to the point of rejection and there is no pardon for unbelief.

If the Spirit of God is speaking to you today to be saved, don't resist. There is no provision apart from Christ for salvation. To reject the convicting work of the Spirit is to reject the person who died for your sins. To reject the one who died for your sins is to reject the one whose grace has pardoned you, the result of which then is eternal hell. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

There is one final point in verses 11-12.

IV. THERE IS A DEFENSIBLE PRACTICE – v. 11-12

These verses do not apply to the pulpit and to those who refuse to study and prepare sermons trusting that God's Spirit will give them a message five minutes before they get up to preach. This passage

is for the courtroom. In those times when the disciples could expect persecution and accusation they could also expect that the Holy Spirit would give them the words to say in defense of their case.

In Acts 4:8-20, Peter and John have been arrested and put in prison. Eventually they are brought before the Sanhedrin to give an accounting of their preaching the gospel. Verse 8 begins by noting that Peter became filled with the Spirit and began to speak. When he finished speaking it is stated that they took note that these men had been with Jesus. There was an undeniable conviction in their testimony and when ordered not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, Peter said they couldn't help but speak about what they had seen and heard.

Maybe Peter remembered the words of Jesus as He told them to rely on the Holy Spirit who would give them the words to say when they are brought before magistrates.

The conclusion of these 12 verses is that the man who is led by the Spirit stands in stark contrast to the man who blasphemes the Spirit. Those who are led by the Spirit will be aided by the Spirit to give testimony at the right time and they will do so boldly. Persecution won't shatter their faith, it will give them opportunity to be a witness in the power and words of the Spirit who will give the right words to say in that moment. Jesus gives a word of encouragement to entrust the crisis to God's Spirit to stand strong and speak boldly – without fear. Don't fear what man can do to you.

Have you made that all important decision to listen to the Spirit of God and repent of sin and trust Christ as Savior or are you still resisting Him? You never know what will happen when you walk out those doors. There is pardon for sin and peace that endures.

Are you being persecuted in some way for your faith and unsure how to respond? Listen to God's

Spirit who will give you what to say in that moment. It may just be what they need to hear to bring them under the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

Regardless of whether we ever encounter such persecution where we are brought before a judge on account of our faith, we are to live in the power of the Holy Spirit who is at work in us to develop the character of God in us.