
The Facets of Fear

Luke 12:1-34¹

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We have been going through a time of great fear and anxiety...

Fear of getting sick...

Anxiety about our finances...

Worry about our kids and their future...

If we are honest, we will admit to some if not all of these.

Jesus often says things that shock us...

Jesus sometimes commands things that challenge the very roots of our belief systems.

Do not Fear the Manipulation of False Teachers (v.1-3)

Here is the infectious hypocrisy and manipulation by the false religious leaders of Jesus' day.

12 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. ² Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³ 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 Trampling Crowds (v.1)

Why does a huge crowd trampling over one another, prompt the conversation that follows? Why does Luke start like this? All the pushing and shoving and trampling on people is a result of... *fear*.

The Surprising Caution (v.2)

Jesus words are a surprise, I think. "Look out for crowds...", is what we would expect. Ah Jesus' favorite target, the religious leadership of the day. Watch out for their leaven. Watch out for their hypocrisy which tends to manipulate and infect people.

The Frightening Cause (v.3)

What the Pharisees do and say in secret will be broadcast for all to hear. They use their power and rules to make people afraid. But they should be afraid of what is going to happen to them. This is certainly first about their plotting to kill Jesus. But it is also about the general behavior of false religious leadership. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees used fear to manipulate people.

Are you easily manipulated by fear?

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Do not Fear Man, but Fear God (v.4-7)

We are called to the right kind and right object of fear, that is respect and reverence of God.

⁴“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷ Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

The Limited Power of Man (v.4)

Why are we afraid of people and their edicts? Why do we cower under oppression? Why do we crave the approval and acceptance of others? Why do threats against our lives cause panic? What will we do when faced with real persecution? If we will hesitate to say we are Christians just because we might be embarrassed or shamed a little, what is going to happen?

You say, what has that got to do with this text? Stay with me...

The Ultimate Authority of God (v.5)

Don't fear man who can only destroy the body but fear the one who has the power to cast your soul into hell. Now who is that? A popular interpretation is, the devil. Don't fear man, but we should fear the devil. The devil has no authority to cast anyone into hell. Who has the authority, the power, to cast you into hell? God does.

The Encouraging Value of People (v.6-7)

Fear God!!! But... are we just supposed to be afraid of God like some big dangerous heavenly ogre?

How in the world do these two sentences go together? Fear God!!! The God who has declared you to be of ever so much greater worth and value than the birds and the beasts. So people have a wrong fear of God because they have wrong view of themselves. We are worthless worms as sinners. But as humans and more importantly, as His little flock, we prizes us.

So, because God can cast your soul into hell and because He values you above the bests and birds, reverence and respect Him. True godly fear respects the authority of God while recognizing His care for us.

Do not Fear the Coming Persecution (v.8-12)

Jesus predicts a fearful situation. This is spoken to the disciples who would face what was predicted here, Luke is writing to churches whose founders and leaders experienced this. So, it may only have an indirect application to us.

⁸“And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, ⁹ but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how

you should defend yourself or what you should say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

The Importance of a Faithful Profession (v.8-9)

Since we are to not fear man and to respect the one who can send us to hell, then it is critical that we maintain our affirmation of faith. So, what fear will cause you to deny that you are Christian? That is not a casual, small, insignificant issue. It may become evidence that you are not a Christian at all.

The Warning against Spiritual Blasphemy (v.10)

But the worst is not just denying the Lord. That can be forgiven. But you, in denying the Lord, curse the Holy Spirit, that is final evidence of being lost without remedy. Some would say that what Jesus is referring to could only happen during the time when Jesus was on earth. And yes, the immediate audience including the Pharisees need to hear this dire warning. But so do you. Brothers and Sisters, do not curse, blaspheme, denounce the person, power and presence of the Spirit. Only an unbeliever can do that.

The Prophecy of Dangerous Persecution (v.11-12)

Now, when are we most likely to be tempted to deny the Lord and curse the Spirit? When we are dragged before the magistrates and the government or some anti-Christian group who threatens our lives unless we deny our Lord.

See the development?

We must not fear man, even the power of false leaders...

We must reverence and respect God who cares for us...

We must not deny the Lord even in the most threatening of situations...

We must not blaspheme the Spirit who can be in us all that Christ is for us...

We must do so without fear in persecution...

Here is an opportunity for some to say, “Once again we have sermon that does not apply to us at all.” I want to say something to all of you. Much of the Bible is to prepare us *for situations we are not yet in*. We become very focused on the present issues that we are struggling with. Know why? Because you dismissed teaching and exhortations that were meant to prepare for this moment. So now, don’t dismiss teaching that is not about this moment but may be about a time that is coming. So high schoolers and singles should be soaking up as much as they can about marriage as an example. The subject of holding fast during deep trouble and life-threatening persecution may not be what you want to hear tonight but evidently, it is what God intended for you to hear.

Do you fear man? Do you reverence God? Will you hold fast to your profession? Do you, will you deny the Lord?

But, why is this important now, today, to you here at this time?

Fear the Dangers of a Materialistic Heart (v.13-21)

Luke simply continues the narrative. We tend to stop between these two. When we do, we miss something very important...

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Think about how this connects...

The Problem of a Family Inheritance (v.13-14)

Why in the world would someone say that in the midst of a crowd? Is it possible his brother is in the crowd? Is he trying to shame his brother and put the "fear of God" in him?

Jesus does not like it! You can tell. "Who made me your judge?"

The Command against a Covetous Heart (v.15)

This is explosive. Don't be covetous. Your value is not measured by the worth of what you own. Your life is not about your stuff. We all look at one another and say, "That is so true..." You better hang on. Jesus is about to run a dagger through our materialistic, self-focused, covetous, greedy culture.

But stop... why is this here now? How does all this fit together?

Two statements are parts of the thread here. "You are of more value than the beasts and the birds." "Your value is not in what you own." Stop and think about that. We have two strong statements about how we measure our worth and value in the midst of not fearing man, fearing God and not allowing fear to cause us to deny faith in persecution. Here it is. Ready?

Materialistic people will be vulnerable to denying the faith.

Now hold that in your mind and watch what Jesus does in His illustration.

The Illustration of a Materialistic Person (v.16-21)

¹⁶And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ' ²⁰But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Simple right? Makes perfect sense to us. This is the American dream... well in ancient form. Work hard. Build up my money, my stocks, my house. Retire. Take it easy. Wealth works. This is all accompanied by congratulatory self-talk.

Look at God's response. "You fool!" You did not respect or reverence God. You had no proper fear of the judgment that lies beyond death. Then it will be about the state of

your soul, not the worth of your goods. The person who lays up treasure for themselves is not rich toward God.

Is Jesus' saying wealth is wrong? Is it somehow innately evil to be rich? No because ultimately, God is rich. He has vast treasures throughout the universe. All is His. No, what makes it wrong is when we are seeking, are satisfied and become satiated with our wealth. This will there is only so much righteous room in the heart for treasures.

Are you rich towards God?

Do not Fear for the Necessities of Life (v.22-31)

But there is another kind of fear that grips too many people's lives. While they may not have much, they are worried and anxious about what they don't have. Jesus turns to His disciples and highlights the correction of an anxious/fearful heart.

²² And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Jesus' seems to have regularly spoken like this. We find similar paragraphs in other gospels often in different contexts. Frankly, this is where many of God's people are fearful, worried and anxious, particularly in the present circumstances.

The Command that Addresses our Fears (v.22)

Does that surprise you? You are commanded to not be anxious, to not be fearful about the ordinary provisions of life. *You are commended* and so to be fearful and anxious *is sin*. The Lord would not give us a command that we cannot obey. So how are we to obey this?

The Explanation that Corrects our Thinking (v.23)

We obey this like we do all other commands. We obey by faith. We obey when we clearly address our wrong thinking. Life is more than food and clothing. Basic provisions of life are not supposed to be the center of our existence. Yes, we need to do the work necessary to provide for ourselves. The Bible is clear about that. But we are not to worry, we are not to be anxious when we are being faithful about these things.

Given that this follows the parable of the rich man, I suspect that the worry and anxiety here is not so much about whether we will have rice and bread tomorrow with something to drink. This is simply not our existence. Not one of you have only two changes of clothes and wash your underwear every night. Not one of you has missed a meal in the last week because you had no food.

The Questions that Expose our Thinking (v.24-28)

These questions expose several different kinds of thinking from which sinful fear, worry and anxiety arise.

Do you think God cares more for birds and beasts than He cares for you? Your worry may indicate that you do not really believe in the care of God for you.

Do you think you have control over the length of your life? Your worry and fear may indicate that you think that you can extend your life and live longer if only you...

Do you think that God does not consider the hard work you do in providing for yourself? Your worry and fear may indicate that you are trusting and depending on yourself, rather than trusting and depending on God.

Do you think that staying alive is the most important thing in life? Your worry and fear indicate that you really are not ready to die.

The Root of our Anxious Fears (v.28b)

So here it is. "O, you of little faith!" Your fear over life, death, provision, leaders, persecution are rooted in little faith. You simply do not believe what God has said. Jesus spoke this to His disciples. They were following Him. They had left all. They were facing increasing risk in angering the religious and governmental authorities. They probably did not have a lot. And so, some were worried and anxious. Jesus challenges and thus begins to change their sinful fear.

The command to not be fearful and anxious requires changing how you think. It is that simple. And it is that hard. We are not used to connecting our emotions with our beliefs. But Jesus does.

The Pursuit that Expresses our Trusts (v.29-31)

If not that then what instead?

²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Now Jesus connects your obedience and your beliefs by highlighting your wants, your pursuits. What is it that you want more than anything. Now don't give me the fake, Sunday School, religious label, Christian bumper sticker answer. Give me the real stuff. You know what you really want. Comfort, ease, no risk. Safety, security. Your kids happiness, your retirement, your next promotion, that *thing* whatever it may be. This is what you pursue.

And this present crisis has challenged, changed and even deprived you of many of those things. And you are angry. And you are fearful. And you don't understand why. You know why? You know why you are manipulated by people? Why you cling to life at all costs? Why you may deny the Lord under pressure? Why you will expand your lifestyle to fill your income? Why you worry about whether or not you will enough?

Because you are pursuing your kingdom, not God's. Do you see it? Instead of pursuing all the things that the world, our culture, unbelievers think is important, pursue God's

kingdom. Seek His Kingdom first. That means that everything that you think is “normal” to seek and pursue in life has to be challenged and often changed in the light of God’s Kingdom.

Stop being anxious and fearful. Start changing how you think. Make God’s Kingdom your ultimate and life-transforming priority.

The Call to a Radical Courage (v.32-34)

³² “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The Encouragement that Fuels our Repentance (v.32)

In the midst of all this thunder and lightening, comes tender words. “Shhh, fear not, little flock.” Even your pursuit of God’s Kingdom is about God being delighted to give it to you. It is not a vain, empty, unrewarding pursuit. Pursuing God’s kingdom first as your life’s priority puts you right in the center of pleasing God. It puts you right in the center of God’s delight to give you what you pursue.

The Words that Shock our Comforts (v.33)

What should you do? Here is radical test. I don’t think it is a universal call. But I suspect that many if not most of us simply would not do this. Sell what you need to in order to be sure the needy in our congregation are taken care of. Stop piling up to ensure your future. Transport your treasure to heaven.

The Reason that Challenges our Assumptions (v.34)

This verse is often reversed when quoted, preached or applied. Note what Jesus says: Your heart will go after your treasure. Your will want what you think is most valuable. You will cling to wrong beliefs in order to misplaced treasures. But value the Kingdom of God, then your heart will be drawn to it and will be dazzled by it.

Is Jesus just talking about money? I don’t think so. I think He is challenging all your treasures...

Yes, your money... Your homes... Your spouses... Your children... Your jobs...
Your success, reputation, position...

Reflect and Respond

How do we think about our fears, our worries, our anxieties?

We tend to justify them...

We tend to excuse them...

We tend to succumb to them...

We tend to medicate them...

There is fear that is natural and good. But it is realistic and rightly cautious about real threats and risks. But even our natural fear must be subject to the Word of God.

There are fears that are sinful and disobedient. We have seen these.

Some live in fears that allow us to be manipulated by sinful people. These manipulative people take the respect that is due them and turn it into a weapon to try to control you.

Some live in fear of man that craves the approval, affirmation and acceptance of others. In doing so you have not valued the approval of God.

Some live in fear of death, holding on to living and all that it means. You will be vulnerable to denying the Lord in the times of pressure and persecution.

Some live without fear of judgment, constantly focused on what you do have. You live a life of casual and carnal comfort that has forgotten that you are accountable to a holy God.

Some live in fear of want, constantly focused on what you don't have. You are troubled and anxious because you actually doubt the care and concern of the Lord and pursue the comforts of our culture.

What does repentance involve?

Replace your fear of man with the fear of God. Lift Him up in your own esteem. Crave His approval and acceptance first.

Change you wrong belief's about God's sovereign control over your life and His deep care for you. Replace the sentences of doubt with sentences of affirmation.

Repent of pursuing your own self-focused living, your own kingdom. Instead, make living in and living for God's kingdom a life changing priority.

What will this kind of life look like?

It will respond with gracious refusal to be manipulated by fear.

It will depend on God for everything while doing all God requires.

It will live in such way that recognizes the fragility of this life and the huge gain of the next life.

It will be a life courageously consumed with God's kingdom.