

DO NOT FEAR ABOUT YOUR LIFE

Luke 12:1-12

Key Verses: 12:4,5

"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."

Out of his deep sorrow, Jesus rebuked the religious leaders. It was because religious leaders are supposed to be servants of God, and they are called to shepherd God's flock. But these religious leaders were useless to God because they were corrupt, and their hypocrisy made people feel nauseous badly. Today Jesus speaks to his disciples several things as warnings and encouragements.

First, be careful of the hypocritical Pharisees (1-3).

Look at verse 1. "Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.'" When Jesus said, "the yeast of the Pharisees," it meant the "bad influence" of the Pharisees. Bad influence has one major characteristic. Bad influence spreads too fast, and it cannot be stopped by human effort. Jesus said this because a crowd of many thousands had gathered. There was a danger that they would trample one another. The many-thousand crowd of people came to Jesus because they tasted the healing power of Jesus and they heard the good news of the kingdom of God. So they wanted to hear more about Jesus. This is the reason why they gathered around Jesus. John 10:14 explains the relationship between Jesus and the crowd of many thousands. It says, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." Between Jesus and people there was a heart-to-heart communication. They do not know much. But they know one thing very clearly, that Jesus is a good shepherd. They want to remain as permanent

sheep and be loved and cared for permanently. Despite their stupidity, they have extraordinary knowledge. They know Jesus' voice, just as Jesus knows the Father in heaven.

So Jesus said in the last part of verse 1, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Jesus prayed that helpless sheep may be kept from the yeast of the Pharisees. Why is bad influence so dangerous? It is because bad influence is like yeast to the dough, and bad influence is like worms to the apple. Especially, bad influence appeals effectively to man's sinful nature not to obey God, but enjoy sinful nature.

Originally the Pharisees were chosen to serve God. They were called to teach the peoples of all nations the law of God. They were chosen to raise many Bible teachers and shepherds so that those who were raised by the Pharisees might also be the servants of God. In this way, God wanted to teach the law of God to the people of the whole world. Therefore the Pharisees had to love God with all their hearts and with all their souls and with all their strength. But they did not practice the law of God with their hearts; they practiced the law of God ceremonially. As a result, their hypocritical lives gave bad influence to God's people. When the Pharisees loved the world in their hearts, people also loved the world. When the Pharisees loved money in their hearts, people also loved money. Speedily, both the Pharisees and God's people together loved money more than God. They loved the fleeting pleasures of life more than the law of God. The seed of the Pharisees' bad influence poisoned naive people until they forgot all the grace they had received. They began to shout at the top of their lungs, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (Lk 23:21). It is a totally unbelievable event. It is indeed a sad story. But it was the bad influence of the Pharisees.

There have been many men of bad influence. One of them is Rehoboam, the king of Judah, the son of great King Solomon. After King Solomon passed away, people came to Rehoboam to plead with him to reduce the quota system of hard labor. Rehoboam should have been like King David, who was humble and cared for his people like his own children. But Rehoboam answered arrogantly and violently, "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions" (1Ki 12:14b). Rehoboam's violence in speech planted violence

in the hearts of discontented people. The immediate result was the murder of Rehoboam's cabinet member, who was in charge of forced labor. But the principal result was internecine war between brothers. The Bible says, "So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day" (1Ki 12:19).

Another example is Jeroboam, king of northern Israel. He was afraid that if people went to Jerusalem for an annual pilgrimage, they would be homesick. So he built two idols, one in Bethel and the other in Dan. Lazy people liked it. Jeroboam learned that people followed his political intrigue. Then he built a huge number of little shrines to make people worship God in the shrines as modern people worship God on the TV screen. Soon people abandoned God. So the Bible repeats that Jeroboam was the worst example of leading his people to sin against God repeatedly. Bad influence is, if anything, compared to setting fire to a beautiful building and burning it down, which was built over a long period of time and with a huge amount of money. Therefore we must be on our guard against the yeast of the Pharisees.

Jesus tells us the character of truth. Look at verses 2-3. "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs." People can buy sensational media and make sensational stories to discredit good people as bad people. But in the long run, all their deeds done in the darkness will be disclosed as in the daylight. Here Jesus tells them that they should not be swayed by the manipulation of evil men, but stand firm and be on their guard. Moreover, they should prevent the Pharisees' hypocrisy for the sake of God's future blessing on their country.

Jesus said this because he had a broken shepherd heart for his people, who could have been wonderful if they had had a good shepherd to the end. How can we be on our guard against the yeast of the Pharisees? We must read the Bible (Ja 1:5). Then God gives us wisdom to discern good and evil. All other books are one-dimensional or two-dimensional. But the Bible is a three-dimensional book. When we read the Bible, which is three-dimensional, it is easy for us to know the bad influence of the Pharisees, as a mother knows her babies very well.

Second, do not fear any man (4-7).

As we know well, everybody is burdened by the fear of death. King Hezekiah heard from a prophet that he would die. Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to God. This shows that even the king had the fear of death. Human beings' best wishes might be to live in this world forever. People in both East and West shouted as their best greetings, "Long live the king! Long live the king, 1,000 years!"

Jesus told his disciples not to be afraid of death. Jesus said this on the basis of the Bible truth that God is the Sovereign Ruler. God appoints each person to be born in a certain generation and live so many days and so many minutes. To be born at the appointed time is a universal truth. By the same token, to die at the appointed time is also a universal truth. Worrying too much about death is a nagging fear. But it is empty fear. We must thank God for the privilege of living God's life in this generation.

Most importantly, God gave his one and only Son to bear all our iniquities and transgressions. Finally God crucified him on the cross to shed his holy blood. In this way, God confirmed his promise to send the Messiah from the root of Jesse. Most importantly, God promised eternal life and the kingdom of God as the inheritance of those who believe in him. Therefore, we should not fear any man, but fear God who determines eternal life.

One of God's servants thought that he worked so hard when he was young that he would die around the age of 35. But he is now 64. Man's lifespan is in the hand of God. Not only man, even the lifespan of sparrows is in the hand of God. Look at verse 6. "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God." Our God is Almighty God. We have no wisdom to count how many hairs we have. But he knows how many hairs we have very correctly. So Jesus strongly encourages his disciples, "Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (7b).

Third, God is the owner of our lives.

There was a young missionary named John Paton. He was a pioneer missionary to the New Hebrides, a group of islands off the coast of Australia. The name of the island was Tanna, an island inhabited by vicious cannibals.

One of his senior pastors strongly encouraged him not to go to Tanna Island, because of the danger that he would be eaten by cannibals. John Paton replied, "You are pretty old, aren't you? Soon you will die and be eaten by worms. I would rather serve the Lord and be eaten by cannibals. What difference does it make, to be eaten by worms or by cannibals?" Soon after they arrived in Tanna, his beloved wife died of malaria. His first son Peter died soon after. John's heart was broken. But he said, "I will not run away from God." He believed God's absolute sovereign rule over man's life. Why should we worry? Why should we fret for nothing? We must learn to trust in God more and more.

One famous evangelist usually spends six months to get many people to his evangelistic campaign. He would not get more than 200,000 people. But John Paul II is beyond comparison to him. John Paul II became pope when he was 58 years old, the youngest pope since 1846. Once, because of his bodyguard's mistake, he was shot badly. But God restored his body very soon. Do you know what he did right after his recovery? John Paul II did not care for his old skin. He realized he had to overcome the fear of assassination. He also realized that the pope must take care of God's flock. He decided to travel to all the poorest African and Arabian and Latin American countries, not to mention to America. John Paul II was able to do this because he believed that a man's life span is in the hands of God. He endangered his life by traveling to so many countries. Traveling was the worst thing to do as an aged person. But he continued to travel to visit the poor countries and those countries which needed an independent spirit. He loved God. But through his actions, it is very clear that he is an altruist. As a pope, he traveled most. Because of his altruism, people liked him so much. One time in African countries, 3.5 million people gathered to hear him speak. They all cried because of his father-like image. At every meeting he had an average of 1 million participants. This shows how honorable he is and how his altruism is so appealing to the thirsty souls who are living at the end of the 20th century. The best example might be Jesus. The religious leaders plotted against him and finally crucified him as a criminal. But Jesus said in Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." There is no fear of death in Jesus Christ.

Fourth, Christian identity and eternal victory (8-12).

We are living in the last part of the 20th century. At the present, dogmatic beliefs are fervently denied. Because of this, faith in the absolutes of God has gradually vanished. At the same time, inalienable human rights have been riding on high tide. Freedom is good and precious. But there is a problem. Human nature is good and evil. One person was like an angel. Now he is more like the devil. In times like these, it is not easy for anyone to identify that he is a child of God.

Jesus knew his disciples were living under Roman rule. So it was not easy for them to identify themselves as servants of God. So Jesus encouraged them to have a clear identity in verses 8-10, which say, "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. 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." The children of God should not be afraid of those who persecute the work of God. Those who persecute the work of God will not find the way for the forgiveness of God.

When we do God's work, we expect some admiration from others. Such a thing has never happened. When we do God's work, we only receive persecutions. When we receive persecutions, we don't have to think what to answer. The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom how to answer. We have identity because we believe that Jesus comes again to take us back to his glorious kingdom and to judge the evil and cast them into eternal condemnation. May God help us identify ourselves as children of God.