

Luke 12:1-12 // Who do you fear?

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Date: 25 January 2026

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[0:00] If you can turn your pew Bibles to page 1044.! Today's reading is Luke 12, 1-12.

! He is to speak first to his disciples, saying, Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you've said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you've whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

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 your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell.

Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.

[1:31] Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid. You're worth more than many sparrows. I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God.

But whoever disowns me before others 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. When you're brought before synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say.

For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, hello, St Silas Church.

If we've not met, I'm Martin Ayers, the lead pastor here. And if you could keep your Bibles open at Luke chapter 12, that would be really helpful. Thanks, Lamont, for reading that for us so helpfully.

[2:47] It's page 1044. You can find an outline on the notice sheet. You'd find that helpful to follow as we go. We're going to look at this together. Then we'll sing in response.

And as we do that, there'll be prayer ministry going on. So just at the back to my right, to your left, there'll be a team there. If you want to share with them something that you'd like prayer for, they'd be glad to pray with you.

But let's pray. Let's ask for God's help now as we turn to his word. Mighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you for your holiness, that you are the uncreated creator.

There is none like you. And that you speak to us by your spirit as we open your word. We ask that you will open our ears to hear your voice.

And you'll give us heads that can understand and hearts that are willing to change and follow you. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Jesus speaks to us today about fear.

[3:50] He asks us, who do you really fear? He does that because he's preparing his disciples for life in a world where the great dividing line is going to be about him.

How people are responding to him. By this point in Jesus' ministry, he seems to be astonishingly popular. I don't know if you noticed that in verse 1 of chapter 12, that it's actually got dangerous.

The crowd is so vast and gathering to hear him that they're trampling on one another. This sense of almost, we might almost say hysteria, trying to get near Jesus, such as his overwhelming popularity, his power, his teaching, his ministry.

But last week, we looked at chapter 11, and we saw that Jesus spoke words that were so devastating to the religious leaders that by the end of chapter 11, just have a look at verse 53 there, they are opposing him fiercely.

And verse 54, they're waiting to catch him in something he might say. So by now, he needs to prepare his people that we might ask ourselves, have I got what it takes to stand alongside a saviour like this?

[5 : 05] So he wants us to think about what we're really afraid of. Maybe you're here, and you think, well, I'm not really afraid of anything. I'm not really that kind of person.

I don't know what you're talking about. But fear is one of our most basic emotions. I was asking Doogie about this from our church. He was a psychologist, and he was explaining to me how fear works on us.

But actually, for lots of us, fear is one of the things that gets us out of bed in the morning. It's fear that drives us with a sense of anxiety to get things done in life.

Fear is a very basic emotion for us. And often, that is a fear of other people. If we've got a presentation coming up at work, and you find yourself waking up in the night worrying about it, there's a sense of fear of what will my boss think of my work, or what will my audience think of the presentation.

Or we might find ourselves feeling anxious, fearful, on the way into a bar to meet friends, or on the way to a party, as we think about what we might wear. There's this sense that we fear other people.

[6 : 15] Maybe we think, I won't know the right things to say with that crowd of people. Sometimes it can be hard quite to separate out what fears are driving us and motivating us.

I think I'm an example of this. I often get worked up in advance of preaching. And I'll find Saturday is my day off. But sometimes on a Saturday, I'll find myself turning on the laptop, and going and just tweaking something, putting something differently, or taking something out that I was going to say.

Why do I do that? Well, in one sense, hopefully, some of that is because I get that when we, as Christians, gather on a Sunday, and we're hearing the Word of God preached, there is a gravity to that.

It's a really significant moment for us. And so it's sensing the weight of the importance of this time. And hopefully, too, there is a sense of fearing God in me, in trying to get that right.

In 2 Timothy 2, Paul writes to a younger pastor, Timothy, and he talks about him doing his best to make sure that he won't be ashamed before God, because he correctly handles the Word of Truth.

[7 : 28] So there's an appropriate way for anyone preaching God's Word to have a right concern for that. But how much of it is just that I care too much what you guys think of me?

So that I'm not just concerned as to how you're responding to God and His Word, but I'm also concerned what people think of me when I preach.

So you see the complexity there of thinking about who do we fear, and how is our fear driving us? What if we fear the wrong things?

And these verses are some of the hardest things we've heard Jesus say so far in Luke's Gospel, but I think we should find them liberating, and I hope that you will see why. So our first point is, be on your guard against the subtle fear that puts on a performance.

Look with me again at Jesus' words in verse 1. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Last week, Jesus pronounced these three wars on the Pharisees, and war is the opposite of blessing.

[8 : 39] So it's a shocking thing when the Pharisees were the prominent religious leaders in Israel. They're the ones who seem so concerned to be blessed by God, and Jesus is saying they're under judgment from God.

Why? He says it's because they're like a cup or a dish that you've cleaned the outside of, but the inside is still dirty.

Behind their thin veneer of religious respectability, in their hearts, they don't love God. And in verse 43 of chapter 11, he told us what they do love.

What they do love is recognition, reputation. They fear people, but they don't fear God. And he calls that attitude a kind of yeast, that it spreads.

That's what yeast does. It spreads quietly and unmistakably till it's permeated the whole batch. Getting yourself preoccupied, unduly concerned, by what other people think of you, catches on.

[9 : 46] It's dangerous. It's contagious. And Jesus clarifies what the yeast is that he's referring to in verse one. He says it's hypocrisy. Hypocrites were actors who wore masks to disguise who they really were while they were putting on their performances.

And that's so often how the world around us works, isn't it? We project an image that we know will be approved of, respected, admired, accepted, and that's got exponentially worse in our times because we live in a world now where pictures can be taken anywhere all the time, by us, by other people.

And we can curate them and filter them and make our lives look very together. And then we can share our images and our stories so quickly on platforms where other people can see them and they can express their approval of them.

And so all around us, people wear masks. They perform. And it can be subtle to drift into that mask wearing in church life.

Maybe you start coming into a faith community, a church, because you're seeking God and you meet people that you really admire because they seem to be kind and generous and spiritually committed, devout.

[11 : 11] And then that would be well and good. And then because you really like those people, naturally, you want to be liked by them. And then you drift into really wanting to impress them, to be spoken well of by them.

So you start doing the right things, the things that that church or faith community value, hoping that they'll notice that you're doing them and you'll get recognition.

And when there are areas of your life or your character that those people whom you long for acceptance from would not approve of, you start hiding those things away rather than being honest about them.

So we get less concerned with what God thinks of us and trying to bring things out into the open that we would get help because we're more concerned with what other people think of us.

And Jesus tells us why that would be so foolish if you look at verse 2. Be on your guard, he says. Verse 2, there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known.

[12:18] 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. In other words, on judgment day, all the books will be open and it will be clear that we were never really hiding anything from God.

He hears the things we say that we don't really want anyone else to say. He sees the things we do that we don't want anyone else to know that we do. And hypocrisy could not be more dangerous, could it?

For the Pharisees are hard-hearted towards Jesus. So they are unsaved. For all their busy religious activity, they are not right with God.

And one of the things that makes religious moralism like that so dangerous is that if you're among a community of people who approve of you and think you're a good person for the things you do, then you start believing your own propaganda and you stop thinking you really need Jesus to save you.

So Jesus is giving us this wake-up call. God sent Jesus because there was no other way that you could be saved from your internal corruption.

[13:35] How would we be on our guard against this yeast of the Pharisees in our lives? Well, somehow, we have to keep reflecting on who people really are, that we would worry less what they think of us.

And what we need to do in our hearts is kindle a deep desire for communion with God so that we're deeply concerned with what he thinks of us.

We want to know him better. We want to know Jesus better. We had a speaker here last summer, Ray Ortland from the States. He talks a lot about gospel culture, about having a culture, a way we do things, a way we live and act among one another in church that genuinely reflects the gospel, what we believe about Jesus.

And he said something that I found very striking. He said, in life, you've got a binary choice. In church life, you've got a binary. And it's true all over. You can either be known or you can be impressive, but you can't be both.

Now, someone, I said this at the 9.30, and someone said, they weren't sure what I meant or what Ray meant. But the issue there was just that as you get to know a group of people well, there'll be things about you that if you shared them would make you less impressive to them.

[14:55] And so you have a choice there of either I hide those things away and I'm impressive or I'm honest about what I'm really struggling with and I'm known, but they will think less of me.

The mask comes down. I actually said to Ray, I was so struck by that, I said, this known or impressive thing, I can see it's true for me, but is it really true for everyone? Because I think there are some really impressive people.

And he said, honestly, it's true. If you knew them, they would be less impressive. The point being that we don't need to fear this much what other people think of us.

And when we can find a couple of people in church life that we're genuinely wanting to be really honest with about the struggles we're still struggling with, it breaks the power of those things because it brings them into the light and gets us help as we find friends who don't affirm us in sinful ways and besetting sins.

They don't affirm those things, but they don't reject us. They put an arm around our shoulder and they pray with us. So we can't cover things up from God and we don't need to and we shouldn't from one another.

[16:07] That's the subtle fear that we're to guard against. Then our second point today, Jesus gives us sobering words. Our second point, be gripped by a supreme fear that leads to freedom.

So have a look with me at verse 4. 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 your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. This is extraordinary, isn't it, that Jesus says this.

It's a bit like, I was thinking, there's a book called *What is the What?* about a refugee, Valentino, who fled from Sudan and made it to America from war-torn Sudan.

And he fled Sudan when he was a boy and he was living in the terror of war and he fled. And on his way out of the country, he got at one point to a wide river and it was dangerous.

[17 : 08] And he was stood on the bank paralyzed by fear of getting into the river. And then he heard the gunshots and the bombs behind him of the conflict.

And struck by that greater fear, he got into the river and got through. It's that thing of don't fear that because there is this other thing you should be more frightened of instead.

And Jesus is saying, stop being so afraid of people because God is more frightening than people. And not just people who might exclude you or mock you.

Not just people who might refuse to employ you because you're a Christian. His disciples are going to be publicly flogged, shamed, excommunicated, impoverished.

And Jesus says, there's something you should be more afraid of than that. It would be being on the wrong side of God. And at this point we might be thinking, really?

[18 : 08] Is this what we believe? But soberingly, Jesus wants us to be gripped by the reality of hell. It's confronting for us because we live in a society that says our values are all relative.

You get to make up your own mind what's good and bad. But none of us actually really believes that. Deep down, when we see a tyrant use force to take over another country, we would never accept them saying, well, in the West you guys say you do you.

I'm just doing me. This is who I am. I'm a tyrant. I don't like those people. I want their land. No, we judge people by overarching moral standards all the time.

We do it of people that we read about in the past. We do it about people around the world today. Some things are wrong even if the people doing them think that they're right. And we also long, don't we, for our world to have justice.

We long for that for Iran at the moment where some of the most courageous people in a generation have been horribly slaughtered. And we're seeing that on the news as they're being killed as they hit the streets to fight for freedom.

[19 : 20] And what an awful thought it would be to think that the people who have perpetrated that in Iran might never face a day of reckoning for that bloodshed. Well, God's settled, controlled hostility towards evil is an aspect of his love.

He loves his creation. He delights in his creation. And so he is rightly hostile towards evil and injustice. It goes against the moral fabric of the world as he made it.

So his promised judgment day is going to be this demonstration of his goodness. as he establishes his justice. And he'll be praised for it.

The Bible assures us of that. There will be relief on that day. We yearn for it as well. We were made in God's image. And Jesus assures us here soberingly that there will be a day of justice and there will be a place where evil is punished.

Hell will be a place of ongoing destruction because sin is destructive. It will be a place of ruin because sin ruins things. And it will be a place of complete loneliness.

[20 : 35] Hell because sin breaks relationships. So the Bible assures us that it is good news that God will punish evil in hell. But when we start thinking about our own hearts and how we treat others and how we treat God we realize that we're not just caught in the crossfire of evil.

We've been firing the bullets ourselves. So Jesus says be deeply concerned, be afraid of what it would be like for you personally were you to experience yourself the justice of a holy God for how you've mistreated him and how you've mistreated other people.

It strikes me that today Jesus gives us a whole new way of looking at things. There's a way of looking at the world and looking at our lives where we say well I've got these goals for my life.

I've got the kind of ideas of who I want to be and what I want to do for my own self-fulfillment and it's as though Christianity is saying God is for you in those things and he is there to help you make your dreams become a reality.

He can give you the strength and the security and the power to achieve your goals and if that's how we think about why we're in church or why we are seeking after God Jesus is saying I see the world very differently to that.

[22 : 02] Look at the world like this. Life is about knowing God. He made you to know him to live for his glory and to enjoy him forever and you've fallen short of that goal because you're self-centered so you've pushed him out and there is nothing you can do personally to fix that and if you carry on like that you're going to lose God forever and it will be hell and at the same time Jesus says that's the very reason that I've come I've come looking for you I love you I will gladly rescue you that's the mission that I'm on so wake up with fear to what a holy God would do to you so that you come to me Jesus says for refuge for peace for full forgiveness now once we've done that and we've come to Jesus do we still have to be afraid of God well for the

Christian we still fear God but fearing God looks different we fear him enough to stop us from drifting we fear him enough to persevere to be conscientious because we have that thought at the back of our minds of what it would look like not to go the distance as a Christian how awful that would be not to be right with God and then as we go on in life knowing God it's not being scared of him as though we hide from him but to fear God as a Christian is to come to him with trembling gratitude to listen to his word obediently with reverence to have this sense in our hearts of awe about what God is like now I said this was going to be liberating what is liberating about being told don't be scared of them here's something you should be more scared of well the liberation is in what Jesus says next that if you fear

God like that you don't need to be afraid of anything else look at verse 6 Jesus says are not five sparrows sold for two pennies yet not one of them is forgotten by God indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered don't be afraid you are worth more than many sparrows in other words whatever people do to you God knows you he knows everything about you he values you with an intimate concern he holds you he's in control nothing will snatch you out of his hand he gave up everything to make you safe and so we don't need to be afraid that's our third point break out from a social fear that undermines your mission we saw in chapter 10 that a key mark of being a

Christian is that we're people that have been given this overarching mission for our lives to make Jesus known and what Jesus has just said here moves us to do that with real urgency knowing this is the breathtaking spiritual reality however much people want to ignore it in our culture what we and everyone around us deserves!

to meet God without a saviour is horrifying but that means we have to confront our social fear our anxiety that people may treat us badly because we tell them that we follow Jesus so Jesus says to us if you speak up for me I'll speak up for you look at verse 8 I tell you whoever publicly acknowledges me before others the son of man will also acknowledge before the angels of God but whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God what Jesus does before the angels of God is going to be a really big deal in Daniel chapter 7 the prophet Daniel had his vision of Jesus the son of man and he was taken into the presence of God and he was given by God authority glory and sovereign power and all nations and people of every language worshipped him and

[26 : 38] Daniel said his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away his kingdom will never be destroyed and Jesus is saying if you acknowledge me I'll acknowledge you wow so let me ask do people know that you follow Jesus or is it something that you hide away if people ask us what we did at the weekend is it is being at church or being with friends from church over lunch or going to the youth group is that the thing that we avoid in our conversation as we tell them what we've been up to are there people that you just never really dare tell that you trust Jesus that you follow Jesus it's obvious that we find it hard isn't it because the rest of the time we're so good at talking about the things we really love I mean I once got the sleeper train to London a few years ago and I am for the sleeper train I went on to my friends about how good the sleeper train was so much that one of my friends actually took me to one side and said

Martin please will you stop telling us how good the sleeper train is like we get that you liked the sleeper I went on holiday early last year we took our kids on holiday to the Netherlands the holiday was so good I went on about it so much that by the summer one of my good friends had taken his whole family to the Netherlands he was like if it's that good we can't miss out on this if we discovered something we love we just share it don't we we want to pass on the news and then when it comes to Jesus we tighten up about the whole thing why do we do that well we're afraid we're afraid of the response so Jesus says whatever approach you take towards me among your people that's the he sees a key mark of genuine faith in him that we would be willing to acknowledge it to others then Jesus gives us two other encouragements to be willing to cross the pain barrier and tell people that we follow

Jesus in verse 12 it's that he hasn't left us alone to do that he promises that the Holy Spirit will empower and equip his disciples to be witnesses to him so we don't have to worry about what we say we just depend on him as the writer Tim Chester says are you someone who in the Christian life wants more of the Holy Spirit would you like do you yearn for an experience of the Spirit power in your life well if you do pray and go and tell someone about Jesus who's not a Christian that is front and center of the Spirit promised work among his people the other encouragement that Jesus gives us to be willing to acknowledge him is that he himself is so gracious and I think we get that idea in verse 10 that's what I think is going on there if you look at verse 10 he says everyone who speaks a word against the son of man will be forgiven!

are the people who hear about Jesus from his spirit equipped disciples speaking about him and they take a settled decision not to trust Jesus and they they're unforgiven because they are rejecting God's only way to forgive us but the other group those who in verse 10 speak a word against the son of man I think that's describing a genuine disciple who in a moment of weakness messes it up they falter out of fear in the moment we deny Jesus or we speak against Jesus because we're afraid and Jesus says if you do that run back to him because he will forgive you for messing up how comforting that must have been for the apostle Peter who denied Jesus three times and wept about it and then when the angels at the empty tomb met the women they said go and tell the disciples and

Peter he's gone ahead of you into Galilee there you'll see him just as he told you Jesus is gracious with his people when we fall and that should encourage us all the more to say he is such a good saviour I'll acknowledge him I'll tell people that I am with him he's my saviour so Jesus is saying don't be afraid remember as you go out into the world God has the awesome authority of verse five and he cares for us with the most intimate conscientious care of verses six and seven so when people notice you do things differently because you're a Christian and you're put on the spot about that and you're called to speak up how good to remember these people cannot really harm me nothing can really harm me in the early days of the Soviet Union a hundred years ago a Baptist preacher Cornelius Martins was brought before a communist boss a party leader who ordered two of his thugs to strip

[32:12] Cornelius of his clothes and Cornelius said don't trouble yourself I'll undress myself I don't fear to die because I will be going home to the Lord and if the Lord has decided that my hour has not come today it will be impossible for you to harm me here that was enough to put the party leader into such a rage that he pulled out a gun and fired it at Cornelius and the gun jammed and he couldn't shoot him and he sent him!

in disgust! What would have given Cornelius that kind of courage? Well it comes from knowing that Jesus is good for his words here how do we know we can entrust our lives into his hands well casting a shadow over this teaching is that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he had every reason to be afraid people would do the worst that people could ever do to him as they!

He would experience from God what he tells us to be so afraid of the holy wrath that he had to endure as he suffered hell on the cross facing that agony in our place so that we can know God not as a judge but as a loving father let's pray together fear him you saints and you will then have nothing else to fear make you his service your delight he'll make your wants his care heavenly Father we're conscious of the ways too often people seem very big to us and our view of you is too small would you impress on us more deeply your greatness and power and glory and splendor and majesty that we would respond to you with due reverence a fear that drives out all other fear and would you then embolden us and equip us by your spirit to witness to

Jesus in our generation with confidence and urgency Lord that you would have more to save in our times saved from the reality of hell thanks to the all sufficient work of our saviour Jesus at the cross we ask these things in Jesus name Amen as