

Luke (chapter 12)

I. Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees

12:1 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.

A. This seems to follow Jesus’ exchange with the Pharisees and teachers of the law in c. 11. He now leaves the house and addresses the crowd outside.

B. Jesus had drawn huge crowds in Galilee. Luke now tells the crowds were also huge in Judea—perhaps larger.

C. Of course Judea was a Jewish province, whereas Galilee was both Jews and Gentiles. And surely Jesus’ reputation preceded him.

D. The mood is changing. Rather than a merely teaching and healing ministry, everything becomes much more urgent. There’s little time left. Urgent decisions to be made. There’s no room for delay. The pressure is on!

E. Notice that Jesus does not focus on the Sadducees, who were the “liberals” of the day as they denied the resurrection of the dead and the inspiration of all the OT other than the first five books (Torah, Law, or as Christians say, The Books of Law).

F. The Sadducees had Hellenized their religion in order to gain social and political standing among the Romans. “Hellenized” means they absorbed much of the surrounding Greek philosophy into their thought, as the eastern Roman Empire continued to have a Hellenistic (Grecian) culture even after Roman conquest. Jews were tolerated in Rome, but looked down on.

G. Jesus calls Pharisees “hypocrites,” which literally means “false faced.” The word comes from the Greek theatre, referring to actor who wore masks as they acted.



H. We often think this is the only criticism Jesus leveled at the Pharisees, but he more often charges them with misinterpreting scripture to impose burdens that God never intended.

I. Of course, the two go together. When you adopt a theology that's too hard, you either live in despair or else arrogance, becoming a hypocrite, because you fool yourself into thinking you've actually done all that God commands.

J. Our mistake is that it's far easier for us to feel justified as not being hypocrites rather than not imposing commands God does not—and so we become guilty of both!

K. Jesus' ultimate point is to remind us that we can't keep secrets from God. I think we know that—in theory, at least.

L. The only way we can be truly honest before God is to admit our failings, our sins, our fleshly desires, even our anger and frustrations with God. As we peel away the defense mechanisms and denials, we find ourselves laid naked before the Creator—which is the only way to return to Eden.

M. But rather than feeling shame, we must learn to feel God's love and grace, delighting in the freedom and Spirit he gives us so that we can try to serve him

N. As I type this, I think of a mother in her kitchen with a five-year daughter. The daughter is trying desperately to help, but keeps spilling things on the floor, mis-measuring, and otherwise messing up. She can't carry the loads or reach many of the shelves. And she doesn't really understand what she's doing. And the mother is delighted that her daughter is trying and wants to learn.

O. God is a not a harsh deity seeking to trip us up and trap us. Rather, he's our father who wants us to make it. He gently and patiently instructs us and forgives as we mess up—even when we don't realize we're messing up. We have no clue how mistaken we are sometimes, and yet God knows and accepts our hearts. And the more we try and struggle to learn and get it right, the closer we grow to him.

P. Wright takes this passage to be warning the apostles to keep quiet as people are watching and rumors will spread to the authorities. I just don't see it. Luke selects his material not only to tell the story of Jesus, but for us to learn. Such a command would not longer be of value to us. Besides, if Jesus wanted secrecy, why condemn the Pharisees among a crowd of *thousands*? And why talk about hypocrisy? It's God who sees through hypocrisy, not the earthly powers.

II. Have No Fear

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.

A. This is the only place in the Synoptics that Jesus calls his disciples “friends.” This is no trivial matter. God called Abraham “friend.” It’s a big deal. Compare John 15:13-15 when Jesus calls his apostles friends only at the very end of his ministry. It was like a graduation. I’m no longer your master, I’m your friend.

B. Here, “friend,” which we use casually in American society, serves to emphasize God’s closeness and compassion. If they are Jesus’ friends, then they are God’s friends—like Abraham.

(Isa 41:8-10) "But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of **Abraham** my **friend**, 9 I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. 10 **So do not fear**, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

C. V. 7 is a very popular verse, as it tells us that God is not too big to care about each of us. He knows us intimately.

D. We often humanize God by imagining that he’s limited and doesn’t have time or patience to worry with our little problems. But God is far larger than we imagine—and the maker of time has infinite time to be concerned about us.

E. There’s a certain irony in describing the love and intimacy with God while saying “fear him!”

F. Although God can and does punish, it’s the farthest thing from what he wants to do. Just a parent punishes out of obligation and never pleasure—far more so, God will take no pleasure in our damnation.

III. Acknowledge Christ Before Men

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.”

A. This is all about the missionary work of the church, yet to come. Jesus had already sent out two groups of missionaries, and after his death, would send out far more.

B. He promised both persecution and the words to say. He chose most of his apostles from among the uneducated, and they'd be confronted by rabbis and experts in the law. He wanted them to have the confidence they need to confront such men.

C. The blasphemy passage is famously difficult. Whatever the answer is, it has to work in context. It's not suicide, as taught by some, as Jesus isn't talking in such terms. It's not just an arbitrary rule. After all, Jesus would be given the highest name later—why honor the Holy Spirit more than Jesus when the Spirit would be sent to honor Jesus?

D. Rather, I think the point is really simple. Those who deny Jesus while he's on earth will get a second chance when his missionaries come preaching his name. Some will take that chance and be saved. But some will reject that teaching—even though it's from the Spirit. And there will be no second chance. The Spirit's coming and speaking through the emissaries of Jesus is all there will ever be! Reject God's human messengers, and you've rejected not only Jesus, but your last chance.

10:16 “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

E. Wright makes the point, once you declare a body of water polluted, you'll never drink from it again. If it's the only water there is, you die.

IV. The Parable of the Rich Fool

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” 14 But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”

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

A. The father of a man and his brother died and the man wanted his share of the inheritance. Under the Law of Moses, he was certainly entitled to his money. And the local courts would have given him justice.

B. The man, however, chose to take his once-in-the-history-of-the-world moment with the incarnate Son of God and worry about money. Big mistake!

C. “Man” is the address given to a stranger—in contrast to the “friends” used just before.

D. Notice how many times Jesus has the rich man was “I” or “my” or “mine.” The implication is that he should say “God’s.”

E. Jesus’ rebuke was aimed straight to his heart. It’s not that justice shouldn’t be done, or that we should enable thievery, but that we need to get our priorities in order. As Jesus will soon say—the Kingdom of Heaven is a pearl of great price. Sell everything to buy it. It’s not most important, it’s ALL important. There’s no “balancing” interests. You don’t keep work, family, and church in perspective. Rather, the Kingdom is the ONLY thing that matters. (Of course, the rest matter but only because the Kingdom teaches us to care about such things as part of our obligation to Jesus, not because they have any importance outside the Kingdom.)

(Col 3:5) Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

(1 Tim 6:10-11) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. *11* But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

(1 Tim 6:17) **Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth**, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

F. Jesus’ point is to condemn greed—covetousness in the KJV, per the Ten Commandments, but to do so in terms of the Kingdom.

G. However, as we see, there’s no condemnation of having money. We aren’t commanded to live in poverty or near poverty. On the other hand, we are commanded to use our wealth to help others.

H. Herein lies the stewardship principle. Jesus certainly didn’t mind that the women who supported his ministry were wealthy. Rather, he honored them because they generously did God’s work. It’s all about why the money is important to us. If you see money as a tool for use in God’s kingdom, then good. If you see money as an end or a way to purchase sensual pleasures for yourself, not so good.

I. Scriptures don’t give clear guidelines on where to draw the line, and this is surely because we aren’t called to be monks.

J. How we write our wills says a lot about our priorities. Most people leave everything to their children and many agonize over how to pass it to their great grandchildren. Working to build an inheritance for our descendants seems to be an improper purpose. In fact, I know lots of people ruined by being made rich by their ancestors.

K. It's not an absolute rule, but generally it's very dangerous and improper to dispose of great wealth to our descendants. Certainly, it's good to give something to help the next generation or two make it—pay for college or such—but leaving them independently wealthy more often than not ruins them.

L. Give the money to a God-fearing charitable work.

V. Do Not Be Anxious

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?”

A. He is speaking to us. We live in an age that obsesses about extending our lives. Now, wanting to be healthy is certainly proper, but obsessing over living long is quite the opposite of how Jesus and his apostles lived.

B. Ravens were unclean—God cares even for the unclean animals!

C. Part of the lesson is this: life is *short*. Enjoy it! Not worrying is only the first step. Rather, the point is—

(Psa 118:24) This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

D. This is not a lesson for Sunday morning—it's a lesson for every day. God gave you life, family, homes, church, friends, etc.—to be enjoyed.

E. On the other hand, we are also taught that the greatest joy comes from living by Kingdom principles.

F. Sociologists have learned that money does not buy happiness. Of course, if you don't have the necessities, then you're not very happy. But those with barely enough are just as happy as those with vast fortunes.

G. A recently published book, Daniel Gilbert's *Stumbling on Happiness* (I've not read, just seen and read interviews with the author) makes the point that research

proves that people generally have no idea what will make them happy and so often make decisions that do not do so.

H. The two things that are most likely to make people happy are marriage and religion.

I. Interview in *Mother Jones*—

MJ: You have an extremely interesting explanation for why capitalism exists in Chapter 11. Care to explain?

DG: I argue that for economies like ours to thrive, people must work for goods and services. People only work for things that make them happy. So societies have to convince their members that goods and services will do this. They often don't make us happy, of course, and so the question is who engineers this great lie? I explain that there is, in fact, no conspiracy to delude us. Rather, the great lie arises all on its own. How this happens is a bit complicated but I explain it in my book with lucid, insightful, and charming prose. Oops. You were supposed to say that, not me.

MJ: So if capitalism depends on people being deluded into thinking that producing and consuming are routes to happiness and yet the wealthy are no happier than the middle class, which you argue in your book -- why do people continue to buy in?

DG: The Japanese have a lovely saying about fools: "He asks an elm tree for pears." When money doesn't buy the happiness we thought it did, we tend to think we must not have earned enough of it. It takes special circumstances before we question whether we might be asking money for something it can't provide.

MJ: The *Mother Jones* article "[Reversal of Fortune](#)" argues that for a long time, westerners have believed that economic growth, fueled by individuals working hard and pursuing more and more cash and goods, makes everyone happy. But recent economic trends show that economic growth is making the rich richer and doing nothing to affect the poor and middle classes -- wages at the bottom of the American economy have [stayed stagnant, in real dollars, since the 70's](#). The GNP curve is up while "life satisfaction" indexes have stayed the same. Yet people don't clamor for change. Your thoughts?

DG: Nothing surprising here. Money makes a huge difference to the happiness of poor people. If you live in a cardboard box under a bridge, money can improve your happiness dramatically. But once you have a decent middle-class existence -- food, shelter, security, and all the rest -- money does less and less for you until eventually it does nothing at all. The irony, then, is that in a "rich get richer" society, the people who

are getting the money are the people for whom it can do the least, and the people who are not getting the money are the people for whom it could do the most. If a single dollar bill can buy one unit of happiness for a rich person and one hundred units of happiness for a poor person, on whom should that dollar be spent?

J. Of course, many would say the solution is higher taxes. This has been tried and the government is quite inept at dispensing happiness. Rather, changed behavior resulting from changed values is essential—and this comes person to person (really: Savior to person), not government to person.

K. This is not to say that government programs for the poor are wrong or completely without value. Money helps. It's just not nearly enough.

L. Rather, so long as the church abandons the poor and the inner cities, there is no hope for the poor. The government can't even put a bandaid on the despair of the urban poor.

M. I'd contend (he'd disagree, but he's an atheist) that God knows us better than we know ourselves. Therefore, God's begging us not to trust our instincts and instead take his word for it. Just do this, God says, and you'll be happier! We say, God, we're smarter than you. We're idiots.

N. Now research proves it. We don't have a clue.

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.

O. "Lilies" likely refers to the scarlet anemone (prettier than a lily, I think) —



P. Song of Solomon refers to the man's lips as having the color of "lilies." (5:13) The word is not precise. Of the various flowers indigenous to the area suggested as being a more likely translation, this is the only one that has the appropriate color, unless women in those lands had white lips!

Q. God says, you don't need as much as you think.

R. "Nations" or "peoples" is pretty pertinent. Not only do we go running after these things, but entire countries do, leading to war. Japan invaded its neighbors to gain access to natural resources, not realizing they'd be far richer sitting at home manufacturing and banking.

S. The American South fought to preserve slavery, not realizing that slavery was keeping them in poverty while the North was building railroads and factories.

T. Most wars are about money and a desire to gain a higher standard of living.

U. V. 31 is a lesson we've heard from Jesus before. Material things aren't wrong. We need them! But we are to receive them as an incident to pursuing God's will.

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.

V. V. 32 is not advocating poverty or communism—just a refusal to accumulate more than you need.

VI. You Must Be Ready

35 "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, 36 and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. 38 If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!

39 But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. 40 You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

A. "Dressed for action" is "gird up your loins," literally, pull up your oriental robes so that you are free to do manual labor.

B. How pleased the master will be if he comes in at 3 in the morning and finds the servants awake and busy!

C. Jews divided the night into three watches. The second and third watch refer to very late—even to dawn.

D. V. 39 is a new metaphor. You just don't know when you'll be called to account.

41 Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?"

42 And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? 43 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. 44 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 45 But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. 47 And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. 48 But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

E. Peter asks, "Are you worried about OUR loyalty?" Jesus says, "You know more, having been with me, so I expect more. And punishments will be more severe!"

F. Jesus seems to speak of degrees of punishment and reward.

G. V. 48 promises mercy to those not knowing "the master's will." They are still punished, but not so badly.

H. Remembering that this is all one discussion, we can't miss the implication that "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more," also applies to earthly wealth—indeed, any blessing received from God.

I. An interesting discussion question would be whether, in doing mission work, we are changing the stakes—from certain light punishment to possible unspeakably bad punishment (I don't know how this works, so don't ask) but with the possibility of gaining true happiness and eternal life. Should we leave the heathen in ignorance or bring them Jesus, knowing that some will reject him?

J. Points to make—

1. We can't question God's wisdom.

2. While we don't comprehend the light vs. the hard punishment, even light punishment in hell is truly awful.
3. We never, ever do mission work out of duty just because we are commanded to do so. Rather, it has to be an act of love, or else it's not even truly Christian. This observation should lead to the correct answer.

VII. Not Peace, but Division

49 "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! 51 Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 52 For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

- A. Harsh and sad, but true. Change is always painful. If you want to avoid conflict, then you'll never make anything better.
- B. "Fire" likely means the fire of judgment. Fire is often a metaphor for burning up the useless—the chaff—to purify what remains.
- C. There's a bit of a cost-benefit analysis. Jesus knew it. His actions would bring eternal bliss to many, as well as a better life on earth for many millions, but it would not come easily.
- D. Jesus was not philosophical—he was in personal agony contemplating the price that would have to be paid.
- E. We live in a society that thinks great things can be bought cheaply. We shudder at any sacrifice. We can't imagine having to suffer to gain a greater good. God seems harsh and unfair to us when he makes these kinds of calculations. There must be a better way, we think! We are wrong. Life just isn't that way.

VIII. Interpreting the Time

54 He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming.' And so it happens. 55 And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat,' and it happens. 56 You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

- A. This is part of the same speech, not just a random proverb. It goes back to the "better be ready" part of the speech. Tough times are coming. Be prepared. Read the signs—the Son of Man is walking to Jerusalem for a reason.

IX. Settle with Your Accuser

57 “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? 58 As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. 59 I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”

A. The wording is very similar to a lesson found in the Sermon on the Mount. The context puts a very different spin on it.

B. Jesus is talking about the fact that everything is about to change. Judgment is coming.

(Rom 3:25) God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--

C. This could mean—

1. That we should settle with those we owe, so God doesn't find us unreconciled with our neighbors, or

2. That we should settle with God himself—get right with God while you can!

D. What do we owe God? Allegiance, loyalty, obedience, faith in Jesus.