



“Healthy Fear”
Luke 12:1-7

Idea: The problem of the heart is the heart of the problem, which misplaced fear.

Intro: King Solomon wisely said, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*” (Prov 1:7). If we were to look back at what was experienced during COVID a few years ago, we would discover that fear marked much of it. Regardless of how you might feel about COVID and how it was handled, the entire experience exposed just how fearful humanity is. It reminded us that our lives are finite, fleeting, and frightening. This reminder was not all bad because we need a good dose of reality to keep us grounded. The problem, however, was that many, if not most people, built up walls and shut others out in an attempt to protect and preserve.

Fear causes us to look within rather than looking up and out. It has been said, “Fear is the dark room where negatives are developed.” Goodness, have we not seen this played out over the last few years? Substance abuse and suicide have skyrocketed. Could there be a correlation here? I cannot help but see a direct connection between unhealthy fear and the destructive behaviors we see in society.

I mentioned unhealthy fear. Is there such a thing as healthy and unhealthy fear? Can it be categorized? Absolutely! Fear can be both. For example, we recognize the power of fire. It can consume and destroy, yet it can also power and propel. Fire, if left unchecked, can burn down an entire forest and everything in its path. Its heat can be extremely dangerous. For this reason, we warn our children to never touch the stove when it is hot. On the other hand, fire, when properly contained and controlled, heats our homes, cooks our food, and propels our vehicles. An unhealthy fear of fire would leave us stranded, cold, and hungry. While a healthy fear of fire keeps us in awe and mindful of its raw power.

Today, I want to call our attention to what healthy fear looks like when it comes to our relationship with God. Remember what Solomon said, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.*” Standing in awe of God and respecting His raw power and authority is the foundation upon which everything that we learn about life is built. This perspective will enable us to face the challenges and dangers of life without fear.

“Men who fear God face life fearlessly. Men who do not fear God end up fearing everything.”
– Richard Halverson

Read Luke 11:53-12:7.

Inquiry: The Lord’s disciples may not have realized it, but they were in great danger. For one thing, they were surrounded by immense crowds of people whose major concern was not to hear spiritual truth but to see Jesus do a miracle or meet some personal need. At the same time, the scribes and Pharisees were plotting against

Jesus and trying to get Him out of the way. The snare of popularity and the fear of man has brought ruin to more than one servant of God.

In this twelfth chapter we find five warnings. Four of them must be heeded by God's people today if we want to live faithfully. The other must be heeded by a lost world if they want to be redeemed. We will consider the first warning against hypocrisy over the next couple Sundays. We begin with a call for a healthy sense of fear.

As the crowds were increasing around Jesus, He pulled the disciples together for a time of teaching, warning them of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (vs. 1). Hypocrisy was the Lord's number one critique of Israel's religious leaders. The Greek word (ὑπόκρισις) from which we translate this term means "actor." It refers to one who plays a part. Hypocrisy is saying one thing but doing another. It is moral inconsistency. Now, there are hypocrites in every walk of life. These are people who try to impress others in order to hide their real selves. In the Christian life, a hypocrite is someone who tries to appear more spiritual than he or she really is. In the early church, it was Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

It makes sense that the Lord would warn His disciples of the dangers of hypocrisy at this time. As more and more people began to come out to see and hear from Jesus, the disciples might be tempted either to gain popularity by pleasing the crowds or avoid trouble by pleasing the scribes and Pharisees. Everyone wants to be accepted by others. It is normal to want to be liked. Therefore, it is easy to fall into the trap of playing the particular part others want to see. This too was true for the disciples. According to Jesus, fear of man is unhealthy fear. On the other hand, possessing a holy fear of God is the healthiest decision a person can make. As we said last Sunday, the problem of the heart is the heart of the problem, which is misplaced fear. There are four things about a healthy fear of God for us to see in this text. Healthy fear...

1. Acknowledges that God knows all.

In verse 2, we read that whatever is covered up and hidden will be known. Ultimately, we are to discern from Jesus' words that God knows everything that is done. This scenario reminds us of the very first cover-up. When Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, the Bible tells us that their eyes were opened to the shameful and destructiveness of their decision (Gen 3:7). They responded by sewing leaves together to make clothing to hide their nakedness. Then when God came calling on them in Eden, Adam and Eve hid from His presence (Gen 3:8). They hoped the Lord would not notice the consequences of their decision, but what they failed to realize and acknowledge was that their decision had changed everything about them and God already knew it. He knew it because God sees and knows everything.

¹³The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; ¹⁴from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, ¹⁵he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds. – Psalm 33:13-15

The Pharisees' elaborate piety served as a veneer for their sinful, contaminated, and infectious souls. They deceived themselves into believing that God did not know the wickedness of their hearts, but Jesus knew their spiritual condition (Luke 11:37-52). And He knows the spiritual condition of our hearts today. He knows the disparity between our profession and our practice. Therefore, we cannot deceive Him because He sees through our masquerade. Healthy fear stands in awe of God's power and presence, acknowledging that nothing is hidden from His view.

2. Recognizes that God exposes all.

God's knowledge of our hidden sin leads to Him exposing it (vs. 2-3). In Eden, Adam and Eve's sin was a conscience rebellion against His command (Gen 2:17), and God came calling it out. We would expect to see His wrath in this scene, which would be justified. Instead, we see His incredible grace on

full display. God pursued Adam and Eve while they ran and hid. He questioned them about their condition and location (Gen 3:9-11) asking, *“Where are you?...Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”* These questions were meant to expose their sin. Adam and Eve blamed others, even God, for their situation, but God’s gracious questions exposed the reality that each of them was not where they were supposed to be. They led Adam and Eve to see their sin as God exposed it before them.

Healthy fear recognizes that God will expose all. The Pharisees failed to recognize this truth, and the disciples were in danger of falling into the same trap. Hypocrisy leads one to believe that the real you will not be found out, but Jesus clarifies that what is said in the dark will be heard in the light and what is whispered in a private room will be proclaimed on the housetop. Jesus knows and will expose the real you.

3. Yields to God as Judge of all.

God’s knowing and exposing of man’s sin highlights His role as Judge. We are all ultimately answerable to Him for the decisions and actions we make in life. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey the command in Eden, they answered to God for it. He called out their sin and dispensed the consequences for it (Gen 3:14-19). We read in Revelation that everyone will one day stand before God and give an account for what each has done (Rev 20:11-15). We will all be judged by what is written in the books where our life-stories have been recorded. Those who rejected Jesus Christ will be judged by one set of books, and those who received Christ will be judged by another called the Book of Life.

Remembering we are accountable to God will lead us to a healthy fear of God as we yield to His Lordship. It will keep us from falling into the temptation of fearing man and his approval. God judged Adam and Eve’s sin in Eden, and He will judge our sin too, so let’s yield to Him as our Judge. Thankfully, He judges mercifully and graciously.

4. Rests in God’s value of all.

Here is a truth we must never forget: God loves you. You are valuable to Him. Jesus uses the insignificance of sparrows as a word picture to make this point (vs. 6). The life of sparrows is not worth much in the eyes of men. In New Testament times, a person could purchase five sparrows for two pennies. Their lack of value meant that no man would have gotten upset if one of them was lost, but it was not so with God. He never lost sight or forgot about them because each was valued by Him. Jesus further emphasized His point by saying that God knows the number of hairs on each person’s head (vs. 7). In other words, God knows everything about each of us because each of us holds significant value before God.

Healthy fear rests in the value God places over our lives. It does not fear the opinions of friends and foes. It is not concerned with cultural compromise. Instead, healthy fear believes what God’s Word says about humanity’s intrinsic value. It believes that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1; Psalm 139). It remembers the great cost God paid for our redemption. God ultimately exposed our sin by nailing it to the cross and exhausting His wrath against it by slaying Jesus in our place. If this does not prove the value that He places on each of us, then nothing will.

Conclusion: What is your greatest fear? The valedictorian of Powhatan’s 2023 class said the other night in his graduation address that public speaking is most people’s number one fear. It ranks higher than death. Fear of speaking in public is a real fear, but for most people it is a non-issue simply due to a lack of opportunity. This is probably true for you. There are other fears, however, that do impact your life. You might be crippled by the fear of what others think about you. You live for the applause of men and women. Your social media status

drives your self-esteem. As a result, your fear of others leads you to compromise biblical convictions to protect and preserve your reputation. Or you might be crippled by the fear of death. This fear keeps you from taking risks. You will do whatever is necessary to sustain life as you know it.

I have a question for you. If these particular fears or any others rightly describe you, can you honestly say that this fear brings blessing and freedom to your life? I would argue that unhealthy fear only binds a person. It never brings freedom. When we read the New Testament, we discover that because Jesus feared the Father, He was free to preach and do as the Father directed. Public opinion did not matter. The same is true of the apostles. In Acts 4, Peter and John stood before the Jerusalem Council after healing a lame man. They were questioned and warned not to speak in the name of Jesus again. The apostles responded by saying, *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:19-20).

Solomon said, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”* To fear God means that you stand in awe of who He is. It means that you never lose sight of His power and authority. It means you obey what He has said. You do so because He has the authority and power to bring His Word to fruition in your life. And you obey because you love God, knowing He is good, faithful, and true. The Pharisees had no fear of God. They were hypocrites who claimed to fear God, while refusing to keep His Word.

Jesus said, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). This is healthy fear. It is what it means to fear the Lord. As such, it is the beginning of knowledge. Do you want to know how to live life well? It begins with fearing God.