

Fear Not

Luke: Certainty of the Truth

Luke 12:4-34

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Fear is the order of the day.

During the French Revolution, the national convention of 1793 declared, “Terror is the order of the day.” I don’t know if I’d say terror, but fear seems to be the order of our day as well. We have “an ambiance of fear” in our culture. Fear has been an issue in every age and culture. But things like terrorist attacks, the threat of bombings, the financial crisis of 2008, race riots, the changes in politics, and the rapid change in technology can “accelerate and inflame” our fears.¹

It’s interesting. In a time when we have an abundance of resources and technologies that are designed to keep us safe and secure, we still live in the age of anxiety. We still worry so much about safety and security. How are we as Christians to respond to the fear that surrounds us and the fear we experience in our own lives? How can we be at peace when we face threats to our safety and security?

Jesus addresses these questions in our passage this morning. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 12.

In Luke 12, Jesus tells his disciples over and over again to not be afraid or anxious. But why? What are the dangers that face them? Well, for one, their safety will be threatened. Secondly, their security may feel threatened. They face the threat of persecution. And they face the threat of possessions—of either having too much or having too little.

So how can Jesus’ disciples live without fear? They have to change their perspective. They have to look beyond the temporal problems in this life and look to God’s eternal promises. God *does* promise safety and security. But not in this life!

We’ll face all kinds of anxieties in life now if we live without reference to the life to come.² We’ll be afraid if we focus on the temporal and not the eternal.

This passage is divided into two large sections. Verses 4-12 deal with our safety fears—the threat of persecution. Verses 13-34 deal with our security fears—our possessions.

Luke 12:4-34³

¹In 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. ²Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³Therefore 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. ⁴“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵But 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! ⁶Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

¹ Michael Ovey, “[Chose Your Fears Carefully](#),” Themelios, Vol. 41.3, December 2016.

² Bullmore, Mike “[A Very Thin Veil Between this World and the Next](#),” Sermon, Crossway Community Church, February 4, 2001.

³ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

⁸“And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, ⁹but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And 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, ¹²for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

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.” 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.”

²²And 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. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴Consider 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! ²⁵And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷Consider 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. ²⁸But 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! ²⁹And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

³²“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell 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. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

This is the Word of the Lord.

SAFETY AND PERSECUTION (12:4-12)

Let’s begin with our fear for safety and the threat of persecution. This is what we learn: those who acknowledge Christ do not have to fear the danger of temporal persecution because God has promised eternal protection.

We’ve seen over the last two weeks that Jesus is opposed by the religious leaders. Eventually they will oppose him to the point of death. Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51), and we know that when he comes to Jerusalem he will be handed over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise (Lk. 18:32-33).

We know also that those who follow Jesus will also be opposed. He bore rejection and the cross—we too must take up our cross daily and follow him (Lk. 9:23). So how do we follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem? How do we live our lives in the face of rejection and opposition? How do we live our lives without fear when our safety is threatened?

Like I said earlier, it all has to do with eternal perspective. We have to remember the promises of God. This is what Jesus presses into in verses 4-12. There are three promises that Jesus alludes to.

One has to do with eternal judgment (vv. 4-5). One has to do with eternal protection from judgment (vv. 6-10). And the last has to do with the promise of the Holy Spirit (vv. 11-12).

Eternal Judgment

Let's start with the eternal perspective on judgment.

What is the ultimate and unescapable danger facing humanity? Death. 1 Corinthians 15 calls death the last enemy. But the Bible is clear: physical death is seasonal.⁴ Despite what the secularists say, death is not forever. The bigger issue is what happens after death. Hebrews says, "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

We don't need to fear people who can kill us. We need to fear the one who will judge us all. In verses 4-5, Jesus says, "Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. 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!"

Physical death is seasonal. Spiritual death is eternal. In light of God's judgment, the persecution of man is not a legitimate fear—hell is a legitimate fear.⁵ Jesus says, hell is a place of eternal punishment—it's the unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43); hell is a place of utter darkness (2 Pet. 2:17) where people will be alienated and shut out from God's presence for eternity (Matt. 25:10-12); it will also be a place of eternal death (Rev. 20:14) and destruction (Rom. 9:22).⁶ Jesus is saying that if you want something to fear, fear eternal opposition from God, not temporal opposition from man. With this eternal perspective, the prospect of persecution and physical death seems inconsequential.

Protection from Judgment

However, with all of that said, Jesus doesn't dwell on the judgment of God. He focuses on the tenderness and care of God.⁷ God's judgment and his grace are not mutually exclusive. But Jesus focuses on God's grace more in this passage. Verses 6-10 deal with God's protection of his people from judgment. Jesus says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows. And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. 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."

I'm not going to explain everything in these verses, but I think the basic point is clear; even insignificant sparrows are not forgotten by God. That's not to say that sparrows won't be bought and sold and then killed for food. But God doesn't forget even the sparrows. How much more will God not forget Jesus' disciples. They're much more valuable than sparrows. Now, that doesn't mean that Jesus' disciples won't be rejected and persecuted and even killed. But God won't forget them. He's not unaware of the persecution they face. And he will not forget them in the final judgment.

⁴ Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Luke*. The pillar New Testament commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2015.

⁵ Edwards

⁶ See "Article 10: Response and Eternal Destiny." in *Evangelical Convictions*, Minneapolis, Minn., Free Church Publications, 2011.

⁷ Edwards and Green

Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. The new international commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1997.

Instead God will protect them!⁸ We see this in verse 8. Jesus says that if we acknowledge Jesus before men, Jesus will acknowledge us before God.

We are all sinners who deserve eternal death and judgment. But if we place our trust in Jesus, we will be forgiven our sins and do not have to fear God's judgment. This is only possible because Jesus took the road to Jerusalem where he died on a cross for our sins and rose from the dead. And we know that this is only possible for those who place their trust in Jesus and his work on the cross. Jesus will acknowledge those who acknowledge him. But he will deny those who deny him. And they will face judgment in fear.

So what about you? Have you placed your trust in Jesus? He's the only way to be saved from the wrath of God. He's the only way to have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. If you haven't placed your trust in Jesus, then I pray that you will see your need for Jesus today. I pray that you will see that without him you will face the judgment of God with no hope. But I also pray that you would trust Jesus today and follow him for all of your days.

If you have placed your trust in Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life, then how are you living? Are you living in fear or in faithfulness? Most of you won't face threats to your physical safety for following Jesus. But all of you face threats to your social standing in this world.

Who do you fear? Do you fear God or man? Do you acknowledge Jesus before man? Or are you ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ? What did you do the last time you had an opportunity to acknowledge Jesus before your classmates, your co-workers, your neighbors, or your family? If you're afraid of man's opinion of you or afraid of what man may do to you, then maybe you don't have an adequate sense of the judgment of God. Or maybe you don't have an adequate sense of the grace of God. These are the two things that motivate us to live without fear in the face of opposition.

Holy Spirit

But there's more. Not only does Jesus remind us of the promise of eternal judgment on the last day and the promise of eternal life on the last day. He also reminds us of the promise of the Holy Spirit right now. We see this in verses 11-12: "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, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

Being faithful to Jesus involves bearing witness to Jesus in this world. But we have a great promise here. God enables what he requires. He gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will help us to acknowledge Jesus before men. He'll help us know what to say when we're opposed.

So there's no promise of protection from our enemies now, although there's a great promise of eternal protection from the judgment of God. But there *is* a promise of power now. The Holy Spirit empowers us for gospel witness even in the face of persecution. That should help us to live our lives without fear.

⁸ Green

SECURITY AND POSSESSIONS (12:13-34)

So, we've considered the threat to our safety and we've seen that in light of God's promise of eternal protection, we don't have to be afraid. Instead, we can be faithful until Christ returns.

Life is not found in possessions.

Let's now look at the threat to our security. This is what we learn: those who seek God's kingdom do not have to fear the lack of temporal possessions because God has promised eternal provision.

While Jesus is teaching his disciples about not fearing persecution, a man interrupts him and asks him to arbitrate a dispute between him and his brother (v. 13). He wants their inheritance to be fairly divided (v. 14). Jesus responds by saying in verse 15, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." So not only is persecution life-threatening. We also see that when we seek possessions, they may also be life-threatening.

The Greek language has three words for life: *Bios*, which has to do with your physical life, *psyche*, which has to do with your soul, and *zoe*, which has to do with eternal life. *Bios* is quantitative; it has to do with length of days. *Psyche* is qualitative; it has to do with happiness. And *zoe* is quintessential; it has to do with your relationship with God.⁹

When it comes to *bios*, the abundance of possessions *do* matter. If all there is to life is your life on earth, then "the one with the most toys wins." But what if there's more to life than your length of days? What if there's a qualitative measure of life? And what if there's eternal life? Then, your life does *not* consist in the abundance of possessions.

The life Jesus is talking about in verse 15 is *zoe*. It has to do with eternal life. So what he's saying is that eternal life has nothing to do with how many possessions you have. Eternal life has everything to do with your relationship with God. And not even *psyche* or happiness can be found in possessions.

Not Rich toward God

This is drawn out in the parable in verses 16-21. There was a rich man that had many possessions. And he was totally focused on them. He was seeking them. And he became very wealthy. And so he started trying to figure out what he was going to do with all of his grain. Verse 17 says, "He thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'" He didn't seek God. He didn't view his possessions in relationship with God. He thought *to himself*. "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. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'"

Why does God call this man a fool? It's not because he wasn't smart with his money. It's because he didn't have a life that was oriented toward God.¹⁰ That's what's true of all fools. He was trying to live life through his own strength. He was seeking earthly possessions instead of eternal possessions.

⁹ Edwards

¹⁰ Edwards and Green

He was worried about the quantity of his life instead of the quality of his life. He was rich in the world, but, as Jesus says in verse 21, he was not rich toward God.

The problem with the abundance of possessions is they make it easy for us to forget God. They make it easy for us to think about what *we've* done and about what *we'll* do to gain security. But there's nothing we can do to gain eternal security. Only God can provide that.

How many of us are approaching our money and possessions the way this man was? There's nothing wrong with having money. But there is something wrong with thinking about our acquisition of wealth without reference to God.

Just this week, I was working on our family budget. I spent a good part of Monday and part of Tuesday on this task. But as I was thinking about Luke 12, I realized that in all my planning, I didn't spend any time in prayer. I was making my own spending plans without depending on God.

How many of you here are living life without much dependence upon God? When you look at your financial situation do you start thinking to yourself without turning to God? Do you say to yourself, "Self, what shall I do with my life? How shall I seek security in life? Oh, I know what I'll do; I have a plan. I'll work really hard in school and get good grades so that I can get into a good college. And then with my degree from that good college I'll get a good paying job. And with my big paychecks I'll buy a nice house in a safe neighborhood and a nice reliable car. And I'll make sure to save a lot of money for my kids and for my retirement. And then I'll say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, play golf, buy a retirement home, and be merry!'"

Is this your idea of security? Is this the way you plan on attaining security? Jesus says that people that approach their earthly possessions this way may be in danger of losing their eternal possessions.

Seek the Kingdom

So, if we shouldn't seek earthly security, what should we seek? We should seek the kingdom of God.

Look at verses 22-31. "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. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 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! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? 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. 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! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you."

Verses 29-31 show us the contrast of different security options. In verse 29, Jesus reiterates what he taught in the parable. He reiterates what not to seek. "And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried." He goes on in verse 30 to say that this is what people who are of the nations or kingdoms of the world seek. Then, he contrasts this with what his disciples *should* seek. "Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you." (v. 31). The point is that if we seek the kingdom of God, we'll gain the kingdom of God. And this is much greater than

anything we may seek in this life. But in the process of seeking the things of the *next life*, God will also provide for the things we need in *this* life.

We get so worried about the things of this life. We fear not having enough now. Jesus says, worry about having enough in eternity. If this is your focus, you'll have plenty now, and even more then.

Jesus draws this out further in verses 32-34. He says, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 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. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If we seek the kingdom of God, we can have confidence that we'll have our basic needs met. But that's not all. We can also give our possessions away because we'll have an eternal perspective. We'll realize that we have much more to look forward to than a lush retirement. We'll have treasure in heaven. If our heart treasures heaven and the things that are totally secure, then we won't be focused on the treasures of this life which are never secure.

This is the perspective that should mark Jesus' disciples. If we're going to follow Jesus, we need to follow his example. Paul does a great job of reminding us of Jesus' example in 2 Corinthians 8:9. He says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

Jesus is rich because Jesus is God. But Jesus became poor so that we might become rich. Jesus gave up his throne on high, he took on flesh and died on a cross. This is what Paul means when he says that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor. And he did this for a reason. So that we might become rich. But not rich in earthly possessions. He did this so that we might become rich in heavenly possessions. He did this so that God might give us the kingdom—that he might give us eternal life.

If we're to follow Jesus, we need to do what he did. He gave everything for the eternal joy that was set before him. We need to do the same. The riches we have in Christ are much greater than all the riches of this life. That's what enables us to live lives without fear of persecution or loss of possessions in this life. That's what enables us to be faithful in this life, to bear witness for Christ and to be generous toward those in need.

Hebrews 11 tells us that Moses considered the reproaches of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. This is a remarkable statement. The treasures of Egypt are greater than any wealth any of us could ever imagine possessing; greater than Bill Gates' wealth, greater than Charles Koch's wealth, greater than Donald Trump's wealth. Moses considered the reproaches of Christ *greater wealth* than all of these!

We may suffer persecution in this life. We may suffer want of earthly possessions. But we have something far greater. As we sang earlier, "How rich a treasure we possess!" Do you believe that?

Some people say that you can become so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good. Jesus seems to teach the opposite. The more heavenly minded you are, the more good you'll do on earth. The more heavenly minded you are the less you'll be afraid. You'll be able to bear witness for Christ in the face of opposition, and you'll be able to be generous with what you have.

Without this heavenly mindedness, I'm afraid we'll never be of any earthly good. We'll simply live our lives in worry and fear.