

CONCERNING THE WAY

March 27, 2012

LESSON 133: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Chapter 12

In most of this chapter Jesus teaches several truths to His inner circle of disciples, as they are on their way to Jerusalem where Jesus will present Himself to the nation as their Messiah. Jesus knows He will be rejected, and so He will be preparing His disciples to deal with that. Keep that context in mind as we go through the verses, and we'll discuss how the teachings relate to us.

Hypocrisy

Luke 12:1-3 Meanwhile, the people had gathered by the thousands and were trampling on one another. Jesus began to speak first to his disciples. **"Watch out for the yeast-that is, the hypocrisy-of the Pharisees! (2) There is nothing covered that will not be exposed and nothing secret that will not be made known. (3) Accordingly, what you have said in darkness will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in private rooms will be shouted from the housetops."**

- Jesus was saying that it is foolish to be hypocritical because eventually everything will come out into the open. So the disciples should be open, not two-faced, about the way they lived. In the Scriptures yeast often refers to something evil.
- The word hypocrite began by meaning someone who answers; and hypocrisy originally meant answering. So it used to mean just normal dialogue, but then it gradually came to mean dialogue in a play. The hypocrite is not genuine; he is play-acting. The basis of hypocrisy is insincerity. God would rather have a blunt, honest sinner, than someone who puts on an act of goodness.

Witnessing without fear

Luke 12:4-5 **"But I tell you, my friends, never be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can't do anything more. (5) I'll show you the one you should be afraid of. Be afraid of the one who has the authority to throw you into hell after killing you. Yes, I tell you, be afraid of him!"**

- This is the attitude we should have in life, an attitude of fearlessness. Some think the one to be afraid of is Satan, but that's not what Jesus is saying. Satan has no authority to throw us into hell. Only God can do that. So Jesus is saying to fear God, not men.
- The power of another person over you is strictly limited to this life. A man can destroy another man's life but not his soul. But God has power over a person's soul. So it is reasonable to fear God rather than to fear men.

Luke 12:6-7 **"Five sparrows are sold for two pennies, aren't they? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. (7) Why, even all the hairs on your head have been counted! Stop being afraid. You are worth more than a bunch of sparrows."**

- To God we are never lost in the crowd; He knows each of us intimately. Not even the sparrow which is considered worthless by men is forgotten by God. Every hair on our head is numbered! It has been calculated that a blonde person has about 145,000 hairs; a dark-haired person, 120,000; and a person

with red hair, 90,000! All of us can confidently say, "God cares for me and is in control no matter what comes (Romans 8:28)."

Luke 12:8-10 "But I tell you, the Son of Man will acknowledge before God's angels everyone who acknowledges me before people. (9) But whoever denies me before people will be denied before God's angels. (10) Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the person who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven."

- We really can't forget the context here. Jesus is about to formally present Himself to the nation of Israel in Jerusalem as their Messiah. If the nation's leaders accept Him, He will begin the Kingdom of God on earth, defeat His enemies, and rule from David's throne in Jerusalem. The people that acknowledge that He is the Messiah will be acknowledged before God's angels and be accepted into His kingdom. He will announce that they belong to Him! But the people who deny that He is the Messiah will be denied entry into the Kingdom.
- The disciples and those who they preached the message of the Kingdom to would have to make a choice. If they acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah, then they would have access to the way of salvation and be part of the Kingdom of God. Those who did not acknowledge Him were denying themselves the way of salvation. Jesus carried the logic one step further, saying that one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.
- In Matthew 12:32 Jesus linked this with the Pharisees who were rejecting the work of Jesus, saying He got His power to heal from Satan. Apparently the Pharisees were being convicted by the Holy Spirit that Jesus was actually the Messiah, but were rejecting what He was telling them. They could never be forgiven because they were rejecting God's only way of salvation. (In contrast to that, some of Jesus' own brothers who rejected Him at first (John 7:5) later came to faith (Acts 1:14) and were forgiven even though they had spoken against the Messiah.)
- To understand this we have to remember that Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit as the Jews understood Him, not in the full Christian sense. To a Jew, God's Spirit had two great functions. Through the Spirit He told His truth to people, and by the action of the Spirit in a person's mind and heart that person could recognize and grasp God's truth. Now, if a person refuses to use an ability he has for long enough he will lose it, and if we stop using a part of the body long enough it atrophies.
- In the same way we can lose the ability to recognize God and His truth. By repeatedly refusing God's word, by repeatedly taking our own way, by repeatedly shutting our eyes to God and closing our ears to him, we can come to a point when we do not recognize him when we see him, and to us evil becomes good and good becomes evil. That is what happened to the scribes and Pharisees, and that is what is happening in the world today.
- Why is that the unforgivable sin? Because in that situation repentance is impossible. If a person does not even realize that he is sinning, if he can't even tell or care what good and evil is, he can't repent. God has not shut him out; but because of his continual refusals he has shut himself out. So, if you are worried that you have committed the "unforgiveable sin", you haven't.

Luke 12:11-12 When people bring you before synagogue leaders, rulers, or authorities, don't worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say. (12) For in that

hour the Holy Spirit will teach you what you are to say."

- This promise applied specifically to the witnessing of the disciples in the period before the New Testament was written. It does not mean today that we shouldn't prepare ourselves through study and prayer so that we are prepared for witnessing opportunities, we should. But the principle for us is that the indwelling, guiding, energizing Holy Spirit is always there, assuming we have done our part, to speak through us when necessary. This should take away our fear of telling people about Jesus.

Material Possessions In Life

Luke 12:13-15 Then someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." (14) But Jesus said to him, "Mister, who appointed me to be a judge or arbitrator over you people?" (15) Then he said to them, "Be careful to guard yourselves against every kind of greed, for a person's life doesn't consist of the amount of possessions he has."

- It was not unusual for people in Israel to take their disputes to respected Rabbis; but Jesus refused to be mixed up in anyone's disputes about money. But Jesus used that opportunity to lay down what his disciples' attitude to material things should be. He had something to say to both those who had a lot of possessions and to those who did not:

Luke 12:16-21 Then he told them a parable. He said, "The land of a certain rich man produced good crops. (17) So he began to think to himself, 'What should I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' (18) Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and I'll store all my grain and goods in them. (19) Then I'll say to my soul, 'Soul, you've stored up plenty of good things for many years. Take it easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.'" (20) But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Now who will get the things you've accumulated?' (21) That's how it is with the person who stores up treasures for himself and isn't rich toward God."

- To those who had a lot Jesus gave this parable of the Rich Fool. Two things stand out about this man:
- He never saw beyond himself. Notice how many I's, me's, my's and mine's there are. He was completely self-centered. It never seemed to enter his head to give any of his wealth away. His whole attitude was the opposite of godly. Instead of denying himself he thought only of himself; instead of finding his happiness in giving he tried to create happiness by storing it up for himself.
- He never saw beyond this world. All his plans were made on the basis of life here. There is a story of a conversation between a young and ambitious man and an older man who knew life. The young man said, "I will learn my trade." "And then?" said the older man. "I will set up in business." "And then?" "I will make my fortune." "And then?" "I suppose that I shall grow old and retire and live on my money." "And then?" "Well, I suppose that someday I will die." "And then?" came the last and most important question.
- The person who doesn't plan for life after death is going to have the rudest of rude shocks someday. This man's attitude was that he would have an easy life because he had everything he could possibly want or need. He probably thought he was very wise to store up all those things, but God knew the truth, that the man was foolish because when he died that night his wealth would do nothing for him. They would just be given to someone else. The Greek word translated fool here is actually stronger

than that, it means "insane one".

- So this is a very serious and sober warning against self-centered covetousness. As Christians we are to build up treasure in heaven, not on earth. It's not wrong to plan for our future (Proverbs 6:6-11), but if we are trusting in what we have stored up instead of God for our future, then we are as foolish as this man.

Worrying About Your Life

Luke 12:22-30 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "That's why I'm telling you to stop worrying about your life-what you will eat-or about your body-what you will wear. (23) For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. (24) Consider the crows. They don't plant or harvest, they don't even have a storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than birds! (25) Can any of you add an hour to your span of life by worrying? (26) So if you can't do a small thing like that, why worry about other things? (27) Consider how the lilies grow. They don't work or spin yarn, but I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. (28) Now if that's the way God clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and thrown into an oven tomorrow, how much more will he clothe you-you who have little faith? (29) "So stop concerning yourselves about what you will eat or what you will drink, and stop being distressed. (30) For it is the gentiles who are concerned about all these things. Surely your Father knows that you need them!"

- Then Jesus had something to say to those who had few possessions. In all this section Jesus commands us not to be anxious or worry. Jesus never told anyone to be lazy, foolish, or irresponsible in the way they lived their life. What he did tell us is to do our best and then leave the rest to God.
- The lilies Jesus spoke of are thought to be the scarlet anemones. After one of the rare summer rains, the mountain sides would be red with them; they bloomed one day and then died.
- Wood was scarce in Israel, so dried grasses were used to feed the oven fires. Jesus said, "If God looks after the birds and the flowers, how much more will he care for you?"
- Finally Jesus pointed out that worry is foolish because that's the attitude of pagans. The pagan world is concerned with the material things of life and not with life's more important spiritual realities.

Luke 12:31-34 Instead, be concerned about his kingdom, and these things will be provided for you as well. (32) Stop being afraid, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. (33) "Sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor. Make yourselves wallets that don't wear out-a dependable treasure in heaven, where no thief can get close and no moth can destroy anything. (34) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

- Instead of being worried about material things, we should pursue spiritual things (seeking God's kingdom) and then our material needs will be met by God.
- Jesus then told His disciples to focus on the coming Kingdom. He compared them to a little flock, a defenseless group which could be preyed on. To make them even more defenseless Christ told them to sell their possessions and give to the poor. This is what the early church did (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37).

Jesus' point was that if His followers had treasure on earth they would be always thinking about protecting it. But if they had their treasure in heaven, which is safe from theft and decay, and were "rich toward God" (Luke 12:21), they would be concerned with teaching people about the kingdom and so they would not be worrying about anything else.

- Jesus gave similar advice to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:21. But this command of Jesus must be balanced against New Testament instructions by the apostles that a man has a responsibility to "provide for his own, especially for his own family" (1 Timothy 5:8). We are also to "have something to share with the one who has need" (Ephesians 4:28; see also 1 John 3:17) and to "sow generously" as "a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). All of this implies that, by working hard in the vocation God has given us, we have the resources to do these things, as the Lord provides. Ananias and Sapphira were punished not for keeping part of their possessions, but because they lied about it (Acts 5:1-5).
- The principle for us is this: all that we have comes from the Lord, and must be used in ways that He leads and that honor Him. Our personal needs and wants should be kept to a minimum, so that more can be used in His service and to meet the needs of others.

Jesus teaches about readiness

Luke 12:35-37 "You must keep your belts fastened and your lamps burning. (36) Be like people who are waiting for their master to return from a wedding. As soon as he comes and knocks, they will open the door for him. (37) How blessed are those servants whom the master finds watching for him when he comes! Truly I tell you, he will put an apron on, make them sit down at the table, and go around and serve them.

- The Messiah was there with the disciples, but they really had no idea when or how He would begin His earthly kingdom reign. And without national repentance, the kingdom would be delayed, and, of course, that is exactly what happened. So Jesus tells the disciples then and all of us today to be ready!
- This passage applies mainly to Israel and the second coming of Jesus Christ, but we can apply the principle to believers in today's Church age expecting the Rapture. Jesus is saying we need to be ready for His return. We need to be doing all we can for Him, and live expecting Him to return at any time. The lamp people used then was like a cotton wick floating in a little boat of oil. The wick had to constantly be kept trimmed and the oil replenished or the light would go out.

Luke 12:38-40 How blessed they will be if he comes in the middle of the night or near dawn and finds them awake! (39) But be sure of this: if the homeowner had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. (40) So be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you don't expect him."

- When Jesus comes back to the earth, He will come as a judge this time, and will come like a thief in the night (read Matthew 24:37-51 for a more detailed version of what Jesus said here). Those who are not looking for Him will be taken away to judgment. In the Rapture, Jesus will appear in the air and gather all the believers to Him and take them back to heaven with Him. (1Thessalonians 4:16-17).
- We can't know when this age will come to an end and Jesus comes back. How should we want God to find us?

Luke 12:41-44 Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable just for us or for everyone?" (42) The Lord said, "Who, then, is the faithful and careful manager whom his master will put in charge of giving all his other servants their share of food at the right time? (43) How blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing this when he comes! (44) Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his property."

- Jesus did not answer Peter's question directly, but instead told another parable, about a faithful and unfaithful manager, or steward. In that place and time the steward had almost unlimited power. He was normally a slave, yet he had control of all the other slaves. A trusted steward ran his master's house for him and administered his estate.

Luke 12:45-48 "But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time to come back,' and begins to beat the other servants and to eat, drink, and get drunk, (46) the master of that servant will come on a day when he doesn't expect him and at an hour that he doesn't know. Then his master will punish him severely and assign him a place with unfaithful people. (47) That servant who knew what his master wanted but didn't prepare himself or do what was wanted will receive a severe beating. (48) But the servant who did things that deserved a beating without knowing it will receive a light beating. Much will be required from everyone to whom much has been given. But even more will be demanded from the one to whom much has been entrusted."

- These verses show that He was talking primarily about the leadership of the nation at that time. The religious leaders were supposed to be managing the nation for God until He brought in the kingdom. But they failed in that task; they were not looking expectantly toward the kingdom. Because of the punishment Jesus mentions (46-47), Jesus must not have been speaking about believers who were not ready. He seems to have been referring to the nation's leaders who would be present at the time of the coming of the Messiah. Faithless ones (v. 47) will be judged more severely than those who, even though they are wicked, had not heard about the coming of the Messiah (v. 48).
- The nation of Israel had all the advantages. They had all the revelation of God given in the Old Testament. They had the miracles and teachings of Moses and all the other prophets. So they will be judged more severely for rejecting their promised King.
- Since the context surrounding this parable is the judgment at the return of Christ (Luke 12:40, 49), its purpose is clearly to teach that there will somehow be degrees of punishment in hell. Both servants represent lost people, and both are punished, with neither of them saved. The intensity of the suffering, though, is related to how sinful they were compared to how much light they had received or truth known. We may not fully understand how this works, but the righteous "Judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25) is very able to "render every man according to his deeds" (Romans 2:6).
- This principle also applies to the saved in heaven (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). At "the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10), all born-again believers will have their work examined to see "what sort it is." This passage clearly teaches that, for example, those born in Christian homes, in Christian lands, with plenty of access to Bibles, churches, and schools, as well as other privileges, will be evaluated more critically than those believers who served the Lord without such advantages.
- Even though this parable is not about believers, we can still learn from it. The unwise steward made

two mistakes:

- He said, I will do what I want while my master is gone; he forgot that eventually there will be consequences for that attitude. We have a habit of dividing life into compartments. There are some compartments that we allow God into; and there are compartments we don't allow Him into, in fact there are parts of our lives where we never think of him at all. We tend to draw a line between sacred and secular; but if we really know what Christianity means we understand that there is no part of life when the master is away. We are constantly working and living under His eye.
- He said, I have plenty of time to clean up my act before the master comes. We must never think we have plenty of time to make things right with God. Jesus said, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). Don't put off any business you need to take care of with the Lord!
- The last verse of this passage contains the warning that knowledge and privilege always bring responsibility. Sin is extra sinful to the man who knew better.

Luke 12:49-53 "I have come to bring fire on earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! (50) I have a baptism to be baptized with, and what stress I am under until it is completed! (51) "Do you think that I came to bring peace on earth? Not at all, I tell you, but rather division! (52) From now on, five people in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. (53) They will be divided father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

- To the disciples, who were learning to accept Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed one of God, these words would come as a big shock. They thought of the Messiah as conqueror and king, and the Messianic age as a golden time of peace.
- The Greek verb baptizein means to dip. In the passive it means to be submerged. Often it is used metaphorically. It is used to describe a person going through some terrible experience.
- That is the way Jesus uses it here. He said, "I have a terrible experience that I have to go through, and I will be under tremendous stress until I get through it and it is finished." The cross was always on His mind. How different from the Jewish idea of God's King! Yes, He was God, but He was also a man, who knew that God's judgment for the entire world's sin was going to be poured out on Him.
- His coming did cause division. That was one of the reasons why the Romans hated Christianity--it tore families in two. Jewish believers are still ostracized from their families and friends today. Over and over again a person had to decide whether he loved Christ or his family more. The essence of Christianity is that loyalty to Christ has to take precedence over the loyalties of this earth.
- After Jesus spoke directly to His disciples, He turned His attention to the crowds that had followed Him:

Luke 12:54-56 Then Jesus said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud coming in the west, you immediately say, 'There's going to be a storm,' and that's what happens. (55) When you see a south wind blowing, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and so it is. (56) You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky, yet you don't know how to interpret the present time?"

- Jesus taught the crowds that they needed to be sensitive to the things they were seeing. They had been watching Him and listening to Him but still couldn't see that He was the Messiah. He made the point that they, with no trouble, could interpret natural signs. When they saw the clouds forming in the west, over the Mediterranean Sea, they knew rain was on the way. When the south wind blew from the

desert they knew the hot winds were coming. But they could not discern spiritual signs. They should have seen what was right before their eyes—He was offering the kingdom and they were not responding correctly to His offer.

Luke 12:57-59 "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? (58) For example, when you go with your opponent in front of a ruler, do your best to settle with him on the way there. Otherwise, you will be dragged in front of the judge, and the judge will hand you over to an officer, and the officer will throw you into prison. (59) I tell you, you will never get out of there until you pay back the last penny!"

- Jesus used a very vivid illustration. He said, "When you are threatened with a lawsuit, come to an agreement with your opponent before the suit comes to court, otherwise you will be thrown into prison and have to pay everything you owe. There's no doubt of how the lawsuit will turn out, no possibility that you would not be guilty. Everyone has a bad case in the presence of God; and if he is smart, he will make his peace with God while there is still time.