

INTERNAL RENEWAL

Luke 12:1–12

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“Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began 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 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. 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 the killing of the body, has power 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. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men 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 are 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’” (Luke 12:1–12, NIV).

My message today is entitled “Internal Renewal.” We have been going through the Book of Luke now for some months and may I ask if you, in your own life, have come to a subtle determination as to who Jesus is and whether or not that subtle determination is producing a

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difference in your life? In the early part of the Gospel of Luke, Luke started off by telling us that Jesus' birth was like no other. And he has given us a portrait of Jesus launching into His public ministry with the approval of the Father and the blessing of the Spirit and the testing of the devil. No one has launched a ministry with such supernatural encounter gathered around them.

Then Luke has shown us that no one has ever spoken or acted like Jesus. When we come to Luke 9, Jesus by that time in His ministry has collected a group of people and He asks His inner core of followers, "Who do you say that I am?" Once they identify Him as the Messiah, the Christ, He then begins to explicitly talk about the death that He will die in Jerusalem for us and, at the same time, He begins moving directionally and geographically toward Jerusalem. We are in the particular section of the Gospel of Luke—beginning with Luke 9:50 through about the nineteenth chapter—in which Jesus is on His way. During that course of time, He engages in dialogue with the Pharisees, who accuse Him of doing His deeds by the power of the devil, and then Jesus turns on the Pharisees and accuses them of a religion that only pays obedience to external regulations and He denounces, at the conclusion of Luke 11, hypocrisy or a religion that is based upon a set of rules and regulations and keeping the outward show, or being religious without the internal reality relating to God rightly.

Having rebuked the Pharisees and their scribes, Jesus—now in Luke 12—turns to His own disciples. There is a great crowd that is pressing on Him. So much so that Luke says they trample one another. Jesus is without a microphone, so people are getting as close as they can physically to hear what He has to say. Whereas, at the end of chapter 11, He had been speaking directly at the Pharisees, now in chapter 12 He is speaking directly to the disciples and to the listening crowd. He wishes to contrast the life He wants in them and the life that He has just denounced in the Pharisees. They have the external righteousness. Jesus is calling for an internal revolution.

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An inward transformation in His disciples and, of course, in us. As you read through this passage, it's pretty easy to see, after a period of time of meditating upon it, that there are three key things that Jesus says about the inner life.

I. First thing He says is that there is going to come day when our inner life will be exposed to God.

That's the focus of verses 1–3. Jesus says, knowing that that day is to come, "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees." The yeast of the Pharisees is living and acting like they are acting, taking life as one big posturing act, as a role that one goes through that is divorced from an internal reality. Jesus is saying that the Pharisees aren't really aware that there's going to come a day when we stand before God and all the religious sham and all the acting like being spiritual is going to be exposed and the real inward life is going to be evident to all. Jesus says that knowing that someday this is going to happen, we will stand before God and what we really are will be revealed. Let's then live in the present knowing that that day is coming. That will keep our lives honest and pure, for there may be people that we can fool and mislead, but God...never!

Jesus shows continually in His ministry that He truly knows what is in us. A man is lowered through a roof and he is a paralytic and the first thing that Jesus says to him is, "Your sins be forgiven you" (Mark 2:5). Everyone else thought his problem was illness, but Jesus says, "No, I see what you really need is forgiveness." The woman at the well in John 4 talked with Jesus. She tried to engage Him in a theological argument about where to worship God. Jesus broke through the argument by saying, "I know you have a great need. You're very miserable and unhappy in your life." She had to have been, given the serial marriages that she had had—five of them—then a common law relationship with a man who was not her husband. Jesus read her heart and saw that she was unhappy and miserable. Rather than waiting for that to be exposed on the day when

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she stood before God, Jesus Himself brings it out in the present, that all the rest of life might be changed as a result of His knowing.

When Jesus wants to get to our inner life in this present moment, it's not that He might expose us but rather that He might heal us. Not that He might shame us but that He might restore us. There can really be little progress, I don't think any progress, in our spiritual life or our walk with God until we come to a point of absolute honesty and transparency with God. If we do not open up to Him, Jesus says that there will come a day when what we are in secret will be shouted from the housetops.

I have always, as a younger Christian, been afraid that the Lord would tell everybody everything I ever did. There are some who take that Scripture to mean that. However, the context is that Jesus is talking against the religious opposition who is unwilling to let God into their life. And the Scriptures do tell us who have faith in Christ that the blood of Jesus Christ covers us from all of our sins. So I don't think, as a dedicated believer in the Lord, we need to look forward to an exposé in eternity. The light of the fact that God knows everything, however, is designed to produce in us character and holiness and to tell us that God knows what's going on in the inner rooms of our life. God would much rather we deal with it on that level than for it ever to be shouted from the housetops.

I told my son yesterday, "I need to understand my sermon that I'm preaching tomorrow a little bit better. Is there a ladder around somewhere?" He said, "What do you want the ladder for?" I said, "I want to climb up on the roof and I want to get the experience of telling the whole neighborhood all the things that you and Evangeline do that I don't like, things that are done in the inner rooms." I thought that would be kind of a comic picture, wouldn't it? A man up on the

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housetop saying, “I want to tell you about my kids!” George, in fact, warned me that if I did, he was going to get up on the roof of the church today and tell everybody about me.

When we think about getting up on the housetop, I think of telling about what’s going on with somebody else. The Lord puts it back on the internal dimension and says, “Take care for your own life.”

Abraham Lincoln is quoted for having said, “You can fool some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time.” To which we might add, you cannot fool God any of the time. Knowing that we will one day appear before God, let us—in the present—live our life open to God. No secrets. No hiding from Him.

II. The second thing that Jesus says about the inner life is that, since we will one day appear before God and everything will be open, then we must therefore be concerned more about God’s approval of our life than about man’s approval.

That’s the focus of verses 4 and 5. “Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell.” Serious language from Jesus. Tough language from Jesus.

When I came back from Israel a few months ago, I talked about the underlying Bible word for “hell,” which is the *Gehenna* which means “valley of Hinnom.” It is a valley on a corner of Jerusalem which, in Jesus’ day, was used as the town dump. Jesus is saying, “If you deny Me before men, then one day eternally you’re out on the dump of no use, refuse, a life that has no value, no goodness to it.” Life that has no eternity with God to it.

This is a severe teaching we recognize of Jesus. But we also recognize that each one of us, on a personal level, has the power to exclude people from our presence that we choose not to have a relationship with. If we, as human beings, have the right to exclude people from our presence,

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God says that He has the right, the legal right—to exclude whoever from His presence, those who do not want a relationship with Him.

God really sends no one to hell. People send themselves to hell by their own refusal of the Lord. The Scriptures therefore tell us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. They tell us to recognize that the worse thing in the entire world is not death, it's not bankruptcy. The worse thing in the entire world is to meet God unprepared. Revelation 6 gives us that image of the final day, when all the people of earth who are unprepared to meet God cry for the mountains and the rocks to fall and crush them rather than to meet the Lamb. They show, in that moment, that indeed the fear of meeting God unprepared is predominant over even the fear of death.

Jesus acknowledges this. Fidelity to Jesus requires us to report what He says. If there was nothing to save us from, He didn't need to come. Jesus didn't come to simply give us instruction on how to live a better moral life or have better character and positive living. All those things are important. He could have dropped a book on us if that's all He wanted to communicate. But the Scriptures tell us that we were lost, we were without God, we were in the world without hope.

We faced an eternal extinction from God, an eternal banishment from God. And no book could have saved us. Only Jesus coming and living a sinless life and dying a death that substituted for ours, whereby in Himself He took the punishment for you and for me. In those moments of His death He received the sentence of God's wrath. Only that will be able to save us.

In one of George Orwell's essays, he described a wasp that was sucking jam on his plate. He cut him in half. It paid no attention, it merely went on its way with its meal, while a tiny stream of jam trickled out of its esophagus. Only when it tried to fly away did it grasp the dreadful thing that had happened to it. The severed wasp describes life without Christ. Severed from our own

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souls, greedy and unaware, people continue to consume life's sweetness. Only when it is time to fly away will their dreadful condition be grasped.

Jesus says, "Be afraid of Him who has power over life eternal."

III. Then the third thing about inner renewal that Jesus says, inasmuch as there's going to be a day when we appear before God, knowing that ought to make us more concerned about God's approval than man's. Therefore, this walking with a right relationship with God will transform us, it will do something for us.

Living in this kind of way, knowing that we're going to be meeting God in the flesh, knowing that we must seek His approval more than man's. The change that's going to be produced in us is that we would be persons of right relationships before God and courage in living before others.

Persons who have trust in God. Persons who have courage before others.

Let's look for a moment at the theme of trust in God. The Lord not only talks to us about the danger of not relating to Him, but He talks to us, as well, about the tremendous joy and intimacy that comes in knowing Him. He uses two figures of speech to tell us and encourage to trust Him and trust in His goodness.

The one story that Jesus tells is about sparrows. He says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And I tell you not one of them is forgotten by God." There's a little story within a story here. Because if you cross over to Matthew's Gospel (10:29), two sparrows are sold for one penny, and here in Luke 12, Jesus is telling us that five sparrows are sold for two pennies. So putting those two Scriptures together, we get an idea of what sparrows sold for in Jesus' day. Somebody asked me after the first service, "Why would anyone want to buy sparrows?" They were a delicacy that people loved to eat. Five for two.

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What's happening is simply the kind of thing you get at the flea market, a swap meet or a good sale—two for the price of one. In this particular case, if two sparrows sold for one penny and five for two it meant that the fifth one was being thrown in free. That, therefore, makes Jesus' word so significant when He says to us that yet not one of them is forgotten by God—not even the freebie. God knows.

That has always blown my fuses. I have a rough time keeping track of people, let alone sparrows. I am working with some lists right now on my computer and it seems to me sometimes a Herculean task to try to keep names and lists updated. I'd like to see what the computer of heaven looks like if God knows all the sparrows which the Bible tells us that He does. He probably has them grouped by continents. Then grouped by centuries. Then grouped by areas within the continents.

Jesus is saying that God's knowledge astonishes us. If He's aware of the freebie sparrow, He is certainly aware of you who are worth more than many sparrows—or all sparrows. So trust Him.

If the illustration of the sparrow is not enough, Jesus goes on to say, He even knows the number of hairs on your head. There is not a person here that knows the number of hair on their head.

That reminds me of the story of the guy who woke up one morning. He had one hair left on his head. He carefully nurtured that one hair. When he woke up the next morning, there it was, lying on his pillow and he exclaimed, "I'm bald!"

I'm told that blonds have about 125,000 hairs. Dark haired people about 120,000. Red headed people about 90,000. God knows that detail. It just reinforces what Jesus said about knowing what goes on in the inner room. If He has such a prodigious knowledge of the hair we have, He certainly knows what's going on in the inner rooms of our life.

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This knowledge is meant, not to scare us, but to be wonderful to us. God knows. God understands. We have in Jesus a sympathetic and a caring Lord.

My mother had a favorite poem which she kept hanging on a wall somewhere in the house. It said something like this,

Said the robin to the sparrow, "I should really like to know

Why those anxious human beings rush about and worry so."

Said the sparrow to the robin, "Well I think that it might be

That they have no Heavenly Father such as cares for you and me."

The imagery of life with its scurry and hurry, without trust and rest in God. Yet we have a Heavenly Father who cares for us.

So a right relationship with God transforms us into persons who trust the Lord. Maybe you're in a situation today in your life where you need to renew that trust anew and say, "I know that You're in control and care for me and love me."

Then Jesus says, "The right relationship with God gives us courage." It gives us courage before men so that when we stand before men we will acknowledge Him rather than disowning Him, and then, when we are brought before people who are hostile to us, the Holy Spirit will give us the things to say. Jesus says that there are some who deny Him before men. Then He links that with the theme of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit being an eternal sin. Those two things belong together, because to deny Jesus before men means that a person is not listening to the Holy Spirit, who is always saying, "Jesus is God's Son, our Savior, who died for us that we might have eternal life." If we turn aside that voice of the Spirit, which comes to us through the Bible and through our inner life in a spiritual sense, if we turn that aside, we are blaspheming the Spirit by saying to God, "I choose not to believe what the Spirit is telling me about Jesus."

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This is what the Pharisees had been doing when they said Jesus was in a league with the devil.

They were in that direction of life which would forever cut off the pathway to salvation, for there is no salvation unless we listen and give witness to the Spirit as He tells us all Jesus is.

I know if I brought my children up here and said, “This is my daughter, Evangeline, and my son, George Paul, and I love them dearly,” and somebody in the audience said, “That’s not your son and that’s not your daughter,” they’re entitled to their opinion, but just because they have an opinion, doesn’t mean they’re right. There are many opinions about Jesus, but God stands His Son in our midst and says, “This is My beloved Son, Hear ye him.” If we ignore that, we do it to our own peril. There are some things that God cannot do. He cannot deny Himself and He cannot lie. He cannot say of His Son, “This is not My Son.” He can only say, “This is My Son.” He or she who bears testimony to Jesus, that He is God’s Son, has life within Himself.

The Lord tells us that the Holy Spirit, whom we must not blaspheme and whose witness we must live with, will then give us courage as we bear witness for Him in the world. That’s why the Scripture today sort of focuses on a positive note, for as followers of Jesus, the Lord does not want us to think of the Holy Spirit primarily as one who we must be careful not to blaspheme, but to think of Him as our helper. The one who gives us courage in our testimony.

We’ve had two great weeks in the church. I remember talking to Bill Wilson two Sundays ago and Governor John Ashcroft last Sunday—two young men who are really living this out in our world today, speaking as the Holy Spirit gives them the courage to do so. I talked to Bill Wilson privately and he was telling me about the hurricane that came to New York a few weeks ago. It blew part of the roof of their tenement house where he and his wife were living. He said, “We could look out at night and see the stars.” They finally got some plastic over it until they could get the roof fixed. Then last Sunday I got time to be alone for several hours with John Ashcroft

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and we were talking and sharing what had happened to us over the years. He said, “You’ve got to come by the Governor’s Mansion sometime in Jefferson City and visit our house, see where we live. When I look up at my ceiling, there’s a gold leaf even on the ceiling of the Governor’s Mansion.” I thought, here are two of my friends who are doing works of the Lord. One doing the work of the Lord and looks out at night and sees the stars. The other, sees the gold leaf on his ceiling. Both of them are in the perfect will of God. Both of them are being anointed by the Holy Spirit in their respective roles. Neither would change places with the other. God has called them to their unique individuality.

And God has called each one of us to our unique individuality and says that in that place of assignment in life, the Holy Spirit wants to give us courage and boldness to witness for Him. You’ll find that courage and boldness as you do it. It’s not something that can be stored up in advance. It’s not, “When I know enough, I’ll witness more.” It’s as we go and as we share and as we talk with other people that the Lord gives us just what to say.

In closing, let me just remark that for centuries it appeared to human beings that the earth was stationary and that the sun revolved around the earth. It was the view of the world before a Polish scholar came along by the name of Copernicus. Copernicus proved that what seemed obvious on the surface was not. And it was, in fact, the earth that was moving around the sun, not the sun around the earth. That discovery has forever changed physical reality since then.

There are many people whose center of the universe is themselves. The Lord Jesus Christ is not thought of and their inner life is not geared around Jesus Christ. But Jesus brought a new reality. Just as there was a Copernican Revolution, there is a Christ Revolution, and when Christ comes into our life, He becomes the center, and everything we are begins focusing and gravitating

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around Him. If it's not, it would suggest that He's not at the center. And He seeks to be at the center of our inward life, reforming us and changing us and equipping us to do His will.

Closing Prayer

Father, we want to thank You for these moments of being in Your Word. We want to thank You that You are far more concerned about us than simply that we do outward religious duties. True, Your Word asks us to do things that are outward, like be present in worship services with other believers, give of our resources to You. But You're concerned that everything we do on an outward level arises from an inward conviction and an inward relationship with You. Lord, for friends here today who perhaps in recent weeks or months have gotten into the ritual of being a believer and going through the motions and maybe living one life during the week and another at times when spirituality is called for. Help us, Lord, to be renewed on the inside, because all of life is open to You. Let our dedication to You be complete and total. May You be at the center of our life. May there be nothing half-hearted about our service to You. We ask, in Jesus' name. Thank You for bringing a new reality into our life and into our world through Christ. Amen.