



Luke 12:1-12
“Your Life Is On The Line”

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(3rd Sunday of Easter)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

VIIIE: LUKE 12:1-12 "YOUR LIFE IS ON THE LINE!"

Maintaining Popularity (People-Pleasing) Leads To Hypocrisy

1) vv.1-3 THE SPEECH OF THE DISCIPLES JUDGED.

11:53, Great Popularity: Electric Atmosphere

v.1 = L, 2 Goals: 1) Avoid Hypocrisy, 2) Maintain Confession Under Stress

= "As they sought to trap him." vv. 1-2 //Mt. 16:5-6, Mk. 8:14-15

1 In the meantime,
when so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another,
he (i.e. Jesus) began **to say** to his disciples,

Heavy Use Of Speech Language, Inner Circle: Not Crowds, Lk. 11:53

Continuing Imperative, Leaven Corrupts The Whole (Hidden And Powerful)

a "First, beware of the leaven of **the Pharisees**, which is hypocrisy/. A Virus! **Warning: Authorities (cf. 11:37-54)**

11:42, Hypocrisy = Virtue Outside/Vice Inside, Ex. 12:14-20

2 b1 Nothing is covered up
that will not be revealed,
or hidden
that will not be known./

v.2 // Mt. 10:26-27, 12:10; Revelation Promised At The End, Rom. 2:15, I Cor. 4:5

God Knows All: Live With Integrity Now, Hidden Truth About Will Be Told

8:17(doublet), Perhaps Under Persecution

ACTIONS, Be Open And Sincere Now; This Is Why Hypocrisy Won't Work

Be Same Inside/Outside, No Privacy Before God

3 b2 Therefore whatever you have said in the dark
shall be heard in the light,
and what you have whispered (lit. spoken in an ear) in private rooms
shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

v.3 // Mt. 10:27 (I → you), 8:16, 11:33, Example No. 1: Night/ Daytime

SPEECH, 11:34-36

Example No. 2: Private/ Public

Complete Omniscience, Witness?

To Be Transparent About Jesus Is Our Best Weapon!

2) vv.4-5 I TELL YOU WHO TO FEAR: FEAR GOD, NOT MEN!

vv.4-7 Fear (5x), God Has Ultimate Oversight, Authority Formula, "I Tell You"

4 a "I tell you, my friends,
b do not fear
those who kill the body,
and after that have no more that they can do.

Receive His Support, Jn. 15:13-15, Friendship As Antidote, Only Time In Luke

Epicurus Sovereign Maxims, 23, 24, et. al., Unbounded Confidence + Real Fear

vv.4-5 // Mt. 10:28, New Faith Controversial! In Persecution, 11:53

When Dead, What More Can They Do?

Fear Of God Is Lost In Our Day! False Fear v. True Fear

5 b' But I will warn you whom to fear:
fear him who, after he has killed (i.e. the body),
has power to cast into hell (lit. Gehenna);

Emphatic Position, 9:25

4 Macc. 13:14-15, Mt. 10:28 On Soul's Death

James 3:6, Valley Of Hinnom = S.W. Jerusalem Dump

a' yes, I tell you, fear him!

Respect/Revere/Obey, Absolute Power Relativizes Other Fears, Apostasy Kills
Jer. 7:31-32, Proverbs 1:7, Rev. 20:11-15 (Second Death)

3) vv.6-7a GOD'S VALUATION AND INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF EACH.

vv.6-7 // Mt. 10:29-31, Rabbinic Argument: Lesser To Greater

6 a Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? (Yes) Nearly Worthless
b And not one of them is forgotten before God. Conclusion: You Are Not Forgotten

7 c Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 21:18, I Sam. 14:45, 2 Sam. 14:11

b' Fear not; Conclusion: Perfect Love Cast Out Fear, Real Comfort

a' you are of more value than many sparrows. 10:20, Knows All Details, You Matter Immensely!

One Who Has Power Over Destiny Cares For You! So No Fear!

2') vv.8-9 I TELL YOU WHO TO CONFESS: CONFESS JESUS CHRIST!

vv.8-9 // Mt. 10:32-33, Accountable For What We Say/Do, Formula, "I Tell You"

8 "And I tell you,
a every one who acknowledges (confesses) me before men, What We Say Now In Witness: Courage
b the SON OF MAN also will acknowledge before the angels of God; 2 Scenes, What Angels Say Then

9 a' but he who denies me before men Formal Trial? What We Don't Say Now In Witness: Fear

b' will be denied before the angels of God. Loyalty Matters, What Angels Don't Say Then, 9:26

Our Ultimate Destiny Rests On Our Relationship To Jesus Now

10 a And every one who speaks a word against the SON OF MAN Self-Reference, v.10 Controversial

b will be forgiven; p.v. 22:54ff., Reject The Earthly Jesus Like Peter/ Another Chance, 5:21

a' but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit Post-Pentecost, Acts 5:32, 7:51 "resist the Holy Spirit"

b' will not be forgiven. p.v. Disciples Who Do Not Witness Before Persecutors Deny The Spirit Within

v.10 // Mt. 12:32, Mk.3:28-30, Permanent Obstinacy

1') vv.10-11 THE SPEECH OF DISCIPLES AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.

11 And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, Story Of Acts **Warning: Authorities**
a do not be anxious = Fearful That You Have Been Wrong About Jesus
b how or what you are to answer or what you are to say; vv.11-12 //Mt. 10:19-20, 13:11; Defense = Apologia

12 a' for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour Prophecy, No Need To Anxiously Prepare // Mk. 13:11, Mt. 10:20

b' what you ought to say." 21:14-15, Acts 4:5-8, 5:17, 6:10, 17:1-9/ Post-Easter Inspiration (Prophecy)

Philo, Life of Moses 1.49.274, Assurance, Trinitarian: God the Father/Jesus/Spirit

YOUR LIFE IS ON THE LINE

“Why even the hairs of your head are all numbered!”

God knows all the details.

L U K E 1 2 : 7

In the midwinter of 320AD forty Roman soldiers in Lesser Armenia fought a different kind of battle. The account of their death is preserved for us by a pair of brothers, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa who contributed some of the technical language of the Nicene Creed we use from time to time.

Forty soldiers of the Roman Twelfth Legion were Christians. One day at Sebaste their captain announced that Emperor Licinius had issued an edict requiring all soldiers, as a sign of loyalty, to offer incense to the pagan gods. The forty legionaries replied, “You can have our armor and even our bodies, but the allegiance of our hearts belongs to Jesus Christ.”

The captain had the men march off to a frozen lake, and there told them to renounce Christ or die. There were baths of hot water on the shore as a temptation to apostatize (which means *to deny the Lord*). Throughout the night, the men huddled together naked and sang “Forty martyrs for Christ, forty martyrs for Christ.” The frigid air took its toll, and one by one thirty-nine fell into the cold sleep of death.

Only one remained alive. His courage failed, and he stumbled to the shore, renouncing his faith in Christ. The officer of the guard had been watching this drama of sacrifice and now defection. Secretly he had come to believe in Christ. When he saw the fortieth man come to shore, he walked onto the frozen lake, disrobed, and confessed he was a Christian. As dawn broke, forty bodies lay frozen on the ice.”¹

This act of corporate witness should not surprise us since Jesus spoke so clearly of being prepared to make such a witness. “After all,” he said, “all they can do is kill you!” which he was soon to fulfill in his own life. That we can hardly imagine such

¹ F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 1254.

shows how tame and timid our understanding of Christian faith has become. On the weakness of the Western churches Dr. John Stott writes:

“Today the church is not persecuted so much as ignored. Its revolutionary message has been reduced to a toothless creed for bourgeois suburbanites. Nobody opposes it any longer, because really there is nothing to oppose.”²

But if you take a close look at our baptismal vows, there’s nothing weak about this faith. This is because they were first formulated in the second century where to confess that *Jesus is Lord* meant to say that *Caesar is not*. We repeat them at every baptism, but tell me, have you ever *heard them* and the life of vigilance and struggle they imply. They set us against the world and its agendas.

Vow No. 1, “On behalf of *the whole church* (including the 40 martyrs of Sebaste) I ask you, “Do you *renounce* the spiritual forces of wickedness, *reject* the evil powers of this world, and *repent* of your sins?” **I DO**.

Here we say a strong No to everything that opposes God, first in the invisible demonic realm of fallen angels, then in the visible world of culture, and finally in our own hearts. Ours is a war on three fronts all at once: up there- *the spiritual forces of wickedness*, out there- *the evil powers of this world*, and in our own hearts- *your sins*. It’s a comprehensive loyalty issue and a holistic world view. We live on a battlefield, internally and externally, and so the language the church uses is militant. For parents to take such vows for their little ones is to commit them as a family to a certain way of life. There’s nothing cute or sentimental about a baptism properly understood, even of a naive, helpless child. You’re being inducted into an army from which there is no retirement, no retreat, and no rear areas in which to hide and play cards.

Then in Vow No. 2 we take up holy armaments for the struggle, “Do you *accept* the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?” **I DO**.³ Note the strong string of *r* verbs that tie the two vows together: *renounce, reject, repent, resist*. Knowing the high cost of becoming a disciple, the church asks, Will you say No to all that opposes

² R. Kent Hughes, *1001 Great Stories* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1998), 306.

³ *U.M. Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: The U.M. Publishing House, 1989), 34.

God and Yes to being a resistance fighter with God's weapons of freedom and power? Will you join in our witness to Jesus Christ? These are large promises, and like the vows of marriage the implications grow with time. Your life now matters in a much larger struggle when joined to Jesus Christ and his followers across the ages.

There is a witness to be made, an alternative way of life to be announced, a Savior to be followed, a world to serve, and it will be costly because of all the resistant forces arrayed against us and let loose in our own hearts, so never underestimate what you are up against without and within. The final benefit of being a follower of Jesus is not this or that blessing but his company and companionship, and that is what the forty martyrs of Sebaste did not wish to surrender. Better to freeze to death in a single night than die the death of a thousand compromises across a lifetime. "It's just a bit of incense before a lifeless statue of a man in Rome, an empty political ritual." "No. It's a false statement about who God is, and we will not participate in a lie." For us in different circumstances, ours is not a martyrdom all at once but a faithful witness every day, less dramatic but just as valuable. We do not choose the terms of our living and our dying; he does, and the thousand dollars of our lives will not be spent in one heroic gesture but a quarter at a time in our little corner of the world, our duty station, our outpost of God's kingdom.

The forty had heroic faith; we must have great faithfulness. Theirs was a blazing sprint, ours a long marathon. And this is what the whole of this passage from Luke is about: how to see clearly and how to stay faithful and how to remember God's intimate care, how to have courage and not crumple under the complex pressures of this world from which we are never separated as long as we live. There are sober warnings here of a hell to be avoided as well as great promises of aid from the Holy Spirit when the chips are down and we don't know what to say. The stakes are high; your life is on the line every day.

You have no doubt seen the war movies where a commander gives his troops a final briefing and epic charge before the battle commences, and that is precisely the tone of this passage. Go back and watch *The Longest Day* or *Saving Private Ryan* or *Brave Heart* with the blue face paint. Listen as I do from time to time to the war speeches of Winston Churchill- especially June 4, 1940 after Dunkirk- where he took the English language and marched it off to war.⁴ But it's not about not-being-afraid because that's impossible when life is at stake. It's about fearing and reverencing the

⁴ See the speech at www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lIT2ZYg-4E.

God who knows all about us, and have we not as a nation- an perhaps even more sadly as a church- lost the fear of God and spend all our energies trying to keep people happy and coddled? It wasn't me who said it to frighten you. It was Jesus who instructed us in fear rightly placed, "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear him!"

I never want to lose or forfeit the protective grace of the fear of God: that God is just and holy, that nothing about me is a surprise, that I am loved more deeply and fiercely than I know, that the decreasing count of hairs upon on my head are all numbered, that life is a prelude to a truth-telling judgment when all I have thought or done will be laid bare in the great sorting-out, that Jesus Christ and his Spirit and his people are enough for me to remain faithful, and that is not a safe thing to be embarrassed about claiming to be his follower, as he himself said so plainly, "...but he who denies me before men shall be denied before the angels of God." Why? Because not to name him is treason to his cause. So when I feel myself growing slack and sloppy and slothful and no-count and sorry, I sometimes get on my knees and as an antidote say over and over out loud, "I fear you, Lord," until my sleepy heart rouses and I am again sobered and alert. Respect, reverence, honor, awe and obedience are owed to God, and when we forget these, it is not God who is diminished but us because we literally lose touch with reality. I hate to admit this because it sounds nutty, but there are times- though not many- when I have slapped myself hard in the face and shouted, "Wake up, you idiot!" Awareness of a holy God who is to be feared is a great grace. To forget such a God is a downward slide, and we are already far down the slope.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

The Ugly Truth About Popularity (vv.1-3)

Jesus knew that acclaim is overrated and that the crowds who cheer one day may turn on you the next. Verse 1 tells us the mob around Jesus, literally tens of thousands, was as rowdy and out of control as a rock concert, "In the meantime, when so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together *that they trod upon one another....*" Here was a man who healed the sick, freed the tormented, and spoke with such simplicity and authority that people were riveted by his fresh vision of what God was doing through him at ground level. They wondered if he was the Messiah and looking for troops beyond his twelve officers.

Sick people and the curious were getting trampled to get near Jesus, and he was not a bit impressed. In fact, it was at this moment of maximum star appeal that he pulled his close friends aside give them a little advice, “Ladies and gentlemen, if popularity, if keeping and holding a crowd is what you’re after, it will make you a hypocrite.” It’s like yeast, hidden and powerful, able to take over and change a hole lump of dough so that it’s all puffed up. The Pharisees were concerned about looking good and getting all the rituals and rules right. They looked good outside but were rotten within.⁵ Jesus knew differently. What’s outside is not nearly as important as what’s inside. God sees the heart, so live your life before Jesus and not the crowds. Let him rule, then let your light shine! Live before an audience of One, then if notoriety comes, it won’t twist you out of shape. Being a people-pleaser rather than a God-pleaser, another name for which is playing to the wrong audience, is a path to having your public image and private reality wedged apart, which is what hypocrisy is all about, being two who are split instead of one with integrity. And the wider the gap, the harder the fall, especially with preachers and politicians. We all have a hypocrisy gap; the goal is to keep it as narrow as possible through a relationship with the Lord who keeps the gap closely monitored and send us regular Tweets if we’re paying attention to his still, small voice.

A hypocrite, someone who’s more concerned about opinion polls than who they are within, can’t do that. They have no light to shine. They have to hide who they are, because down deep it’s ugly and gnarled and dark. And the day is coming, said Jesus, when hypocrisy and its games of hiding won’t work any more. Why? Because God’s going to shine light in every dark corner. You thought no one was listening or watching in the dark or the private room, but our all-knowing omniscient God was. Verse 2: “Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” All the sin and evil and crud people have been stuffing down and keeping out of the public eye will be paraded before the angels. There is no privacy with God. On that day when all is exposed; many will see their lives as a sham and themselves as the devil’s dupes. And because you don’t want to be one of them, let the inside you and the outside you be formed into one transparent person over time. Let Christ shine out from your heart and bring the rest of life into proper alignment. Whenever you are secretly tempted to do something wrong, remind yourself, “Is this something I want the whole world to watch on God’s Jumbo-Tron in instant replay?” It will help keep you straight. I frankly don’t want to end life as an embarrassment. In the end I’ve only got one plea, “May the blood of Jesus Christ,

⁵ 11:37-54.

freely shed for sinners like me, be alone enough.” Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling; O Lamb of God, I come. That’s my plan: believe it, offer it to others, live it with God’s help, count on it at the end when my little life is ended. I encourage you not to bring your resume to that final appointment; God will laugh.

Getting Your Fears In Right Order (vv.4-7)

Richard Halverson, former chaplain to the U.S. Senate, wrote these wise words, “Men (and women) who fear God face life fearlessly. Those who do not fear God end up fearing everything.”⁶

I remember a Tuesday night in Charleston. The chief chaplain for SLED called and asked me to come to the State Ports Authority where there would be nearly four hundred Charleston City Police, Highway Patrol Officers and SLED agents in riot gear to guard a ship against another outbreak of violence. He wanted some extra chaplains as peacemakers and asked if I had a bullet proof vest! I was anxious but I went to avoid being thought a coward. I was frightened the first time I preached a sermon and the first time I was with someone when they died. I was frightened the first time I heard a prison door slam closed behind me and was locked in a room with twenty criminals for a Bible study. I was frightened the first time I made a death notification in the North Charleston ghetto and told a momma that her seventeen year old son had been killed in a drug deal. I was frightened when I emceed a banquet in Texas for four hundred and asked them for a million dollars for world missions. I was frightened the first time I went through Moscow airport in 1993 carrying \$5000.00 in a secret money belt to buy Bibles in Kazakhstan. I have a touch of fear early every Sunday morning when no one is here and I ask, “Lord, what do you want to do with your people today?”

But I have, in the midst of fears, found God both knows and is bigger than all my fears. Fear is that place where my faith hasn’t been yet; it’s the growing edge of doubt and uncertainty; fear is the emotional form ignorance takes in my heart, and I hear God’s voice calling to me, “Fear not! Step out. I am already here ahead of you, just beyond sight.” One thing is certain about fear; if you let it control you it will make your life little, give you a constricted instead of a broad life. Faith is the conviction that God is Lord of the areas beyond my comfort zone. Following Jesus is not about playing it safe. Author Annie Dillard points to the “enormous temptation

⁶ Albert M. Wells, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 73.

in all of life to diddle around making itsy-bitsy friends and meals and journeys for itsy-bitsy years on end.” The trouble with that, says Dillard, is that God and “the world is wider than that in all directions, more dangerous and more bitter, more extravagant and bright. We are making hay when we should be making whoppee; we are raising tomatoes when we should be raising Cain, or Lazarus.”⁷

So young men and women, and not so young men and women like myself, and older men and women like some of you whiteheads and baldheads, listen up. Get your fears in the right priority. Don’t fear people, said Jesus. Don’t fear those who don’t like or don’t understand why Jesus is important and why his opinion outweighs all others. All they can do- if they do their worst- is kill you, and then you go to heaven to await the end of the age! To his closest friends to whom he would soon entrust the church, Jesus said, “Gentleman, get your fears in the right order. Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that there is no more that they can do.”

There are a lot worse things that can happen than die for your faith, as martyrs do even today. You could live a trivial, self-serving, petty, stupid, small, no-count life of endless TV and pop culture that will turn your brain to mush and your spine to silly putty. You could miss your destiny. The horror of Hell is real; it’s the high price people pay for saying a persistent and consistent No to God’s love shown to us in Jesus Christ; it is permanent separation from God and all that is good. God has arrangements for those who do not want to live in a life-giving kingdom of Trinitarian love and who have not developed a taste for it in this life. You will never be free of fears, but you can learn to *fear God* and to *respect God* and to *listen to God* and to *obey God* and to *love God* at such depth that all the other fears will not keep you from the destiny for which you were made. God only made one of you; don’t waste it. To fear God is not to live in quivering timidity; it’s to live with the courage of your convictions before a world that establishes its beliefs by weekly opinion polls and the latest trends. The way to conquer fears is not by denying them but by getting them in right order, and here is the order Jesus recommends, verse 5: “But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, *fear him*.” Only if you fear God above all will you be able to live with enough courage to stare down all the little fears that nip at your heels and steal into your heart to turn you into a quivering blob of cowardice, and I do not want to be such.

You will laugh when I tell you this, but as a chubby ten year old with a bad

⁷ James Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1988), 492.

crewcut and a disobedient cowlick in front I was once in a Cub Scout Blue-and Gold banquet about the knights of King Arthur's round table. It was my acting debut. We took big round ice cream containers, the kind they have at ice cream stores, scrubbed them out, cut two eye slits, added cardboard visors, painted them silver, and made them into helmets. Our shields were also of cardboard, painted gold with heraldic crests and our broadswords plastic. I was *Sir Phillip the Fearless* and my comrades *Sir David the Daring* and *Sir Christopher the Courageous*. We slew dragons, rescued fair maidens, defended the poor and needy, and gave honor to our king as we ate (without manners!) at his great round table with great goblets of sparkling mead (actually Canada Dry ginger ale!). I remember it for three reasons: it was unbearably corny, the inside of my helmet smelled like stale chocolate ice cream, and it touched something deep in my heart, a dream that lay dormant for years until Jesus Christ reawakened it on July 5, 1972 when I surrendered my life after a great wound.

After my first trip to Russia and Kazakhstan in 1993 I visited old friend who was sick, Mrs. Katherine Tomlin, who'd been a member of one of my first country churches. She'd heard of my trip and in my absence wrote a poem. I went to pray with her, and knighted me with her words. She titled it *Semper Intrepid*:

"I have a friend, Phil is his name, Who crosses the world in aeroplanes,
Seeking neither fortune nor earthly fame.
His mission is one of saving souls, He risks his neck to gain his goal,
With abandon he gives himself full fold. *Semper Intrepid*."

When she quoted it to me the first time I was suddenly ten years old again with my ice cream helmet and plastic sword. *Semper Intrepid* is now my private motto and aspiration, and when I'm fearful or discouraged I say the Latin words to myself and remember that my king is not Arthur but Jesus and I sit at his round table waiting assignments. My prayer is that God will plant a dream in your heart, something bigger than you'd claim for yourself, something worth living for beyond making money and becoming boringly practical. Jesus wants you as a friend and co-worker in God's kingdom, and I cannot promise anything but his constant companionship.

Getting your fears in proper order is a start. The second antidote is the deep knowledge of how valuable you are to God. If not a single tiny worthless sparrow is forgotten, and if God knows the exact number of hairs on your head, and if Jesus had been speaking in our terms he'd have added that God knows your unique fingerprint and the exact sequence of all the amino acids in your DNA, then you are valued by

the only one whose opinion finally counts. As science presses past the known into the unknown, the depth of Jesus' claim increases.

The human genome that Francis Collins and his team cracked is packed with at least four million gene switches that reside in bits of DNA. For years, scientists thought many of these bits were useless. In the 1970s, Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of DNA's structure, suspected it was "little better than junk," and the phrase *junk DNA* has haunted genetics ever since. In the early 2000s, scientists still believed that perhaps 97 percent of what's called *the sequence of bases* had no apparent function. But in September 2012 a team of 440 scientists from 32 labs round the world made a startling discovery: *Junk DNA* isn't. It's a complex system that controls genes. Thus far they've determined that 80 percent of this DNA is active and needed. *Junk* is now a *hidden treasure* that plays a critical role in controlling how cells, organs, and other tissues behave.⁸ God know every sparrow, the hairs on your head, the ridges and valleys of your fingerprints; God made you, and God don't make no junk, not even at the DNA level. You are known in fearful detail; you are loved, and while life may hurt us, with God it cannot permanently do us harm. So fear and love God, follow Jesus Christ with others, and do not live in anxiety over self-preservation; however and whenever you die, the Lord will welcome you. Love without the respect of fear grows sloppy and presumptuous; fear without the magnetism of love is cowering and craven, but together they are strong. Love is a form of awe, and awe is the twin of fear. If God never thrills and scares you at the same time, you may be dealing with some lesser deity of your own creation.

A Warning And A Promise (vv.8-11)

I am to officially notify you of an appointment. Of all the things we think important, only one will matter, and here is the question ahead of time: Did you openly confess your loyalty to Jesus Christ in front of others, particularly those who didn't like it? The whole of humanity will finally be sorted out according to what Jesus Christ thinks of them. Of some he will say to the Father, "This is one of mine," and of others, "This is not one of mine. They were embarrassed about me." Sheep and goats, saved and lost, blessed and damned, right and left hand, however you name the two groups, there will be in the end only two camps: verses 8 and 9, "And I tell you,

⁸ Gina Kolata, "Bits of Mystery DNA, Far From 'Junk,' Play Crucial Role," *The New York Times* (9-5-12); Stephen S. Hall, "Hidden Treasures in Junk DNA," *Scientific American* (9-18-12).

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every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man will also acknowledge before the angels of God; but the who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” Don’t worry about those who’ve never heard; God will find a way to make the same offer to all. No one is lost on fine print or ignorance. Follow the grace you’re given and more will come. Reject the grace given and the lights begin to dim. Repeat the rejection often enough and you grow blind. We have an appointment, and this is the standard if Jesus is who we claim him to be. If not, it won’t matter and the church will be shown to be history’s biggest fraud.

Now when many of our people hear such teaching about judgment, they say things like, “That’s Baptist.” Yes, but also United Methodist because the New Testament is full of it. I call it *the doctrine of the two piles*: the saves and the culls, just like sorting peaches over in Johnston. It’s in our Confession of Faith which we inherited in 1968 from the EUB’s, and it’s sobering. Our lives are under constant inspection with more than enough resources offered, and in the end a sorting out:

~~Article XII The Judgment of the Future State~~ We believe in (and women) and under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation.”⁹

John Steinbeck in his *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*, writes of a sermon he heard at a church in New England:

“It had been long since I had heard such a good approach. It is our practice now, at least in the large cities, to find from our psychiatric priesthood that our sins aren't really sins at all but accidents that are set in motion by forces beyond our control. There was no nonsense in this church. The minister... reassured us that we were a pretty sorry lot. And he was right. Having softened us up, he went into a glorious sermon, a fire-and-brimstone sermon.... He spoke of hell as an expert, not the mush-mush hell of these soft days, but a well-stoked, white-hot hell served by technicians of the first order.”¹⁰

⁹ BOD 2012, 74.

¹⁰ *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1961), 78.

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When you hear of such and laugh with your sophisticate associates, be aware you're mocking one of Jesus' clearest teachings, one he often repeated to warn us it was not a place you want to go, not ever, not even for a moment.

I received a Facebook post from Steinbeck's granddaughter on Thursday. Her life's not been an easy one; we helped her get off heroin and find Christ in Charleston in the mid 1990's. Jesus was the only medicine strong enough to heal her soul. There was a time when like many of you I envied the famous because of their privileges. But after hearing my friend's stories of the inside workings of one famous american family, I saw how wrong was my judgment and how much better my boring little life of faith and marriage. Today she works with other addicts, and her husband bakes the communion bread for First Scotts Church. The well-known need Jesus, and particularly their non-famous offspring under whose shadow and in whose vices they often dwell. Jesus is for the well-known and the unknown. My father once treated a patient who was famous in my childhood mind. I was curious about this person and my interest was apparent, but not with my father who looked me in the eye and delivered an unforgettable line, "Son, when naked and sick they're all the same."

There is only one way to avoid being a religious hypocrite, and that's to be unashamed about Jesus and ask for help to live it out every day from the heart. Once you deny Christ, once you choose silence and make it a habit out of fear, it gets harder and harder to regain your confidence. Your conscience condemns you. And to make a habit of it, says Jesus, is to risk a sin beyond forgiveness.¹¹ Not that God is not willing but that you've become so hardened to him and so impressed with the opinions of others. So when God nudges you to speak about Christ, do it! When a person needs a word of hope, give it. You don't have to know all the answers or be able to answer all the objections. Just tell what's he's done for you. As the old

¹¹ Verse 10b is admittedly a disputed verse. Four options are possible: 1) Claiming that Jesus has come from Satan (Lk. 11:14-20), 2) Renouncing Jesus because of persecution, i.e. apostasy, 3) Rejecting the preaching of the apostles, and 4) Persistently rejecting the message of the gospel. Of these four, No. 2 makes most sense in this context, so Charles Talbert, "The disciples, who are the evangelist's primary concern here, would be rejecting the Spirit's inspiration when, required to testify before persecutors, the would, in direct opposition to the Spirit's influence, deny Christ (vv.11-12; cf. 21:14-15; Acts 4:8, 19-20; 5:30). By denying Christ the disciples deny the Holy Spirit within and blaspheme the only one who can mediate God's forgiveness (*Reading Luke* [New York, NY: Crossroads, 1984], 201).

spiritual says, “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.” We never make our witness alone; we always have a divine helper when our mouth is dry and our insides shaking: verse 12, “for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” God will give you the words, if you open your mouth.

I love the story of the little boy who returned home after his first trip to Sunday School. His mother asked, “Who was your teacher?”

“I don’t remember her name, but she must have been Jesus’ grandmother.”

“What do you mean?” asked the mother.

“Well,” he replied, “she didn’t talk about anyone else. She must be his grandmother.”¹²

Friends, ever be ashamed of Jesus or your links with his people. Speak about him whenever you have opportunity. Then you can approach your appointment with confidence and not fear, and Jesus will say of you, “This is one of mine.”

CONCLUSION

She was a seventeen year old junior at Columbine High School outside Denver, the Class of 2000. After a time of rebellion and dabbling in the occult, she’d come back to Christ with the help of a church youth group and some tough love from her parents. One day two rampaging classmates came into her school with guns. They asked if she believed in God. *She said Yes*, and was killed. Her name was Cassie Bernall, and there’s no telling how many young people have come to Jesus Christ because of her story. The day of the martyrs is not over. We are all to be faithful and courageous witnesses. How else will the world hear except from us? When is the last time you used his name with love and devotion? It is the most powerful and offensive and jolting and loving name in all creation, and only two syllables: Jesus. And when you speak it in witness and love, the angels are nearby to help.

¹² Hewett, *Illustrations*, 490.
