

Title: Pursuing the cure
Text: Luke 12.1-7
Theme: Love for God is the cure for hypocrisy
Series: Luke
Prop Stmtnt: Fearing God

Luke was a doctor who knew many of the apostles and traveled with some of them. He wrote the books of Luke and Acts *“that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”* I’ve conducted the research. I’ve investigated the stories. I’ve interviewed the participants and witnesses. I’ve seen the evidence. I’ve written it all down. Here it is. You can believe this. In fact, you must. In telling us the story of Jesus, Luke describes the confrontations Jesus had with the Pharisees, who were, for the most part, religious hypocrites. They exerted social and religious control on the nation. Jesus was a threat to them.

Later, when Luke wrote the book of Acts, he describes how the early church had to deal with hypocrites. There weren’t many, but they were there. Wherever the message of Christ and his gospel go, inevitably the problem of hypocrisy arises. Hypocrisy is the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs that one’s life doesn’t really conform to. It is, living a lie. It goes back to Cain, who went through the motions of a religious sacrifice and God called him out on it. Like the Pharisees, thousands of years later, Cain responded to the exposure with anger and murder. Hypocrisy is not new. We are tempted to imitate that which has real or perceived value.

It was the end of 2008. Lehman Brothers was going under, Washington Mutual and a couple of dozen other banks had failed. 140 more banks would fail in 2009. GM would declare bankruptcy, as would Chrysler. The stock market was imploding, as people were withdrawing their funds. One investment firm was particularly nervous. On paper, this firm was worth billions of dollars but in reality, there was only \$300 million in the bank. Bernie Madoff built, what appeared to be one of the most successful investment firms of all time, but it was a lie. At the firm’s Christmas party, Bernie’s sons confronted their dad who later that night privately confessed to them, “I’m running a Ponzi scheme and we’re out of money.” The fallout was bad because many people entrusted their life’s savings to Bernie. But there are worse things and religious hypocrisy is one of them.

There are some religions, that like a Ponzi scheme are built on a lie. I was talking with some followers of the Mormon religion. Their beliefs come from, in part, the book of Mormon, that was supposedly an English translation by Joseph Smith of “reformed Egyptian” given to him by the Angel Moroni on golden plates. I asked these guys if they had ever seen the golden plates. They had not. They didn’t because they don’t exist. They were supposedly buried by the angel in a cave in a hill called Cumorah outside of Palmyra, NY. However, the hill does not appear to have any caves. The very heart of the Mormon religion is hollow and yet people are asked to bank their souls on its teachings. That is worse than a financial Ponzi scheme. When a Mormon realizes they have been lied to, and they leave that religion, they have at least discovered some truth. Mormonism is not worth believing. But there is something worse.

Genuine Christianity is built upon the person and the work of Jesus Christ. He is the very heart of our faith. Jesus Christ is the highest treasure and the greatest worth. We worship him. That is, we ascribe worth to him because he is worth everything. Since Jesus is worth everything, we can see why it would be tempting for people to pretend to imitate being close to him or representing him. Only Jesus can offer you eternal life. If you alone possessed the power to give people eternal life, do you realize the power you would have? People would kill to get that. So, we should expect hypocrisy to be a constant issue within genuine Christianity.

It makes a lot of sense then when there is a lot of attention given to this issue in the NT. Just as Israel had religious hypocrites who distorted the Word of God that had been revealed up until that point, the church has suffered at the hands of religious hypocrites who either distort the words of God, or they obscure them by their inconsistent lives. Beloved, the hard news is that this is always something that we have to address. The good news is that we can.

Read Text:

"In the meantime..." The reputation of Christ is spreading and thousands of people were gathering in order to hear Christ, be healed by him and just be near him. This appears to be the Pharisees' nightmare coming true. Chapter 11 concluded by saying that the scribes and Pharisees ramped up their efforts to trap Christ, or trip him up in some way. If they can get him to say something, even out of context, they will use it in an effort to destroy him. But they are losing the battle. Hypocrites can stay in power if they can control the flow of information. Now with thousands gathering, panic is setting in on the Pharisees.

Large crowds create momentum and excitement. This appears to be the very thing that Jesus would want. However, Jesus does not give priority to the crowds. *"He began to say to his disciples first..."* Addressing them and helping them think clearly in the midst of all of this excitement, drama and momentum was the most important thing. Jesus is not impressed with the large crowd. He knows that it will be a very small number of faithful who will be near him at the cross.

You are a coach. Your team is about to take the field, floor or rink for a championship game. In the locker room you hear the roar of the crowd and your players are feeling the pressure. Part of your job is to keep them grounded. You do that by reminding them of what really matters and warning them about what doesn't. Don't let the crowd play you. Don't let others sway you. Don't let popular opinion intimidate you so that you pretend to be something that you are not.

1. **The Warning of hypocrisy** (1-3)

And this is a warning. Beware. Be on your guard. Left unattended, hypocrisy will spread like leaven in dough, or disease in a body. Once you start pretending in order to cover something up, you have to keep doing it and doing it. People like that influence others who can help them in the cover up. Jesus warns the disciples not to let that begin among them. This is not what following Jesus looks like.

A. Be warned because God knows everything. (2)

God knows everything and everything will be revealed. Romans 2.16 says, *"God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."* Peter Falk used to play the detective Columbo. When he was questioning a suspect and had identified an inconsistency in the suspects alibi, Columbo would start to walk away and then turn around and say his trademark line, *"Just one more thing."* You knew right then that he was about to blow the lid off and expose it all.

God does not have to investigate in order to find the truth. He knows it all. He knows everything. God is omniscient. This warning is intended to prevent you from doing anything that you think you can do and cover up. You cannot. *"Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed...."* But wait, have you ever done something and appeared to have gotten away with it? Or are you aware that others have done things and it looks like they never got caught? You won't and they won't. God allows many things to be caught in this life so that people can repent. But all things will be revealed when we stand before God and then repentance will be too late. If you are hiding your sin, let this bring you to confession. Related to this ...

B. Be warned because God is everywhere. (3)

God is omniscient and God is omnipresent. He is everywhere at the same time. He knows it all because he sees it all. He is in the private room and heard what you whispered. Your private sins, unconfessed will be revealed. Ask David. But do you see how this warning is actually a mercy? David's sin was uncovered and it gave him the opportunity to repent. We may be tempted to think that if someone gets away with something that they never faced their day in court. Not true! Criminals who commit suicide may appear to rob the victims or the families of the victims, the opportunity for justice. Not so! The benefit of man's court is to be a preview of God's court. Sadly, the Pharisees were the court in their day. Jesus exposes the fact that the courts are corrupt and is warning them even as he warns the disciples, everything will be heard and these corrupt religious judges who think they are judging Jesus will be judged. Don't let what they do as religious leaders set a pattern for you. We do not live like that.

I love how Jesus so perfectly practices what he preaches, or models the very truths he teaches. What he said in private (in the dinner) is what he says in public, again. The gathering of thousands does not "change" Jesus. He doesn't care about your popularity, or his, in that sense. He cares about your integrity. Your real life is not what you project or post or pretend before others. Your real life is you and God. When you and God are on the same page meaning your relationship with him is good and true, then life is good and true. Your worth is not determined by what others believe about you but what God knows about you. Do you see the blessing of that? Many of you are faithful, consistent, caring people. You have experienced slights, and inequities. God's omniscience and omnipresence means, he knows it all and sees it all. Your faithfulness will be worth it. He will reward that.

Is your life characterized by covering up or being honest? Are you a loner? Why? What are you fearful of? Do you play to the crowd, or do you really care about people? Are you the main character in your play, or is your life centered on Christ?

2. The Cure for hypocrisy (4-7)

Note from v.2: Live open before the God who is open with you.

A. **Know who to fear and who not to. (4-5)**

Soren Kierkegaard said, *"The tyrant dies and his rule is over, the martyr dies and his rule begins."* Remember these words? "When this poor lisping, stammering tongue, lies silent in the grave, then in a nobler, sweeter song, I'll sing thy power to save." This body is mortal, corruptible and perishable. It will die and it will decompose. Many in our history have been martyred because of their confession of Christ and their refusal to renounce their allegiance to him. Beginning with Stephen, then James, most of the early disciples and many in the early church died for the faith. Jesus said, "do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do." What's the worst that can happen to you? You die.

Let's say that you are in your car on your way to a dock in Florida because you are going on a cruise with your family. You have been looking forward to this trip for a very long time. However, on your way, there is an incident that has the road shut down and so you frantically try to find another route around the problem. You punch the address in to your app and guess what? You not only find a road, but it's a short-cut that will get you there even faster than you thought. Are you frustrated now? Probably not. You are probably delighted.

That, my beloved, is a good way to think about our deaths. Our life to come with Christ is beyond anything we can grasp. The very best of the things in life that we experience now, family, reunions, vacations, dinners, holidays, celebrations, birthdays, hiking, and of course, church, yes, is a dim shadow of the brilliance and beauty of the life that is coming. We love our lives that God has given us and our family and friends, but even these are a shadow of what is in store for us. If God would hasten your journey through an early or untimely death, or even through martyrdom, this is like a shortcut to the cruise.

The fear of man is a complete waste of time. What can man do? He can only, if God permits, kill you, but he cannot touch your soul. And I say, if God permits, because as Jesus indicates here in v.4, some of his followers will face persecution and death as a price for following him. Jesus is letting us know that we do not need to fear that. I commend to you the reading of the stories of those who have died for the cause of Christ. As a child I knew the story of Polycarp who in the middle of the 2nd century was arrested and taken to the Colosseum where the local proconsul tried to get him to avoid death by just denying Christ. You know, it's only words, sort of thing. Polycarp said, *"For eighty and six years I have been his (Christ) servant, and he has done me no wrong. And how can I now blaspheme my king who saved me?"* When the proconsul threatened this old man with death by lions or fire, Polycarp said, *"You threaten me with fire which burns*

for an hour at most; you must know about the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. Why are you wasting time? Kill me in whatever way you see fit." Polycarp perfectly reflects this text. He fears God and not man and thus man has no real power of over him. The worst that man could do is give him a shortcut to the cruise.

All earthly judges are under the ultimate Judge. All earthly kings are under the ultimate King. All earthly authorities are temporary and give an account to the final and eternal authority. We fear him. Yes, we fear him. Oh we love him, but our love is not silly and sentimental. We have a deep awe of his holiness an awareness of his glorious righteousness, and unbounded power. We respect the power of God even as we are humbled by how he chose to pour out his wrath against our sin, in the death of his Son. Our awesome God knows everything and will expose everything that we hide. If you really know that and you really believe that, it will rightly rid you of hypocrisy.

In the anticipated sequel to Dead Reckoning, part 1, agent Ethan Hunt is on another mission impossible, this time to destroy the Entity, which is a powerful AI system that has hacked into all computer systems and therefore knows everything about everyone, to the degree that your life is on-line. It knows where you are and can anticipate what you will do before you do it. The story line is scary plausible and makes you want to destroy all of your social media. We could only hope. God is the ultimate entity. He knows everything. That alone would be terrifying but there is more to know. This God who knows everything, loves you. If you and I had a reasonable idea of how much our all-powerful God loves us, the temptation of hypocrisy would have no appeal. Why would I be tempted to cover up anything, when there is a God who loves me and died for me and forgives me and restores me and embraces me and believes in me and will live with me?

B. Know who loves you and who to love. (6-7)

Sparrows are insignificant and cheap birds. If you are a weekly reader of my blog, you know that I have some bird feeders. I was in a bird store one day where the sales person was trying to sell me the expensive food because it catered to the discerning palate of the more uncommon birds, not like sparrows. In other words, if I wanted to attract the pretty birds, I need to buy pretty bird seed. I'm a bit cheap, and I thought, Jesus loves sparrows, so I'll stick with the common stuff. In the city markets, sparrows would have been the cheapest thing sold. Five sparrows for 2 pennies. That's pretty cheap and yet, not one of them is forgotten before God! God knows about the sparrows and cares about them. And you? He knows your life in detail. He knows the number of hairs on your head. Is that really all that important? No, but that's the point. If he knows the insignificant facts, then beloved, he certainly knows the important stuff. Therefore, "fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows." Your God loves you.

4 audiences:

- 1) Those tempted to hide.

We are all tempted to give in or give up in part because we are tempted to believe a lie that what we do doesn't matter or what we do won't be known. Living with the fear of what you covered up will be found out is never worth it, but living with the knowledge that you are loved by God and that you value that love so much that you are willing to address your temptations and fight.

2) Those who are still hiding

What you are hiding will seek to steal everything it can from you; your sleep, your conscience, your concentration, your joy, your health, your relationships, your time, your money and the trust of others. If you will confess your sin, you have a merciful God who sent Christ to forgive you and save you. He will embrace you. Believe him!

3) Those who are staying the course

God knows even if others get more applause than you do. Even the hairs of your head are numbered, how much more every act of faith, every prayer, every endurance and perseverance through trial.

4) Those who have yet to believe

There is no hiding from God, but there is a refuge in God where you can hide and be found.