



JESUS AND FEAR

Part 52 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 12:1-12 | October 31, 2010

Luke 12:1-12

¹ In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³ Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

⁴ “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷ Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

⁸ “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, ⁹ but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. ¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. ¹¹ And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

ANNOUNCEMENTS

My name is Mark, one of the pastors here at the church, and I do have a few announcements for you.

First announcement, I'm going to be leading a trip to the nation of Turkey. It'll be coming up July 18–24 this summer. The reason I'm leading a tour there is I actually really love this country and the sites I'll be taking you to. My family and I had the privilege of going to Greece, Israel, and Turkey a little over a year ago and briefly hit a few sites in Turkey and said, “I need to go back.” So I went back with a team in November and loved it. Of all the places I've ever been, to be honest with you, Turkey is my favorite. And I liked it even more than Israel because it is not touristy, the sites are wide open, the countryside is beautiful, and a lot of the places mentioned in the Bible are in modern day Turkey. This includes places that Paul ministered to and from, as well as the first few chapters of Revelation. A lot of what is modern day Turkey was historically the place where the gospel initially spread.

So I'm going to be leading a tour and here are the details. You're welcome to pick up a flyer on your way out or visit at marshillchurch.org/turkey.

We're going to go to Izmir, Pergamum, Thyatira, Philadelphia, Sardis, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Kusadasi, and then we're going to end in Ephesus, which is epic. This is a city that, in its day, had a quarter of a million people, the temple of Diana, one of the seven great wonders of the world. Paul worked from there for a few years, Timothy was there, Luke's grave is still there, the guy we're studying the book of the Bible of, you can actually go to his tomb. It is silly awesome. And it is one of the most significant archaeological digs and finds in the history of the world. Mark Antony, Cleopatra were there. It's amazing, they've excavated the twenty-plus-thousand-seat amphitheater in which Paul preached and incited a riot.

We're going to show it all to you and I thought it would be cool if we could just have Ephesus to ourselves, to wander around, investigate, maybe have dinner and a sermon, so we rented the whole city of Ephesus. Why not? If you're going to do it, do it big. That's what we like to say at Mars Hill. So, we've got the whole city of Ephesus to ourselves. And I'll be teaching along the way at various places. We'll bring the film crew with us. We'll capture some footage. We'll also capture some sermons and this will be part of the preaching series in 2012 where we're going to go through the whole book of Ephesians and also going to go through the seven churches of Revelation. There's an add-on to the tour as well, where we'll take you to Istanbul, Turkey. You can see the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque. You can go to the Grand Bazaar, the spice market, pretty fantastic.

There are two informational meetings that are forthcoming. November 2 at the Ballard Campus, November 3 at the Bellevue Campus, and you're welcome to come. At that meeting I'll show you some slides and footage and answer your questions, and the head of the tour will also answer logistics questions.

Secondly, I gave you a letter today. You should have obtained it on your way in. If not, please feel free to get one on your way out. It's a little letter from me, kind of a good news report, where we're going, what we're doing. What church experts will tell you is that, as a church grows and it hits certain sizes, it needs certain adjustments, not unlike when you buy a car. You buy a car, they tell you at forty thousand miles, you're going to need new

tires. And at sixty thousand miles, you're going to need a tune-up. And at a hundred thousand miles, you're going to need to overhaul a lot of the systems. And lo and behold, right around that mileage that's exactly what happens. It's kind of like that with a church. As a church matures, ages, grows, there are a few alterations, adjustments that need to get made along the way.

October marks the fourteenth-year anniversary of Mars Hill, so Mars Hill recently turned fourteen and I recently turned forty, so the church is young and I am old. And that's where we find ourselves this month. And so what I've been doing is handing off a lot of my responsibilities. Our church planting network, Acts 29, is now fully overseen by Pastor Scott Thomas. The Resurgence, our training network, is fully overseen by Pastor Justin Holcomb. And I have centralized and focused a lot more of my energy just to make sure that Mars Hill doesn't get neglected and overlooked because, to be honest with you, I'm as happy as I've ever been. I'm totally thrilled with what God is doing. I love this church and I don't feel like we're done. I feel like we got a lot left to do and God has a lot left for us to pursue. But we are at that point at about ten thousand people a Sunday, spread across our nine campuses, two states, twenty-five services, 1,340 services this last year, over 1,600 services, roughly, we'll have this year by God's grace. So it's a big, complex situation.

And so I visited all of the campuses, met with the campus pastors, the elders, community group leaders, hundreds of hours of work. Met with some of the pastors of the largest churches in America. Along the way, we got a nice award. We're the fifty-fourth largest and thirtieth fastest-growing church in America. That's out of four hundred thousand. And so God has been exceedingly gracious to us. And some of you say, "Is it all about the numbers?" Well, we want more people to know Jesus and have their life changed, so we would like that number to go up. And what we want to do is prepare for that, just like when a mother gets pregnant, the first thing she asks the doctor is, "How many?" Because if she's having quadruplets, that's different than one and she just needs to be prepared, all right? There's a lot of car seats and bottles and details to tend to. As a church we've, by God's grace, hit ten thousand. Okay, what's next? Who all might God be bringing? How can we prepare to love, welcome, serve them in this family we call Mars Hill?

So the details are in here, things we're working on, things to be praying for. A couple of big things, the hope and prayer is to build essentially a world-class band development and worship leader's school. We have 1,300 services. The need for bands is continuous and we've been doing that decently. I think we can do that excellently.

Kid's ministry, you'll see some upgrades and we'll be explaining that to you in forthcoming months. Want to upgrade the kid's ministry space. Also, we're working on a curriculum for kids that's age appropriate based on the *Doctrine* book, the same thing we use for membership, and also, it's not official, but we are working on a Mars Hill children's study Bible that's kind of Mars Hill, which means it will be dark and cool. So, a lot of good things there. We want to improve what we're doing for children and for kids in the next season.

We're raising up more campus pastors and pursuing new campuses, so the Bellevue Campus is opening a second location and opening a brand new facility next year that will accommodate a lot more seats. The Shoreline Campus is relocating into a bigger, nicer, better facility than we have had, so they can continue to grow. They'll be pushing up and next year launching Mars Hill Everett. It is official and I'll announce it today: Pastor Tim, our longstanding worship pastor for the last decade, will be moving with his wife Beth and their daughters to Portland. We will launch Mars Hill Portland by God's grace next year. [*Congregation applauding*] Hoo-rah. And we are working on Mars Hill Orange County after that, going to southern California. So, a lot going on. Other than that, it's all laziness and naps. We're busy, pray for your leaders.

And so what we like to do at the end of the year is have a big push financially to end the year strong, finish budget well, have some surplus to pursue these new opportunities, so in the ensuing weeks you will hear about the Generous Campaign and Pastor Jamie will kick it off next week with a book that I'm going to give you and explain to you and it just ties into the gospel of Luke. That being said, it's now sermon time.

JESUS AND FEAR

We are in Luke 12:1-12, Jesus and fear. What book of the Bible have we been in? Luke. What book of the Bible are we in? Luke. For the next eighteen months when I ask that question, you can answer, "Luke." We're taking two-and-a-half years going through Luke. Because we like the Bible and we thought, "What the heck? 'Two-and-a-half years looking at the life of Jesus? That's a good way to spend two-and-a-half years.'" Some of you called it your freshman year, two-and-a-half years. This is a much better way to spend two-and-a-half years. So, I'll pray, we'll study the Bible together.

Father God, you are great and you are helpful and you are holy and you are truthful, and as we open your word, Lord God, we want to come under its authority. We want to hear from you. We want to learn from Jesus. So Holy Spirit, please come and illuminate the Scriptures which you have inspired to be written, and empower us to live a life patterned after Jesus by the grace that you give. In his good name, amen.

RELIGIOUS BULLIES

All right, let me set it up. Throughout the course of Luke's telling of Jesus' life, one thing that is frequent are these series of conflicts between religious people and Jesus. It just keeps happening and it's going to happen again this week. And so this week I want us to learn from Jesus' conflict with religious people how to deal with bullies. And these are religious bullies that he is dealing with. They are called the Pharisees.

We read of them in Luke 12:1. "In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.'"

Now what we see here is that there is Jesus and a multitude of people who are trying to get to him to learn from him. The Bible says thousands of people. By definition, two thousand or more people is what constitutes a megachurch. Jesus is here a megachurch pastor. Thousands of people are coming and it's like they opened the gates to the Radiohead world tour first night. Everybody is running in and stepping and climbing over one another

to get to Jesus. He's exceedingly popular and this is in a day when the average town is forty, sixty, eighty, one hundred people. So to get thousands of people, that's a big deal. People are walking miles. Towns are emptying. People are venturing over rough terrain on foot for hours. This is a big deal.

And between Jesus and the multitudes are literally religious people, and they're getting in the way, prohibiting, inhibiting people getting to Jesus. It's always been that way. It remains that way. Until Jesus returns, it will be that way. Thousands of people need to get to Jesus and religious people make it tough.

And so Jesus is going to have a public conflict with the religious people. He's not going to pick the fight. He's also not going to lose it. They are going to pick a fight with him. And what we see is, number one, they are bullies. They're bullies. There's all kinds of bullies. You can have a bully who's a boss. You can have a bully who's a pastor. You can have a bully who's a coach. You can have a bully who's supposed to be a friend. You can have a bully who's a parent. I've even seen kids who are bullies, sometimes bullying one another, sometimes bullying their own parents.

I saw this recently at a restaurant, where the family was having dinner and the young child decided they didn't want to eat dinner, just dessert. And they looked around and they knew, "If I throw a fit, freak out, my parents will give me whatever I want." So that's exactly what they did. Blood-curdling scream, freaking out, total tantrum. The parents looked at the child in an effort to stave off their horrific embarrassment and said, "Just knock it off. I'll give you whatever you want." That's a little terrorist. That's what that is. That's a dessert-loving terrorist. This has turned into a hostage negotiation.

Bullies come in all sizes, shapes, and forms. Some bullies are mean and cruel and rude. Some are really sweet and nice. They smile and flirt with you and say nice things to you and encourage you while they push you around. Jesus here is dealing with a particular kind of bully. There are lots of kinds of bullies. He's dealing with religious bullies. They've been pushing people around and now they want to show up and they want to push Jesus around. They want to tell him what to do. They realize, "Thousands are following him, they're not following us. If we get him to follow us, then they will be following us as well."

Number two, Jesus says that these religious bullies are hypocrites, hypocrites. What's a hypocrite? Well, a hypocrite is someone who, according to the definition of the word in the original Greek text, they're wearing a mask, or they're like an actor playing a role. So if you look at religious people, say, "Well, they must love God. Look, they dress a certain way. They act a certain way. They speak a certain way. They're against all the sinful things and they seem very sincere and very committed and very devout." And Jesus says, "I know their heart and I can tell you they don't love me. They love control. They love piety. They love morality. They love religion, but they don't love me."

Now, Christians are often accused of being hypocrites and let me say a few things on this. Number one, some people who say they're Christians aren't. Some aren't, like if you asked these guys, "Do you believe in God, love God, worship God?" They'd say, "Yeah." But Jesus says they don't really know him or love him. Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven. Some will hear, 'Depart from me, I don't even know you. We don't have a relationship.'"

Number two, some Christians are hypocrites and a hypocrite is one who pretends they're something they're not. But that's not only Christians. Politicians do it, leaders do it, non-Christians do it. We give the presentation that we're holy and devout and pious and moral and good, and if you followed us around and looked at what we were doing, you would see some inconsistency.

Number three, most Christians aren't hypocrites because to be a Christian you have to confess and profess that you're a what? A sinner. So sometimes non-Christians will look at Christians and say, "Well, you're a hypocrite." "Why?" "Because you're sinning." "To become a Christian, I had to raise my hand as being a sinner. If being a Christian means you say you're a sinner, and I sin, that's not hypocrisy. I'm just being consistent. I said I was a sinner. I sin. That's not a hypocrite." By definition, a Christian is one who says, "I'm a sinner. Jesus died for me, that's how bad I am. I really need help. God, help me." That's a Christian.

Now, the hypocrite is the one who says, "You have a lot of sin, I don't have it. You struggle with it, I don't. I'll judge you, you can't judge me." And then you follow them around and you realize, "Hey, they're ripping people off and committing sexual sin and all the stuff they're telling everybody else not to do, and all of the stuff that they deny doing, that's the very thing they're doing."

These guys are bullies, pushing people around, and hypocrites, judging people for things that they're guilty of. Now here's how it works. Bullies use tactics, and these are religious bullies, but there's all kinds of bullies and the principles are consistent. And because we've been spending so much time with the Pharisees, and they will continue to show up throughout the remainder of the book until they murder Jesus, it's important for us to understand how they work. And I'm going to give you some of their tactics and tricks and how they're going to use all of these in this event with Jesus. And this is how bullies work in our life as well. And if you're a bully, you're probably familiar with some of these also.

Threatening with punishment, "If you do that, you will pay. If you don't do what I tell you to do, you will suffer. You're going to pay, you're going to hurt, it's going to cost you." Threat of punishment or withholding of reward.

Sometimes they seek to embarrass or humiliate. That's exactly what they're doing to Jesus. They're not pulling him aside, one on one, "Okay, Jesus, we disagree. Can we talk about this?" No, they're going to publicly shame him, humiliate him. They're going to pick a fight in front of this large crowd of thousands.

Also, they work through intimidation. Sometimes this is sheer force of personality, a little overwhelming. It can also be commanding and demanding, "I order you. I'm telling you. You need to." Bossing, bullying, shoving you around. Some people are just pushy and they're rude and they won't take no for an answer. They just keep pushing, they just keep demanding, they just keep inserting, and they wear you down. That's a bully.

Sometimes they're just inconsiderate. All they care about is themselves. They don't think of you, other people, it's all about them. They're the center and everybody needs to work around them. Sometimes bullies are just rude. The things they ask for, demand, how they always want to be a priority and get cuts in the line of your life, it's fascinating.

Also, some bullies are the self-appointed rule maker. In your life or in your family or in your community, they just choose to be the rule maker. So they're going to make the rules, tell everybody the rules, enforce the rules, and if you break the rules, they're going to tell everybody else that you broke the rules to shame you to get you back in line.

Now, all of these things they're going to do with Jesus, and when it comes to the rule-making and shame-causing religious type of control freaks and bullies, sometimes it starts when you're little. You ever seen kids play together? I've got five kids, love them, sometimes I'll pretend like I'm leaving the room but I'll eavesdrop just to see what's going on. And usually there's one kid who decides, "There's no adults, I'm in charge." And they make rules about the Legos and the Barbies and everything else, and they announce the rules to all of the other children. And if the other children break the rules, "You can't do that. You broke a rule. Do you kids see that? They broke a rule." That's just a little Pharisee. Just a little Lego Pharisee. That's all it is. And I've heard parents say, "Oh, my child is a leader." No they're not. They're not, they murdered Jesus. Your child murdered Jesus. Well, that's where they're going if you don't correct this. They're on the wrong team.

But it happens even when you're an adult, doesn't it? Certain people you know, they make rules that aren't in the Bible and they tell you to obey them and if you don't then their wrath comes down and they'll shame you and tell everyone else and no one else wants to endure their wrath, so they agree with them and all of a sudden you're backing up and you're feeling pushed around. The bullies are going to use all of these tactics and tricks with Jesus.

FEAR OF MAN

And what bullies really use, and what the Pharisees have used to bully the multitudes, the Pharisees have bullied the multitudes. Now they want to bully Jesus. It's something called fear of man. They want you to be scared of them. Proverbs 29:25 says that the fear of man is a trap or a snare. They want you to be afraid of them. There's a guy named Ed Welch who's written a lot on this. He's a good biblical counselor. He's got a book, *When People Are Big and God Is Small*. He gives us this functional working definition of fear of man. "Fear in the biblical sense," and here, Jesus is going to—let me say this.

Jesus is going to use the word "fear" five times. Some of you say, "Where is he going with this?" Jesus is going to use the word "fear" five times in this section, so one of the big megathemes is fear. He's going to use the word "anxious" once, so anxiety is often caused by fear. You're scared of someone, you're scared of consequences, you're scared of what's going to happen, you're scared of what they're going to do, you're fearful of them. You have fear of man issues. The result is anxiety. You're stressed, you can't sleep, you got a nervous eye twitch, you know. You don't want to see them, you try to avoid them, you can't sleep at night, your blood pressure is up, you're stressed out, you're freaked out, you're anxious. And you go to your doctor and maybe your doctor, in an effort to try and help, is going to try and deal with all of your physical symptoms and complications. And that can be helpful and good, but if you don't deal with the fear-causing source, you're going to still have the anxiety-causing consequence. You're scared. So Jesus is going to talk about fear and how it leads to anxiety and how to overcome the problem of anxiety through dealing with the source of the fear.

Ed Welch says it this way. "Fear in the biblical sense . . . includes being afraid of someone, but it extends to holding someone in awe, being controlled or mastered by people, worshipping other people." I'll explain that. "Putting your trust in people," as opposed to God, "or needing people." Because if you're needing someone, you're using them, which means you're not loving them. "The fear of man can be summarized this way: We replace God with people. Instead of a biblically guided fear of the Lord, we fear others. . . . When we are in our teens, it is called 'peer pressure.' "When we are older, it is called 'people-pleasing.' Recently, it has been called 'codependency.'"

See, the Bible is timeless and so it's good for all times. And ours is a day when people are filled with anxiety and fear of man issues and Jesus is going to talk about it because he loves us. And what he tells us is to beware, to be aware. To beware is to be aware.

Let me ask you a few questions pastorally to help you ascertain if you have fear of man issues, and if so, to what degree. Again, this is adapted from Welch's work. Number one, have you struggled with peer pressure? What people think, what they say, being accepted by that person, being approved by that group of people?

Number two, are you overcommitted, a people pleaser? Your answer to everything is, "Yes, I'll do that. Yes, I'll do that. Yes, I'll do that." You say, "I'm being holy like Jesus." Maybe not, because sometimes serving becomes sinning, and you can't say no because you want to please everybody and in so doing you can't really please God because God would tell you, "Sometimes you got to say, 'No.'"

Number three, is self-esteem a critical concern for you? Is it a big deal?

Number four, are embarrassment or shyness common for you? Embarrassment is, "I just don't want anybody to make fun of me. I don't want to be the center of attention. I don't want to get into any trouble, so what I'm going to do, I'm going to withdraw, retreat. I'm just going to be shy and hide and try not to get in any visible conflict or trouble."

Number five, do you second-guess decisions because of what people might think? "Yeah, I'll do that. Oh, but they're not going to like that. Yeah, I'd love—oh, but what are they going to say? What are they going to think? Oh, boy." And you're always second-guessing your decisions. "Yeah, God would like me to do that. But they wouldn't. Uh oh, what am I going to do?" I had this conversation with a woman a little bit earlier today. "I want to be a Christian and walk with Jesus." "Okay, why don't you?" "I don't think my husband would like that." Okay, so you've got two lords here and you've

got to figure out which one you're going to go with.

Number six, do other people often make you angry, depressed, or drive you crazy? If so, they may be inordinately centered in your life. They're too big of a deal.

Number seven, do you avoid people? Okay, I'll just come clean, that's my tactic. Certain people, it's like, "You are very emotionally expensive. I'm going to avoid you." Okay, I have tricks and I'll tell them to you. I avoid eye contact and I avoid certain situations and people. I'm not saying it's holy and it's not loving and it's not helpful to people, but it's what I've done. Grace will be like, "Do you want to go talk to them?" "No. I don't." "Well, they look like they want to talk to you." "I know, I know, I know." She's very sweet. "But you should help them, you're their pastor." "Yeah, I know, I know, I know, I know." "So why don't—" "Yeah, it's not going to happen, okay?" So that's how I deal with it. It's not holy, it's not helpful.

Number eight, do you take too much responsibility for other people? If so, maybe you want to be their lord. "I'll save you, I'll fix you, I'll heal you." What, is your name Jesus? Oh, it's not? Okay, then maybe you've given yourself the wrong job description.

Number nine, are you too committed to being nice, keeping peace, and avoiding conflict? Some of you were taught, "Christians are nice. They make peace and they avoid conflict." You're like, "I'm being a good Christian." You may be a bad Christian because Jesus isn't always nice, Jesus doesn't always make peace, and Jesus doesn't avoid conflict.

You're going to see it today. When it's time to rebuke, when it's time to correct, when it's time to exhort, that's what he does. Now, Jesus isn't rude, he doesn't pick a fight, but when somebody picks a fight with him, he doesn't just accommodate and acquiesce and submit to them.

WHO IS ON THE THRONE?

Because here's really what's going on. Fear of man is that somebody wants to be, or you want somebody to be, the lord. So, think of if it in this way with me. Jesus is the only Lord, Jesus is the real Lord, but we're talking about here functional, false lords. So think, if you will, over your life is a throne. And on it is written the word "Lord." Someone sits on it. Somebody sits on it. In your heart, in your mind, somebody sits on it. Who is it? Who is it? Fear of man is when somebody other than Jesus sits on that throne. And what you want to do then is you want to please them and appease them, that's what you want to do. You know what that is? Worship. So they're the most important relationship in your whole life. What they think matters at least as much as God. You want them to bless you. You want them to never leave you nor forsake you. You want them to tell you, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Functionally, they're your god. Again, this could be somebody who's horrific and bossy and rude, somebody who is nice and sweet and kind.

How many of you, this makes sense of your whole life? I talked to an atheist earlier today. He said, "I'm an atheist, I don't believe in God." He said, "But I struggle with anxiety. I struggle with depression. I struggle with suicidal thoughts. I've got a lot of anxiousness." And he was crying, he was shaking. It was a cool conversation, he was a really honest guy, a really nice guy. I enjoyed my time with him. He said, "I'm not sure what you're saying is true, but if what you're saying is true then my whole life makes sense." He said, "Somebody other than Jesus has been on the throne and it's not working for me, but I'm not sure that Jesus is Lord." I said, "Well, do you have questions?" He said, "Yeah, would somebody be willing to talk to me?" "I have ten thousand people who would be willing to talk to you. You know, like we'd all love to talk to you because we've all been there."

This might make sense of your whole life, so as we unpack this, let me tell you this, this isn't something you're going to learn today and then be fine for the rest of your life. This is something you're going to learn today and be working on for the rest of your life because sometimes people in various ways get themselves on the throne. In other ways, we just put them there. And even with ourselves, sometimes we're on somebody else's throne. What do we do with this?

OVERCOME FEAR OF MAN BY LIVING FOR JUDGMENT DAY

Jesus is going to give us four truths that are most helpful. We're going to look at his example, we're going to examine his words, starting with these.

Number one, we overcome fear of man by living for judgment day. Jesus says, Luke 12:2-3, "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops."

Here's what bullies want to do. They want to be the judge, they want you to come before them, and they want to judge you, oftentimes based on rules they made, not rules that God made. And what Jesus here is saying is, "Don't let them sit on the seat of judgment."

Let's say, for example, hypothetically you and I had a big conflict and we disagreed about something and it was a legal matter and you thought I was guilty and I thought I was innocent and we met and we went through mediation and arbitration and we had no resolution and I kept meeting with you and I kept telling you, "Look, I think you're wrong. I think you're wrong. I think you're wrong." And you said, "You know what? I don't think I am." Would you let me judge you? Would you let me decide? No, what you would say is, "Let's both go before the judge. Let's have our day in court, let him or her render the verdict." And you would wait until your day in court. All right, you wouldn't come before me and let me have a robe on and a gavel and pretend like I was a judge. You'd say, "You don't have authority, that's not your role. You can render whatever verdict you like and I'm not going to submit to it because that's not your job."

Some people literally, you need to see them, they walk around with a gavel and a robe and they act like a judge. "Sit down, I'm going to tell you some things. I'm going to confront you on some things. I'm going to judge you on some things." You're like, "Pfft, look, a gavel and a robe does not a judge

make. You're a hypocrite. You're playing a role you don't possess."

What we're not talking about here is not submitting to godly authority. If you have parents who love the Lord and you're a kid, honor your mother and father, you know. If you've got pastors who love you and are giving you counsel from the Bible, respect that authority. What we're talking about here are people that have no right to be in authority over you and the only power they have is the power you give them. This could be a bossy, pushy boyfriend, a horrible husband, all right. Somebody who's just not rightly exercising authority in your life or they have no right to authority at all in your life.

Jesus says, "Don't let them be the judge." First of all, it's not good for you. Second of all, it's not good for them. Jesus alone is the judge. It says in John 5, Jesus says, "The Father has entrusted all judgment to me." Ultimately, no one knows our heart but God. Ultimately, no one determines our destiny but God. We don't decide who goes to heaven and hell, Jesus does. We don't ultimately 100 percent know everybody who's a Christian or not. God knows the heart. And so these kinds of judgments, Jesus says, "Leave them to me." And what he says is, "I am the perfect judge. I know things that have been said when nobody else was a witness because I'm God and I hear and know all." And so Jesus knows all, Jesus sees all, Jesus hears all, Jesus will judge all, Jesus is the only judge, and there is a judgment day coming, and if you let bullies make judgment day today and you let them wear a robe and hold a gavel, you're enabling their sin. You're guilty of giving them power. So ignore them, refute them, argue with them, have a conversation like this, walk away.

OVERCOME FEAR OF MAN BY BEING WILLING TO SUFFER

Number two, Jesus says to overcome fear of man by being willing to suffer. Luke 12:4-5, "I tell you, my friends," Jesus loves you, right. These are words to help. "Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!"

Here's what Jesus says. If you refuse to worship people like gods and live out of fear of man, if you refuse to allow them to sit on the throne of your life, some of them will cause you to suffer. You're going to suffer. This could be emotionally, they're just going to make it hard for you. This could be financially, they're going to sue you, divorce you, rob you. This could be spiritually, they could take verses out of context and hammer you and get a whole bunch of Christians involved and poison your community. This could be mentally, they could play games with you and make it very difficult for you.

I'm mindful of one friend of mine right now, she's in the midst of a divorce from a controlling, overbearing, religious bully. This guy makes rules about the rules about the rules. His wife is not flourishing, she's dying, his kids are not blessed, they're burdened. Everybody's miserable. When confronted on it, he says, "I don't see what the problem is." Well, you don't see what the problem is because in this little house you're god, lord, king, and Christ, and you get to make rules and render verdicts and judge people and oppress and condemn them, so it works for you. It isn't working for them. She's miserable, the kids are miserable. It's horrible, horrible what this guy does to his family.

And Jesus says sometimes it can even be physical violence, all the way to the point of death. Okay, now in telling you that, I'm warning you that if you're going to follow Jesus, you're going to have to suffer. Jesus suffered. The bullies, they harmed him physically, they harmed him emotionally. All right, they beat him. They arrested him. They lied about him. They harmed his reputation. They ripped the flesh off his body. They crucified him. That's what the bullies did. They made him suffer.

So if we're going to follow Jesus—and we don't need to be self-righteous and haughty and proud about this, we need to be humble and heartfelt about it. It's like, "Well, if I'm going to follow Jesus, who suffered, I'm going to suffer." And I don't tell you that so that you become fatalistic, but I tell you that so that you prepare yourself. People are going to say and do things. And Jesus says, "Don't be afraid of even losing your life."

So here's what he's saying. If you're going to be a Christian, you've got to be willing to die for Jesus if that's what it comes to, or live for Jesus if that's what it comes to. And sometimes the living for Jesus can be harder than the dying for Jesus. And I don't want to denigrate martyrs who have died for their faith, but if somebody walks up and says, "If you're a Christian, I'll kill you," it's over pretty quick. If you convert to Christianity and your mother hates that, it's going to be weird for forty years. Christmas is going to be awkward. Uncle Tom's going to give you the stink eye. Thanksgiving's going to be brutal. As soon as you get engaged to a believer and want to get married in a church, they're just going to fire up the carnival music and the whole fiasco's going to start again. Forty years of getting opposed and neglected and threatened by your family or friends or coworkers—sometimes living for Jesus is as hard as dying for Jesus, and you've got to be willing to do both.

And here's what Jesus says. "The worst they could do is kill you. That's all." All right, and we kind of chuckle, and you're like, "Well, that's sort of a big deal. On my to-do list is breathing. Like, it's a thing for me. I'd like to continue to check that box." Here's what he's saying. "All they can do is kill you." "Really, is there something worse, Jesus, than death?" He says, "Yeah, there's something worse than death." "What is it?" "Hell," Jesus says hell is worse than death. Jesus talks about hell more than anyone in the Bible.

So Jesus is saying for the non-Christian who remains separated from Jesus, this life is their heaven. This is as good as it gets. They sit on their little throne and they have their little kingdom and they render their little verdicts, and then they die and they meet the real king. They stand before the real throne, they get judged by the real judge, and they go to the real hell where they suffer conscious, eternal torment. For how long? Forever. Jesus says, "That's way worse than dying." If you belong to Jesus, this life is as bad as it gets. This is your hell. Their heaven is your hell. It only gets better from here. Paul says to die is? Gain. So even if you get killed, you're going to die and then you're going to be with Jesus and you're going to go, "This is better. This is totally better than what I had." It's better.

It's not like we want to die, but if we do, it's all right. I talked to a guy today, his heart's failed him, he's dying a bit at a time. He's an older man, member of the church. I said, "How are you doing?" He said, "I'm in no hurry, but I'm looking forward to going." That's a good answer. I said, "Why's that?" He said, "I'm going to hang out with Jesus." Yeah, it's better.

So all they can do is—so even if they're like, "We're going to kill you!" "Well, I'll tell Jesus you said hi and you can figure it out with him later." It's not so bad. Because truthfully, this life, in light of the life we will have forever with God, it's really not that long. And I know right now it doesn't feel way. Right now in your suffering it feels like a really big deal today because the bullies make it hurt. But when you've been with Jesus for, I don't know, a billion years, in eternity future and the kingdom of God, if you're a Christian, it's not going to be that big of a deal.

Let me ask you this. Do you remember the first day of third grade? I just occasionally ask random questions to see if you're still with me. You're going, "I don't know." Now, the first day of third grade, at the moment, it felt like a really big deal. You were anxious, you were stressed out, you were worried, you were uncomfortable, you're freaking out a little bit. But now in hindsight, you're like, "I don't know. It seemed like a big deal, there have been a few days between now and then. It's really not that big of a deal." Your whole life is the first day of third grade. That's it. Your whole life is the first day of third grade. You're going to die. If you belong to Jesus, you're going to be with Jesus. In a billion years, people will ask, "Well, tell me about your life on earth." You're like, "I don't know, I think I wore a hat. I don't know. I don't know. It seemed like a big deal at the time."

OVERCOME FEAR OF MAN WITH THE LOVE OF GOD

Jesus continues that we overcome fear of man with the love of God. He says, "Are not five sparrows," just little almost worthless birds, "sold for two pennies? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs on your head are numbered." And some of you the number is decreasing. "Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows."

See, when you're suffering, you can wonder, and if the bullies, it looks like they're winning, you may wonder, "God, do you really love me? "Are you really paying any attention? Do you even care?" Jesus says four things. Number one, God knows you perfectly. He sees and knows all. Number two, God remembers you continually. He hasn't forgotten about you. Number three, God watches you carefully. He's paying attention. And number four, God values you deeply. He does love you.

And I'll tell you what, if we assume that God loves us and by faith know that he's paying attention and keeping account, and he remains lovingly committed to us, it changes how we suffer and it frees us from the fear of man. First of all, you realize as you're suffering, "You know what? I've caused Jesus to suffer. He died for my sin, so as I'm suffering it makes me even more thankful for Jesus, that he would love me so much that God would become a man and that he would suffer for me. Now that I'm suffering, I really appreciate what Jesus has done for me."

Number two, it causes you to be humble and repentant and to ask, "Not only am I suffering, but I've probably caused other people to suffer. Who have I been a bully to? Who have I sat on the throne for? Who have I harmed? Who do I need to apologize to, ask forgiveness of?" See, if we believe that God loves us, then we believe that even if what's happening to us isn't good and holy and just, it'll be used by a good, holy, and just God to teach us more about Jesus and to make us more like him. So we overcome fear of man with the love of God. God loves me. One way or another, he's going to get me through.

OVERCOME FEAR OF MAN WITH THE FEAR OF GOD

And then Jesus closes with sort of the culminating big idea, that you overcome fear of man with the fear of God. Luke 12:8-12, "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man," that's a title of himself from Daniel. He uses it about eighty times. It means God become a man. "Also will acknowledge before the angels of God," who will serve as the witnesses, "but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities," the bullies are going to get you, you're going to suffer at some point. "Do not be anxious," fear, fear, fear, fear, fear. "Do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

Here's the big idea: fear of man or fear of God. Those are your options. There is no alternative. Someone is the most important person. Someone is the biggest dominant personality in your life. Okay, if it's someone other than Jesus, you have fear of man. You're worshipping them. They're your functional lord even if Jesus is your theological Lord.

Proverbs 29:25 again, "The fear of man is a trap or a snare." It won't work for them, it doesn't work for you, it doesn't work at all. The alternative is the fear of the Lord. Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Before you can get anything straight in your life, you have to get straight who the Lord is. Jesus is Lord. The shortest confession of Christian belief is, has always been, Jesus is Lord. And so you and I have this very important choice to make. In our lives functionally, practically, emotionally, relationally, who's the Lord? Who sits on the throne? If it's not Jesus it'll be someone else. It's not good for you, it's not good for them.

And if Jesus is on the throne and Jesus is Lord and Jesus is God and Jesus is savior and you belong to Jesus and his death was for your sin and his life is for your reconciliation, Jesus says, "I can forgive anyone of anything." What an enormous claim. Friends, Jesus can forgive anyone of anything, except for one thing. That's what he says. There is one thing Jesus can't forgive. There's one thing that Jesus won't forgive. Of all the sins you can commit, there's one sin you can commit there is no forgiveness for, you just go to hell. You just go to hell to suffer conscious, eternal torment which is just. The punishment will fit the crime forever. It's really important we know what that sin is, isn't it? This would be like there's a land mine somewhere in your house. You can walk anywhere you want, you step on that one, it's over. You say, "It's very important for me to know where that's at." All

right, Jesus is saying here, "Any sin you commit, I can forgive, but there's one I won't." Okay, what one is that? I would like to know where is that land mine in my life. Jesus says, "It's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."

How many of you have freaked out about this? Okay, you can be honest. Let me tell you this, if you're freaking out about it, you probably haven't done it. "Oh, thank you, Pastor Mark." You're welcome. Okay, if you have a tender conscience and you're freaking out about it, you've probably not committed it.

Let me tell you what the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit isn't. It's not cursing God. That's wrong, but that's not the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. It's not denying God. Peter is going to do that and he's going to get reconciled with Jesus. It's not doubting. Thomas doubted and he was reconciled back to God. It's not suicide. Some have said that it is. They're wrong. It's not murder. It's not a sexual sin. It's not an ongoing sin that you struggle to overcome. It's none of those things.

What is it? Well, in Luke 11:15, which is the section that kicks off this entire narrative, the religious bullies, the Pharisees, they confront Jesus and they have a face-to-face conflict. And they basically declare, "Jesus, you have a lot of power and authority. You do miracles and cast out demons, but you do it by the power of Satan." Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is resisting all of the work of the Holy Spirit and ultimately rejecting the person of Jesus.

See, the Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity. He is God, he exists to, the Bible says, convict us of sin, show us where we're unholly and unrighteous. The Holy Spirit empowered the life of Jesus. The Holy Spirit reveals to us Jesus. The Holy Spirit inspires the writing of the Bible so we can know that we are sinners and that Jesus is our Savior Lord and we can turn from sin and trust in him. And if we do, Jesus forgives anyone of anything, and anyone of everything. But if you grieve, quench, resist, blaspheme the Holy Spirit—this is not something that happens once and then you meet Jesus and have a change of mind. This is something that is a life commitment and you die remaining committed to this position, the position that you and Jesus are essentially face to face, and you come to this conclusion: "Jesus, you are evil and I am good. Jesus, you are wrong and I am right. Jesus, you are not Lord, but I am. I reject you, Jesus. You are not God, you are not Savior, you are not Lord." That was the commitment of the Pharisees all the way to the point of murdering him. And he came back three days later to prove them wrong. And it serves as evidence historically that he is God, Lord, Savior, Judge, and Christ.

Do you know Jesus? Do you love Jesus? Do you trust Jesus? Is Jesus your God? Is Jesus your Lord? If not, you're already presently guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. You're grieving, quenching, resisting, blaspheming all of his work in your life. Some of you say, "So am I going to hell?" If you die now, you will. But as long as you're breathing, there's hope for you.

I dealt with another young man earlier today, he came up to me, he said, "I don't believe in Jesus, I'm not a Christian, I'm getting off drugs and alcohol, I'm at the third step in the twelve steps, and I got to figure out who the higher power is." I said, "Well, I don't know about the twelve steps and the higher power. Jesus, let's talk about him." He said, "So if I die, am I committing the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and will I go to hell?" I said, "What do you know about Jesus?" He told me. I said, "What do you think about Jesus?" He said, "I don't believe in him, I don't know him, I don't trust him, I don't love him." I said, "You are committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. You're resisting and quenching and rebelling against all of the truth of Jesus." And he said, "You know what? I want to know the truth about Jesus." And he said, "If Jesus is God, I'll worship him." Great, just follow the truth wherever it leads. It always leads to Jesus. I told him, "As long as you're alive, there's hope. God's kept you alive because he still loves you! He's still pursuing you! He's still welcoming you!"

Here, Jesus is welcoming the multitudes and the Pharisees to both receive him as Lord. Jesus loves the sinners and he loves the religious guys. Jesus loves the multitudes. Jesus loves the bullies. Jesus is welcoming them all. It's not too late, friend. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is someone who dies fighting Jesus, thinking they're good, he's bad, they're right, he's wrong, they're Lord, he's not. Is that you? Is that you? If so, you've declared yourself to be an enemy of God and there's nothing left for you when you die than to stand before the judge and to be sentenced to hell, to suffer forever. It's far worse than death.

And I'm amazed at how many people buckle up and eat their vitamins and drink bottled water and watch their cholesterol and don't even think about their eternity. They're so consumed with their life they don't remember that they will live forever somewhere. Jesus says, "Don't just be afraid of losing your life, be afraid of losing your life and going to hell."

THREE QUESTIONS

I'm going to ask you three questions in closing and you've got a big decision to make. Are you going to leave here with Jesus as Lord or someone else? So, number one, whose throne are you on? Who right now worships you like a little god? And you like it, there's a lot of benefits for you. Whose throne are you on? My encouragement to you, get off the throne. Get off the throne.

Number two, who's on your throne? Who's on your throne? Is it someone other than Jesus? Repent of that, get them off the throne, receive Jesus, acknowledge that he is the one who sits on the throne.

Number three, my final question, what difficult conversations do you need to have by the power of the Holy Spirit? Jesus says when you've lived under fear of man and you're going to do like he is doing and have that difficult, tense, conflicted conversation, "I'm not going to do that anymore. I can't accept that. I need to rebuke you. We can't be friends. We're breaking up. We need counseling. You need to stop. I can't tolerate this. Unless things change, we're not going to be close anymore." You've got to have that hard conversation.

Jesus says when you've lived under fear of man and it comes time to have that painful conversation, you're going to become anxious. You're going to

be stressed out. You're going to have a panic attack. You're going to have a sleepless night. You're going to have high blood pressure. You're going to give yourself an ulcer. You're going to be freaking out. And he says, "So don't be anxious."

This is where theology conquers biology. This is where understanding Jesus is Lord changes how your body physically responds to conflict. And he says, "Don't worry about what you're going to say. The Holy Spirit will give you the words. So don't be anxious, be honest, and the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say." He'll tell you what to say, and you know what? He did that right here for the Lord Jesus Christ, who had the hard conversation by the power of the Holy Spirit. And he sends the Holy Spirit to all the Christians to have those same hard conversations. And he sends the Holy Spirit so that those who are not Christians have a conversation with Jesus that maybe for them is a hard conversation. "Jesus, I'm a sinner and I need you. I acknowledge that you are Lord and I come to you for life."

Father God, I pray for the people here whom Jesus calls friends. God, I thank you that the Bible is not just truthful. It is, it's also helpful. This is really helpful. For a day when the leading prescription medication is antidepressants, when most people's troubles are anxiety and stress related, this is really helpful. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for loving those of us who are on the throne and loving those of us who worship someone else on the throne and loving us enough to have a Spirit-filled hard conversation and loving us enough to suffer and loving us enough to die and to rise and to love and to forgive. I pray that none of my friends here would commit their lives to the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. I pray they would not remain stiff necked, hard hearted, that instead, Lord God, they would turn from sin and trust in you and realize that they are bad and you are good, and they are liars and you're a truth teller, and they're lost and you're the Lord. I pray this for my friends because it's liberating. Life makes sense. In Jesus' name, amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.