

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 17: Fear God, Not Man; the Rich Fool; Readiness -- Luke 12:1–59

So many thousands of people have crowded in to hear Jesus that they are trampling one another, and in the middle of that crush He turns first to His own disciples and lowers His voice to a warning: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (v. 1). It is an arresting way to begin. With a sea of admirers pressing close, the danger Jesus names is not the hostile crowd but the small, hidden corruption that can grow quietly inside a religious heart. Leaven works invisibly, spreading through the whole loaf before anyone notices. Jesus wants His followers to understand that the most dangerous thing in the room may be the pretending we do when we think no one is watching.

From there the chapter opens out like a wide landscape of the soul. Jesus speaks of a God before whom nothing stays hidden, a God to be feared rightly rather than the people whose opinions we so often fear wrongly. He tells of a wealthy man whose barns were full and whose soul was empty, a man who made every plan except the one that mattered, and who heard in the night the words, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you” (v. 20). He calls anxious people to stop grasping and start trusting, to seek the kingdom and store up treasure in heaven. And He sets before us the picture of servants standing dressed and ready, lamps burning, waiting through the long watches of the night for their master to come home.

Underneath all of it runs a single question, and it is a searching one: where is your treasure, and therefore where is your heart? “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (v. 34). Jesus is not merely rearranging our finances. He is exposing what we love, what we trust, and what we are quietly living for. The rich fool and the watchful servant are two ways of spending the same short life. One stores up for himself and is not rich toward God. The other holds everything loosely, ready at any moment to open the door to his returning Lord.

Read this chapter slowly, because it asks more of us than information. It asks us to live as people who could meet God tonight and not be ashamed. It asks us to confess Christ openly before a watching world rather than hide our allegiance to protect ourselves. It asks us to loosen our grip on the things we cannot keep and to fasten our hearts on the One we cannot lose. “To whom much was given, of him much will be required” (v. 48). Let the chapter do its work. Let it find the hypocrisy, the anxiety, and the misplaced treasure in us, and let it form in us instead a heart kept ready for the Master.

Group Discussion: Jesus warns His disciples to beware of hypocrisy, the leaven of the Pharisees, and reminds them that “nothing is covered up that will not be revealed” (vv. 1–2). We all know the temptation to look more spiritual on the outside than we really are on the inside. Why is hypocrisy so easy to slip into, even for sincere believers, and what does it do to us over time when we let the gap between our public self and our private self keep growing?

Personal Reflection: Jesus says, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (v. 34). If someone could not hear your words but could only watch where your time, your money, and your daily attention actually go, what would they conclude you treasure most? Is there one specific place where your heart has quietly attached itself to something other than God, and what would it look like to begin loosening that grip this week?

Read Luke 12:1–59

Study Questions

1. Jesus tells His disciples not to fear those “who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do,” but to fear the One “who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell” (vv. 4–5), and He calls them to “acknowledge” Him “before men” (v. 8). What does this passage teach about a right fear of God and the call to confess Christ openly, and how does fearing God rather than man set us free rather than enslave us?
2. Jesus exposes hypocrisy as a hidden leaven and insists that “nothing is covered up that will not be revealed” (vv. 1–3). Where in your own life are you most tempted to manage appearances, to seem more committed or more godly on the outside than you are on the inside, and what would it look like to let God close that gap this week?
3. When the disciples are threatened, Jesus reminds them that even the sparrows are not forgotten by God and that “even the hairs of your head are all numbered” (vv. 6–7), and He promises that the Holy Spirit “will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (v. 12). What do these promises reveal about God’s care for His people and His provision for those who confess Christ under pressure?
4. A man in the crowd interrupts Jesus to demand, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me,” and Jesus warns, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (vv. 13–15). Where are you most prone to believe the quiet lie that more, a bigger house, a fuller account, the next purchase, will finally make your life secure or satisfied?
5. In the parable of the rich fool, the man tears down his barns to build bigger ones and says to his soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry,” only to hear God say, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you” (vv. 16–20). Jesus concludes, “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (v. 21). What makes this man a fool in God’s eyes rather than merely successful, and what does it mean to be “rich toward God”?
6. Jesus tells anxious disciples to “consider the ravens” and “the lilies,” and reminds them that “your Father knows that you need” these things (vv. 24–30). When anxiety about provision, money, health, or the future rises in you, what does it reveal about where you are looking for security, and how might “seek his kingdom” first (v. 31) reorder the things you worry about?
7. Jesus commands, “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail,” and

then explains, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (vv. 33–34). What does this teach about the relationship between our possessions and our hearts, and how does laying up treasure in heaven actually change what we love?

8. Jesus pictures servants who “stay dressed for action” with “lamps burning,” waiting to open the door at once when their master returns, and He calls them “blessed” if he finds them awake (vv. 35–38). Picture the Master returning tonight and finding you exactly as you are living right now. What would He find you dressed and ready for, and what would He find you distracted by?
9. Jesus warns that the Son of Man is coming “at an hour you do not expect” (v. 40), and contrasts the faithful and wise manager, found doing his duty, with the wicked servant who says “My master is delayed in coming” and grows careless and abusive (vv. 42–46). He adds that “everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required” (v. 48). What does this passage teach about readiness for the Lord’s return and the coming judgment, about the danger of both careless complacency and presuming to know the times, and about our accountability for what God has entrusted to us?
10. Look back across the whole chapter, from the warning against hypocrisy, to the rich fool, to the call to seek the kingdom, to the servants waiting through the night. Jesus has been pressing one question: is your heart kept ready for your Master? Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 12 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 10:28–33, fearing God rather than man and confessing Christ before others; 1 Timothy 6:6–19, godliness with contentment and being rich in good works rather than uncertain riches; Colossians 3:1–4, setting your mind on things above where Christ is seated; Matthew 25:1–13, the wise and foolish virgins keeping their lamps ready for the bridegroom; 2 Peter 3:8–14, the Lord’s patience and the kind of holy and godly lives we ought to live as we wait.