

The Central Importance of a Right Response to Jesus

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[0 : 00] Now, on to our Bible reading, which is coming from Luke chapters 11 and 12 this morning. That's page 870, if you have one of the Blue Church Bibles that you've grabbed on your way in.

Josh Johnson, one of our ministers, is preaching for us from this book, Luke's gospel account, as he gives certainty regarding the things of Christ. And we're joining the passage at verse 29 of chapter 11, reading through to 12 verse 12.

So, chapter 11, verse 29. When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, this generation is an evil generation.

It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

The Queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

[1 : 24] The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light.

Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light. But when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore, be careful, lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.

While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him. So he went in and reclined at table. The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner.

[2 : 27] And the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish. But inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

You fools! Does not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give his arms those things that are within. And behold, everything is clean for you.

But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others.

Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.

One of the lawyers answered him, Teacher, in saying these things, you insult us also. And he said, Woe to you lawyers also!

[3 : 35] For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you!

For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses, and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs.

Therefore also the wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be charged against this generation.

From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.

Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.

[4 : 40] As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

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 leaving of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

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.

I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that, have nothing more that 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. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?

[5 : 51] And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why? Even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not. You are of more value than many sparrows.

And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God. 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, 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. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. And may he bless it to us.

Well, do open once again in your Bibles to Luke chapter 11 and follow along to see what message Luke has for us here.

[7 : 10] Jesus is utterly divisive. We have seen that again and again in Luke's gospel. He insists that there are only two ways that we can go.

Joy or judgment. Heaven or hell. Friend of God or foe. And these two opposing ways all ultimately center on how we respond to Jesus.

We saw last week that in this section of Luke's gospel that we're in, a section that's all concerned with what is of utmost importance in following Jesus to and through Jerusalem, to and through the cross, to be taken up in glory.

We saw that a real relationship with Jesus is absolutely fundamental, of absolute necessity. And so Luke told us that we're to sit at Jesus' feet, delighting in his word and his presence with his people. And we're to speak to our Father. Jesus teaches us how to pray and also tells us of the confidence that we have as we come to pray. And so a real relationship involves both hearing and speaking to God, but also loyalty to Jesus.

[8 : 22] And that's where we ended last time. Various ways of not being for Jesus and so being against him. Do you see 11.23? Whoever is not with me is against me.

Whoever does not gather scatters. And so Luke is now showing us in these words that we've read together, he's showing us that how we respond to Jesus really does matter.

Do you see 11.28? Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it. There's no decision in this world that has more consequence and significance attached to it than what we do with God's word when it comes to us.

And so Luke spells out three key things that ought to shape our response to Jesus' word. And the first is that we have sufficient evidence. Verses 29 to 36. We have sufficient evidence to respond to Jesus as he commands.

There is no lack in God's revelation of himself through Jesus Christ. The fault of those who refuse the good life-giving news of the gospel is at their own door alone.

[9 : 39] That's the message of these verses. And Luke shows us it in two ways. Firstly, in verses 29 to 32, he gives two examples of people who had less gospel privilege yet still repented.

That's what we see with the sign of Jonah and with the queen of Sheba, the queen of the south. So notice verse 29. Amidst swelling popularity around Jesus, he is as plain as can be about what it means to follow him and respond to him.

He doesn't play to the crowd. Instead, he says, this generation is an evil generation. Why? Because it seeks a sign.

Now, we've just seen last week that Jesus tells people to ask and seek and knock and you'll find.

So why does Jesus take such issue with the sign that's being sought here?

Is he being a bit tricky? Is he being slightly disingenuous? Of course not. That's not what Jesus is like. Now, notice the sign that they're talking about goes all the way back to 1116.

[10:45] what we were looking at last week. They're seeking a sign from heaven to show that Jesus really is good and not evil. That really he is God and not the devil.

That's the evil that Jesus is speaking about. It's having the truth of God right before their eyes. A miraculous sign. Jesus has just saved a mute.

And they've all seen it. And yet they refuse to accept it for what it was. And so no sign will be given them. Says Jesus, well, accept the sign of Jonah.

Jesus here isn't addressing people who are believing and seeking reassurance. He isn't chastising those who might have genuine doubts who are coming to Jesus and saying, help me understand.

No, we've already seen in Luke's gospel that he's patient with people like that.

Remember his answer to John the Baptist doubts in chapter 7? It was one of patience, not condemnation. No, instead here, he's confronting those who wish to defend or justify their unbelief.

[11:55] That's the true issue here. A bigotry, a bias that determinedly refuses that which has been made plain. They've had plenty of signs.

Jesus has visibly demonstrated the breaking in of the world to come and he's been teaching them about it so that the kingdom of God has come upon them. And yet, they still refuse to believe him, thinking he's a devil.

They aren't interested in signs. They're interested in maintaining their unbelief. And so to provide a sign here would only give credence to their hardened and unbelieving hearts.

And don't we often hear sentiments like that? Oh, well, I would believe in God if only he would make himself known, if he'd show me undeniably that he's real. Or, oh, I've tried that but it wasn't really for me.

Well, what is the sign that Jesus says will come to those who determinedly reject Jesus? It's the sign of Jonah. Now, the word sign here is the word miracle. And so the sign of Jonah was not just his message to Nineveh.

[13:08] It was that he had to go through a great ordeal to get there. Remember, he tried to run away from God but God intervened and made it abundantly clear to Jonah that there was no running from him.

And so he was to go and minister to Nineveh. And so, Jonah's message of impending judgment upon that great city came with the added sign of Jonah's miraculous time in the belly of the fish where he was rescued from death to life to go and preach to them.

And verse 30, similarly, the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus himself will be a message to this generation, a message of impending judgment that also comes with an added sign of Jesus' three days, not in the belly of a fish but three days in a tomb having descended to the darkest depths and then being raised in vindication to judge the living and the dead.

And do you see verse 32? The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment and condemn this generation just as the queen of Sheba will. Verse 31, she sought out Solomon traveling from afar to sit at Solomon's feet inquiring of what she had heard and willing to receive, willing to have her heart and mind opened to the Lord.

But look, one greater than Solomon, one greater than Jonah was here. This generation that Jesus is addressing, they have it better than the queen of Sheba.

[14:40] They have it better than the Ninevites. They had in their midst the anointed Messiah of Israel. They had the Christ right there in front of them ushering in the world to come.

They'd witnessed the tangible glimpses of the coming of God's eternal kingdom before their very eyes. They'd had it explained to them. And so the reality is that both the queen of Sheba and the people of Nineveh will be witnesses for the prosecution at the last day.

Verse 32, why? Because they both repented. They both received the wisdom and word of God as it was. And you know, it's easy when confronted with something like this to deflect, to ask questions about, well, what about those who haven't heard anything about Jesus, anything about the gospel? But that isn't the case for anyone here today. Just like the generation that Jesus was addressing, we are better off than Nineveh and the queen of Sheba. Those who have spent any time in church in this church will have been shown the significance of Jesus and his claims.

And very often, what is thus exposed is the bare fact that some people don't want to repent. The hindrance to trusting Jesus isn't knowing enough about him.

[16:03] In fact, it's quite striking throughout Jesus' ministry how often his most scathing rebukes are directed not at ignorant outsiders. I've actually seen some of those repent in the Ninevites and the queen of Sheba.

but rather it's directed at those who have all the privilege. Those who've been brought up with the scriptures. Those who have sat in many, many church services and Bible studies and all these sorts of things and yet wouldn't and didn't repent.

If even the pagans in Nineveh and the pagan queen of Sheba could respond to the call of the gospel, then how much more is the responsibility placed upon those who have heard the gospel in all of its fullness today?

And that leads us on to verses 33 to 36. Luke makes clear there's nothing wrong with the message. Only the hearers. That's what this whole picture of light and darkness is speaking of.

Verse 33, if you put a lamp in the cellar or under a basket, then don't complain if it isn't lighting the whole room or the whole house. You see, it isn't a problem with the light.

[17:16] It's a problem with what is done with the light. Put it on a stand. Or verse 34, your eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, if it can see, I take it, if it is open and willing to receive the word of God, then your whole body will be lit up full of the light and life of the gospel.

That's what the gospel does when it's allowed to dwell in the hearts of believers. It cannot do anything else. It produces light and life. But if our eye is bad, that is, if we're blinded, I take it that if we're hard-hearted, unwilling to even countenance, the truth about Jesus, if we stubbornly and ignorantly refuse what is utterly plain, then all that can dwell within is darkness.

And notice, verse 35, where's the responsibility for this? Not with the message. Therefore, be careful, be careful, lest the light in you be darkness.

You see, there's no excuse. There's been no lack of light. That isn't the issue. The full brightness of God's revelation has been poured out in his very own son, taking on flesh. The light isn't the issue. The gospel isn't the issue. It's a message of wonderful salvation, wonderful rescue. It declares the year of the Lord's favor. But how we each respond to Jesus matters.

[18:52] Take care in how we do, lest we be filled with darkness instead of the light of the gospel. Jesus is saying that anyone who refuses the gospel does so willfully.

They're covering their eyes and putting their fingers in their ears. Unbelief isn't a rational position that has weighed the evidence. Quite the opposite. Unbelief is being intent on refusing any evidence at all that would lead one to Jesus.

and not even being willing to consider such things reasonably. Well, the question comes, what will you do with the light of the gospel?

The message and the summons is plain. We've received the privilege of having the Bible open before us again and again. Will you let its message fill your life with light?

Will you let it get to work in you? Will you let its message of transformation actually transform you?

Will you let it deal with the darkness that lurks in each of us? Or do you love the darkness too much to hear the wondrous words of the Savior reaching out to you in love?

[20:10] Or what about us as a church? We've known the great privilege of gospel ministry stretching back generations. What will we do with that privilege? What will we do collectively with the light that we have had shone in our midst?

We mustn't put it in a cellar. We must have it always on display in our lives, in our service, in our witness to a city that is clothed in darkness. And it must be the thing that we pass on to our children and pass on to those who will lead the church in decades to come.

Jesus says to us as individuals and to us as a church, be careful lest the light in you be darkness.

And Luke goes on to make clear what being careful looks like in verses 37 to 54 by giving us a stark exposure. A stark exposure.

Jesus detests hypocrisy and he will always stand against perverse religion that skews his gospel message from a message of life to a message of death.

[21 : 21] Here in these verses we see in the professing church of the day, in their leaders, we see them exposed as being filled with darkness and not light. Verse 37, a Pharisee invites Jesus to dine with him.

And what follows is one of the most tense meals that you can imagine. Jesus takes aim at the religious leaders of the day and breaks them down completely, leaving them naked, as it were, utterly exposed before the Lord Jesus.

We see a taste of the issue first in verses 38 to 41. The Pharisee is astonished that Jesus didn't wash before dinner. And this isn't about etiquette, it's about ethics.

Jesus instantly pulls the Pharisees up for their great attention towards washing, but washing the outside. They had all manner of rules and rituals and customs about ritual cleanness that had been added to what God required.

And they took them very seriously indeed. But it was all twisted out of joint. So much so that they think the divine Son of God is a transgressor.

[22 : 31] Do you see they fuss over cleaning the outside, but their hearts are filled with greed and wickedness? God has always been interested in the heart.

To not grasp that is to get God's law all wrong, to get it back to front. No amount of washing will change a heart that's all twisted and bent out of shape.

When we moved into our house, the previous occupants had been smokers, and we painted the house, but no matter how many times we painted the ceiling, the tar stains kept leaking through, coat after coat, to no avail.

The paint couldn't hide the nastiness that was lurking underneath. It needed to be dealt with.

Thankfully, in something like that, stain blocker can tackle these things.

But merely external rights and practices and washing cannot cleanse the human heart. And to pretend that that is suit is to choke the light of the gospel, be filled with darkness.

[23 : 38] God has never been interested in the performance of piety. He's always been interested in producing purity within his people. Not mere displays, but devotion to him and to his people.

And so we need to take care not to be caught up with putting on a shoe for people. Jesus isn't interested in gloss. He's interested in that which is genuine.

And with the issue out in the open, Jesus launches into six woes, three against the Pharisees and three against the lawyers, which is theologians, the theologians of the day.

And as we come to these, it would be so very easy for us to be smug here, wouldn't it, and point the finger at those Jesus rebukes, when actually these are warnings to his true people too.

Do you see chapter 12, verse 1? Don't be wooed by the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Spoken to who? To the disciples. So we mustn't come to this smugly.

[24 : 45] So verses 42 to 44, three woes in the Pharisees. The first one, verse 42, you tithe your herbs, but neglect justice and the love of God. You see, they love the appearance of obedience, tithing more than is even required, but missing the very heart and point of the law.

Tithing was for the purpose of responding to God in love, giving to him out of love, and giving for the Lord's people for their benefit.

The reality is that full religion fixates on rules and regulations. But real faith focuses on relationships of love, love for God, love for his people.

To fuss about every jot and tittle of the law, but to have no sense of justice in the world, or to have no love for God and his people is just rank hypocrisy. It's missing the whole point of God's law.

It's like fixating on keeping the Sabbath holy, but actually not really cherishing in any meaningful way the family of God that you worship with.

[25 : 56] Or it's like making a big show of wearing a head covering, but actually completely ignoring what Paul means by it, not actually being submissive and feminine.

And often what these kinds of displays are all really about is about receiving honor, being well thought of, as if that's what matters to God. And so verse 43, what can begin to really matter to us is the seats that we sit in, the titles that we carry, the recognition that we receive, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces.

What really counts is that people know that I'm an elder, or whatever it is. But Jesus cries, whoa, to make a show of honoring God, to be interested only, to make a show of honoring God is to be

interested only in being honored.

And so look at Jesus' conclusion, verse 44, woe to you, for you're like unmarked graves. And the real sting of his words there is that any contact with death and dead bodies and things that they touched would actually make you richly unclean.

And so do you see? Jesus says that religious hypocrites, sanctimonious Christians, fool believers, are like unmarked graves. They make other people unclean.

[27 : 21] And nobody can even tell it's happening because they're unmarked. They're concerned for cleanness, but actually they're super spreaders of impurity.

Solemn words. So much so that one of the theologians pipes up, verse 45, teacher, you're insulting us too in what you say. Well, Jesus continues.

More woos on the theologians, verses 45 to 52. Woo to the theologians, for they too lewd people up with burdens, law after law. We've seen that already, haven't we, with the Sabbath?

The religious experts of the day had their own supplementary law book, the Mishnah, that records nearly 40 different kinds of work that are banned on the Sabbath. Tying a knot, weaving a couple of threads, work.

But then there are clarifications and all that. It doesn't count as work if you untie a knot with only one hand. They're the local red tape factory, regulation after regulation. When they were to be messengers of salvation.

[28 : 26] No, they give burdens instead of blessings, grief instead of grace. And more than looting people with burdens, actually they stand against all that the true prophets of God have ever said.

That's what verses 47 to 51 are all about. They're happy to build tombs and statues of the prophets to revere the great teachers of old. Happy to say, peace be upon them, but not happy to listen to them.

Not happy to actually listen to the prophets and do what they say. And so, Jesus says, they're bound up with their forefathers who literally killed the prophets. Do you see verse 47?

You build the tombs, but your fathers did the killing. You're bound up with them, verse 48. You consent to their deeds, their deeds of killing and persecuting the prophets of God.

And he says, their blood is charged against this generation. Now, that language of this generation isn't a neutral phrase in the Gospels, it's a negative one.

[29 : 29] And it's not talking about a moment in history, I think it's a moral comment. This generation speaks of those who refuse God and reject his word.

Do you see? The blood of all the prophets from evil at the very beginning of the Bible through to Zechariah at the end of 2 Chronicles, which was the last book of the Hebrew Old Testament. The blood of all the prophets from beginning to end may be charged against this generation.

Because those whom Jesus spoke to were bound up with their fathers in rejecting God and refusing his word. And so Jesus' words here are grave words, not just for his hearers then, but for any and all who pay mere lip service to God's messengers today.

Those who refuse to hear and keep his word. Jesus is exposing not just the fruitlessness or even the folly of simply musing on theology, sitting around and deliberating on all kinds of wonderful sounding theological ideas, of sitting around clarifying what is reformed theology truly.

He's exposing not just its fruitlessness and folly, but also its fiendishness. Jesus' word, when we're blessed to receive it and hear it, isn't to titillate the mind or to burnish our credentials or to elevate our particular tribe within Christendom.

[30 : 54] No, it's to be received and obeyed. And when it isn't, when God's word in the hands of his people, of those who would desire to teach and lead others, when it is used for these skewed purposes, when it isn't heard and kept, well, that is to go the path that verse 52 steals you away from heaven and steals others away too.

woe to you, theologians, for you have taken away the key and you do not enter and you hinder others from entering.

The reality is that sanctimonious religion, sanctimonious Christians, those who love the show of religion, but whose hearts are so very far from what Jesus teaches, from God's own heart, they aren't just excluding themselves.

They've created a toxin that spreads. Well, here, Jesus has exposed them fully. And you know, when Jesus does that, when he strips us down and breaks us down and reveals to us just exactly what we are, it leaves us on the cusp of glorious opportunity, doesn't it?

When the bare reality of all that we are is laid out before us, when we're confronted with what is true, it brings with it the opportunity to respond in repentance, doesn't it? We've got nowhere else to run, nowhere else to hide.

[32 : 26] When that's the case, we can wonderfully run to Jesus and receive from him all that he loves to give his people, his own spirit, the light of his gospel, grace, forgiveness, and transformation.

But of course, sometimes such an exposure can also lead to even greater hardening. Sadly, that's what we see here. Do you see verses 53 and 54? The theologians and the Pharisees, they're now lying in wait for Jesus, hunting him.

Because after all, that's what this generation does with those who bring God's word. They prove that they are indeed like their fathers who murdered the prophets.

And so with this bubbling hatred, Jesus moves to talk directly to his disciples. And he gives them a steadying encouragement in chapter 12, verses 1 to 12.

A steadying encouragement. Jesus wants to reassure his people that they can respond rightly to him, even amidst all manner of pressure not to.

[33 : 37] Jesus is utterly realistic with us. He knows the pressures and temptations that we face. And so he speaks in these verses about not having a false faith that wants to put on an act for Jesus.

And he also speaks about not having a fearful faith that wants to conceal from the world that we do belong to Jesus. With the religious establishment buying for Jesus' blood, it's no surprise that Luke places this event right here.

Verse 1, with Jesus speaking directly to his disciples. And notice what he says. Beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. That's what he's just exposed about them, their sham religion. But notice he calls it a leaven. And the thing about leaven, is that it isn't really seen. It works away slowly in the background, bubbling away under the surface.

Jesus says, beware of being enticed by the Pharisees. They offer a seemingly easier way. Their rules and their clarity can tie everything off in a nice bow for you and make religion very doable.

[34 : 51] You can be in control of it. But as we've seen, that is to be given to hypocrisy. It cannot be maintained. Because it means having to kick against God's word and God's messengers time after time.

And it means having to maintain an act. But Jesus says, that is impossible. You see? Verses 2 and 3, the truth will out in the end.

Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed. Whatever is said in the dark will be heard in the light. We see that again and again, don't we? the truth will out.

Whether it's the rank hypocrisy of our politicians who lectured us about social distancing, only to be found out to be partying and worse. Or the preacher who's preaching is full of strictures and condemnation and setting a high and holy bar for people with little or no grace, only to be found to be having an affair.

A day is always coming when what has been hidden will be revealed. Often it will be in this world, but if it isn't in this world, it will be revealed at the last day.

[36 : 04] And so Jesus is saying, don't think that you can hide a sham faith from him. Don't think that you can play along as a Christian with some outward gloss and that nobody will ever find out.

The Pharisees' way might be very tempting and appealing to have honor and awe instead of hardship, to have no real radical and costly discipleship of Jesus, just some external flourishes. But fake faith will be shown in the end. Jesus sees through it. But the big encouragement that Jesus gives his followers and that he gives to us is that what cannot also be hidden is real faith.

do you see verse 8? Those who acknowledge Jesus before men, Jesus will acknowledge before the angels of heaven. And so Jesus is saying, don't fear in this world.

Don't fear the possibility of social shame. Don't fear those who can do you harm in this world. Don't try to conceal from this world that we belong to Jesus. Now I know that that's a lot easier to say than to do.

[37 : 14] It can be quite a prospect to fly the flag for Jesus when we knew the flack that will come with it. When we knew that we'll be teased at school, mocked at home, and it will make life difficult at work.

I'd imagine that the majority of us here know what it's like to have a sense of fear at these things. I know I do at times. But look at what Jesus says to us.

Man may be able to make things really tricky now. People may harm us. But after that, there's nothing more that they can do. At worst, all they can do is temporary damage, temporary harm. So Jesus says, don't fear them, but instead fear the one who has authority over heaven and hell. You see, when we bow before God, when we fear him and know him, when our confidence and trust is in him, we don't have to fear man.

for we belong then to the one who holds this world and the fate of every man and woman in his hands, the one who reigns over heaven and earth and all that's beneath.

[38 : 25] And with God, we don't only fear him. Do you see that? Fear not. Verse 7, for he isn't a tyrant. Now notice how quickly Jesus moves to show God's care and concern for those who belong to him.

You see, he is our father. Remember that? That's how we are to pray to him. Father. Yes, so fear him. Yes, bow down to him and worship him, but also be reassured that he knows and cares about every detail of our lives.

And he won't give us a serpent or a scorpion. Verse 6, even when five sparrows are sold cheaply, God knows each and every one of them.

Indeed, verse 7, he knows even the number of hairs on our head. Such is his attention towards us. I'd struggle to count the number of hairs that gather on the floor after my wife has dried and brushed her hair, never mind what's left on her head.

But God knows each of us so tenderly, so closely. He knows every hair on our head. And he tells us, fear not, we are of far more value than many sparrows.

[39 : 42] And so Jesus' plea in following him will bring shame and suffering in this world. But that is nothing compared to what is at stake in the world to come. The way of the Pharisees and theologians, the hypocrites, is to remove the key from people, to hinder people from entering the kingdom.

But when we respond to Jesus, when we follow him publicly, we're following the one who holds the key to heaven and hell. And who welcomes people into his kingdom. That's why he sent his son. And so those who do fly the flag for Jesus in this world, Jesus will fly the flag for them in the world to come. Our allegiance to Jesus will never, no never, go unnoticed in heaven.

And so isn't that a steadying encouragement? Rather than facing the opposite, being ashamed of him. And so facing the prospect that at that last great day, he denies us.

Away from me. I never knew you. But even with all of this, look at how Jesus finishes this section. Verse 10, he is willing to forgive those who've stumbled.

[40 : 53] Past denial of Jesus doesn't have to be terminal. Peter knew that well, didn't he? Even one of Jesus' closest followers knew the fear of being associated publicly with Jesus.

It's a real fear. But Jesus is willing to receive real failures. Like me. Like you. But look at what Jesus goes on to say.

He also promises us that his spirit will be with us. Remember that? When he teaches us to pray, he says that our heavenly father will give us his spirit.

The spirit will not leave us. Now, sometimes people can get very confused about verse 10 and blaspheming against the Holy Spirit and can worry terribly about not being able to be forgiven.

Notice, Jesus has said momentary disloyalty to Jesus is forgivable. What Jesus is talking about here is verse 11. The people who bring us before them to give an account for belonging to Jesus.

[41 : 57] Those who put us on trial. Those who seek to pressurize us to abandon and deny Jesus. It is they who actually are being brought before the Holy Spirit.

Do you see? God's spirit will be with his people. We don't need to worry about what we will say when the day comes for us to be dragged before courts, when prisons facing us, when we have a tribunal at work.

All because we won't deny Jesus and the plain teaching of his word. Jesus assures us our father knows the very details of our lives, the hairs on our heads. He won't abandon us on that day.

His spirit is with us. He will grant us help with what to say. And because that's the case, the people on trial will actually not be us, but them.

They'll be on trial because they'll be on trial before the Holy Spirit of God because to crush his people, to stomp them, to try to squeeze the faith out of them, to oppose them, that is to blaspheme

against the Holy Spirit.

[43 : 01] And so Jesus' words here are saying, don't fear those who can make things difficult only in this life because actually they're only making things dreadfully difficult for themselves in eternity.

And so those who need to fear God more than anyone are those who would come after his people. They ought to fear the one who can cast into hell.

Jesus beckons us to follow him and he wants us to respond to him with real faith, with real love and loyalty to receive his wonderful gospel message that brings light and life.

And he knows that that can be costly and challenging. But he gives us the steadying encouragement. Everyone, everyone who acknowledges me before men, however teamly, the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God.

The heavens will know about it. God will know that will never abandon us. And those who respond to Jesus with loyal love are assured that his spirit will never abandon us.

[44 : 17] Let's pray. gracious Father, grant us your grace to resist the allure of an easier discipleship.

And grant us your strengthening to not be cowed by the real threats, the very real threats that we face at the hands of men in this world. And instead, would we find, through the empowering of your spirit, would we find all the reserves we need to confess Jesus as our Lord publicly, persistently, purely.

And we ask for your help in this, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.