

The Priority of Real Response

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[0 : 00] But let's turn now this morning to our Bibles and to our reading for this morning, which you'll find in Luke's Gospel at chapter 11, page 870, if you have one of our church Bibles.

We're continuing our studies in Luke's Gospel and continue where we left off last time at Luke's Gospel, chapter 11, and at verse 29, and we'll read through to chapter 12, verse 12.

And Jesus in this section is teaching his disciples as they follow him along the path to Jerusalem, the road to glory, which comes for Jesus only through the cross and suffering.

And he's teaching them about the priorities for life on that road to glory. And you'll see in verse 28 of Luke 11, he sums up the response that's required.

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it and do it. And that's the theme that follows on here. When the crowds were increasing, Jesus began to say, this generation is an evil generation.

[1 : 16] 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.

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, a hidden place, 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's 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.

[2 : 28] 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.

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! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give us alms 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 seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplace. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.

[3 : 28] One of the lawyers, the teachers of the scriptures, answered him, Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also. And he said, Woe to you lawyers also!

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 deed 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'll 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. 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.

[4 : 46] 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.

Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and whatever 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?

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.

[5 : 50] 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 synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you'll defend yourselves or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you must say.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Amen. Amen. Well, let's turn, if you would, to Luke's Gospel, chapter 11, and page 870 in our Visitor's Bibles.

As we journey through Luke's Gospel, we're journeying with Jesus and his disciples, and we're listening to him teach them and therefore teach us about the priorities for all who would join Jesus in that journey to his coming glory in heaven.

[7 : 18] And in these chapters, we're seeing how the focus is very especially on what the priorities must be on that journey. We saw last time that according to Jesus, the first priority must be a real and living relationship.

A relationship with God himself, which can be had only through a relationship with Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. And you remember that that was exemplified by Mary in chapter 10, verse 39.

Mary who sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Jesus teaching her about what really matters in life. And of course, real relationship is a two-way thing.

It requires listening and speaking, turning to God in prayer. Again, through Jesus Christ and asking God to provide us with all that he thinks is really important and matters for our lives.

And we saw last time in chapter 11, the first 13 verses, how simple that prayer can be. We're coming as children to our Father. It's a simple thing. And we saw how shameless our prayer can be because Jesus is plain.

[8 : 31] We need God's Holy Spirit. And therefore, we must ask him. But we know that he promises to give, to answer, and to open the door.

And therefore, we don't need to hold back. We're able to ask for his goodness. And those who know him truly recognize his power as it really is.

That it's good and not evil. That it's to be rejoiced in and not rejected. And therefore, we can't be neutral. We can't be agnostic about Jesus.

And Jesus says that very plainly in chapter 11, verse 23. Those who are not positively with him are not neutral. They're against him. They're not gathering for his kingdom, says Jesus, but they're scattering.

They're destroying. And so, to respond truly is what Jesus demands of us. And he sums it up there in verse 28.

[9 : 28] What does it mean? It means hearing the word of God and doing it. And this next section of teaching continues and reinforces that theme of response.

The gospel of the kingdom, the good news that Jesus brings into the world requires a response. We mustn't just hear it, he says. We must do something. And the passage we're looking at today is all about that, all about what we must do.

It's a priority of real response. And that response is a true and loyal response to the revelation of God that has come into our world in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son.

Because in this revelation, the personal call of God on every human life has been made and has been revealed. And that call demands a response from absolutely everyone.

And so Jesus' words here this morning are directed to everyone. every human being who hears him. And it's a challenge to make sure that we prioritize making that response really true and really loyal.

[10 : 40] And in doing that, he focuses what he's saying around three great themes, around a great responsibility, a great rebuke, and then finally a great reassurance.

So let's look at these three things in the passage. First of all, in chapter 11, verses 29 to 36, Jesus speaks of a great responsibility for all who receive clear and true revelation of God in Christ.

All people, he says, have a great responsibility to perceive the sign that God has sent them from heaven in Christ and not to be falsely prejudiced against it.

So verse 35, be careful, he says, lest the light in you be darkness. It's very significant in verse 29 we're told that it's as the crowds were increasing and Jesus' ministry is growing when he's at the height of his fame and his popularity.

It's very significant that that's the moment he issues this great warning. There's no hint of triumphalism about Jesus, is there? There's no blog site trumpeting the success of his new way of doing church for the next generation.

[11 : 54] There's just absolute realism from Jesus. This generation, he says, is an evil generation that seeks for a sign. What does he mean?

Because, well, just back in chapter 11, he's told people that he wants them to ask, he wants them to seek, he wants them to knock. He promises that they will receive, that they will find when they ask.

So, why does he not want them to ask for a sign? Well, the answer is because these people have already been given multiple signs, mighty words, revelation that is unmistakable and indisputable.

And their words here, you see, simply reveal that far from genuinely seeking understanding from God, they were just purposefully avoiding understanding.

they weren't genuinely wanting to believe what was clear evidence, rather they're trying to just simply rationalize their refusal to believe clear and compelling evidence.

[12 : 55] Nobody denied the supernatural power that Jesus was exhibiting. They saw that he was casting out demons. Everyone marveled, as we saw back in chapter 11, verse 14.

But some of them, rather than admit that it was good and wonderful and healthy power at work, some of them said, no, this is Satan, this is the devil. And you see, Jesus is saying he will not dance to their tune.

He will not just give them the signs that they're after because they don't want real signs. They want to disbelieve. So he says he will give them the ultimate sign, verse 30, the sign of Jonah.

As Jonah was to Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation, the most privileged generation, surely, in the history of the world until this point, to have the very presence of God himself in the flesh in front of them.

Now Jonah, remember, was a prophet who came warning that God's patience was at an end with a brutal and wicked nation, the nation of Assyria.

[14 : 03] And he promised that judgment was on its way unless they repented. And he warned them of judgment and yet he proclaimed mercy to them if there was repentance.

In fact, Jonah himself was an embodiment of God's mercy, wasn't he? Because he himself had been saved from his sin and from his fleeing. He'd been saved from the depths of death at the bottom of the sea and brought again to the land of the living.

also Christ himself through his death and his three days in the tomb of death would show forth the depth and the mercy and the love of God to a recalcitrant people.

That he would go to such lengths of the death of his own son to bring the opportunity to repent and receive mercy before it's too late to be saved from God's judgment.

But alas, you see, this generation did not think it needed to repent. They didn't need to listen or rather they didn't want to listen to God's warnings.

[15 : 11] It's very salutary, isn't it, when you think about it that very often it's not the pagan world but it's the people of the book like these people who have had the Bible for generations.

That it's these people who are in Jesus' sights. It's these people that Jesus is slating. What he is saying here is that his official church cannot see what even complete rank pagans can see and respond to.

Verse 31, the queen of the south, the queen of the Sheba, queen of Sheba, a pagan queen. She responded to God's revelation in the wisdom of Solomon in her day but they refused the wisdom of God incarnate in front of their own eyes.

And so at the judgment, Jesus says, both she and the ruthless pagans of Nineveh, they will rise up to condemn these privileged Israelites because although the light they received was far, far less because they responded to that light that that generation refused and rejected the very light of the world himself, God himself, come down from heaven in the flesh of man.

because great revelation brings great responsibility and to refuse that responsibility is culpable. in fact, according to Jesus, it's damnable.

[16 : 39] And that's the point that Jesus is driving home here in verses 33 to 36. You see, blindness to the light that God has made known in Jesus Christ must be and can only be a willing blindness because there's nothing defective in the light that's been given.

The issue is what people have done with the light. It's been shined on them with all the grace and mercy of heaven but they've refused it. See, people talk often so confusedly, don't they, about faith.

They say things like, well, I wish I could have faith like you but I just can't. Or they say things like, well, you know, there's no evidence for that but you'll just have to take it as a matter of faith. But friends, that is not at all what the Bible means by faith.

That is never what the Bible understands when it talks about faith. Faith for the Bible is never a mindless step into the dark. Faith, according to Jesus, is a reasonable and rational acceptance of the light of truth and reality in response to unmistakable revelation from God.

It's unbelief that is an act of a perverse and prejudiced refusal of the light and a determination to remain in darkness.

[17 : 58] A determination not to see what is clear as day to anyone who will examine the evidence with open eyes and honest eyes and unprejudiced hearts. That's what Jesus is saying in verse 33.

Do you see? Light is meant to illuminate a house. Of course. And it will unless it's purposely hidden. If you put it in a cellar, literally a hidden place, that is an utterly perverse thing to do with the light.

But of course, it's possible. But don't blame the lamp if the house is in darkness and you put it in the cellar. There's no fault in the lamp. It's the folly and the perversity of the response to the light that is the problem.

It's the same with the eye, verse 34. There's nothing wrong with the sun's light if it's shining at midday. But if somebody's blind, well then, they'll be in the dark.

You see, Jesus is saying, don't blame God. Don't blame me if you're still in the dark. I've deluged you with light, with revelation of God in word and in deed.

[19 : 05] And if you don't see, it is because you won't see. You're shutting your eyes. It's your eyes that are distorted and dark and evil.

You've closed your eyes to receiving the light that God has given you. You are keeping yourselves in the dark. Just what Jesus says in another place in John 3, verse 19.

You're condemned, he says to people, if you refuse to believe in the Son of God. The light has come into the world. And here's the truth, says Jesus. People love darkness rather than light.

Why? Because, says Jesus, their deeds were evil. Because the light is exposing them and telling them that they're evil in God's sight and that they need to repent and seek God's mercy.

And if you tell people that, people will become outraged. We don't want the light of God to expose us and to challenge us and to demand repentance from us and change from us.

[20 : 13] So we blind ourselves to the light. that's the truth that stops most people following Jesus. That's why. But be careful, says Jesus, verse 35.

Be careful lest the light in you be darkness. Don't think it's just about possessing the truth, the light of God's revelation.

Don't think that's enough. You have to let it in to do its work, to get rid of all the darkness and fill your whole body, your whole life with light. That's a real challenge to the whole church, isn't it?

Especially it's a challenge to those who've had exposure to the light and the truth of God and that's all of us here in this room today, isn't it? Revelation always brings responsibility to respond rightly to God and great revelation brings great responsibility.

Jesus pinpoints, you see, that generation four times in this paragraph. Four times. It was a critical moment of destiny for them. And the last, tragically, for the most part, they chose darkness.

[21 : 28] And it did lead to disaster. History books will tell you in AD 70, the temple, the city, was utterly destroyed by the Roman invasion.

It was not saved as Nineveh was saved. But every generation faces its call from the Lord to respond and to be responsible for the light that God has given.

Now that is Christ's call here. It's deadly serious. It's true for every person, every single one. And especially, it's a sharp call for those who've been given much, who've had the privilege of God's word open and heard and taught all of their lives.

And that is very many of us, isn't it, in a church like this? If you're one of the young people who's grown up in this church, you have grown up with very great privilege. And Jesus is saying to you, what are you doing with the light that's been given to you?

Is it on a stand? Is it giving light? Or is it hidden? Are you refusing it? It's true for every generation of every church as a whole.

[22 : 39] Every church is only ever one generation away from disappearing utterly. That's the truth. And this church's witness now and in the future depends on this generation and this generation's response to the light.

Not the passing generation, not the one before. It's the under-40s in this church. It's your commitment to prayer and to giving and to mission.

and to training. Not just the older ones. It's your response that's going to see what the future of this church is. A great responsibility is lying on your shoulders.

What are you doing with it, says Jesus, this morning? I think it's also true to a measure for every generation in a nation and in a culture as well.

Israel, of course, was unique. It was God's chosen nation on earth. But Jesus also refers to Nineveh here in its generation and its destiny. And it's true to say, isn't it, that our Western world has been a place of great privilege with its Christian revelation for these 2,000 years and very especially in the last 500 years since the Protestant Reformation.

[23 : 50] What a great responsibility the Western world has not to squander that blessing and our nation also. But if it does, as it seems intent on doing more and more today, we shouldn't be surprised at the collapse that will follow.

We shouldn't be surprised at things that we hold dear, that we've cherished in our culture for generations will begin to disappear and no longer be there. We shouldn't be surprised if some of these cherished freedoms that we love cannot survive the moral vacuum that is beginning to envelop us.

If you choose darkness rather than light, there are consequences. So let these words of Jesus ring in all of our ears then. Be careful lest the light in you be darkness.

We have received great light, bear great responsibility to perceive the light, to respond truly, not with prejudice to reject it. But of course, the response called for is a true response of the whole heart to the light of God in Christ.

We're to have a whole body full of light, says Jesus. And a real response to Jesus brings purity on the inside, not just polish on the outside of our lives.

[25 : 15] And that's always the real difference, isn't it, between the righteousness of God and the mere religion of man. And that's Jesus' solemn message in verses 37 to 52 here.

He gives a real rebuke to those who reject this true righteousness of God in Christ. And instead of practicing God's true holiness, rather pervert it into something utterly false, something that is not holiness but is just hypocrisy.

What a terrible thing to be a teacher of the way of God's salvation and yet to hear Jesus' words in verse 52 directed at you.

Do you see? You've taken away the key of knowledge. You didn't enter yourselves and you hindered those who are entering. Jesus' charge against the Pharisees and against the teachers and leaders, the scribes, the teachers of the law called lawyers here in our version.

His charge is the charge of hypocrisy. You can see that in chapter 12, verse 1, beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. And that is spelled out here in verses 37 to 41 in the general rebuke that Jesus gives before he then spells it out further in these six particular woes, three at the Pharisees and then three at their teachers.

[26 : 34] Begins in verse 37 with the invitation to dine in the house of a Pharisee and his shock that Jesus didn't bathe himself ceremonially before eating. Now the Pharisees were very zealous, very spiritually committed people.

And of course they of all people then ought to be the very first ones to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ. But the light of God had been utterly distorted for them.

It becomes so utterly dark and so dark it had become that they actually look at the Son of God himself and they think he must be unholy.

He doesn't abide by our religious rituals therefore he is at fault. But Jesus says to them you've got it absolutely upside down. It's the other way around. You Pharisees have substituted ritual for reality.

Verse 39 you clean the outside things, the outside of the cup but what matters, what really matters in your lives well they're filthy. You're just full of greed and wickedness.

[27 : 45] The Pharisees were very anti-idolatry. Do you remember idolatry was the great scourge of the Israelite people all the way through the Old Testament. It's one of the things that the exile in Babylon finally got rid of and flushed out.

There was no more of that idol worship after the exile. And the Pharisees were very determined to keep religion pure in that way. And so in that sense there were Puritans in the best sense of that word.

But of course outward idolatry is only really the expression of idolatry of the heart. And greed which the Bible says is the very heart of idolatry and wickedness will not be changed merely by outward rituals will they?

Mere outward religious activity like alms giving verse 41 that isn't enough. Jesus says it's inward cleansing that we need. They might look very pious very polished on the outside but in reality he says they're not pure inside they're putrid.

It's a great warning isn't it? A warning to us about how we portray ourselves to others and how others portray themselves to us. Sometimes what can look very pious very proper can actually be very perverse and putrid to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[29 : 10] But real righteousness real holiness real purity and cleanness of life and beauty of life to Jesus isn't about rituals it's about reality.

It's not about just keeping our rules right it's about keeping our relationships right. our relationship with God and therefore our relationships with one another. And so Jesus exposes these people they're earnest people mark you they're earnest and keen to do righteously but what had become so distorted about God's truth to them was that they believed you see that they had become masters of God's law instead of being people who were mastered by it instead of being servants of God led by his word.

that's a very real danger isn't it for all of us. We mustn't think here that this is a tirade against those Pharisees those people out there who are not like us thank God.

That's just to fall into their trap isn't it? Beware that leaven says Jesus in chapter 12 verse 1 to his disciples first he says this. We need to hear these warnings very carefully lest that creeping leaven of hypocrisy should infect our hearts and quench our righteousness in his sight.

Lest we allow rules to quench the real righteousness of right relationships as they did with their tithing in verse 42. They lost all sense of proportion.

[30 : 45] The whole purpose of tithing in the Old Testament was to enable an expression of love to God and love to neighbor. It was to show compassion and love to people. Read it in Deuteronomy chapter 14.

But the more they cherished the letter the less they exhibited the spirit of the law which was full of compassion and help to fellow human beings. Just like the Sabbath command it was there for the blessing of man and beast.

But they had so perverted it that to heal a man and bring him back to life on the Sabbath was against their way of looking at things. It was all sheer sanctimony and absolutely no real saintliness.

I've met Christians utterly austere and obsessive about their Sabbatarianism and yet I've known them to be the most tight-fisted and mean and uncompassionate people I've ever met.

Absolutely the opposite of the whole spirit of the Sabbath. That kind of sanctimony can so easily creep in. One of my friends who like us had their church out of the Church of Scotland and was meeting in a hotel met a lady from the parish church in the street.

[32 : 01] She looked at him scornfully and said I was disgusted to hear that your church is now meeting in a hotel which is a licensed premises. And she turned around and walked up the street a bag in each hand with six gin bottles clanking away.

She's an alcoholic. But she said it with all seriousness. That is the sanctimony of religion.

It's so easy, isn't it, to think that we can hide truth from God as long as people think well of us, as long as we get recognition in the church and in public. That's verse 43.

The synagogue and the marketplace. That's what we care about so often. How terrible though to be exposed by Jesus' words in verse 44. Not only not being clean in God's eyes, but being so corrupt as to actually be contagious to other people like unmarked graves.

If you had any touch, any contact at all with death and Israel, you became unclean. And unmarked graves were the worst kind of hazard. You could stumble on them unawares. But if we are false, if we are fraudulent in following Jesus, we're not just harming ourselves.

[33 : 16] We're endangering others too and that's even worse. Hence, Jesus' biting words to these teachers of the law in verses 45 to 52.

You see, they assume Jesus doesn't realize what he's saying. Don't you realize you're insulting us by saying this, Jesus? Yes, I certainly do, he says. And he points both barrels at them and fires right at them.

Woe to you who are called to teach God's way of salvation, but instead you load people with burdens and you don't offer a finger to help them in their plight.

Jesus' harshest words, you know, harshest words are always spoken to spiritual leaders. Just as in the Old Testament, the harshest words of God are spoken to the prophets who lead people astray.

That's why James says what he says in James 3 verse 1. But what a terrible charge for any Christian leader, whether you are a Christian leader in the home as a parent with your children, or a youth leader in the church, or a home group leader, or an elder, or worst of all, a pastor of a congregation.

[34 : 26] What a terrible thing that Jesus should say. You point your finger to condemn people of their sin, but you never lift a finger of compassion to help people caught in sin.

That's why we all need to keep what Hebrews 5 verse 2 says of the Old Testament priest always before us. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.

God save us from false sanctimony. Help us to understand true saintliness, true humanity in Christ. And save us too from becoming venerator of the tombs of the prophets, but murderers and haters of the living word of God today when it comes to us.

I can't help thinking of the tiring statue of John Knox outside the assembly halls in the mound in Edinburgh which is dutifully paraded past every year as the church pays tribute to its presbyterian heritage.

But the truth is that if the real John Knox turned up today and said a word in the general assembly, he would be hounded out and shouted down. But all of us can so easily pretend great allegiance to our tradition, to our movement, to our heritage, and in the end that can become a substitute for real living righteousness, for real spiritual life, for real love for the Lord himself.

[35 : 58] Today, it's very easy to slip into a form of godliness that denies its real power. forever. But friends, that is the sad history of many, many a dynamic spiritual movement in the history of the church.

And it's a warning to us, all of us today. We cannot live on past generations response to Jesus Christ. It will be required, says Jesus, of this generation.

As someone has said of the zeal of the Pharisees, how tragic and frightening that what began as a movement and as a spiritual movement is that. What began as a movement ended as a disease, a hindrance, verse 52, to themselves and worse to countless others, stopping them entering the kingdom of heaven.

Friends, the priority according to Jesus in every generation is a real response. A real response today of true and loyal response and love to the revelation of God that we have in Jesus Christ.

And the worst thing that we can ever do therefore is collude together in fooling ourselves and fooling one another. The polished outside can ever substitute for purity inside and for hearts that really are changed and cleansed by the grace and mercy of God.

[37 : 29] well, I'm sure we've all been at dinner parties that have ended awkwardly and somebody's spoken out of turn or offended people but I doubt if any of us have ever been at one that would have ended with quite such a sour atmosphere as this one.

It must have been very, very tense and verse 53 makes plain, doesn't it, that Jesus had offended absolutely everybody. And so now the Pharisees really are out to get him. They're pursuing him.

They're hunting him. That's the language. Lying in wait to catch him. And no doubt also taking very great notice of who was with Jesus and associating with him.

And that no doubt explains this next section in verses 12, 1 to 12 of chapter 12 where Jesus turns to his closest disciples to teach them and to give them, in fact, a great reassurance for those who are revealed to be the redeemed of God in Christ.

He gives this great reassurance to the disciples that they can and must faithfully profess their loyalty to him and not try and privatize their faith and not fearfully pretend that they don't belong to Jesus.

[38 : 50] And it's both a challenge and a real encouragement to confess Christ openly out of faithfulness to God and not to conceal our faith out of conformity and fear of the world.

And as always, Jesus always gives real warnings and real comfort together. And both are needed as the context here makes very plain. Jesus is being pursued by aggressive opponents.

And the disciples must have been alarmed by that. You would have been too. And verse one tells us that crowds were thronging around them. They were trampling one another. It must have been a rather alarming situation and certainly a very public one.

Jesus was a marked man. And everybody would see that they were part of Jesus' band. How would you feel? That's why he gives a real warning in verses one to three.

Beware the very hypocrisy and pretense that I've just been speaking out because it will tempt you also, especially in these circumstances. Both the temptation to pretend to Jesus that you're a real disciple while in reality wanting to hold back and refuse the radical priorities that he has for your life, but also the temptation to pretend to the world that you're not a follower of Jesus at all when it looks like it's going to be a lot of trouble and very dangerous to be too close to Jesus.

[40 : 17] When the chips are really down, but you see who is willing to stand up and be loyal publicly to Jesus. It would be very interesting at Chalmers Church in Edinburgh this week, won't it, to see whether the students that live in Pollock Halls will want to be seen going into that church this morning.

That will tell, won't it? And Jesus says, beware, because you know there can be no fraud. Verse two, in the end he says, the truth will out.

everything that's hidden will be seen for what it truly is sooner or later. Whatever is whispered in the dark will be known publicly. You can't hide. Everything that is hidden, including all hypocrisy, will come out eventually.

We've seen that, haven't we? It's always in our newspapers, even this week, ashamed politicians pontificating against party funding, and then they're found to be in it up to the neck, getting that funding themselves.

Or the bankers on the fiddle, or the aging celebrities that are exposed as perverts, like Jimmy Savile and all these others, and have their knighthoods taken away.

[41 : 27] Sooner or later, usually sooner, it'll out what you really are and what you really believe. And if not sooner, then as the apostle Paul says in Romans chapter two, on the day when God judges all secrets of men by Jesus Christ, it will out then.

So don't think that you can hide a fraudulent faith from God. Or don't think you can hide genuine faith from men. That actually seems to be Jesus' main point here because immediately after this warning, he goes right on to give real comfort in verse four.

I tell you, my friends, do not fear. That's the echo through this whole passage again in verse seven. Fear not. Verse 11, do not be anxious. If there can be no fraud in our lives because revelation is inevitable, the truth will out in the end, then there need also be no fear in our lives because Jesus' reassurance is wonderful.

See how Jesus gives a wonderful answer here as to why we don't need to fear. He gives us a call to a right and a reverent fear of God and to a restful faith in God.

You see, firstly, he says we don't have to tremble before men because we do tremble before God whose power is far greater than any persecution of man. Man can only kill our bodies, says Jesus.

[42 : 53] That's all. Nothing worse. But God holds the keys to heaven and hell. Man might deprive us temporarily, physically, but that's all.

And surely it's better to suffer the loss of all things in this earth than to have to live with the knowledge that we've grieved our Lord or disowned him and therefore disqualified ourselves from his kingdom.

Fear him, ye saints, we sang, and you will have nothing else to fear. His service will be your delight and your needs will be his care. And indeed, from urging reverent fear, Jesus immediately assures us that we can have restful faith in his abundant care because his promised provision is far greater than any privation of man, any privation in this whole world.

Are you fearful sometimes of standing for Jesus openly so that you put yourself in the way of scorn at your school or in university, with your workmates, even with your family, wherever it might be?

Are you fearful of that? I think the answer is most of us yes. Isn't that right? I am. I'm sure most of you are. What Jesus says, listen to the great reassurance he gives us in these words.

[44 : 20] First of all, look at verses six and seven. There's his perfect care and personal care for us. Not one sparrow which is worth less than a halfpenny is forgotten in his sight.

How much more will he watch over you? You're more valuable than many sparrows. Every hair on your very head is numbered, says Jesus. That's a wonderfully tender image.

Think of a mother sitting and patiently combing the long hair of her daughter, patiently pleating it so it's all in just the right place.

So interested and full of care is she that her daughter's hair will look just right. how much more will our father in heaven care for our every need?

Then there's a great reassurance in verse eight of his proud confession of us who have confessed him. He'll confess us before the angels of God in heaven. He so values our loyalty to him that he will not fail to proclaim our name before the whole host of heaven.

[45 : 37] How could we contemplate denying him? And so missing out on that and indeed as verse nine says rather being denied by him in that marvelous hour.

And until then verses 10 to 12 he tells us we have his promised commitment to us by his Holy Spirit. we saw back in chapter 11 verse 13 last time that he promises his Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

And here he promises that his Holy Spirit will never leave us. In fact verse 12 in the darkest crisis we might ever face he will be there and he will give us the precise words that we have to say.

So we need not fear. in fact the truth is that in those times of worse trial Jesus is telling us here that it's not us who are really on trial but it's those who are against us who are really on trial because they're against the Holy Spirit of God.

That's what verse 10 means. Such is Christ's great mercy that even some of those who have blasphemed him and opposed him in his earthly ministry will be given the opportunity to repent at the preaching of the gospel of Christ through the Holy Spirit through the apostles and through the church.

[47 : 00] That's what we see on the day of Pentecost isn't it? Peter challenges them and they realize they have crucified the Son of God and they're cut to the heart and they repent and they say what must we do to be saved?

And they humble themselves and they find life. But Jesus is clear those who persistently resist the call of the Holy Spirit and the gospel of Christ.

Well says Jesus in verse 10 they can't harm you they can't damn you but they can bring damnation upon themselves.

So fear not when they arraign you on account of the gospel of Christ it's not you who need to be afraid it's them. That's what Paul says to the Philippians in Philippians 1 verse 29 don't be frightened by your opponents this is a clear sign to them of their destruction but your salvation and that from God.

Stephen knew that in Acts chapter 7 when he was tried and then when he was stoned that's why he cried out to God oh don't hold their sins against them. He knew what they were doing condemning themselves.

[48 : 14] that's why he testified to Jesus and we're told there the Holy Spirit filled him and enabled him to see heaven opened and see the glory of the Lord Jesus seated at the right hand of God.

His Holy Spirit will never leave you. That is Jesus promise to every one of us who remains loyal to him and to his gospel and who professes him forthrightly and publicly.

instead of pretending and wanting to hide away fearfully. So friends we all bear a great responsibility don't we to respond truly and loyally to the great revelation that we've received in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't reject him and don't let us allow ourselves ever to be infected by the leaven of spiritual falsehood and hypocrisy. He can hide it for a time but it will out in the end always.

And for that Jesus is clear there can only be great rebuke from him. Terrible woe and for us ultimate loss.

[49 : 34] instead he wants us to be encouraged by his great reassurance that when you do truly fear him you need fear nothing else and no one else in this world.

That his service will then be our delight and we can know that our needs will always be his care. fear.

So follow him and fear him and don't fear anything or anyone in this world. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father how we thank you that even as you challenge us your word brings us such great comfort to strengthen us and to help us on our way.

Help us to be a people who help one another to be true within true with each other and therefore true with you and to respond truly and loyally this day in our generation to your call of grace to us.

[50 : 49] for Jesus sake. Amen.