

STUDY 3 - LUKE 12:8-12

As we move into verse 8 in this sermon Jesus turns from warning against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They were not the same on the inside as they were on the outside, and they were gripped by fear of man. He moves to talk about what real, authentic discipleship looks like.

Unlike the hypocrites, disciples of Jesus will “acknowledge me before men”. This obviously flows on from what Jesus has just said about being freed from the fear of men in verses 4 and 5. It is important that Jesus is very personal in this statement. Disciples “acknowledge me” - that is, Jesus. If we are his disciples we will speak up for Jesus. The Pharisees had no problem with speaking about “God”, it was Jesus they wanted to put to death, as they couldn’t bear the thought that he revealed God and was the only way to God. That is just as true in our culture. Vague spirituality may be welcomed, but we must focus on Jesus. This may not be our temptation, but in our circles there may be other substitutes. For example, we can talk about “gospel” a lot, but “Jesus” less.

It is important to notice that to “acknowledge Jesus” means to talk about him. Just notice how many times the word “speak” and “say” are mentioned in these verses. While it is true that our lives must show the message we proclaim, the often quoted expression “preach the gospel at all times, if necessary, use words” is wrong!

Jesus is also clearly talking to and about “everyone” here, this is not just a command for the particularly gifted. That is a real encouragement though, as it means the accompanying promise is true for all. When we come before Jesus at the judgement, the most important thing will be knowing that he knows us, and welcomes us.

Putting this together, it is clear that Jesus does not expect to have any secret followers. What goes on in our hearts - our devotion to him - will come out of our mouths and be on show to those around. This is very different to the Pharisees, who have on show something very different to what is going on in their hearts.

Verse 9 is a terrifying verse and reminds us of what Jesus has already said in verse 5 about who we should fear. However, it does raise the question. Are we saved by faith in Christ, plus our courage to speak? What if we fail, or have failed in the past? I’m sure many of us or in our groups will remember to our shame times when we have failed. Jesus is speaking to his disciples, amongst whom is Peter who will deny Jesus in a very serious way.

Verse 10 seems to be a very difficult verse, but in this context it is an encouragement. Jesus is explicitly saying that there is forgiveness if we sin by

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denying him. Even if we “speak against the Son of Man” rather than “acknowledging me” we will be forgiven. What a comfort this must have been to Peter when he remembered it!

However if we “blaspheme against the Holy Spirit” we will not be forgiven. Many Christians worry about this statement - but it is important to recognise this is not something that is a one off or can be done accidentally. Again, Jesus is referring back to the Pharisees who are committing this very sin. Mark 3:22-29 is helpful here, as it shows that to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to ascribe the Spirit’s work in Jesus to the devil. It is never forgiven because it is never repented of. If you think Jesus is the devil you will never go to him in repentance and faith.

As Jesus draws this challenge to a conclusion he ends with even more comfort. For some, this call to acknowledge Jesus will mean persecution and trial. This comes at a great cost. But Jesus will not abandon his people in those moments. When we acknowledge Jesus he will be at work by his Holy Spirit, giving us the words to say. In a very specific way this is a promise to those first disciples, who we know from the book of Acts were put on trial and who the Lord did speak powerfully through. But the same Spirit who spoke through them is at work within us too.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Jesus has warned the disciples against “hypocrisy” in the opening verses of this sermon in Luke 12. What have been some of the characteristics of this hypocrisy?

Jesus now moves on to teach us what it means to be an authentic disciple. What does he say we will do if we are his followers (vs 8)?

Why do you think it is so significant that he talks about acknowledging “me” and not just “God” in general?

In this paragraph, what does it mean to “acknowledge Jesus”? Should our Christianity just be a personal, private thing?

Who is Jesus talking to? Is this just a command for people with particular gifts of preaching or evangelism?

What wonderful encouragement does Jesus give us if we do that in verse 8? Why is that such a precious promise?

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Verse 9 is quite stark and can lead us to worry about the times in our lives when we have failed. How does Jesus follow that statement in verse 10? Do you think verse 10 is meant to be an encouragement or a discouragement?

Is speaking against Jesus (or not speaking up for Jesus) the unforgivable sin? Why might that be important for some of the disciples who are listening to Jesus to hear?

What won't be forgiven? Look back to Mark 3:22, then vs 28-29. What is "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit"? Can we do this accidentally? How does it fit into what Jesus has been saying about the Pharisees?

We might still feel that this is too challenging and that we will fail when difficult times come and we need to acknowledge Jesus. What help does Jesus promise in vs 11-12?