

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 21 July 2019

No.: T1103

Speaker: Jonathan Hughes

Lukes Gospel 12: 1 - 21

Instructions for His disciples & the parable of the rich fool

The year was 1952. Florence Chadwick was attempting to be the first woman to swim in the open Pacific Ocean from the coast of California to Catalina Island 26 miles away. She had been swimming for 15 hours when a dense sea fog descended and her visibility was cut to just a few yards ahead. Cold and exhausted, she signalled to the team in the boat that had accompanied her to guard against sharks, and to help in a crisis. Her swim was over – she could go no further. She climbed into the boat and as the fog lifted she realised that she was less than a mile from shore. If only I had been able to see what lay ahead, she claimed, I would have been able to make it!

Two months later she made good on her statement by repeating the swim, this time successfully. Florence was also the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions, and in record time! Her words hold truth far beyond the world of open sea swimming and eloquently illustrate the truth of today's message: If only I had been able to see what lay ahead.

This morning we continue our studies in the Gospel of Luke by looking at the first 21 verses:

In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops. And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven. Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

Then one from the crowd said to Him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But He said to him, Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you? And He said to them, Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.

Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?

So he said, I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

I think in these verses Jesus gives His disciples a real warning as to how they view things, and backs His message up with the parable of the rich but foolish farmer. It was a time of genuine spiritual danger for the disciples, though they may scarcely have realised it. In verse 1 we read that an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together to listen to Jesus. Outwardly, Jesus message was popular and all seemed to be going well. The disciples may have thought that Jesus mission to usher in His kingdom was going well and that they were going to have a major part in that kingdom. However, we have to wonder how many were there in the hope of seeing another miracle or because that was where the crowds were. Being a part of a crowd, frankly any crowd, has always been more popular than standing alone for what you believe in.

So Jesus warns His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. Now leaven, or yeast, in the Bible is always used as a picture of sin. In the same way that a small amount of yeast will spread throughout the whole batch of dough and cause the bread to rise, so sin will quickly spread in our lives if it is not immediately stopped and judged. One small lie can lead to another bigger one. When we have done something wrong once, our consciences are less sensitive and so we find it easier to do something wrong again.

The particular sin of the Pharisees was hypocrisy. Outwardly they professed a great religious fervour, but inwardly they were stone cold dead. Their outer actions were to make them look good, and if in the process they made others look bad, well that was all to the good. Now this is never Gods way. He changes from the inside out and looks for inner reality that is then lived out in our actions. How many of the crowd were there to appear interested on the outside, religiously conforming, but inwardly there was no new life?

There is such a danger of this happening today. It is very easy to speak about what Christians should be doing, or places that Christians should not go to. The problem with this approach is that it does not spring from a changed inner life. We do something to conform rather than from an inner conviction that this is something that God is calling us to. It is so much easier to address the gross, outward sins rather than deal with the hidden inner sins. So if I was unable to attend church on Sunday because I was too busy washing and polishing my lovely new sports car I would soon be condemned for pride and wrong priorities. However, we are ready to accept an older person being so independent that even when they are too old to get to church on their own, they will not ask for help, and so deprive the local church of their presence. Inner pride is less obvious but equally deadly!

Jesus went on to teach His disciples that all things are known to God and it is to Him that we are truly answerable. I might rightly be afraid of a tough looking gang of youths causing a nuisance on the corner of my street. They are a very visible threat to my well being – or so I think. However, the very worst they could do is to prematurely end my life and then I would be with the Lord Jesus in heaven forever and that would be a good thing. Jesus told His disciples that the One who should really be taken account of is God Himself. For the individual who is not saved: It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews chapter 10, verse 31). The fate of the lost should truly move us to reach out to them in love, rather than holding them at arms length because of the wrong things that they are doing. Now for us who are saved: are we more frightened of going back to a dark and empty house on a winters night or of answering to God who has told us not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together? (Hebrews chapter 10, verse 25). Somehow this kind of behaviour has become acceptable. We have lost sight of reality in the fog of self-fulfilment that

characterises 21st century living. If I truly believed that Jesus may return at any moment then I would never miss being found together with my brothers and sisters in the local church, if I could possibly be there, because there is nowhere I would rather be when He returns than in that place. What a joy it would be if He found me remembering Him at the breaking of bread, or making a cup of tea after the Gospel.

Jesus told His disciples that God knows even the number of hairs on our head. Now in my case that might be a rapidly declining number sadly, but it is still a number beyond my knowing, and I am not overly concerned when a few more drop out after giving it a good brush each morning! Now it is obvious from Jesus words that God knows far more about me than just how many hairs I have. Jesus was telling His disciples that there is not a single issue in their lives that God did not know about – from the trivial to the eternal. Now do I believe that?..... Truly?

You see, if I truly believe that the all powerful God knows everything about me then my only logical response can be complete surrender to Him, obedience to His word and a life free from worry. If God could speak a word and worlds came into being, then He is well able to speak to me in my circumstances and provide for all that is good for me. If God could speak to the wind and the waves and they heard His voice and had to obey it, then surely, when He speaks to me through His word, I must listen and obey. The only other alternatives are that Jesus was mistaken when He told His disciples that God knows all about them, or that He does know but simply does not care. Even to say that is sheer blasphemous foolishness! Of course He knows and who could doubt that He cares when we look at Calvary?

So if we are compelled to accept that God knows everything about us, and that this knowledge is a working, caring knowledge rather than just a list of facts, then what effect ought this to have on our lives? Well, it ought to enable me to live the very best kind of life for Him. I need not waste time worrying about my future for it is entirely in His hands. I need not waste time pursuing the passing riches of this world, beyond what I need to pay the bills, because there are heavenly store houses waiting to be filled with my good works instead. I need not waste time worrying about what others think about me for I am accepted in Gods beloved Son. I need not waste time in bitterness and revenge for the righteous judge of all the earth will do right. Can you see what a warm and wonderful life this could be? How tantalisingly desirous this is....if only I truly believe what Jesus was telling His disciples. And it really matters!

Jesus next words in verses 8 and 9 are likely to be misinterpreted if we miss the context in which they were spoken. If I am living a life of complete dependence on Him, free from waste and worry, then I am truly confessing before men the greatness of my God. I dont think that Jesus is particularly talking about oral confession here – words are cheap. It is my actions that truly confess my reliance upon God. When I live this positive kind of life before men, then God will be able to say, as it were to the angelic host, Look there! See, sending the Lord Jesus to die for him was worth it. There is My omniscient wisdom! But when my actions deny the reality of my faith – when I choose to worry and doubt, when I take my own provision into my own hands then I am denying Him. Such a life could never be used as an example before the angels! Perhaps you have never really given much thought to what the angels make of your life. But it is clear from Scripture that our actions on earth have quite an impact upon the angels in heaven.

What a wonderful thing it would be if God could use my life as an object lesson for the legions of heaven to teach them about His wisdom. Perhaps after this broadcast you might like to read 1 Corinthians 11, verses 1 – 16 and Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1,2 to see other examples of how our lives on earth are observed in the heavenly realm. It is important to note that this denial is before the angels of God. This verse in no way gives us cause to believe that if we deny the Lord Jesus here upon earth, whether by word or deed, then He will deny us to God and then we can lose our salvation. That is simply not what this verse is saying and such a thought runs contrary to

the rest of what the Bible teaches. If only we could see clearly the end in view and so live worthily of Him. What a joy it will be to be in heaven and for the angels to recognise us as one cause of their worshipping God. What shame to be unrecognised by them, as our lives have been deemed too shameful to be shown to them!

The Pharisees were in such danger. They had spoken against the Lord Jesus but even this could be forgiven them. Indeed, it is true for many of us who have time and again rejected the Lord Jesus before finally repenting and turning to Him in salvation. But the Pharisees were soon to reject the clear working of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and the formation of the church. In doing so for them there could be no forgiveness. So Israel, as a nation, lies under the judgement of God in the present day. Salvation is by faith in Christ, irrespective of gender or nationhood. Therefore, when a man in the crowd calls on Jesus to be a judge of earthly matters, Jesus rebukes his earthbound concerns. Jesus had come on eternal business and this was the salvation of souls. He could clearly see His work and the end in view and He would not be distracted from it. Knowing all things, too, He would give His disciples a warning that soon they would be the ones in the firing line. At just such a time, they would be helped by the Holy Spirit and given the wisdom to act and speak in a God-honouring way.

It has well been said that verses 11 – 12 are a great comfort to the persecuted child of God but it is not an excuse for the lazy preacher of the Gospel! God fully expects us to do for ourselves what we are able to do, in His strength. He will then do for us what we are unable to do, for His glory.

So in the first 15 verses of chapter 12, Jesus had taught His disciples to keep the end in view. There is an eternal heaven to be gained and what we do now very much impacts upon what we shall do in a future day. The idea that we will all be the same in glory, irrespective of how we have lived on earth, is one that finds no basis in the Bible. The reward for service now will be increased service for Him in a day to come.

Jesus now tells the disciples a parable to illustrate the truth of what He has been saying. Imagine a farmer who is unbelievably successful. His current barns are too small to keep his bountiful harvest safe from decay. So he decides to pull down his small barn and build a bigger one. Since he now has more than enough to keep him for the rest of his life, he will retire and enjoy what he has earned. After all, further enrichment would only mean leaving more behind when he died and there would be no benefit for him in that! If that had been all that Jesus had said, then we would be left thinking that here was a prudent and sensible farmer – no wonder that he was rich. He had worked hard and now he was going to enjoy the fruit of his work.

But that farmer took no thought as to God. Fool, God called him, and so he was, for he had taken no thought to eternity. In the fog of the ordinary affairs of this world, he had lost sight of the fact that there is more to life than this life and this world. That very night he would die. None of what he had done would be of any use to him then and in heavenly terms he was a pauper. The psalmist could write: The fool has said in his heart, There is no God (Psalm 14:1). Some suggest this can be interpreted as, No God for me! When individuals take no thought of God, then they are acting foolishly indeed. They may be the most highly educated of individuals, but knowledge is not the same as wisdom.

The farmer had thought only of this life and in so doing he was the worlds greatest fool. How wonderful it is to know God as our Saviour. There is nothing finer in life. And yet, it is still possible to act in a foolish way. When I am poor, it makes no sense to give my money to support the Lords work. When I am tired, it makes no sense to work hard for Him. When I am old, it makes no sense to use what little energy I have in what others could do. All these ways of thinking, like the farmer, are perfectly sensible when we take no account of God. Florence Chadwicks call to be rescued made perfect sense if there were miles and miles still to swim for she was exhausted. But it made

no sense when she saw how close she was. And such worldly thinking makes no sense when we consider that we have an eternal destiny.

C.T. Studd, missionary, Cambridge graduate and cricketer said: Only one life? twill soon be past. Only whats done for Christ will last. There is the wisdom of God for our lives. Few of us will ever be called to become missionaries on a foreign field but all of us are called to serve God in all that we do, where we are. I should want to bring my children up for God so that they really love Him. I should want to be the kind of spouse that Ephesians chapter 5 speaks about. I should want to be the kind of employee who thinks that God is my line supervisor. In the hum drum and mundane, we only have this life. There is no rehearsal. Only what we can truly say we have done, as unto the Lord, has value to it.

Imagine we were back in the mid 1990s and there was the real possibility that we might have joined the euro in this country. Now imagine that the chancellor of the Exchequer had announced on the news that on such and such a date, say January 1st 2000, the pound sterling would cease to be legal tender and could no longer even be exchanged in the bank. How would you have reacted? You could ignore it and hope that it never happened but when it did all your money would be utterly worthless! Such is the approach of the ungodly. Alternatively, you could have rushed out and exchanged every last penny into euros, even the ones in the sides of the sofa! Thats fine, except several years is a long time to live without money to buy the every day essentials, as the shops would still have been using sterling. The prudent approach would have been to keep in sterling only what was absolutely necessary to get you through to January 1st 2000 and to exchange the rest into euros! Here we stand, about to step over the threshold of eternity at any moment. If only we had eyes to see this and then to act accordingly. May He give us His wisdom to live for Him every day!

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on Luke chapter 12, verses 1- 21: Instructions to His disciples and the parable of the rich fool, talk number 1103.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.