



Luke 12:4-10

Our Great Heritage 9
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⁴ “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ⁸ “I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. ⁹ But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. ¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Augsburg Confession is an extremely important Christian document. It was the first document to truly spell out the differences between what the Roman Catholic Church was teaching and what Luther and others understood from Scripture. It identified what a true “Lutheran” understanding of the Scriptures was and covered important teachings such as the Trinity, Original Sin, Justification, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper and much more. Its public unveiling took place at a great meeting of Church and State’s highest officials, called by Emperor Charles V, in the city of Augsburg, Germany in 1530.

You may find it interesting that Luther did not write the Augsburg Confession, Philip Melancthon did. And Luther did not present it at this meeting—in fact he wasn’t even there. A faithful layman named Christian Beyer clearly and loudly read this confession of faith before men who could have taken his life for doing so—and less than a year later, the discussions resulting from the Augsburg Confession prompted the Emperor to literally threaten the lives of these Reformers. Today, almost 500 years after, this Augsburg Confession *still* provides a standard for Lutheran teaching because it accurately reflects the truths presented in the Bible!

Whether a confession of faith in Jesus and his Word is carefully crafted and publicly read like the Augsburg Confession or it is an individual’s spoken declaration of faith to another person in a more private context, these confessions are important for multiple reasons. Today, Jesus will explain why as we hear him speak in the words of Luke’s gospel, chapter 12.

The context of Jesus’ words helps us to better understand why he said what he said. He was facing the wrath of the Pharisees, who did not like his faithful teaching of the God’s law and his pointing to himself as the Savior. Since Jesus was facing persecution as he confessed the truth, he knew his followers would face opposition for confessing their faith in him. If they were going to confess their faith and proclaim the gospel in the face of persecution, Jesus knew they needed encouragement, so he spoke to them about:

Confessions of Faith

1. Require a Proper Fear (4-7)

2. Always have a Good Result (8-10)

There are many things that cause us to be afraid. Every kid who has lost mom or dad at the store knows fear. Bedtime can be a little scary because it's dark. As we get older, we are afraid we won't find friends at our new school or that we won't make the team. Marriage troubles cause fear and so do major health concerns. We're afraid we won't be loved, that someone will hurt us, that terrorism will destroy life as we know it. In so many ways throughout our lives, we know fear.

Christians also experience another fear. We are often afraid when it comes to saying that we believe in Jesus as our Savior and telling others about him so that they too may know the forgiveness and salvation we enjoy. We are afraid to talk about this even when someone "opens the door" for the conversation. We're also afraid of putting ourselves in the situation of talking about Jesus when someone literally opens the door when our congregation does some canvassing in a neighborhood. It is really an irrational fear. We aren't going to receive death threats. No one is going to pull a gun on us and chase us away or release big, scary dogs. Physical harm is the least likely thing to happen to us.

So it's really about our emotions—we don't want to feel bad, feel awkward, be embarrassed, feel uncomfortable. We're afraid of the way we will feel. Never mind that most conversations with a friend, a family member—even a stranger—will be civil and possibly even friendly or that most people who answer a door will be nice. We focus on the small percentage that MAY cause us discomfort. And so, we let fear paralyze us and we end up not acknowledging Christ.

What does Jesus say about this kind of fear? **"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.** I'm guessing it is pretty easy to see that we disregard Jesus' intentions for us when we fear what people will do or how they will cause us to feel.

This kind of fear is so out of place! Even IF the worst were to happen to you as you confess Christ to your family member, friend, or a complete stranger—they killed you for it—that's all they can do! And you might say, *"Isn't that kind of a big deal?!"* Jesus points out that their treatment of you doesn't touch your soul. IF this doomsday scenario were to play out because you said something about Jesus, they can't take your faith away. The ultimate price—death—would bring you to heaven. Now, Jesus isn't suggesting that you TRY to get killed so you can get to heaven right away! He's saying, that you are not to not have an "afraid" kind of fear that prevents you from confessing your faith and the truth of salvation in Jesus.

Perhaps surprisingly, Jesus *does* say that you ought to have fear! When he says, **But I will show you whom you should fear**, what kind of fear is he talking about? The kind of fear that Martin Luther included in the Catechism's explanations to each of the Commandments, where he wrote, *"We should fear and love God..."* This is not the "afraid" kind of fear, but awe and respect for the almighty God and trust in him. How do we know? Sparrows and hair! God knows everything there is to know about the birds and the very hairs on your head—things you think little about, but God pays attention

to and takes care of. Just as God has the love and power to do those things and care for them, he also watches over you and your faithful witness. Nothing will happen without the permission of your Heavenly Father and nothing will happen that is not for your spiritual good. It will be in keeping with his purpose in sending out his Word through you; it will accomplish the purpose for which he sent that Word through your lips to that other person.

The God who knows all that and does all that is the God who can also throw a person into hell for eternity—away from him and suffering forever. We should be careful to note Jesus' very specific way of addressing these many followers of his. He said, **Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.** This is not about abstracts and non-descript people! This is about Jesus' disciples then and now. This is about you and me also! Jesus urges us to “Fear God,” to respect and stand in awe of the almighty God and trust in him. This is a proper “fear” and it is required for you and me to make any confession of faith. And if that proper fear is there, we will be able to stand up for Jesus in any situation.

When we have this proper fear of God and we do confess him to others and share the good news about Jesus as we have opportunity, we have the assurance of a good result every time.

“I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. Angels in heaven will hear Jesus himself witness about the public confession of faith given by every one of us! What we do here is seen by our Savior and will be praised in the courts of heaven on the Last Day! That may seem amazing to us. Something we say about our Savior to a neighbor...a truthful and open response about Jesus to someone who asks...a simple sharing of our faith with a child, or someone having a tough time in life, or an explanation given to a fellow student...these things get Jesus excited enough to acknowledge us before the Father and his heavenly creatures? Yes! Why? Because they reveal the faith in our hearts. They show a trust in the Savior and a proper fear of God.

Jesus asks us to publicly confess him and it pleases him. This is a reason to do this fearless—or “properly fearful”—witnessing and confessing and sharing. It pleases Jesus, the one who fearlessly attacked temptations to sin and confrontations with Satan and whips and nails and cross and death and grave—this pleases him! And is that not what we WANT to do—live our lives in thanks to him for saving us through all that he did?!

There is another reason to publicly represent Jesus too. We know that our confessions of faith, our sharing of the gospel, can be used by the Holy Spirit to bring faith to another person. We want that for our friend or family member or neighbor...or even a complete stranger. God wants everyone to be saved and so do we! The last verse of

our lesson addresses those who reject God. Ultimately, if a person commits the “sin against the Holy Spirit”—rejection of God, unbelief—they will find themselves in the hell Jesus mentions here. While we can’t stop someone from rejecting God, we can make the most of our opportunities to share salvation through Jesus with them. Whether we think the odds are good that they will believe us or not is unimportant. Jesus calls us to confess him and let the Spirit do his work.

There is actually always a good result when we confess Christ. That doesn’t mean everyone will appreciate the truth we share. It doesn’t mean everyone will treat us well. It doesn’t mean that everyone will stop rejecting Jesus and trust in him as their Savior. It *does* mean that Jesus is pleased and rejoices in heaven and will acknowledge us on the Last Day. It *does* mean that the Holy Spirit will accomplish something through the message we share. These are good, godly results.

The opposite is true if we disown Jesus here in this world. “Disown” here means to deny our relationship with Jesus, to refuse to acknowledge or confess him. Denying Jesus raises the question of whether there is faith there. Jesus intends to get us thinking about our faith and what it means to follow him and be his witnesses. Just as his original disciples (“followers”) were also apostles (“ones sent out” to be witnesses), so are we! We testify to the truth of salvation in Jesus alone and confess our faith in him as our Savior from sin. That’s what Christians do.

It is good for us to have the examples of Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon and Christian Beyer and others who would not deny Christ, who would not waste the opportunities to be clear about God’s Word and the gospel. They were so confident of God’s Word and his love and promises that they put into writing long documents like the Augsburg Confession that were clear explanations of Scripture. They were so fearless when it came to what people could do to them and so properly fearful of God that they could stand before the most powerful earthly rulers and church officials and confess what they knew to be true. Under a very real threat of death they did this!

You and I really have no point of comparison with that they faced. When tempted to back off, to not say anything when God ought to be represented, when Jesus is disrespected, as an opportunity to share the Savior with someone opens up, we might think of the spiritually brave Reformers of Luther’s time. Better yet, we might think of Jesus himself, as he stood up for us and received the judgment for our sins instead of us. Our Savior paid for the times we have denied him here and in the forgiveness we find in him, you and I are encouraged to go back into the world and confess him before others.

We may see no earthly reward for doing the right thing, saying the right thing, attempting to share Jesus with someone, but there is joy in Jesus’ heart and rejoicing in heaven among those who will be the welcoming party when we leave this world and arrive there one day! This is the ultimate “good result” of faith placed squarely on Christ and we look forward to it! Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.