

# LUKE—WEEK 16

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is The ich Fool by Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606–1669)  
on display at Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen, Berlin*

Jesus's teaching focuses on what's important and what's not. Beware of the dangers the Pharisees represent, especially blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The end could come at any moment. Are you prepared? What is your treasure?

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

Luke 12:1–40 — What's Important  
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1 Luke 12:1–7 (ESV)

*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 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? 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.*

This is another one of those passages that loses something in the translation. The Greek word that’s translated as “fear” (φοβήθητε, pho-bay-thay-teh) means fear or reverence or respect. Try to think of a single concept that means all of those. Phobos is the feeling you get in the presence of something intimidating (which can be bad, or good, even holy). Now consider how the second paragraph would sound with the word “revere” in place of “fear.”

*“I tell you, my friends, do not revere those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to revere: revere him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, revere him!”*

Well, that’s not exactly it either. The right translation is to split the difference and translate phobos as “intimidated by” or “reverently fear,” which is precise but clumsy. Note: in the last sentence “not phobos” has the sense of “not fear” more than “not revere.” *Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

With phobaythayteh correctly understood, the second paragraph is clear, and so is the connection to the first paragraph. The whole passage makes an important point.

Hypocrisy is dangerous.

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We tend to assume that we’re not hypocrites. But Jesus said, “*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*” Beware, because this is a common trap, especially in modern America. Our culture is so steeped in hypocrisy that we don’t even notice it. Just ask someone how they’re doing. You almost never get an honest answer.

And a typical resume is as optimistic as a seed catalog; everything is just amazingly wonderful. No one is genuine, yet we just expect that and double check everything.

Asking the Lord to give us a culture of genuine people is a bit much, but we can ask Him to make us genuine. Ask Him to reveal to us the masks we wear without even noticing.

He will.

2 Luke 12:8–12 (ESV)

*“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.”*

Jesus makes a distinction here that isn't easy to sort out. *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. Also, the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.*

So, speaking a word against the Son of Man is forgivable, but denying Him isn't. Also, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit isn't forgivable. It seems that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and denying Christ are related, if not equivalent. But what about Peter's denial?

*But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. — Luke 22:57–60 (ESV)*

Note that Peter's denial is about whether he was with Jesus, not about who Jesus is. It's a lie, but it doesn't blaspheme anything. It isn't an unforgivable sin because he's not denying Christ in the sense of verse 9 here.

The topic of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is way too long for a daily devotional. There are too many references to even list them all.

But they all point to getting good and evil backwards—calling Holy things evil and evil things good. It makes sense that this would be a fatal error since it's aligning with the other side.

We all make mistakes, but that's a far cry from seeing the world through enemy eyes.

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We usually don't need to concern ourselves with blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. It's pretty extraordinary, and it's not our job to judge someone's spiritual state anyway. Non-Christians can be aggressively nasty, but they usually don't even know enough to commit blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

Still, we need to be sensitive about how open someone is to the gospel. If they make it clear that they're not interested, you should take the hint. Pre-evangelism is appropriate in that case and pressing someone to confess Christ when they're not at that stage is not helpful.

There are many ways to be a witness for Christ.

3 Luke 12:13–21 (ESV)

*Someone in 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 arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”*

Wow. The opportunity of a lifetime—of a thousand lifetimes! The crowd is massive but this guy gets close enough to ask Jesus a question. What will he ask the Lord?

A follow up question on Jesus' previous point about the unforgivable sin would be good. Or he could ask Jesus why He's going to Jerusalem, or how we can know He's the Messiah, or any number of things. The crowd is hanging on Jesus' every word. What will he ask?

Instead, this fool manages to bore everyone with some petty dispute about money. Has he even been paying attention? His baggage owns him.

So Jesus turns this around and teaches a lesson on how people are owned by their money. It's brilliant judo.

This guy tries to change the subject to something secular, and Jesus brings it right back to the kingdom of God.

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We are more like this guy than we care to admit. He understands Jesus' authority, he just wants to use it for his own petty ends. Yeah, we do that too. I know I do it.

Many of my prayers could just as well begin with, “Dear Santa.” It's not wrong to want someone you love healed, but these kinds of prayers are so dominant they make it sound like that's why we're there. The praise and worship parts seem to just be a pro forma warm up.

If Jesus really is who we claim He is, our prayers should sound more like we are before the Lord and talking to Him the way a servant would talk to his master. Instead of asking the Lord to tell my brother to divide his inheritance with me, I'd be asking something like, “What is your will for me today?”

When was the last time you said a prayer that was a question? Was it the kind of question you should be asking someone who's in charge of the universe?

Just as the guy in this passage blew his chance to “ask any question” of the Lord, we blow our chance too.

4 Luke 12:22–34 (ESV)

*And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.*

*“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*

There's an important point in the middle of this passage that's easy to miss. Jesus says. *“Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”*

But that's not the end. Next He says, *“But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!”*

The bit about the lilies isn't quite so simple. Their splendor is short lived. The ovens await.

So, there are two reasons why you shouldn't worry. God will provide, and life is short. That second one is perfectly logical but curiously discomfoting. Life is short, and that's supposed to be a relief. This takes some getting used to but the idea is all over the New Testament.

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* — Philippians 1:21 (ESV)

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As Kenny Chesney puts it, “Everybody want to go to heaven, but nobody want to go now.”

We tend to look forward to heaven in word but not in deed. We look forward to retirement, why are we afraid of Christianity's retirement plan? Compared to how unfulfilling most folks find earthly retirement, heaven is bound to be, well, heaven. We need to wipe off the residue of our old way of thinking. The kingdom perspective should dominate. This doesn't mean living as a monk, just having kingdom goals.

But this can never be done by trying. Only the Holy Spirit can cure us of loving this life. Note that we are not called to hate this life; we are called to love the kingdom and the king more.

It's like loving school but still looking forward to graduating.

5 Luke 12:35–40 (ESV)

*“Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

It's interesting that Jesus talks about His return when He hasn't even left yet. He has mentioned that He's leaving, but His disciples didn't understand it. Jesus will hammer the point, over and over, that we must not assume to know when He's coming back. Still, we've had no end of theories of when it will be.

Here Jesus uses two parables to illustrate how important this is, first about servants standing watch waiting for their master, then another about a master being unprepared for a thief. The contrast between the two illustrations could not be more stark.

In the first, a servant will be rewarded gloriously if he doesn't fall asleep while on duty in the wee small hours of the morning. In the second, the master would not have suffered a loss if he *had known at what hour the thief was coming*.

This combination is quite clever. By using two opposite illustrations, Jesus prevents other issues from distracting us from His point. We don't need to figure out whether we're analogous to masters or servants; both are used. We can't fret over whether this is about rewards or punishments; both are illustrated here.

It's a sermon with only one point.

Be ready.

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And here we are, 2000 years later and yet, every once in a while, someone barks out a prediction of when the second coming will be. Given the Lord's clear instruction that we aren't going to know, it's doubly surprising that the fools who make these predictions claim to make them based on the Bible.

But what does it mean to be ready? How is that different from just being a serious Christian?

It isn't really. Jesus is emphasizing the importance of the tasks before us. Speculating on the time of Christ's return is a “spectator” activity, like betting on the outcome of a football game you're not involved in. If you're actually involved in the game, you don't have time for idle speculation on the outcome.

Jesus is saying, “Keep your head in the game,” and don't lose focus.

The ref could call time at any moment.

