

DO YOU KNOW HOW TO SURVIVE IN A HOSTILE WORLD?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

These are exciting days in which to be alive and to be a follower of Jesus Christ. There are so many spiritual doors of opportunity open for presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to many whose hearts are open to invite him to become their Lord and Savior. We think of the open doors for the gospel in Russia, Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Far East, and our own country. God is doing a wonderful work in offering redemption throughout the world, and it thrills our hearts. At the same time, this is still a hostile world in which the Christian community is being confronted at every open door by the enemies of Jesus Christ. The government of China is now closing down the thousands of house churches, and Iran is closing down the Iranian Bible Society after its 10 years as a legal and open operation. In Liberia a Baptist missionary named Clark Alan Jacobsen was killed by government troops and the church grounds burned and looted in August 1990; all missionaries were forced to leave the country. Anglican Bishop Alexander Muge of Kenya was also killed in a suspicious automobile accident last August. He had been warned by a cabinet minister that he might be killed if he entered the Busia district of his country to minister, because he had been probing the unsolved murder of former foreign minister Robert Ouko. The October 1990 killings of three Russian Orthodox priests who championed religious freedom have raised speculation about renewed KGB activity against religion. Closer to home, the California Supreme Court has now banned prayer at high school events. It is still a wonderful generation to which to minister in the name of Jesus Christ, but at the same time we have to keep in mind that it is a hostile world, and many of our faithful brothers and sisters around the world are experiencing this hostility even to the point of following in the footprints of our loving Lord through the valley of the shadow of death.

The question we want to address today is, Do you know how to survive in a hostile world? As we turn to Luke 11: 53-12:12, let me set the stage for our study. The Lord Jesus Christ was some six months away from presenting himself to Israel as its Messiah, facing its rejection, and finally offering himself up as the final sacrificial Lamb on the cross of Calvary for Israel's sins and the sins of the world. As the countdown became more apparent, so did the opposition from the Jewish religious community. When he cast out a mute spirit from a Jewish victim, the Pharisees sought to accuse Jesus of using the power of Satan to accomplish that healing. When he was invited to lunch by a Pharisee, our Lord was being tested about his theological view of ceremonial cleansing. As the tension in the religious community mounted, the Lord took the disciples aside and began to warn them about the difficulty and hostility that would come upon them then and in the days ahead because of their love and devotion to him. In that context our Lord began to review for his disciples five types of situations they would have to face. With each he gave words of warning as well as encouragement to his disciples in the hope that they would remain faithful to him even to the point of their own physical death.

How can we survive in a hostile world?

I. Beware of hypocrisy

Luke 11:53-12:3

"And when He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him, to catch Him in something He might say. Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops."

We see the plot beginning to thicken. The Lord Jesus has left the home of the Pharisee, and other scribes and Pharisees have become very hostile because the Lord had taken away the hypocritical masks of these supposed religious shepherds of Israel. He said that in the sight of God (see 1 Samuel 16:7) their hearts were filled with robbery and wickedness. He then accused them of (1) losing their love of God and refusing to bring justice among his people; (2) allowing their hearts to be filled with pride so that to sit under their teaching would be like walking over an unmarked grave, defiling anyone who would listen to them; (3) being responsible for the death of all the prophets whom their fathers had killed because they would not continue their teaching; and (4) not only not having the key to eternal life that they thought they had, but hindering anyone who was truly seeking it. So the opposition sought to catch him in a slip of the tongue in which he would incriminate himself. This was taking place when "so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they were stepping on one another..." As the crowds were pressing in and the Pharisees were stirring up their hearts against Christ, the disciples would have been tempted to say to themselves, "It might be better if our faith in Jesus as Messiah became a private affair rather than being so public. You could literally get killed being publicly identified with Jesus!"

Jesus certainly detected their fear, and he began saying to them, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Leaven is a small piece of fermenting dough put aside for producing fermentation in a fresh batch of dough. The Law would not allow leaven (yeast) to be placed in any bread that was to be offered to the Lord, for it was a symbol of evil and the energy of sin (Leviticus 2:11). Jesus was warning his disciples to beware of the teaching or yeast of the Pharisees, who followed after the traditions of men, which in turn corrupted and decayed the minds of the people so that they no longer saw the Father, his true laws of life, or his Messiah. Jesus had already warned his disciples about the teachings of the Pharisees on an earlier occasion when he rebuked the Pharisees: "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." (Mark 7:6-8.) In another setting our Lord warning the disciples, "'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then they understood that he did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matthew 16:11-12.)

Our own immediate community in this day is filled with churches and religious personnel who have set aside the teaching of Christ and replaced it with the teaching of men in order to accommodate their own sinful and rebellious lifestyles as well as those of their parishioners. It looks as if they are getting away with this hypocrisy, but Jesus warned his disciples in his day, and it remains a warning to our present day, that night will become as day. "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known." The Pharisees had developed a lifestyle of hypocrisy, hiding their real values behind a variety of religious masks that all amounted to a life of insincerity, dishonesty, and deception, not realizing that in the end they would all be unmasked. So the Lord was warning his disciples in light of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, "If you think that in the sight of God you can cover up the reality of your hearts, you are greatly mistaken; for either in this lifetime or in the life to come, all must face the righteous Judge in the final judgment, and his name is Jesus."

The apostle Paul will remind the Corinthian Christians during his ministry, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10.) And all those who have rejected Jesus as their Lord and Savior on earth must appear at the great white throne judgment. The apostle John describes the scene in Revelation 20:11-15: "And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it...and I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds...and if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

The Lord continued to warn the disciples, realizing that they, too, might become tempted to hide behind a mask during the time of his persecution and trial: "Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light..." David wrote: "Even the darkness is not dark to Thee, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to Thee." (Psalm 139:12.) "...and what you have whispered in the inner rooms

shall be proclaimed upon the housetops." Paul spoke of the final judgment day to the Romans: "...on the day when...God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus." (Romans 2:16.) The bottom line is, there are no secrets in the sight of God and there are really no secrets on earth. So the sins that are not dealt with here on earth will be dealt with in heaven before the one and only righteous Judge, Jesus Christ. Jesus' warning to his disciples was, "Don't be fooled by the hypocritical Pharisees, and don't fool yourselves. Judgment will be rendered." Jesus was not only showing the disciples the ultimate outcome for the hypocritical Pharisees, but he was also saying to them, "Make sure that's not you! Be careful in your own life that you who are so quick to point out their mistakes are not consumed by the very sin that you're pointing out."

Speaking of a final day of judgment when our sins will be revealed, I receive a biweekly paper called *National and International Religious Report*. In the May 6 report they had the following story:

James McKinney was budget director since 1957 of Arlington [VA] United Methodist Church...and by the time of his death last month at age 74, he had a little office at the church, a salary of \$17,000, and complete control over the finances. In the years preceding his death, finances sagged. Needed maintenance and repairs were put off, and the church had to beg the denomination for end of the year bailouts. Meanwhile McKinney, who had the love and trust of his fellow parishioners, resisted the pastor's pressure to computerize the church's finances. Generosity was a McKinney hallmark: candy for little children, occasionally \$500 to help with college...everyone thought he was dipping into his own pockets for the gifts. After his death the truth came out....[from the church funds] he had given away some \$650,000 altogether. He had devised an accounting procedure to fool other church members....but never spent it on himself. He lived simply and drove an old car. What happened? Old-timers who remember him from when he was a successful businessman believe he did fund his generosity from his own wealth in those years. After he fell on hard times, they say, he had to keep up the image.

How can we survive in a hostile world? Beware of hypocrisy, and...

II. Beware of the power of God

Luke 12:4-5

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 warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!"

The Lord warned his disciples that difficult and deadly days were ahead and many powerful forces would begin to threaten their lives and the lives of their families. He would later tell his disciples in the upper room on the night he was betrayed, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:20.)

We are told over and over again in the Scriptures that our flesh and blood bodies are designed only as temporary housing for our spirits in this physical and very temporary world. Paul encouraged the Corinthians when he wrote, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven." (2 Corinthians 5:1-2.) So if they attack our bodies we are not to be afraid of that. Don't be unfaithful to what you believe about Jesus; don't throw him aside if someone attacks you.

Later Stephen would experience this persecution as he gave testimony to the Jewish leaders that Jesus was the risen Messiah, and even as he spoke they took him outside the city and "...they began stoning him....and they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' And having said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:54-60.) He was conscious the whole time that the Lord was with him. Jesus wanted to

encourage his disciples that their enemies were powerless against the spirit of a man. The most they can do is kill the body and give it what the world would call an untimely death.

But in light of the forthcoming persecution, and I think Jesus had Judas in mind and all who would be tempted to follow in his footsteps, he continued, "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!" In contrast to the crowds of Jews who had a great fear of the power and position of the Pharisees, the Lord was telling his disciples that the only One they should fear was his Father, for it was his Father who created hell for Satan and his angels, and if one wanted to follow Satan and his disciples the Pharisees, then the disciples were to know that God would cast them all into hell forever. "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment." (2 Peter 2:4, 9.)

So the primary thought to keep in mind as Stephen did is that a knowledge of the character of the Father, as Jesus was trying to reveal him to his disciples and the nations, is a knowledge of an awesome and powerful God. The fear our Lord is speaking of in this passage is an attitude that we should have toward our heavenly Abba that recognizes his greatness, righteousness and justice. It is fear in the sense of respect, reverence, and humility when we come into the presence of the revealed God that the prophet Isaiah wrote about: "In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of Him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips.'" (Isaiah 6:1-5.) This respect and awe of our heavenly Abba should not amount to alarm, but it should be combined with a trusting heart, for our majestic and holy God is also our loving and caring Father.

I think we've lost our vision of the awesomeness, the majesty, the glory of God. Recently our discipleship group of men has been studying the revealed character of God, and to a man we have all sensed within our hearts that based on our reading we had had a very shallow view of our awesome but loving and merciful heavenly Father. Whenever any of his saints meet the one and only living God face to face, they fall face down on the ground with their hearts filled with reverence and humility before him.

How can we survive in a hostile world? Beware of hypocrisy and of the power of the one and only living God, and....

III. Beware of the fear of being forgotten

Luke 12:6-7

"Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Everyone in the marketplace was familiar with the selling and consumption of sparrows as a delicacy in the time of our Lord, as they are today in many Third World countries. The Lord used this very familiar illustration to quench the fear within the disciples' hearts that once Jesus left them and the persecution began they would be forgotten as quickly as five sparrows eaten at one meal. So the Lord assured them that not even the most insignificant of God's creatures lies outside the sphere of his loving care. They would never be forgotten, and in the light of the resurrection the last words of our Lord to his disciples before his ascension were: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20.)

"Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows." In times of peace or in times of persecution keep in mind that you are in the hands of a loving and caring Father who will never forsake you or forget you. For if he

knows each and every sparrow that has ever been sold and eaten, and if he knows each and every hair on your head at any given time on earth, then believe me, you are of more value than any five sparrows. Jesus was saying, "You were created in the image of my Father, and if you have placed your faith in me as your Lord and Messiah, then you have been given the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God [John 1:12-13], resulting in eternal value and worth. So my Father's love and care for you will never fail, not even in the hour of your death."

Last week I received a call from a young flight attendant who had met a Christian man on a recent flight. She had shared some her life and struggles with him, and he said she should call me when she returned home to the Bay Area. Last Tuesday she called me, and we met around 4:30. As we began to talk it was apparent that she was really scared, and wasn't sure where she was. She spoke of a lot of struggle. Then as I asked her about her life and her relationship with God, it became very fuzzy, and I saw why she was so upset. She called herself a Christian, but it was a definition she had made up, and it wasn't meeting her needs. It wasn't a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Finally I asked her if she would be willing to give her whole body and soul to Jesus and allow him to become her Lord. In genuine faith she bowed her head and invited Jesus into her life and became born again on May 7, 1991 at 5:25 pm. She was redeemed from the kingdom of darkness and delivered into the kingdom of light. God is so aware of each of us-he knows each one of us by name-that he arranged for her to meet this friend of mine on a plane, get my card, travel all the way from the east coast to the west coast, call me several days later, and get here last Tuesday at 4:30 so she could be saved at 5:25 pm! That's how much he cares. He is not only willing to go to great lengths to save us, but he is the only one who understands who we are and where we are in this hostile world. And he will care for us day by day until we are all gathered together with him in eternity.

How can we survive in a hostile world? Beware of hypocrisy, of underestimating the power of God, of the fear of being forgotten, and...

IV. Beware of denying Jesus as the Christ

Luke 12:8-10

"And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who will speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him."

The Lord was zeroing in on the coming persecution and the reality that Judas and Peter were both in his group of disciples. He also knew that the persecution would become life-threatening, and wanted to warn all his men and all his disciples in every generation until he comes again that action taken on this earth has eternal consequences to the good or the bad. When our Lord speaks of confessing, he means that when a man or woman agrees with God the Father that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, before men, then the Lord himself will agree with God the Father and acknowledge that we are the children of God before the angels in eternity at the great judgment seat for our names will be written in the book of life.

"But he who denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God." A better translation is, "But he who disowns Me before men shall be utterly disowned before the angels of God." There is the terrible story of Judas who denied Jesus as the Christ and then betrayed him and handed him over to his enemies. There is the story of Peter who for a short time denied the Lord three times before and during our Lord's trial. His life for a few days hung in the balance before he was willing to confess his sin and then was forgiven and restored by the risen Lord on the shores of the sea of Galilee. But there is that sobering passage, Matthew 25:31, where it says, "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then he will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him..." And the Lord will reward the righteous ones with eternal life. Then he will turn to the ones who have rejected Him as Messiah and say, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels." (25:41.) In

Matthew 7:22-23, another sobering passage where they come and say, "Lord, Lord, we did all these things in your name," Jesus says to them, "I never knew you!" He is saying to us today, "Be careful-there's eternity in view. Don't give up your faith because of some physical or emotional pain or pressure and deny me. I haven't denied you-don't you deny me."

"And everyone who will speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him." I believe that if we keep this verse in the context in which it is written we may be able to understand what the Lord had in mind. In Matthew 12:31 and Mark 3:28-30 the context is the same one we studied in Luke 11:14-26, when the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out a mute demon by the power of Satan rather than by the power of the Spirit of God. To blaspheme the Holy Spirit is not just to speak a word against him, but rather the continuous and deliberate hardening of one's heart against him when he seeks to show us that Jesus is "the Christ of God," the Savior of the world. These Pharisees, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, were rejecting the work and person of the Holy Spirit in and through the Lord Jesus. Their hearts were becoming so hardened that they were not about to repent of their sinful ways, and if someone will not confess his sins before the one and only righteous Judge, there can be no forgiveness. "God has not shut him out, but by his repeated refusals he has shut himself out. That means that the one man who can never have committed the unforgivable sin is the man who fears that he has, for once a man has committed it, he is so dead to God that he is conscious of no sin at all." (William Barclay, in his commentary on Luke.) When the Spirit of God is sent to convict the world of sin (John 16:8), and men and women in spite of all the evidence turn against that revelation, then they walk into that place where there is the hardening of the heart, and that is the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

How can we survive in a hostile world? Beware of hypocrisy, of the power of God, of the fear of being forgotten, of denying Jesus as the Christ, and...

V. Beware of anxiety

Luke 12:11-12

"And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense, or what you should say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

The Lord Jesus warned his disciples of the difficult days ahead, not only for him but for all those who were willing to follow him. One of the many classic examples is recorded for us in Acts 4: 5-22 (an event that would take place within a year of this warning) when Peter was arrested for healing a lame man at the temple gate and then proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. He was arrested along with John in the middle of his sermon, and the next day placed before the very same supreme court that condemned Jesus Christ to death on the cross some 50 days earlier. The judges asked them, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this [healing]?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit just as Jesus had promised, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." David Gooding wrote in "According to Luke":

The Holy Spirit would use the Christians' witness in order to present before all in the court his supernatural, divine and final witness to the person of Christ. On trial would be not so much the Christians as the court. Let any judge, any prosecutor, any witness, consciously and knowingly and deliberately blaspheme the witness of the Holy Spirit through the believers, then in their folly they would commit the unpardonable and eternal sin: while still living they would pass beyond the point of no return.

Do you know how to survive in a hostile world? Our Lord taught his disciples and all who were and are willing to confess him as their Lord and Savior that we are living in a very hostile world that will continue to

hate him and his disciples in every generation until he comes again. So until he comes again as King of kings, beware of (1) the religious hypocrites, (2) fearing men instead of God, (3) fearing being forgotten in the midst of trials, (4) denying Jesus as the Christ, and (5) becoming anxious during a religious trial, for you will have the presence, power, wisdom, and comfort of the Holy Spirit. It is a hostile world-Jesus lost his physical life on the cross. Most of the apostles lost their physical lives as martyrs rather than deny Jesus as the Christ. Christians down through the centuries to this very day are losing their physical lives for the sake of Jesus Christ. And it appears that on the surface they really did not survive in a hostile world.

But listen to these encouraging words from the apostle Peter written to a suffering Christian community in northern Turkey some 30 years after our Lord's resurrection and ascension. Peter was soon to lose his own physical life on a cross outside the walls of Rome during the reign of Nero.

"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 5:8-11.)

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