

## Fear and Fears-Part 4

### The Fear of Rejection

Luke 12:8-12

We are in the middle of our study through the gospel of Luke. Luke chapter 12 in particular and we've been studying Jesus' words to us regarding fear. He's been telling us whom to fear, whom not to fear, how to eradicate a variety of fears that we all are prone to face in this world. And I suppose that is especially timely this week as we return to this passage in light of the trained and determined fear inducers in our world, a.k.a. terrorist who have struck so close to home this week here in Southern California. And we recognized that to be shot for who you are and what you stand for is a possibility that both Christians and non-Christians alike face, I suppose living in America here. But to be attacked for being a Christian is a particular kind of concern that we carry that can really be induced by a whole lot less than bullets. Right, it doesn't take bombs and bullets to make Christians stand back and feel apprehensive about a world that looks at us and says, "Well we particularly don't like you. And what we think that you do, what you believe or what you stand for is wrong, is bad." Even in the wake of this terrorist attack here in Southern California this week you had as I'm sure you saw this prominent this New York headline on the front page, mock Christians for turning to prayer in the wake of this terrorist attack. God isn't fixing this, the headline read. You know, so, you silly Christians you need to stop praying about this. You really need to do something. Do something beside that, because that's useless, which was echoed in a lot of different blogs and websites.

That can unsettle Christians. That can certainly make Christians as I saw on the news try to respond to that, who step up as pastors and leaders and say, "Well you know it's just that we're not all about prayer, there's other things as well." I understand that but we can't even rightly and boldly defend what prayer is? I mean, we now can be mocked and ridiculed, excluded and hated in ways that really can turn us into people that are much more mousey than God ever designed us to be. It can get us to be quite when we should speak up. It should tempt us to kind of fly under the radar and kind of shut our mouths about things. And you can hold those views privately but try to keep it to yourself so you don't cause too many people to look at you, scoff at you, mock at you or laugh at you. And we'll get our way onto heaven and we can do alright without having to be weirdoes.

Well Jesus speaks to that temptation in our passage this week that we've arrived at in Luke chapter 12. Oh, we're going to look at verses 8 through 12 in Luke chapter 12. And I want to show you the bold instruction of Christ in light of that temptation for you to be a mousey Christian, when you know that what's at stake for us if we are bold and clear. If our allegiance and our association with Christ is something we lead with, and something we're known for, we're going to be challenged. It's going to be difficult. We're going to see that in these words of Christ he's got warnings that have far reaching and eschatological eternal ramifications and we got to look at that. He also adds some promises for us that should be a bolstering kind of strength and courage and comfort to us.

So let's read these words together, Luke chapter 12, you remember the context Jesus goes on about the issue of fear and anxiety and he says this in verse 8. "I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also 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."

This is very important that we take this entire section at one time. You could divide it up I suppose but we've got to understand that what is being said at the beginning of this text, the distinction between acknowledging him and denying him really is within the context and where this discussion is going to verses 11 and 12. Which is He's envisioning the reality of their future of being dragged in, pulled in, before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities and he's saying, "Well listen you better be bold to stand up for the association and allegiance you have with Christ. Don't be ashamed, don't be a mousey Christian, don't try to fly under the radar. Be bold in acknowledging me." Now if you look at those first two verses and say, "Okay, if I acknowledge Christ before people down here, he's going to acknowledge me before the angels in heaven and if I deny him, he's going to deny me." That's a

strong warning for us. But let's first just understand the context, the idea of it. Why in the world would I ever, which should be clear by my introduction, and you know by the headline, but why would I ever be ashamed of Christ? Well, because there's pressure put in us by men. There's a temptation for us to know what we know and believe what we believe but when we're forced to interact with people that don't share that, that don't understand that, that aren't committed to that. Now our temptation is to back down. Let's just start with that, that simple observation from verses 8 and 9 this morning. If you've got a worksheet out and I hope that you do, could you jot down this first point please? We need to expect our loyalty to Christ to be tested.

### 1. Expect Your Loyalty to Christ to be Tested

You ought to expect that. That's going to happen. Matters of fact when you see it in verses 11 and 12 I mean it's not, if you're brought in before the synagogues and rulers, it's when you are. We've got our own version of that in our lives here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but there are going to be times when our loyalty to Christ, our allegiance to Christ, our devotion to Christ is going to be tested. That's an important place for us to start this morning. To kind of help us understand what that looks like, it would be good for us to take that word acknowledge and remind you quickly for those who've been around the block in the Christian life a few times of what this word is. It's the word that is translated elsewhere "confession". It's the Greek word, *homologeō*, that compound word we often explain that because it's such a visual word. *homo* of course is the same or similar and then *logeō* is the word we get the word *logos* from that. That's the word, to speak, so to speak the same thing. Now think about the reference here. I am supposed to speak the same thing about Christ before men. And you'd ask the same thing as what? I want to speak the same thing about Christ before men that God says about Christ. That's certainly an adequate way to understand this. That what God has told us and taught us about who Christ is, that he is Lord, that he's in charge, that he's sovereign, that he deserves our devotion. Well that ought to be the way I speak about him before people.

Now you can see, it's easy for us to think, I don't want to speak the same things I would hear in church about Christ to my non-Christian friends at the work room at the office. I mean I don't know that would get a little embarrassing. That's exactly the point. The point is you're going to be pressured to not speak consistently about the Christ you just sang about. To think differently in a home fellowship group about the Jesus that we follow than you will when you're speaking to your next door neighbor about your commitment to Christ, to alter that, to deny that. We've got to be able to speak the same thing no matter what the context is. And the Bible says if you associate yourself that way with the Biblical Christ, jot this reference down, you might remember it, Luke chapter 6, he says in verse 22, here's what's going to happen and here are the words. The words are people are going to hate you, they're going to exclude you, they're going to revile you, and they're going to spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. When that happens, you ought to rejoice and he's saying that's a good thing because you're in great company and we explain that passage and taught it and hopefully derive some encouragement from it. But what we need to look at now is that when I'm in this world of non-Christians living the Christian life, if I speak about Christ consistently I'm going to have pressure of people saying, well if you're going to do that I'm going to hate you, exclude you, revile you and spurn your name as evil. It doesn't do much for us to advance our reputation in a non-Christian environment to be consistent about our view of Christ when they're sitting around discussing something about Christianity or the Bible and you stand up to say exactly what you would say in the lobby of your church. That's the hard thing.

Now you may say, well, I wish we didn't have to have that kind of pressure put upon us in the non-Christian world. This may surprise you but I'd like you to turn to 1 Peter chapter 1 and as you're turning there I want to say this. This is not just an unfortunate liability of living the Christian life in a non-Christian world. This is the Father's purposeful exam that he gives all of his children so that their faith can be verified. Verified to who? Well, to us and all those around us. God wants you to be certain that your faith is real and because of that he's going to make sure that you will experience a testing of your loyalty to Christ so that you can look in the mirror and say, "Look at what I just went through, in loyalty to Christ I can see that my faith is genuine."

Take a look at the way it's described here 1 Peter chapter 1 beginning at verse 6. In this, Peter writes, you rejoice. What's "this" point back to? Well glance up at it. There's an inheritance coming, there's a great place called the New Jerusalem, you're going to be a part of, you've got citizenship there, God is going to reward you. Well, that is great, I do rejoice in that. And then I have a contrasting word here, though. Now that doesn't really make me happy, though there's something here that doesn't make me happy. Now for a little while if necessary and it is necessary as we see in the rest of scripture, you have been grieved by various trials. Why, is that purpose clause, verse 7, so that the tested genuineness of your faith. There it is that's a great phrase to highlight or underline, the tested genuineness

of your faith, which by the way if you're thinking about that inheritance there's nothing more important than having real faith. If you don't have real faith, you're not going to have the inheritance. So it's more precious than gold. I mean, gold comes through the fire when it's tested, and it's proved to be genuine by the pressure and the heat that's put on it, well your faith is going to be like that. And when you go through the test and it's tested to be genuine, well then it's going to, look after the dash here, it's going to be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. When he shows up, wow, you're going to be excited you had real faith. That's going to be the thing that you marvel, that's the thing that makes you rejoice, so now you can walk through the Christian life because there's been some pressure applied to your loyalty and allegiance and devotion to Christ because you know it's real, and you're like this, verse 8 now. Well you say, I haven't seen him, I don't see him face to face, I didn't live in the time of the first century to watch his miracles but I love him. My faith has been proved genuine. Though I don't see him now, but I trust in him, I believe in him and I rejoice with joy that's inexpressible and filled with glory. Why? Because verse 6 told me I'm looking back at the future inheritance in this passage and I'm recognizing that's for me, that's real, I'm obtaining, verse 9, the outcome of my faith. Real faith, what's that? Salvation of my soul.

I have the confidence that my faith is real. Now in light of that, jot this down, Luke chapter 8 verse 13, in the middle of this discussion about the soils. You have soils that are described as people who are responding to the gospel. The four soils and here are the bookends. You got the first soil that hears the message of the gospel and rejects it. That's the one the bird comes takes the seed away. You got the fourth soil that embraces it, abides in it and bears fruit in all different varieties, thirty, sixty, hundred fold. Then you have two in-between soils. Soil number three is the soil with all the thorns in the soil that end up growing up and there are all these competing things that are trying to get peoples attention, the riches of the world, the anxieties, all the things that are just typical things that might take peoples attention away from the truth. And so here are people that had some kind of glomming onto the truth but in reality I got a lot of other things I glom on to too and this falls by the way side. It doesn't bear fruit. Number two, soil number two that's described in verse 13 of Luke chapter 8 is described this way. The ones that fall upon the rocks are those people that when they hear the word, they receive it with joy. They have "faith" but these have no root, there's no real connection. Remember that great discussion of Christ in John 15 that we are the branches he is the vine. We're supposed to abide in them and then we'll bear fruit. Well, there's no connection here, no real connection to God, just some kind of experience in church or some kind of allegiance or devotion in my mouth, some kind of profession that I'm a Christian, but there's no root, and because there's no root, they only "believe" for awhile and then in a time of testing they fall away.

Jesus explains that over in Matthew 13, the time of testing. Here's how he describes it there. It has no root, no real connection, it endures for awhile but when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, well then they immediately fall away. So what's the test? The test is tribulation, persecution. Someone saying, "You believe that? I think that's stupid, I think that's dumb, I don't think you should", Or maybe it is the barrel of a gun or a pipe bomb and listen if you're all about that we hate you and we're going to kill you. Whatever the extent of the persecution tribulation is, it's the pressure applied on you to deny him, and that's all I'm trying to say. Anticipate and expect that you are going to be called upon to back off, to be quiet, to tone it down a little bit about Christ. Matters of fact, you're going to be tempted to deny him completely.

Speaking of that one, when I say tempted to deny him, who do you think of in the Bible? Who? Peter. Well, wait a minute, you mean to tell me that Peter who denies Christ is now being denied before the angels of God by the Son of Man? That's not what I'm saying. Matters of fact, I'd like you to turn to that passage, Matthew 26. Matthew chapter 26, let's take him as a test case. And he's helpful for us because some of you who are sitting here, feeling conviction in this sermon so far saying, "Well, you know what? I have backed down at the lunch room at work. I mean they've said things about Christ I didn't stand up for his honor there. Matters of fact I went under the radar I got quiet, I backed down. I didn't do what I should have done under pressure." And I'm not saying that because of the stumbling of denial in some situation, now God's promise to you is going to be denied because elsewhere we find in the scripture, if we deny him, he won't deny us because he cannot deny himself. And the point is He's made promises to real Christians that he will carry through on but here's the thing, if you see this as the explanation of your Christian life, if you see this as the totality of who you are, if you see this as the pattern of who you are, if you see this as something you say, "There's a guy who walked away from all of this under pressure." Then you are soil number two, and this isn't real and I don't care what kind of testimony from the past you might have if you do not show that you're going stand faithfully with Christ as a life, well then you're not genuine. But stumbling, no. Is there forgiveness for that? Absolutely.

Because here is Peter, drop all the way down to verse number 31, who looks a lot like all of us in the room. I trust all of us, and that is we've given and professed our devotion to Christ. Look at verse 31, Jesus said to them, you know you're all going to fall away because of me on this night. This is in the Garden of Gethsemane, He's about to be betrayed and He says you're all about to run. And then he quotes the Old Testament minor prophet, strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I'm raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. In the middle of all that he's interrupted by Peter and says, well, what are you talking about? Fall away? Are you kidding me? Though all fall away because of you, I will never fall away. And Jesus says, "You don't know what you're talking about. Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me not once, not twice, you'll deny me three times." And Peter said, "No man, even if I have to die, if they pull out their swords and want to run me through I am loyal to you I'm stating my loyalty. I will not deny you even if it costs me my life." And all the disciples said the same thing.

Drop down to verse 69. We didn't even get out of the chapter, right? I understand it's a long chapter, but we didn't get out of the chapter until this comes to fruition. Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. This is the courtyard of Caiaphas, he's been betrayed, he's been dragged through this kangaroo court overnight, he's sitting there not far from the temple mount in Caiaphas' courtyard and he is there watching from a distance, warming himself by the fire and it says a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean". I think it's funny because in the earlier teaching of Christ to the disciples he says you know what? You're going to have this pressure that's going to be applied to you by men. I know that's the generic word for mankind but it is interesting isn't it that it's some young servant girl in Caiaphas' courthouse. These aren't the burly, you know knuckled, hairy Roman Centurions that he might have in mind when he said don't deny me before men. Well that'll have to be some scary men for me to deny Christ. It's some servant girl in Caiaphas' courtyard. But sure enough, he denies it. Verse 70, he said, "I don't know what you mean." And then he went outside to the entrance and another servant girl saw him and said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And he denied it with an oath. I swear to you I do not know the man. And after a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them for your accent betrays you." You're from up north in Galilee, we can tell by the way you speak. And he began to invoke a curse on himself. Well, my God strike me dead if that's true. What? And he swore. I do not know the man. And immediately the rooster crowed and Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Now there are times I'm assuming you can look at your life and you know there was something and it might have been as strange a sight as you not even willing to stand up for Christ to some diminutive person or some ridiculous statement and anyone could have and should have and you're picturing yourself as a failure because you've stumbled in denying Christ in some situation. The question is - are you denying him in the totality of your life? Do you, like the righteous do, stumble and get back up. Because that's exactly what Peter did and it took some time and a little coaxing but you remember the passage don't you in John 21? After the resurrection, after the commissioning, Peter goes out and starts fishing and he goes back to his old job, and as he's fishing in John 21, Jesus shows up, cooks a breakfast on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Calls Peter over. He jumps out of the boat, he comes to have breakfast with Christ and Jesus has a question for him he asks three times. Do you remember what it was? Do you love me? Peter do you love me? Oh, you know all things Lord; you know that I love you. Well if that's the case, then stop retreating and going underground and flying under the radar back to your old career do what I called you to do. Feed my sheep. A little bit later, Peter do you love me? Lord you know all things; you know that I love you. Really? Well then tend my lambs. Get out there stop being a fisherman, be a fisher of men, sit out there and be the kind of exposed vulnerable associated alive person that's going to be my representative in this world. A little later, Peter, do you love me? Peter was grieved that he asked him a third time, do you love me. He said feed my sheep.

The next verse is the one that is probably the one that we choose not to quote. I know it's right after that third question and answer of Peter but we don't like it because it's such a negative verse and yet it's the most positive verse in the whole passage. John chapter 21 and after that third question, Jesus says in the next verse, "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you use to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted to go, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands - and you can see him physically doing it - and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." And John said in case you missed this reference we all got it is as they sat there and watched this. This he said to show what kind of death Peter would die so as to glorify God. You want to talk about not backing down? You want to talk about confessing and acknowledging Christ before men? Here's someone that's willing to go to his death. Peter, you're going to be a martyr. You're going to die a martyrs' death because you



will not back down and shut up about being associated with me. That's an encouraging verse although it's a terribly negative verse. After he had said that, it says Jesus said to him, "Peter, follow me."

Peter's challenge to prove his profession and though he stumbled and you and I have stumbled, we've stumbled in this. We are scared we do get nervous, our palms sweat, someone brings up Christianity or the Bible or Christ, and it is easy for us to be quiet when we know we should speak up. To back down when we know we shouldn't have. But I'm here to remind you that Jesus is going to come to you maybe in the sermon and say to you, "Do you love me? Well then get back out there." And did he? I mean I'm just talking like a five iron from Caiaphas' courtyard, you've got the temple mount, we're in Acts chapter 2, Luke goes on to record the author God used to write the book of Acts, and says you know what Peter did? Just after that great day of Pentecost he went there on the temple mount and he started to preach and what kind of mousey sermon did he preach? He says this in verse 23 of Acts chapter 2. This Jesus, looking at the crowd, he was delivered up according to the plan of God, but you crucified him and you killed him. You killed him by the hands of lawless men, but God raised him up.

Now that kind of bold preaching didn't take place with a small group Bible study. As a matter of fact the people that responded positively to that message in the vast expanse of the temple mount where Peter preached not far from where he had denied Christ. Do you know Sunday School grads how many people responded positively in repentance to that message after being called out by Peter, boldly in public? Three thousand, think about that. He became this part of a small group huddled together waiting for the Spirit of God to arrive and now he's out there, talk about not denying it. Willing to preach as publicly as anybody ever had on the huge expanse of the temple mount saying you guys crucified him, God raised him from the dead. They said what should we do? He said, repent.

Peter steps up. May this passage that calls us not to deny Christ be a motivation for us no matter what your past has been. Say you know I have wimp out in the past but I'm not going to wimp out, matter of fact I'm going to do what we talked about last time we were together I'm going to envision ahead of time whatever might come I'm going to resolve myself to glorify Christ in the situation. Expect your loyalty to Christ to be tested. Maybe tested in some ultimate way perhaps it will. It'll be tested this week with some conversation, yes, it might be tested in a way you think about your prayer life when you read some hubris in a headline from New York City that says you're all stupid to be praying in the wake of a terrorist attack. Let's expect that loyalty to Christ and his agenda to be tested. Let's resolve that we're not going to back down.

Verse 10, Luke chapter 12. On the heels of that he says which some people would think he's simply ramping up the warning to the disciples. He says, "You know everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man it'll be forgiven of him, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven him." Now, there's a real interpretive key here you cannot miss to this. And a lot of people do miss it when they preach through this and when they write about this or they may make commentaries about this passage. Some people miss this and that is that we move from the warning not to deny Christ to now a warning about those who speak against Christ and those who blaspheme the Spirit. Some people think well he's just telling those disciples not only do I not want you to deny me, certainly don't you start speaking against Christ although that would be forgiven and certainly don't blaspheme the Spirit because there will be no forgiveness for you if you do that. This is not a warning to this group. Let me prove it to you.

Look up to verse 1. In verse number 1 of Luke chapter 12, it says there in the middle of that verse he began to say to his disciples first. Now you have there the red letters starting and Jesus starts to speak and the context tells us he's talking to his disciples, not the blasphemers. Drop down to verse 4. I tell you, what's he say about these people? "My friends". Let me talk to you, you are my friends, you're my disciples, you're not the blasphemers. Now drop down to verse 13, the crowds are now coming into view after verse 12. Next time we get together in this passage we'll look at verse 13 and we'll recognize now we don't have the inner group here, now we're speaking to people from the crowds. So in this section we're talking to the followers of Christ, the friends of Christ, the disciples of Christ and you know what, they're not the people that speak against Christ. They're not the people that blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Who does that? Look at the next verse, verse 11. The people that bring them before the synagogues. Which is a strong word, it's not just the word "bring", they drag them, they bind them, they imprison them, they withhold them from freedom and they bring them to answer to the rulers and the authorities. And they make you answer for your commitment to Christ. Those are the people that speak against Christ. Those are the people that blaspheme the Holy Spirit.



Now, half the verse I guess holds out some hope. Hey, the people that speak against the Son of Man, there's forgiveness available for them but of course they have to repent, but the ones who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, no forgiveness for them. Oh, that's terrible. No forgiveness, never. They can't be forgiven, they won't be forgiven. Wow, that's scary. All I want to do in the shifting of the audience here. Not that this information is going to them, it's going to the disciples but they're suppose to think not of themselves. Oh man I better never blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Trust me I take an appointment probably once a year of someone thinking, I think I've blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. This is not a directive about you. This is a directive about those who pressure you or persecute you to deny Christ. Let's put it this way, number 2. The real function of this verse, number 2 is to remember the fate of our persecutors.

## 2. Remember the Fate of Our Persecutors

Remember the fate of our persecutors. There are those that pressure us because they hate Christianity and some of them have forgiveness that is still available to them that can be granted if they repent. And then there are others that are gone. They're done. They are blasphemers of the Spirit and they are past that point of no return. We've got those two kinds of people that mock your Christianity. Now, I must put an asterisk after that and say this. That's a much harder line of distinction to make in the opponents of Christianity than it was in the first century. Because in the first century there was something going on that made the Spirit's demonstration of power, the Spirit's authentication of Christ so crystal clear that if you were standing there you couldn't deny it. And that was miraculous signs and wonders. Those kinds of miracles couldn't deny it. As a matter of fact the other time we see Jesus bring this up he's talking directly to the Pharisees who've just said, well we watched the miracle you just did but that miracle I think it's Satan in you that's doing it. And then Jesus says no forgiveness for you. You passed the line, there's a point of no return and you've just passed it. Now, how did they pass it? They passed because they looked a what Christ did that any reasonable person would say that is absolute, here's the word I want to use, definitive proof, definitive proof, that you are who you say you are. They looked at it and they ascribed it to Satan. That he said was the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because the Holy Spirit was the one providing that demonstration of the power of God and no one should be able to deny that.

Now why would he be saying this to this group? Because if you look back at chapter 9 and you look back at chapter 10, first in chapter 9 he says to the twelve, I'm sending you out and I'm giving you authority over demons and I'm giving you the power to heal people. So they're doing exactly what Jesus did over there in the book of Matthew, when he said to the Pharisees, you watched me do this miracle, you've just assigned this miraculous power not to the Holy Spirit but to the devil, you know what? No forgiveness for you, you've blasphemed the Holy Spirit. Now there are people that watch these twelve in chapter 9 go into these villages and towns do things that were undeniably supernatural and they denied it. They said you're of Satan, they did the same thing they did to Christ. You know what? They've crossed the line, blasphemed the Spirit, there's no forgiveness for them. And in chapter 10, He sent out the seventy-two, and interestingly enough He gave them and endowed them with a power and authority to do miraculous signs as well. They're told to go out and heal the sick and cast out demons. And you know what? They do the same thing; they come back and say, "Wow, even the demons are subject to us." And he says, "Yeah, I've given you that to authenticate who I am as my messengers."

Now that band of seventy-two, and that band of twelve they actually were having people they could look at and clearly say we did miracles in those towns. And Jesus points that out, he looks back to his Galilean ministries, look at Bethsaida, look at Chorazin, look at all these cities that we grew up in Capernaum, we did all these miracles, you know if those miracles had been done in Tyre and Sidon, the ancient enemies of Israel, if they had been done in places like Sodom and Gomorrah they would have repented but you saw that demonstration of power and you didn't repent. You know it'll be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, which was a notoriously wicked and immoral city, it would be better for those people when they face God, than people that saw the definitive proof from the Holy Spirit that you should have repented.

Let me give you one illustration of this in your mind you can jot down the chapter if you want, Numbers chapter 14. Maybe you don't remember the footnote on this story. Now, get context, Numbers chapter 14, Moses had led the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. They had come out with a bang, matters of fact you want to look at the miraculous signs in the Bible, there are three major rashes of them. There's less than one hundred and they take place in three basic periods of Biblical history. Old Testament starting with Moses and Joshua, and then Elijah and Elisha, and then Jesus and the Apostles. That's where you have all the rashes of miraculous supernatural events;

they just take place in those three groupings, almost exclusively, almost exclusively. So in those rashes, clearly what we have in the ministry of Moses is, he leaves with a miraculous thing, you got the ten plagues, you have the parting of the Red Sea, you've got Manna coming out of the sky. That's what he calls signs, miracles and wonders, and this generation saw them. And they saw them and he brings them to a place called Kadesh Barnea, have you ever heard of that city? Kadesh Barnea. Very important pivotal chapter in Numbers, Numbers chapter 14. And they go and they send in the spies in the chapter previous, do you remember the twelve spies into the land of Cannan? God's ready to take them quickly through the desert and into the Promised Land and they send in the twelve and ten come back and say what? No, we can't do it. Everyone's big there, fortified cities, we can't take it. Now, wait a minute, this is exactly what God said he would do. He told you what he's going to do. Only Caleb and Joshua come back and say, "You know what? If God said it we can do it, I don't care how scary it is." Here's what God said in response. He says, "You know what? I'm done. This generation after some discussion about it all, this generation who have seen my – I'll just read it for you – none of these men who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt, any of them, and they put me to the test these ten times not one of them who have heard my voice and tested me shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. None of them that despise me shall see it." What you might have missed in this story at the end of the chapter in chapter 14 they come back after Moses delivers the news to them in verse 39, they say we're sorry. We're so sorry, so sorry. They rose early in the morning, they went up to the heights of the hill country they came, they put all their armor on, the came to, what they had at least to fight with. And they said, "Here we are Moses we'll go up to the place that the Lord has promised, we've sinned, we blew it, we're ready to fight now. We know yesterday with all the ten spies and all that we're over with that." And Moses said verse 41, "Why are you now transgressing the command of the Lord when it won't succeed. Don't go up the Lord is not among you lest he strike you down before your enemies." At least live your life out wandering around in the desert, you don't want to die some terrible death on the battlefield. What's the point? God says to people that saw the definitive authority of God, you know what I don't care if you repent, I don't care if you're sorry, I don't care if you say oh let's get a "do-over", there's no do-over for you. So when Jesus says to the twelve or the seventy-two if they're included in this discussion, they in fact might be. They're the ones that came to the Judean cities and represented Christ and prepared the way of Christ. Well, if that was the case, there were people that they could look at and say, "No, no, no, they saw the miracles and they still transgressed God's law. They still rejected" Well, you know what? Those are the people, your enemies, no forgiveness for them.

Is it that easy for us? No, why? Well, because every sermon you hear doesn't come with a miracle show. I mean it doesn't happen. Right? You say things to your non-Christian friends, you say you need to repent, you talk about the resurrection, you talk about the veracity of the Bible, you talk about predictive prophesy, you try to prove to them this is right and they say, "No". Well, have they had definitive revelation, definitive evidence, I don't know? At some point I assume because the book of Hebrews talks about there are people that were not living in that first century that did not see those miracles that still can pass a line of hardened and calloused hearts that reject the truth after having full exposure, definitive proof from God in their own hearts. So I don't know who those people are in your life. All I know is this, that some of the people that appose us, have opportunity for repentance and some that oppose us and persecute us and are killing Christians around the world right now, they're past that point of no return.

What does that do for us? Well, I don't have time to look at it and I wish that I did but on the back of the worksheet at least let me give you some homework from 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 to look at how Paul would say to people who were being persecuted remember where your enemies are going to end up. There is something here that should change the way you play this game called the Christian life because you know where it ends. Now, we have the technology at our house, I assuming you do in yours, I'll come home some time my boys will be watching sports and they can pause live TV, pause it, when they're watching some game in the fourth quarter and I plop down and I start talking they pause the game, out of great respect for their father, and we have a conversation and the thing is they're all hooked up to ESPN on their phones of course, so their phones buzz in the middle of the conversation and they find out who won the game. And then when we're done talking about whatever we're talking about, they hit play and of course I'm all stressed out because I know the team they're rooting for thinking there's no way they're going to win this game. But they're at peace, why? Because they know how scary that may look in the real time of what it looks like on that screen they already know who won. When it comes down to it, but the brutes that scare us in this world, you need to realize as you look with some kind of, I don't know, at least some empathetic kind of, "Man it is really bad for you." You may come to kill me, you may come to ridicule me, you may come to chop my head off but you know what? I feel bad for you because you're going to face eternity bearing your sins and I'm going to be translated to a place of God's blessing. So you know what? There is something to that but you'll have to



explore more on your own. When it comes to the persecution or just the pressure and exclusion and ridicule that we face you need to say, “You know what? I gotta remember the fate of those who persecute me.”

There’s one more distinction here that I want to illustrate for you from 2 Timothy chapter 4. With this, let’s look at maybe putting a bow on the second point of this sermon and setting us up for the third. We’ll look at verses 11 and 12 in Luke 12 in just a moment. But let’s use this passage as an example, an illustrative example of how this works in real life. Now, let me read this for you as I often do with some errors so you can see the truth. 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 14, let’s start there. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm - Paul writes to Timothy – may the Lord grant him repentance for he knows not what he does. Is that what it says? No. May the Lord bring his heart to repentance. No. You know I’m praying that he’ll become a Christian one day. No. Now Paul may have a special insight that we don’t have because he’s an Apostle and he’s got a lot different relationship with God as an Apostle than we do, I understand that. I mean that in terms of knowledge and insight and revelation and in God’s wisdom. But I know this, he’s written him off. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Since he’s writing scripture right now, guess what? Alexander went to hell. The Lord repaid him. Beware of him yourself Timothy, for he – here’s one of the evidences of a guy who’s past the point of no return – he strongly opposed our message. Now everyone who strongly opposes the message of Christ, have they blasphemed the Spirit? Not in every case. Don’t know that. Then look at this, verse 16. At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. Look at the bottom of verse 16. The Lord will repay them according to their deeds. Is that what it says? No. He sees a distinction here, may it not be charged against them. Now wait a minute, you got two groups of people, Alexander and then this group of people that should have come to your aid to defend your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, they deserted you but you got the coppersmith, he’s going to hell, you’ve written him off, but you got these guys and you say God be gracious to them, may they learn their lesson so they can stand up and not be such wimps next time. How is that? He sees a distinction here just like we see in our passage in verse 10. Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. There’s forgiveness for those, sometimes they do some bad things like Saul who becomes Paul. He said he was a blasphemer. What kind of blasphemer? Against the definitive witness of the Spirit? No. Ignorantly accusing Christ of being something He’s not because he didn’t have the full picture. But the one who blasphemes against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Apparently Alexander is in the latter category and his deserters are in the former.

Now let’s make this a transitional verse, you’re still in 2 Timothy chapter 4 look at verse 17. Even though I was by myself and I had people like Alexander opposing my message and persecuting me and doing harm to me. The Lord stood by me and strengthened me. So that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Now that is important for us to understand. Whenever you think about persecution, opposition or even being at the end of a barrel of someone who wants to kill you because you are a Christian, think about this now, one thing you need to remember is what we learned in the last two verses of our text this morning. And that is no matter what kind of opposition you’re facing they may drag you before the authorities and rulers of our day, like they were dragged before the synagogues, but do not be anxious. Why? Don’t be anxious about how you’re going to defend yourself or what you’re going to say or what you’re going to do or how you might crumble. God I’m really anxious about what happens when I’m tested. No, remember this, the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say. God’s going to stand with us in these tests. Put it down that way, number 3, we need to be assured God will support us in the test.

### 3. Be Assured God Will Support Us in the Test

God doesn’t want you to be fearful. Matters of fact here’s another word we see throughout his descriptions of fear. It’s the word anxiety at the end of verse 11. Don’t be anxious, don’t be afraid. Oh, yeah I told you last time we got to get there like Paul did in Philippians 1 and say I’m going to resolve ahead of time whether by life or by death I’m going to glorify Christ. That’s good, not a bad thing to think about that. But when it comes to me saying, I don’t know, will I fold, what would I do, what would I say? I don’t know, could I stand up? Just know that you will not be alone even if everyone deserts you. Even if you’re the last one there or like the community college up north when they said are you a Christian? Great, I’m going to put a bullet in your head. Remember that? Not to mention that this other one in San Bernadino took place at a Christmas party, you remember this? Because of our alliance with Christ, even if you’re by yourself in the most heinous situation, know the Bible says the Lord will stand with you. Well it looks like the promise you just read in 2 Timothy chapter 4, he’s going to deliver us from the lion’s mouth, just like we were reading in our DBR. I mean he’s going to shut the mouths of the lions. Well, that’s really not what he says



at the end of verse 18. Oh, there are going to be some lions, proverbial lions end up getting Paul. He becomes a martyr. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed. What do you mean? It sounds a lot like the passage we dealt with a couple weeks ago. They can kill the body but after that there's nothing they can do, because I know this. God will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. So I know this, even if I do become a martyr I got to know that God is going to stand with me through this. By the way, do you know what the word, martyr means? It's a transliterated word like baptizo - baptism, apostolos - apostle. It's one of those transliterated words it comes from the Greek word martyrios we get the word martyr from. You know what it means? It's translated like if you take your ESV, get your Logos out of your Bible software, you'll see that like 90% of time it's not translated martyr. We get the word martyr because we got use to saying it, about certain people that die because of their faith. But most of the time, 90% of the time the word martyrios shows up in the New Testament. You know what it's translated, "witness, to testify, to witness". A martyr is someone who testifies to Christ all the way to the end. Are you a Christian? Think about that at the community college where the shooting took place before this last one. Are you a Christian? Yes, I am. Testifying to that and dying for it, the extreme example. That example is a testimony even when they incur the penalty of whatever it is they're facing from their persecutors. That is what God says is honorable. That's what God says will be rewarded. That's what God says will bring you not just safely into the kingdom but as Peter says elsewhere it will give you a rich welcome into the kingdom.

Be assured God will support you in the test. And speaking of our Daily Bible Reading we read last week of Daniel's three friends, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael, we know them as Shadrach, Meshach and Abendnego. Remember that? I love the statement when they were facing their persecutors and the pressure to deny their God. They said, "You know what God is able to save us from your hand O king, Nebuchadnezzar. But even if he doesn't, even if we die here, even if we burn up in this fiery furnace, just know this, we're not going to bow down to your gods." That's called a testimony, a witness, that's a martyr who doesn't end his life that day, in that chapter, because in that case he did as he would do for Daniel many years later, shut the lion's mouth. Come out of that fire and the Bible does it say it dramatically not even their clothes smelled like smoke. You can't light a fire at your house or the beach without smelling like smoke when you're done. They were cast into the fiery furnace, didn't even have the hair on their arms singed. Not a hair on their head was singed. Want to talk about Christ walking through those trials with us? Remember the picture? There they are, three of them thrown in, I see four in the fire. Interesting. Be assured God will support us in the trial.

By the way speaking of Christian martyrs, the first one technically Christian martyr in the book of Acts is who, Sunday School Grads? Stephen. Stephen. You may not know this, just to highlight the word martyr here for a second. Stephen is the first Christian martyr, which means testimony or testifying or witness. You know that of all the sermons in the book of Acts, all the sermons that we have from all the Apostles preaching amazing things to the people and the crowds in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth. The longest recorded testifying to Christ comes from Stephen at beginning in the book of Acts when he was martyred. He testified right up to the end and it's not a happy sermon, it's not one Pollyanna, seeker or sensitive churches are going to like. He's sitting there at the end of sermon preaching about their need for repentance and how do they respond? Verse 57 of Acts 7 says they cried out with a loud voice, they stopped their ears and they rushed him together, they cast him out of the city and they stoned him there. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. To testify to Christ to the end, you cannot think that as you can sit down and get a chance to talk the Apostle Paul into the kingdom and that act of standing up for Christ didn't have some impact on that road to Damascus, when Jesus said, "Why are you persecuting me, why are you doing this to me?" And he thought, you know what I remember Stephen standing firm to the end and he looks up and even in his dying breath he acknowledges the presence of Christ in his life.

1 Peter chapter 5 says Christians don't be surprised at the fiery trials when they come upon you to, here's the key word, to test you. Your faith will be tested, but rejoice in so far as you share in Christ's suffering and rejoice and be glad and you will when his glory is revealed. So even if you're just, listen to this now, insulted for the name of Christ, you're blessed. Why? Because the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you. You have God in a special way, standing with you in those trials, but none of you suffers a murder or a thief or evil doer or a meddler. We're not talking about any kind of suffering, I'm talking about the suffering where you are being pressured and persecuted because you're a Christian. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, there's the word we use it as a positive or a neutral, they always use it as a negative. Only three times in the New Testament and it was a disparaging word. Their enemies would put on, "Oh, there's the little Christ." That's what Christian means. Even if they call you names and mock you as a part of the Way or the Truth. Now you're going to be the little Christ it says in that text,



let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in that name.

The news headlines this week were tough for us and you can just be like secular news commentators I suppose. Think about our American way and look at what they think of democracy and they you know hate America. You can think of all that but you do understand, I mean the people that get the spot light these days these Muslim terrorists that are out there. I mean you are the target ultimately, I mean they hate America in general, I get that. But they're just one current modern contemporary expression of the hatred that Satan has and always has had through out church history for you, Christians. A roaring lion seeking someone to devour. And God wants to say to us, listen we're not going to be afraid of the headlines. We're not going to be shaken. Oh it does tend to make us anxious but the Bible says, don't be. God is going to walk you through this. When they drag you before the tribunal whether it's in the lunch room or in some situation that becomes a terrorist attack, listen don't be shaken. The Psalmist says in Psalms 16 verse 8, I've set the Lord always before me, he's my focus and because he's at my right hand I will not be shaken. Or one of my favorites Psalms 112 verse 6 and 7, the righteous will never be moved he is not afraid of bad news his heart is firm trusting in the Lord, his heart is steady, he will not be afraid and he will look in triumph over his adversaries. If you should suffer for righteousness sake you are blessed don't have fear of them. Don't be troubled, don't be anxious, set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts and be ready to make a defense just like Stephen did, just like Paul did and God will stand with us in our trials. Will you stand with me as we speak to the one who promises to stand with us as your faithful to not deny him when the pressure is on.

God we know that you've said to us, vengeance is mine I will repay. We do feel like Romans 8 says sometimes just lambs lead to the slaughter. Our kingdom is not one of this world if it were we would see Christ having tanks and machine guns at the church. But God we recognize our weapons of our warfare are not of this world. But they're ready to demolish any argument or any pretense that raises itself up against the knowledge of God and we will in our culture not back down, we will not be quiet, we will not be mousy Christians. God because of that we know the enemy will stir up many people, not just people that we see on the news, not just folks that are part of ISIS or Al-Qaeda it's going to happen with people who sit there from their godless perspective and mock us sometimes just for praying. So help us not be ashamed, help us not back down, help us not to deny you under pressure. Let us be the kinds of people that resolve ahead of time like the Apostle Paul did, that we're going to honor you, we're going to glorify you we're going to stand with you whether in life or in death. And we know that your promise to us should bring us great comfort because you're at our right hand we will not be shaken. The righteous aren't going to be moved we're not going to be afraid of bad news. God we know this is a challenge for us in our day particularly this week because we see what's happening in our world and we know when it strikes so close to home that we start thinking about our own resolve our own allegiance especially when we say we stand with Christ. Hated vehemently by the enemy that we fight in every aspect of our lives. Our battle is not against flesh and blood ultimately it evidences itself that way, it manifests itself in fleshly ways but God we know the battle that we face in one that goes beyond peoples ideology. So God make us faithful and let us do our work to expand this kingdom unabashed, unafraid, unmoved and unshaken whatever may come our way. We do thank you God for the relative peace our culture has had here. Our Christian culture, our parents and grandparents and great grandparents have had in this country. But prepare us now as times change to stand with you without fear in Jesus name. Amen.