

January 27, 2019
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2019 David J. Whitcomb

PROPER FEAR OF GOD 2 Chronicles 7:1-3

The fear of the Lord might be one of the most misunderstood concepts in the Bible. We all know what fear is. We have all experienced it. We all agree that it naturally is the kind of feeling we wish to avoid. Fear is a feeling that overwhelms us when we face a perceived danger. It is so powerful because fear causes our adrenaline system to fire which causes the release of the stress hormone cortisol. That hormone causes various reactions from a person freezing to the point of becoming immobile, to flight (running away), or fight (defending yourself against the object causing fear).

Why would God want people, especially people of His own possession, to feel that way? Part of the misunderstanding of fear is the failure to realize that “the fear of the Lord” is progressive. While it very well might begin with a typical reaction of adrenaline, cortisol, fight or flight, it doesn’t stay at that level. Mature fear of the Lord is such a deep love for Him that it is always revealed as the deepest respect possible.

After God had strengthened and empowered Solomon to build the temple, God, in the Spirit, came down to inhabit the temple. It was an experience the people present would never forget. It was an experience that drove them to worship the Lord sincerely. That is one of the most obvious demonstrations of real, God-honoring, fear.

A Fearful Situation (vv.1-2).

The situation described in our text was fearful because it was a display of divine power in response to prayer. The text starts, *As soon as Solomon finished his prayer (v. 1a)*. If we read verses twelve

through forty-two of the previous chapter, we discover that, at the dedication of the new temple, Solomon prayed about God’s faithfulness.

In his prayer, the king acknowledged that no God, no person shows steadfast love like God does toward His servants. *“O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart” (6:14)*. Solomon also acknowledged that God will answer prayer so that His people will fear Him. *“Whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own sorrow and stretching out his hands toward this house, then hear from heaven your dwelling place and forgive and render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways, for you, you only, know the hearts of the children of mankind, that they may fear you and walk in your ways all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our fathers” (vv.29-31)*. And he prayed that God will cause His people to rejoice at His presence. *“And now arise, O LORD God, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let your saints rejoice in your goodness. O LORD God, do not turn away the face of your anointed one! Remember your steadfast love for David your servant” (6:41-42)*.

God demonstrated His satisfaction with His people’s sacrifice and prayer. *Fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple (v.1b)*. Much in this picture draws from God’s relationship with His people in the past. God had instructed and demonstrated that the aroma from the burning sacrifices was pleasing to Him.

That idea is found all the way back to Noah’s sacrifice after the flood waters had receded. *And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Genesis 8:21-22)*.

This is the same kind of response God gave to the offering when the priests were first consecrated for serving Him in the tabernacle. We read, “*It is a burnt offering to the LORD. It is a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD*” (Exodus 29:18). We should not be surprised to discover that God promised this same response for most of the offerings He required at His people’s hands (Leviticus 1-8).

But in this sacrifice from Solomon at the dedication of the temple, God did a rare miracle. We do know that God sending miracle fire (often assumed to be lightning) is recorded on a few occasions in the Bible, almost always connected with His judgment. But God sending the miracle fire to consume a sacrifice offered to Him happened only three times.

Once God showed His displeasure at the disobedience of priests by sending miracle fire on the sacrifice. That was the case of Nadab and Abihu who offered an unacceptable sacrifice (Leviticus 9:24). That was judgment. They didn’t live long enough to worship God.

Twice God proved miraculously that a particular sacrifice was His will and acceptable to Him for His glory. In Judges 6:19 we read how God showed His pleasure to call Gideon to service by consuming Gideon’s sacrifice with miracle fire. Then in 1 Kings 18:38 is recorded the well-known story of how God showed His pleasure with Elijah’s sacrifice and faithfulness in service by consuming his sacrifice with miracle fire.

Now back to our story. Added to the fire by which God consumed the sacrifice was God’s glory descending into the temple. Presumably this glory was visible like the cloud that filled the tabernacle when it was completed and dedicated (Exodus 40:34). Whatever it was, it was an obvious manifestation of God’s presence.

It is not likely that any of us are going to witness this kind of breathtaking display of God’s glory. We are certainly not about to experience the fire of God consuming our sacrifice, or the cloud of God’s glory entering His temple. However, when was the last time you experienced the purifying, purging fire of God coming down in your heart? When did you last sense the glory of God’s presence entering you, His temple? People who know that experience are shaken nearly as much as people who witness the literal fire and glory of God descending from heaven.

As in our own spiritual experiences, the LORD’s glory was overwhelming. The glory of the LORD filled the temple. They could not enter the temple *because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD’s house* (v.2b).

The glory of the Lord is all His majesty, splendor, might displayed. He is the one and only Great Creator. He is the only one who sustains this fathomless creation. He not only brought all things into being with a word, but He understands the deep secrets of His creation that baffle finite humanity and causes us to draw ridiculous conclusions about what we don’t understand.

The glory of the Lord is also His perfect holiness. This glory exceeds our imagination because we experience so little of it in ourselves. And yet it is that holy glory that all people must face as we stand before our eternal judge who judges in perfect holiness. The glory of the Lord is His amazing grace.

It is to the Lord’s glory that He has provided us with the substitute sacrifice that covers our offenses against Him. It is to the Lord’s glory that He wipes our offences away when we trust Him to keep His promises of faithfulness. Because these things are so, that same glory of the Lord should fill you and me, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Verse two states that because of the Lord’s glory in the temple, the priests could not enter. *And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD* (v.2a). This is quite significant in that the priests were God’s chosen servants. They were unique among all people. They had the joy of representing God to the people through the law and sacrifices. They had the duty to represent the people before God through the sacrifices. But God’s glory is so immense that, for a time, it precluded God’s chosen servants from entering into His presence.

There should be times in our fellowship with God when we are so awestruck by His majesty and glory that we hesitate to barge into His holy presence with our meager requests and desires.

A Respectful Response (v.3).

The people witnessed God’s glory. They witnessed the power of God’s fire, a specific aspect of His glory. *When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down* (v.3a). The crowd gathered also

witnessed the fire. There were people represented in the crowd that were on various levels of fellowship with the Lord. There were, no doubt, unbelievers maybe even pagans as part of the crowd. But they all saw the miracle of God's grace.

They witnessed the holiness of God's glory. It was *the glory of the LORD on the temple (v.3b)*. And yet, it was not just the super saints who were privileged to see holiness of God's glory. People at all levels of spiritual growth or spiritual death witnessed God's glory. This is the picture given throughout Scripture. It is like the various kinds soil that receive the same good seed. It is like the person described in Hebrews six. *For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned (Hebrews 6:4-8)*.

In response to witnessing the glory of God, the people bowed to the ground. By bowing they acknowledged their humble estate. *They bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD (v.3c)*. Bowing down was a demonstration of the attitude in their hearts. They were afraid of God's power and majesty. They felt awesome respect for such a powerful and yet gracious God.

A second aspect of this response is that the people worshiped. This is one of the best descriptions, demonstrations, and definitions of worship. Worship does not make the worshiper feel good about himself, herself. Worship is an expression of the right view of God. To be able to assess the Lord correctly and to give voice to that assessment makes us feel good about the Lord.

A third part of the response in the fear of the Lord is that the people were thankful. This important aspect of the fear of the Lord helps us grasp the nature of that concept. The victim is not thankful for the grizzly bear that towers over him roaring. He is fearful, but not thankful. The victims lying in the path of the F-5 tornado are not

thankful for the destructive force. They feared it, but they were not thankful for it. And people who experience God's condescending to them know full well that He is fearfully powerful. We know that He can and will condemn real people to eternal punishment for their sins. But we are thankful because we also know that He is gracious to forgive repentant sinners. That is what the fear of the Lord looks like.

The people not only bowed and worshiped, but they acknowledged God's steadfast love *saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever" (v.3d)*. The fear of the Lord knows that God is good. The fear of the Lord knows that God's unchanging love endures forever. The fear of the Lord realizes full well God's power and authority. The fear of the Lord realizes God's perfect justice and punishment of sin based on His holy nature. But most important, the fear of the Lord has experienced God's unfathomable grace poured out on penitent sinners like you and me.