

The Call to Fear God

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Bible Verse: Proverbs 1:7
Preached on: Sunday, May 1, 2022

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Well, if you have been with us over the past several months, you know that we just completed a series on the 10 Commandments from Exodus 20 and saw the fearful authority and the searching power of God's moral law and understanding that that law cannot save us through our obedience but it is a revelation of the holiness of God; it instructs believers in two ways, it points us to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only hope of our salvation and it also guides us and instructs us in the will of God in that which is pleasing to God so that we could order our lives accordingly.

One of the things that we saw very early on in that series, we saw that the way that God revealed the 10 Commandments was with fearful glory. There was thunder and lightning so much so that the people trembled at the revelation of his majesty, showing the authority of the 10 Commandments having a fearful authority that was manifested as God made his presence known in the revelation of that to Moses. Well, it seemed to me that in light of those things that there was kind of a natural progression that we might take here in our study and in our development as we seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, it seemed to me that it would be fitting to spend three weeks maybe just focusing on the theme of the fear of God and to develop that theme.

Proverbs 1:7, which will be our text for the next three weeks, we'll radiate out around it, but Proverbs 1:7 says this, it says,

7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

And the fear of the Lord is the beginning in the sense that it is the foundation, everything else is built upon the fear of God, and that means that the fear of God for a church, for an individual Christian and even for an unbeliever, as I'll show today, the fear of God should be the fundamental element of all of life. It is the core of responding to God and it's not too much to say that in our society the fear of God has been lost, tossed into the trash heap and despised and mocked and for some the sooner that it is forgotten the better. That's a very lethal path for society to take and you see it in the way that men celebrate drunkenness and laziness and deceit, immorality and homosexuality and transgenderism. All of these things are ultimately rooted in an absence of the fear of God, an absence of respect for his authority, for his truth, for his creation, for his moral law.

So we're going to need to come back to this principle if we're going to find any way forward, and I realize, I'm kind of giving you a preview of things that I intend to say for the next two or three months in what I'm about to say here, the truth of the matter is that the restoration of the fear of God even within the church, let alone within the broader body of Christ, that is a long term project. That is something that I do not expect to see in my lifetime, it's something that I won't be surprised if my children and my grandchildren do not see in their lifetimes. This is not easily restored but we must start somewhere, and so the Bible says in Romans 3:18, in some sense this is nothing new, the Bible says in Romans 3:18 that, "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Now I ask you this question as we kind of embark on this, as we embark on another weighty topic: where will the fear of God be restored in society and in the church if it's not taught on from a Christian pulpit? If it is not taught on, if we neglect this topic, where is it ever going to begin to be restored? And if it's not restored, how are men ever going to find wisdom and ever find the beginning of knowledge if somebody doesn't step up and say that this is a matter that requires our very close attention? And it's important for us to understand and to just accept the reality, beloved, we can say whatever we want and complain about the condition of society on and on ad nauseam, we could congratulate each other that you and I are not like that, but the fact of the matter is that we need to start inside the church, and I mean not just inside the walls of Truth Community Church but within the church more broadly speaking because the church is at the core of the problem here.

John MacArthur says this in his book "Ashamed of the Gospel," he says, "The fear of God was a central doctrine in the early church. Believers and unbelievers alike were taught to fear Him. None but a rank fool would deal frivolously with God." Then he pivots, John MacArthur does and says this, "The contemporary user-friendly movement seems to miss that point; rather than arousing fear of God, it attempts to portray Him as fun, jovial, easy-going, lenient and even permissive. Haughty sinners who ought to approach God in terror are emboldened to presume on His grace. Sinners hear nothing of divine wrath, that is as wrong as preaching rank heresy."

I agree with that and that's why I quoted it, and I want to exculpate, I want to prevent our church from being guilty of that charge of sinners hearing nothing of the divine wrath. We need to take the fear of God seriously and over the past 50-60 years, and you must understand that the condition – I'm going to preach on this at the Truth Matters Conference in 2 ½ weeks – the condition of our society, the church bears responsibility for it. The rise of homosexuality, the rise of transgenderism, the rise of all of these related sins and distortions of the truth, this has not happened apart from a context of the direction that Christian pulpits took, you know, starting some 50-60 years ago when they decided that they wanted to appeal to unbelievers rather than preaching the truth and making sure that people knew the truth. It became more important to bring people into the audience, bring people into the walls of the church by watering down the message rather than preaching the truth unvarnished, full in the full counsel of God and letting God deal with the consequences of that, and when the church abandoned its place as the

pillar of truth, as the one that was responsible to uphold the truth, then it was obvious that a vacuum would be created and what we see now is in part the response and the reaction to all of that. The restraining force of the word of God and the fear of God was abandoned for the sake of making people comfortable in our midst and we are now reaping the whirlwind as a result of those very foolish decisions by church leaders so many years ago, some of them still with us, some of them now having moved on, you know, into the meeting of their Maker, so to speak. But it's not just the past, even today Christian leaders turn the thrice-holy God into a means for personal fulfillment, a means of advancing political power, or a means of advancing an agenda of social or sexual so-called justice. Beyond that, beloved, beyond that for many many years the church taught the world that the first spiritual law that they needed to know was this: God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Have you heard those things, those four spiritual laws? You know what I'm talking about. The gospel starts there, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

Well, have these people not even read their Bibles? Have they not read their Bibles? What does the Bible say that the starting point is? What does the Bible say the starting point of knowledge is, the starting point of knowing about God? Scripture makes it clear the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. That's where we start as we address these things because, beloved, until you fear God you cannot know him at all, and if you do not fear God, you are lost and in miserable danger of what will happen to you when his judgment finally comes. You see, beloved, we can state it this plainly, this clearly, this directly: God is a God who must be feared. God is a God who must be feared. We do not teach Scripture, we do not teach the attributes of God in order to entertain men and to make them feel good when they walk away. We don't teach God and his attributes, we don't teach about judgment and the cross and redemption, we don't teach these things so that people can have a better life now, that they can know their wealth and health and prosperity now. No, that totally distorts the eternal perspective that should inform the way that everybody responds to God and to respond to him with fear. So until you fear God you cannot know him at all, you do not know him at all because God is a God who must be feared.

So what I want to do today is just give you two basic categories of thought that we will develop over the next two weeks as well. I want to show you, first of all, the call to fear God in Scripture. The call to fear God in Scripture. You can turn in your Bibles to Psalm 111, for example. Psalm 111, and when we talk about the biblical call to fear God, what I want to do this morning is just give you a brief survey of the Old Testament and the New Testament emphasis on this theme. Listen, the fact that this theme has been lost and/or diminished and marginalized by the Christian church, so-called Christian church, is not a reflection of the fact that it is not emphasized in Scripture, it just means that it has been overlooked and ignored in favor of other topics and other themes that preachers wanted to preach on, I guess. But Scripture itself makes this clear and shows the fundamental purpose and the fundamental place that it holds in the way that we respond to deity at all.

Psalm 111:10 says this, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever."

Now with that theme closing out that Psalm, go back up to verse 7 and see what it is that led into that. "The works of His hands are truth and justice; All His precepts are sure." He's revealed himself in creation, he's revealed himself in his written word and it is true and it is just and it is certain in its authority. "They are upheld forever and ever; They are performed in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people; He has ordained His covenant forever; Holy and awesome is His name."

Now beloved, look, when you see those kinds of themes in Scripture, you must understand that God is not a God to be trifled with. God is holy. God is true. God is righteous. And God is the one to whom we will all give an individual account of our lives, we will all stand before him. Now beloved, that has consequences, that has consequences for the entire way that you approach life. It means this, it means that you should be thinking about life in its totality, that you are using your life to prepare for that time when you meet and stand before God in judgment. It means that being right with God, being declared just in his sight, declared righteous in his sight, that that is the most important thing to know. The most important thing that you can do with your life is to make your calling and election sure, as 2 Peter 1 says; that these things are matters that you search out, that you reflect on these things and you search them out and you realize and understand that the fear of God and seeing him in judgment, seeing him in holiness, is far more important than all of the other things and aspects about your career, your marriage, your children, your job, or whatever else it is that occupies most of your time and attention; you come to understand that this fear of God has a controlling central point in all of it and everything is interpreted in light of the fear of God, the fear of God is not an accessory to life, it is the reason that you live, it is the reason God created you that you would learn to fear him and to respect him and to be reconciled to him in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now look, I'm not upset here, I'm not banging on anybody or anything here but it's just a fair question: how many people do you know that live that way with that as the anchor of their thinking and the way that they approach life? What is it that comes out naturally in conversations with one another, does it center on these themes or the lesser matters of earth? And so we just have to be real about this. We have to deal earnestly with the text and with what God has declared to be true. It does us no good to say, "But that's not as much fun," or, "I can't make money doing that." That's irrelevant to the central understanding, the beginning point, the starting point of knowledge is the fear of the Lord, that God is a God who must be feared. And we're going to define what that fear means soon enough.

As you look at that theme of the fear of the Lord, you find that it is essential in understanding the book of Proverbs. Look at Proverbs 3 with me and I'll just kind of cherry-pick three texts to show you the importance in the book of Proverbs. We saw it in Psalms, we see it in Proverbs in chapter 3. We'll start at verse 5 and I could certainly understand if somebody new to Scripture or new to Truth Community Church thought that I had overstated the case and that this has to be central to everything that you do in life and the way that you think about life, I would be sympathetic and understanding if

somebody was resistant to that initially but I want you to see from Scripture the preeminence that is placed on this theme.

Proverbs 3:5 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight." And so with all of your heart trust him, in all your ways acknowledge him, and so the inner and outer man, I mean, that's pretty comprehensive, isn't it? I mean, the word "all" means something here. Then from that well-known text he goes on and says this, "Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." Scripture having called us to trust in the Lord with all of our heart, with the totality of our inner man, and then addressing all of life, all of the different activities and interests and affections of life, in all your ways acknowledge him, he'll make your paths straight. And it goes on to say in light of all of those things, "Fear the LORD and turn away from evil."

So we see this stated forth clearly, and I just beg you, beloved, I just ask you from the bottom of my heart, it's all that I can do, I can't make you do anything, but I just ask you to take these things earnestly and evaluate your life in light of them and what it is that you most desire, and what is it that is in the core of your heart as you consider God and respond to him. Is there a place for this holy reverence, this fear of who he is and being a sinner in his sight?

Look at Proverbs 9:10. Proverbs 9:9. Part of the reason that I feel like I can be so direct with everyone is that I believe with all of my heart that there are many within the walls of this room who want this kind of instruction, it's why you come to Truth Community Church, and so there's an open door there, you might say. Verse 9, Proverbs 9:9 says, "Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning." Then it goes on to say in verse 10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." And as I said just a moment ago, please understand that when it says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, it's not the beginning in the sense that you start there and then you move on to other more important things and you leave the fear of the Lord behind. No, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom in all of life, it undergirds everything like the foundation undergirds a skyscraper, it's what you build everything else upon. That is the sense in which it is the beginning.

Then one more verse out of Proverbs 15 at the end of the chapter, Proverbs 15:33, "The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor comes humility." Now someone might say, "You've made your point, you're repeating yourself here. I'm concerned that you're saying the same things over and over again. Are you okay," kind of thing. No, I'm okay. I'm perfectly okay. I repeat myself and I stress the point here this morning with multiple texts for one reason alone, it's because the Bible itself stresses this theme. The Bible itself stresses the significance of the fear of the Lord.

Look at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes which is the next book after Proverbs. Ecclesiastes 12. In verse 13, having examined all of the emptiness of life in the prior 11 chapters, 11 ½ chapters, the emptiness of life lived apart from God, you might say, the

closing of Ecclesiastes says this in verse 13, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." He surveys all of life, he shows the emptiness of life apart from your Creator and gives wisdom throughout the entire book, and then he sums it all up and says, "Here's the point of it all: you fear God and keep His commandments because this applies to every person." He sums it all up with the theme fear God and keep his commandments.

So you see this call to fear God repeatedly stated in the Old Testament. Now someone might well say, "But that's the Old Testament. We're in the New Testament era now, preacher, and so, you know, we don't need to consider those Old Testament themes in light of the coming of Christ." Well, let's see if that holds up or not. Let's look further into the New Testament and what we find in the New Testament is the same emphasis, the same call to fear God, the same emphasis that God is a God to be feared.

Look at the book of Acts 9, for example. Acts 9:31 says, "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." As the church flourished, the comfort of the Holy Spirit was there, the fear of God was there also; they went on in the fear of God. Just as I said, it's not a beginning point that you leave behind, when you come to Christ and you're redeemed you continue on in the fear of God whatever that means, we haven't defined it yet, all we're wanting to see right now is the centrality of the theme to our thinking and how central it is to our approach to all of life.

Look at 2 Corinthians 5 with me. 2 Corinthians 5. We'll begin in verse 6. 2 Corinthians 5:6 where Paul says, "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord," in other words, while we live here on earth we're not in the presence of the Lord, the immediate presence of the Lord. Verse 7, "for we walk by faith, not by sight we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." What is it that is pleasing to him? We'll see it soon enough, verse 10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Paul, again keeping with what I said earlier, Paul takes an eschatological look at life. He says, "We must contemplate life, we must process and live life in light of the judgment seat of Christ because there is a time of accountability coming in which we will give an account to Christ in how we have lived and we will be judged according to the deeds of our body whether what we've done has been good or bad."

Beloved, beloved, beloved, beloved, look past your immediate circumstances and realize what the ultimate reality of life is and what is ultimately coming. I ask you earnestly and I ask you sympathetically and I ask you for the good of your soul, have you even thought about that? Has that ever factored into the way that you live life and the decisions that you make, that one day I am going to stand before Christ and give an account of my life? Look, I don't know how anyone can contemplate that and not have it have a revolutionary

impact on your life, especially if you came to Christ, you know, as an adult. How could anyone, I ask you, how could anyone come to Christ, understand the fear of God, understand the judgment seat of Christ, and just go on living as if those weren't realities? Sooner or later we have to ask ourselves do I even believe the Bible if I can live life without ordering my priorities around those kinds of things?

So you say, "Well, maybe you're overstating it." Well, I don't think so. Verse 11, 2 Corinthians 5, Paul says, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." He says, "In light of the judgment seat of Christ, in light of the fact that I'm going to give an account to Him, that causes a sense of respect and reverence and fear in my heart that affects what I do. It affects my ministry," Paul says, "because I fear the coming judgment seat of Christ, because I respect that and know that that is going to be a holy moment of accountability," he says, "in response to that I persuade men, knowing what is to come forces me, motivates me, compels me to persuade men to hear the gospel, to persuade men to fear the Lord." He said, "Those eschatological realities, that's what it does to me, it affects the way that I do all of my ministry."

Then over in chapter 7, verse 1, same book, 2 Corinthians 7:1, it says, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved," see, he called his flock beloved too, that's why I do it, "let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Sanctification, the pursuit of sanctification, growth in Christ, growing in obedience, repenting of sin, all of those things become far more important to the one who fears God than the one who doesn't. If you don't fear God, look, if you don't fear God, if you don't contemplate a coming day of judgment, a coming day of accountability before Christ, then sanctification and your spiritual growth really isn't that important to you. If you wonder why your spiritual growth isn't that important to you and why, you know, it doesn't seem to be that much of a motivating factor in life, maybe it's because you don't fear God like you should and you haven't really contemplated the coming judgment seat of Christ in your approach to life because if you fear God and you fear the coming judgment seat of Christ, if you respect that, then all of life is shaped underneath that umbrella, all of life is flavored by, is influenced by those central controlling realities. The familiar passage of Philippians 2:12 says, "work out your salvation with," what? "With fear and trembling."

So you look at the Old Testament, you look at the New Testament, the message resounds: God is a God to be feared. These are no laughing matters. It's not a jovial thing to contemplate. This is meant to be a matter of sober reflection in our hearts as we contemplate the reality of who God is and what it means for us as individuals that God is a God who must be feared. So all we've done so far is just to show you that there is this biblical call to fear God in the Old Testament and the New Testament which is to grip our attention and shape the way that we think about life. It's the beginning of wisdom. If you haven't gotten to this point, you haven't even started on the road toward wisdom and sanctification.

So that leaves us, we see the call and that leads naturally to the second question here this morning: what does it mean to fear God? What does it mean to fear God? How do we

define the term? And if you've been around Christian teaching at all, you've heard this probably many many times because many people will define the fear of God like this and they say that this term means reverential awe. It means reverential awe. Now I've heard that for years, I've probably said it in times past, and I just want to say there's nothing exactly wrong with that definition but I don't think it's that helpful. None of us speak in normal human discourse with those kinds of terms, for one thing, and I also don't think that it really captures the essence of the biblical teaching on the fear of God. If reverential awe, if I'm right about this and that's kind of a nebulous term in our minds, it's not specific enough to really grip us, something's missing in the explanation of it, then there must be more to it that we can see from Scripture and what I want to show you here this week and next week is that the fear of God has two different senses. There are two different ways to understand this depending upon whether a person is unsaved or saved, whether a person has been born again or not, whether he is in Christ or not. The fear of God has two different senses whether someone is a believer in Christ or he has rejected Christ, that is going to have a starting point in differentiating the way that we should understand and teach about the fear of God.

So, in fact, I'll just say this and we'll see this as we go along. As you read through all of Scripture and we're going to cover all of these themes eventually, but as you read through the fear of God and when I first started studying this topic many years ago, it was rather confusing because you would see verses that talk about the fear of God and then you'd read a passage in 1 John that says there is no fear in judgment, the one who fears is not perfected in love, it almost seemed contradictory and that's why we need to take the time to understand it carefully. It is not contradictory but it just needs to be understood and handled carefully rather than simply casually throwing out a common definition, reverential awe, and then moving on to something else. Beloved, if the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom as Scripture says that it is, then it would seem to me to be incumbent to take the time to understand it well in order that we might respond to it appropriately.

So what we want to do today and we'll finish with this today, is I just want to address what the fear of God means for someone who is not a Christian, what the fear of God means for someone who is an unbeliever and what it would mean for somebody even that is a nominal Christian that says they're a Christian when they're really not, and to come to grips with those who are genuinely unbelievers today, and I want to give you a definition for the fear of God as it applies to unbelievers today. The fear of God for the unbeliever is this, the fear of God describes the abject terror that arises in your heart when you understand that a holy God is a threat to your well-being. The fear of God describes the abject terror that arises in your heart when you understand that a holy God is a threat to your well-being. And you might say, "Terror?" Yes, terror, frightful fear. You see, sinners should have an intense alarm at the thought of God and the thought of his holiness because his holiness and his position as judge in the universe, judge of the universe and judge of the individuals of all time, of all men, of all women, of all boys, of all girls, the fact that a holy God is going to judge us should strike fear in the hearts of everyone who is not reconciled to him because there is a time coming where every unsaved person will stand before God in a time of holy judgment with all of their sins unaccounted for, all of

their sins unpaid for, and all of their sins having accumulated a judgment and a guilt that requires in the justice of God eternal judgment.

Look at Revelation 20 with me here. Revelation 20:11, "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them." Why did earth and heaven flee? It's because they were afraid. Verse 12, "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." Stop there for a moment, beloved, just put your finger there and hold the thought for a moment here. What I said earlier you see here again, all of life is leading us to a point of judgment. You and I each have an appointment with God in which we will be judged. Here it's describing unbelievers. Believers' judgment, different matter, we'll talk about that maybe next time. But their deeds, the sum of all of their life is going to be gathered up and evaluated by a holy God. Everything that we do is pointing to that ultimate objective. All of life has to be interpreted through this or you're not taking biblical reality for what it is. You're in danger, in other words, that's what we're saying. You're in danger if you're neglecting this, if you're not thinking about this. If this hasn't been factored into your philosophy of life, you're in great great danger. I don't know how else to say it. Go on in verse 13, "the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Now beloved, that's terrifying, that's frightening. I'm not being melodramatic here, I'm not over-explaining the text. Scripture describes these things as a time of terror.

In the book of Hebrews 10, in fact, let's turn there so that you can see this with your own eyes. Hebrews 10. We were just in Hebrews, of course, for our Scripture reading. Hebrews 10:26 and 27, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.'" He summarizes it all and says, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And the context, my friends, the context in this statement about the terrifying nature of the judgment of God is given in the fact that those who hear and reject the gospel of Jesus Christ, they're going to face the most severe judgment for having insulted the Spirit of grace, having rejected the free offer of salvation, and having regarded as unclean the blood that was shed to save sinners from this very wrath of God.

Think about it this way: there's the fear of God just for who he is, there's this coming judgment which in itself is going to be terrifying, and then the gospel comes and a free

offer of Jesus Christ is made, you can be delivered from all of that judgment if you will just repent of your sin and come to the crucified and risen Christ for your salvation, and the context of that being judgment and the severity and the terror of it all, someone hears that and of their own volition from what they want in their own heart says, "Not for me. I don't want to hear that." And reject it and walk away, I mean, it's a double judgment. There's the judgment of sin as it is, and then there's the added crime, there's the worse aspect of it of having rejected the very thing that God offered that would have delivered you from it and said, "I don't want anything to do with that." Or the same thing, "I'll consider it later," you know, and it's not a matter urgent enough for me to give my attention to it now, maybe later I'll think about that. God, it may seem like a light matter on a human level, God does not view it that way. To reject the gospel in light of the warnings about judgment is a blameworthy guilt that will be entitled to and will face an even more severe judgment according to Scripture. That's how serious this is.

Beloved, we don't do anybody any favors by hiding this from them. A pastor doesn't do any good to his congregation by diminishing this or marginalizing it in his teaching, and we don't do our children any good if we hide this from them, we don't do our friends, neighbors, coworkers any good if we hide this truth from them just for the sake of a superficial peace for a few moments in a relationship. No, in fact, Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

So we peek ahead to Revelation 20, we see what the outcome is going to be, "If anyone's name was not found in the book of life they were thrown into the lake of fire," where there is no relief from the judgment. This is not a judgment where someone is destroyed and ceases to exist, Scripture says the smoke of their burning goes up eternally. We see the warnings. It's a terrifying thing. Flee while you can. And then we see Jesus himself warning us, saying, "Don't worry so much about the course of your earthly life, don't worry about those who can only kill the body but they can't reach your soul. If you're to think rightly about the fear of God, fear the One who has the authority and the ability and the intention to destroy your soul and body in hell as a just punishment for your guilt before Him."

Do you see why it would be wise for someone to fear God? Do you see why it is the height of wisdom for you to fear God in light of the eternal consequences of refusing to do so? These are matters of great weighty eternal significance and, beloved, what it means is this, it is so hard and apart from the help of the Holy Spirit you cannot break the stranglehold that this life has on the minds of men, of people like you and me. Beloved, you do not need Christ so that you can have a better marriage, so that you can find personal fulfillment, so that you can find a spouse to marry, so that you can have the family life that you want. You don't need Christ for personal fulfillment and the church doesn't need Christ so that they can implement a course of social justice on earth. That's not the point. All of that is secondary.

Listen to me, please listen to me: you need Christ so that you can be delivered from the wrath of God eternally. That's why you need Christ. That's why the gospel is good news.

That's why the gospel is so urgent. What good does it do you to have a wonderful life here and a happy home life and, you know, a spouse and three kids and a dog, and to live life and to retire at a ripe old age, what good does any of that do you if you go and you stand before God naked in judgment with no one there to be your advocate on your behalf? What good is it? What have you accomplished to gain the whole world and to lose your soul? What's been accomplished by that, by 70, 80 years of prosperity followed by an eternity of smoke? What's been accomplished by that? You see why Jesus says don't fear those who can kill the body, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. You need Christ in order to be delivered from the wrath of God. That's what matters. And God's wrath, beloved, is a prominent theme in Scripture. The fear of God is a prominent theme, the wrath of God is a prominent theme.

Look at Psalm 7. In Psalm 7:11 it says, "God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day. If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready." The death penalty is ready to be executed upon sinners as a result of the indignation and wrath of God. It's ready. It's quivering waiting to be released.

Look at Romans 5 in the New Testament. Romans 5, speaking about the wrath of God from a gospel perspective, Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." The wrath of God, that is the theme in which Paul opened the letter in Romans 1:18 when he said, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." The book of Romans opens on the theme of God's wrath. He's a God who has indignation every day.

You don't need to turn here but in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 when it talks about the saving work of Christ, it says that as Paul commends the Thessalonians for their faith, it says, "you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come." The fear of God, the wrath of God, reject the gospel and engage yourself in an even more severe judgment, that is the message of Scripture.

John MacArthur went on to say in that same book, he said, "Those truths are not supposed to make us feel comfortable or self-confident, they are supposed to fill us with severe anxiety and fear. Only when the gospel provokes a holy dread of God can it be appreciated for the truly good news that it is."

Do you see? The gospel is good news. Why is it good news? It is not good news because it can make your earthly life better because especially as we go further and further into darkness with this society in which we live, it is going to become much more difficult to be a Christian and to be faithful to God's word as we do. There is not a promise of the best life now. There is not a promise, there is no guarantee that it won't get really difficult and perhaps really difficult really soon for some of us as we try to hold faithful to the word of God in the increasing hostility that the world has against the very principle of

truth itself. It may not be easy in this life and so it's not the good news that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. That's not the gospel, beloved. The good news of the gospel is that in light of this fearful terrifying expectation of judgment, that God offers you a way of escape, that Jesus Christ came, gave his perfect life as a ransom for sinners on the cross, he bore the wrath of God, he bore the sins of those who believe in him, in his body on the cross, that in his burial and resurrection God showed that he accepted that sacrifice on behalf of sinners whose guilt otherwise would have consigned them to an eternal judgment. God accepted the sacrifice of Christ, raised him from the dead and now Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, is presented to you. Flee from the wrath of God, flee from this perverse generation, flee to Christ and you can be saved. That's the good news that God has provided an answer for his own justice, an answer for his own judgment found in the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

So my friends, I ask you: do you feel the fear of God this morning? The good news is Christ came to save sinners just like you. He will save you if you come to him in repentant faith but understand that if you reject that free offer of the gospel of Jesus Christ, what awaits you is nothing but a terrifying expectation of judgment. And so I invite you to Christ today. He will save you if you come to him in repentant faith.

Let's pray together.

Father, with the psalmist we pray who understands the power of Your anger and Your fury according to the fear that is due You? Lord, teach us, then, to number our days that we may present to You a heart of wisdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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