

“FEAR AND FEAR OF THE LORD”**Psalms 23, 34, 46, 55, 76**

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I have the privilege of sharing my home with my delightful 94-year-old mother-in-law. She is in very good physical health, but her memory is giving her difficulties. She washes dishes three times a day which becomes problematic because she forgets how to turn on the hot water. Along with this responsibility, which gives her a sense of purpose, she watches the news as often as she can—the same news all day long. I have created a makeshift office in our family room so that I can study the Bible and still be with her and thereby encourage her to be with others so she will not isolate in her bedroom. This means that I get to watch the news with her quite often until I remind her that it is important to focus on “whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy” according to Philippians 4:8. She puts up with me even through those times when I demonstrate a holier than thou attitude.

I bring up the news because it is full of stories that evoke worry, anxiety, and fear. Here are just a few of the recent summer headlines that remain etched in my brain and maybe yours:

- U.S. Plunges into Recession as Inflation Hammers World’s Biggest Economy
- Smash and Grab Robbers Hit Yorba Linda Jewelry Store
- Covid Numbers Are on the Rise
- 119 School Shootings in the U.S. Since 2018
- Fight Over Immigration Intensifies
- Putin Escalates War in Ukraine
- Water Shortage in SoCal

We fear being sued and going broke. We fear the mole on our back, and the sound of the clock as it ticks us closer to the grave. If we persevere on those issues, we could indeed become very fearful as crime, division, terrorism, disease, and the day-to-day wear of anxiety are all around us. In our culture, fear seems to be in the driver’s seat. We are troubled and anxious. It’s tough to know where to turn, isn’t it?

This brings me to our topic today...Fear and Fear of the Lord. First, let’s talk about fear.

Definitions of Fear

In the NIV Bible, the word “fear” is used 326 times. Approximately half of the time, it is related to the fear of God. As a noun, fear is defined as an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger. As a verb, fear is defined as to be afraid of: expect with alarm; fear the worst.

There are over 500 named fears. “Acrophobia” is the fear of heights. “Claustrophobia” is fear of tight spaces. Fear of spiders and/or bugs is called “arachnophobia;” “ecclesiophobia” is the abnormal fear of church. Due to a surprise encounter during the Girl Scout days of my youth, I suffer from “ophidiophobia” which is the fear of snakes. And my favorite—panophobia—is the fear of everything.

Now, let's turn our attention to a better fear.

What is the Fear of God?

What if faith, not fear, was your default reaction to the emotion of fear? As believers in Christ, we know there is an antidote to all our fears—that antidote is trust in God. If we trust God more, we can fear less. As we searched the Scriptures this week, I would venture to say that each of us learned more about God's character, His great promises, and the importance of fearing Him. We can choose to live in fear or we can choose to fill our thoughts with fear of the Lord and gain trust that goes beyond head knowledge and actually develops into a deep heartfelt confidence.

In our lesson, we were asked to share what the fear of the Lord meant to us. Your initial reaction may have included these questions: "Well, I never thought of fearing God. Isn't He the God of love? Why should I be afraid? Didn't I learn in Sunday School that Jesus is my friend forever (which I taught to my preschoolers just two months ago)?"

The fear of God is a relationship. Like any relationship, the more time we spend with God, the better we get to know Him. Out of this knowledge, we develop an understanding of God's character. We come to know that fearing the Lord means to reverence Him, honor Him, exalt Him, lift Him up, hold Him in high regard, worship Him, hold Him in highest esteem, obey Him, serve Him, adore Him, and understand that He is all-powerful, and all-knowing. He alone is worthy of our praise. Fearing the Lord means to honor His position as Creator and Judge of all mankind. If we go a bit deeper, and this is where I struggle in my Christian walk, we can see that it means that we should yield to His will and maybe the hardest thing for me to do, and perhaps for you, is to surrender to Him completely.

Why Is It Important to Fear the Lord?

Our Lord is a holy God – a righteous God and He hates sin. Whether you are afraid of God or not depends on how you are living. If you are living in sin, you absolutely have the right to be afraid of God. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23);" and "It is upon a man once to die and after this the judgment (Hebrews 9:27)." Sin has consequences.

As Christians, we need to know the difference between fearing the Lord and living in fear of Him. For further clarification of this apparent paradox, it might help us to take note of A. W. Tozer's statement, "No one can know the true grace of God who has not first known the fear of God."

More importantly, the Bible commands us to fear the Lord. The Bible says: "You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him (Deuteronomy 13:4)." Psalm 33:8 tells us "Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him."

I believe that many Christians (I will put myself in this category) take God's power, wisdom, mercy, love, and forgiveness for granted too much of the time. We need to hold tight to those two verses. All creation is commanded to fear the Lord. I think about the two thieves who were staked to the crosses near Jesus when He was crucified. One thief cast terrible reflections about Jesus and chided Him to get them down, while the other one asked the big question, "Don't you even fear God?"

So, let me ask you this and I ask myself...If fearing the Lord means to hold Him in highest esteem, honor Him, obey Him, surrender to Him, follow Him, worship Him, adore Him...**Do you fear God?** Or is He just someone you talk about, someone you pray to in case of an emergency, someone you think about when it is convenient, someone you pray to when you get in trouble when you don't know what to do next, or when you are afraid? This is the way many in the world operate because "There is no fear at all in their eyes." (Romans 3:18) As they do life, they do not honor God.

Why Should We Fear the Lord?

While there are many, I chose to focus on two important reasons why we should fear the Lord. First, He commands it, which we have already discussed. Secondly, Scripture tells us in Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Jeff Swaney did a masterful job in Lesson 3 when he presented his lecture on "God – the Author of Wisdom." I agree with Jeff that if you want to be a wise person, going to school is not the way to acquire wisdom. A wise person is someone in whom God is dwelling and who allows the Holy Spirit to guide and direct his or her actions. The Lord is willing to give wisdom to those who ask for it and to those who are willing to give their lives to Him.

Benefits that Belong to Those Who Fear the Lord

I was actually surprised and overwhelmed with the many beloved and powerful Bible verses that were contained in the psalms we read this week. I actually said to myself, "Self, how can you possibly omit any of these fabulous verses from your October 27th lecture?" Then I asked that of the Lord and I can happily tell you that He did not direct me to ask you to stay here for another 3 hours. So, for the next few minutes, let's focus on some of the verses that speak directly to "fearing the Lord."

Let's take a look at some of God's spectacular promises contained in the book of Psalms that He made to those who fear Him:

Friendship - Psalm 25:14 – "The Lord confides in those who fear Him; He makes His covenant known to them."

The Watchful Care of the Lord - Psalm 33:18 – "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His steadfast love..."

The Deliverance of the Lord's Angels - Psalm 34:7 – "The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him and He delivers them."

Provision – Psalm 34:9-10 – "You who are His holy ones, fear the Lord, for those who fear Him lack nothing. Young lions lack food and go hungry, but those who seek the Lord will not lack any good thing."

Permanent Love of God – Psalm 103:17-18 – "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to the children's children of those who are faithful to His covenant, of those who obey His commandments!"

Being Enjoyed by the Lord - Psalm 147:11 - "...the Lord's delight is in those who fear him, those who put their hope in His unfailing love."

Confidence and Place of Refuge; Drinking at the Fountain of Life – Proverbs 14:26-27 - “Those who fear the Lord are secure; He will be a refuge for their children. Fear of the Lord is a life-giving fountain; it offers escape from the snares of death.”

Being Satisfied - Proverbs 19:23 – “The fear of the Lord leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; He will not be visited with evil.”

Scriptures give us motivation to pursue the fear of the Lord.

The Holiness of God - Revelation 15:4 – “Who will not fear you, Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous deeds have been revealed.”

The Greatness of God - Deuteronomy 10:12 – “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the Lord your God, and live in a way that pleases Him, and love Him and serve Him with all your heart and soul.”

The Goodness of God - 1 Samuel 12:24 – “But be sure to fear the Lord and faithfully serve Him. Think of all the wonderful things He has done for you.”

The Forgiveness of God - Psalm 130:4 – “...You offer forgiveness, that we might learn to fear You.”

The Wondrous Works of God - Joshua 4:23-24 – “For the Lord your God dried up the river right before your eyes, and He kept it dry until you were all across, just as He did at the Red Sea when He dried it up until we had all crossed over. He did this so all the nations of the earth might know that the Lord’s hand is powerful, and so you might fear the Lord your God forever.”

The Judgment of God - Revelation 14:7 – “Fear God,” he (an angel) shouted, “Give glory to Him. For the time has come when He will sit as judge. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water.”

Avoid Evil - Proverbs 16:6 - Unfailing love and faithfulness make atonement for sin. By fearing the Lord, people avoid evil.

Avoiding Evil Brings Healing and Refreshment - Proverbs 3:7-8 – “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones.”

Prolongs Life - Proverbs 10:27 – Fear of the Lord lengthens one’s life, but the years of the wicked are cut short.

The psalms we studied this week stand as profound examples of why all individuals – including world leaders, and God’s people – need to recognize the importance of fearing the Lord. The psalmists overwhelmingly proclaimed the Lord’s great power and His desire to be our refuge and deliverer. This week we read how God, our “radiant warrior,” protector, refuge and deliverer turned the tables on evil and brought glory to Himself.

I was particularly mesmerized by the account of Asaph in Psalm 76, and touched upon in Psalm 46, of the deliverance of Jerusalem when it was besieged by 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. You will remember that God sent a single angel who killed these soldiers in their sleep and left bodies and

weapons as monuments to our Lord's power. All of the psalms we studied extol God's power and the ultimate victory that is His. He will not fail to rescue those who love Him and He will be glorified!

Of the five psalms we studied this week, Psalm 46 is a song attributed to the Sons of Korah. In it they praise the power of the Father, the presence of the Spirit, and the peace of the Son. The Trinity reflects the antidote to feeling afraid. Knowing that the Father can handle any situation that prompts our fear means we can "let go, and let God." With the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are guided and comforted to know we're not alone during fearful times. And there is no better answer to Satan's goading of fear than to know that the Son is our refuge of peace because He has defeated the enemy of our soul.

The other psalms – 34, 55, and 23 – were written by David recalling his reactions to times of fear in his life. Psalm 55:22 "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall." Psalm 34:4 "I sought the Lord and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."

While this lecture is not an exposition on the 23rd Psalm, I feel that it would be incomplete if we did not turn our attention to the psalm that many people point to as the most famous chapter in the entire Bible. Here is one child's insight to its significance:

A Sunday School teacher decided to have her young class memorize the 23rd Psalm. She gave the youngsters a month to learn the chapter. Little Rick was excited about the task, but he just couldn't remember the psalm. After much practice, he could barely get past the first line. On the day that the children were scheduled to recite Psalm 23 in front of the congregation, Ricky was so nervous. When it was his turn, he stepped up to the microphone and said proudly, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and that's all I need to know."

Out of the mouths of babes..., right?

Reflecting on Psalm 23, we can see that just about every fear you and I face in life is related to one of these:

- Physical needs: food, clothing, shelter, safety
- Spiritual needs: We want to be sure our relationship with God is healthy and strong.
- Emotional needs: We all feel anxiety, anger, frustration, fear, abandonment. When those feelings come, God reminds us, "I'm with you. Don't be afraid."
- Relational needs: God will protect us even from our enemies.
- Eternal needs: When this life is over, God has a place for us, where we will enjoy fellowship with Him forever.

What do you and I have to fear? God has already thought of every need we have, and has promised to meet it. Fear not.

Would you would join me in reciting the 23rd Psalm? I don't know about you, but I struggle to recite verses I learned back in the day when the old King James version of the Bible was the only version we had. I have printed the New International version to use today. Let's think about Psalm 23 from the sheep's perspective. Please join me now.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,
He refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right path
for His name’s sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
In the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Surely Your goodness and love will follow me
All the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

David, himself a shepherd and the son of a shepherd and later to be known as the Shepherd King of Israel, stated profoundly, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing (Psalm 23:1).”

In every psalm I studied over the last two months, I found the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Of course, we recognize that connection as the Lord Jesus Christ in Psalm 23 and again in John 10:14-15 where Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. He said, “I am the Good Shepherd. I know My sheep and My sheep know Me...and I lay down my life for My sheep.”

W. Philip Keller was an actual shepherd and wrote a book about this stage of his life entitled A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23. He pointed out similarities between sheep and people. Let me touch upon a few of his points. Keller stated,

“It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep. The behavior of sheep and human beings is similar in many ways—our mob instincts, fears and timidity, stubbornness and stupidity, are all significant parallels. Yet despite these unfavorable characteristics, Christ chooses us, buys us, calls us by name, makes us His own, and delights in caring for us. Our Good Shepherd spares no pain for the welfare of His sheep.”

Psalm 23 reminds us that everything we have in our lives, we owe to our generous God (James 1:17). When I forget God’s goodness, I open the door to fear.

Just like sheep, we are easily panicked. When one startled sheep runs in fright, a dozen will follow. It is significant to note that the presence of their master and owner and protector put sheep at ease as nothing else can; and so, it is in the lives of Christians. There is no substitute for the awareness that the Good Shepherd is present and ready to dispel the fear, the panic, and the uncertainty of life. It

is with this assurance that we follow Him obediently down the right paths as He leads us to “green pastures” and “quiet waters” and rest that refreshes our souls.

This Son of God, Radiant Warrior and Good Shepherd is worthy of our respect, honor, praise and adoration!

Application:

We have an awesome God who will meet our needs, be our security in every area, and enable us to be strong enough to fear no evil. To remind ourselves of that, consider doing this each day:

- 1) Ask the Lord to be your Shepherd and ask Him to show you His will for you each day.
- 2) Give God first place in every area of your life. Worry can be a warning light that you have not given Him first place.
- 3) Relax and give Him your worries and fears in prayer. I Peter 5:7 tells us, “Give all your worries and cares to God.” Tell God about all your needs. Give it to God and thank Him for all He’s done for you in the past and acknowledge what’s ahead of you may be an opportunity to grow your faith. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace that passes understanding because the Lord is your Shepherd.
- 4) Trust Him for one day at a time. When you worry about tomorrow’s problems, you miss all the blessings of today. Worrying about the future can be overwhelming. God graciously divided our days into 24-hour segments. You are going to meet the future one day at a time. You can handle that. Why? Because the Lord is your Shepherd. Even in our darkest days, God says, “I am with you.” (Psalm 23:4-5)
- 5) Believe without a doubt that you will “dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23:6)
Let’s pray and after our prayer, please stand to sing the “Doxology.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, we are so grateful that You are our Good Shepherd. We know that You are always with us even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We thank You for the multitude of blessings that You have already given us and for those that You have prepared for us to receive in the future. Let us live with an attitude of gratitude and generosity as we focus on You and how You would have us serve others. Give us wisdom to learn how to fear You in reverence rather than be caught up in living in fear in this world of turmoil. Help us to yield to Your will and to surrender to You completely as we learn to trust You each day. We especially thank You for Your love and mercy. It’s in Your precious name that we pray. Amen!