

I. Introduction:

- A. There is a phrase toward the of Nehemiah's prayer which is somewhat astonishing to some 21st century ears.
1. Before he asks, "*Grant me mercy in sight of Artaxerxes,*" he says that he is among other godly people.
 - a. That isn't surprising or astonishing because God has always maintained a small remnant of saints.
 - b. The Lord has always, as He said, "*reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.*"
 - c. There may not have been 7,000, but Nehemiah was not alone in his yearning for restoration & revival.
 2. But notice how he describes these people.
 3. He doesn't say that they are saints, or even that they fear God's name.
 4. He describes them as those "*who desire to fear thy name.*"
- B. There is a strange breed of people – in my estimation – who enjoy the rush of adrenalin through their bodies.
1. So they take risks – extreme rock climbing, base-jumping, diving through narrow canyons with nothing but little wings attached to their arms and little cameras attached to their heads.
 2. They can't walk up to a stranger and ask if he is child of God, but they can swim with sharks.
 3. They couldn't declare their allegiance to Christ before a group of girls, but they could defy corrupted power defending the Constitution in front of a bunch of liberal senators.
 4. And, for some of these people, it was as children they began to love horror stories, horror movies – terror.
 5. Perhaps you are among them, but I am not.
 6. Can we say that those people look for reasons to be afraid – something to fear?
- C. There is another group of people who seem to look for something to fear behind every rock, on the backs of every road sign and in every decision made by government – conspiracy seekers.
1. It seems to be an obsession with them to look for reasons to fear.
 2. They are not pleased with their lives – if there isn't the possibility that life could end in 30 seconds.
- D. Again, I am not among them.
1. I don't like the feeling of fear, and I don't look for things to fear.
 2. And yet, I'm here to tell you that these acquaintances of Nehemiah were looking for fear.
 3. They were good people – folk to be emulated.
 4. There were people Nehemiah knew "*who desired to fear God's name.*"
 5. I know that we touched on this subject a time or two during our journey through **Proverbs**.
 6. But since the subject is presented to us again, and in this time a little differently, let's spend another thirty minutes considering "*the fear of God.*"

II. What is it to "FEAR OF THE LORD"?

- A. In Hebrew, the word for "fear" is "*yir'ah,*" and it is used in the Old Testament to describe three things:
1. First, often it describes **the usual kind of fear**.
 - a. That's the old Alfred Hitchcock type of terror; the nightmare kind of terror.
 - b. Sometimes that word describes **the emotion itself**, and sometimes it describes **the cause** of the fear.
 - c. It is the fear we get listening to the bear walk around our tent at night, and it is the bear himself.
 2. Then that word has a special use in "*the fear of God*" involving **respect** and **reverence**.
 3. The Greek equivalent is "*phobos*" and it means essentially the same sorts of things.
 - a. It is the source of our English word "*phobia.*"
 - b. I confess to having a fear of heights; I suffer from "*Acrophobia.*"
 - c. Some people have a fear of spiders – "*Arachnophobia.*"
 - d. I suppose that many people suffer from "*Theophobia*" – fear of the wrath of God.
 4. But Nehemiah, and others – like Paul – seem to suggest that "*Theophobia*" is a good thing.
 5. In **Philippians 2:12** Paul said – "*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*"

- B. In connection with God, the *"fear of the Lord"* is often defined as *"reverence"* or *"awe."*
1. And this is fine as far as it goes, but I wonder if this definition reaches far enough.
 2. Because the word *"reverence"* doesn't usually imply much **trembling**.
 3. Even though the terms *"reverence"* and *"awe"* leave room for *"trembling"* most people don't make that connection.
 4. Few people, even among ourselves – few people tremble in the presence of the Lord, until they see the burning bush and their feet start to burn.
- C. Were those friends of Nehemiah asking God to frighten them? Adrenalin addicts? No, they were not.
1. Just as *"yir'ah"* can speak either of the emotion of fear or the cause of that fear....
 2. The reverence aspect of the word can be either *"awe"* or **respectful service** to God while in that awe.
 3. I believe that Nehemiah was referring to people who longed to visit the temple and to worship the Lord according to the principles laid down in the days of Moses.
 4. They were wanting the opportunity to **express their reverence** for the Lord in reverential worship.
- D. *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obey, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."*
1. The Greek word for *"trembling"* takes us back to regular old fear – *"a trembling or quaking with fear."*
 2. If we were faced with a drug-crazed maniac with a knife demanding our money, most of us would tremble just a bit.
 - a. If we were surrounded by three snarling, bristling, glaring Rottweilers, we might fear.
 - b. If we were a firing squad accused of serving the God of Heaven, we might – or might not – be afraid.
 3. Just at it might be in these situations, the Lord Jesus has taught us to fear the Lord.
 - a. *"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*
 - b. But someone says, *"But that is just for the unsaved, now that I am a Christian, Matthew 10:28 doesn't apply to me."*
 - c. Oh? Then what is the meaning of **Philippians 2:12** – which I've quoted couple times now?
- E. Biblically speaking, a proper *"fear of the Lord"* **must** include **reverence, awe, love** and **SERVICE**.
1. It may not have been what Nehemiah was thinking – but Paul might have been saying that of the fear of the Lord should be a fear of offending God.
 2. And there is room for trembling and quaking when we realize that we have offended Him.
 3. Listen to some scriptures from **Hebrews 10** and **12** –
 - a. *"If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,*
 - b. *But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.*
 - c. *For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*
 - d. *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:*
 - e. *For our God is a consuming fire."*
 4. Shouldn't a child fear to disobey his parent? Fear a spanking if nothing more?
 5. And shouldn't a Christian fear the chastisement of God?
- F. The fear of God is a special kind of reverence – it is a reverence with service.
1. The fear of God is not the hiding in the dark, shivering and chewing on our fingernails kind of fear.
 2. Yes, the fear of God may send us into the darkness, but it is as lights – as ambassadors.
 3. The fear of God is not idle, static, useless and helpless.
 4. The fear of God is busy about the Lord's glory. This is what Nehemiah' friends wanted.

III. The Bible shows that this kind of fear is really important.

- A. The *"fear of the Lord"* is the beginning of knowledge – **Proverbs 1:7**.
1. The *"fear of the Lord"* will cause one to hate evil – **Proverbs 8:13**.
 2. The *"fear of the Lord"* will prolong life – **Proverbs 10:27**.
 3. The *"fear of the Lord"* provides strong confidence and is a fountain of life – **Proverbs 14:26-27**.
 4. The *"fear of the Lord"* prompts one to depart from evil – **Proverbs 16:6**.
 5. The *"fear of the Lord"* leads to a satisfying life, and spares one from much evil – **Proverbs 19:23**.
 6. The *"fear of the Lord"* is a part of the road to riches, honor, and life! – **Proverbs 22:4**.
 7. To how many of these things did the Jews of Shushan aspire?
- B. Without the *"fear of the Lord"* we shut and bar the door to the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge!
1. Without the fear of the Lord we end up flirting with evil, and we will quickly be corrupted by it.
 2. Without fear, our lives are likely to be shortened because God's blessings will be absent.
 - a. Like suffering disease because we did not heed His Word on sexual relationships or drugs.
 - b. Like suffering jail because we didn't listen to the fact that crime brings punishment.
 3. Nehemiah's friends may have been concerned that as things stood – their lives were in jeopardy.
 4. Without the fear of the Lord, when fallen into sin, we will not be motivated to repent.
 5. Only the person who *"trembles at His Word"* has God's promise to receive His blessings –
 - a. *"The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;*
 - b. *To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them."*
 6. This is what those Babylonian brethren longed for.

IV. But how does one develop a proper "fear of the Lord" without going to extremes?

- A. Does the fear of God come through defying Him and daring Him to punish us? Of course not.
1. A proper *"fear of the Lord"* comes through the Holy Spirit's ministry of the Word of God upon us.
 2. And these Old Testament missed the opportunity of hearing and seeing God's word in proper worship.
 3. Just as *"faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"* – the same can be said for the *"fear of the Lord."*
 4. Moses said in **Deuteronomy 31:10-13** – *"And I stayed in the mount, according to the first time, forty days and forty nights; and the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also, and the LORD would not destroy thee.*
 - a. *And the LORD said unto me, Arise, take thy journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give unto them.*
 - b. *And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,*
 - c. *To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?"*
- B. As we read the Word of God, we should gain a healthy degree of the *"fear of the Lord."*
1. **Romans 2:4-11** – *"Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"*
 - a. *But after thy hardness & impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds:*
 - b. *To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;*
 - c. *But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:*
 - d. *For there is no respect of persons with God."*

2. **II Peter 3:7-14** – *“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.*
- But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*
 - The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*
 - But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*
 - Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,*
 - Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?*
 - Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”*

C. The Word of God, properly used, will maintain a proper balance in us.

- The worship and preaching services of the house of God will help us to walk the Christian walk.
- Nehemiah and his brethren didn't have that opportunity, but they yearned for it.

D. It is important to emphasize, however, that to avoid extremes, we must read **all** of God's Word.

- Some read only those portions which reveal God's love and mercy, and which contain nothing *"fearful."*
- Others emphasize the *"fire, hell and brimstone"* passages but know nothing of God's everlasting lovingkindness.
- The one develops an attitude of permissiveness which belittles God's holiness and justice.
- The other develops a psychosis of terror which forgets God's grace and compassion.
- Many of the scriptures that we've read speak of God's grace and forgiveness for those who will repent!
- So we must be careful how we use the Word of God – but use it we must!

E. The Psalmist said...

- "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all [them that are] about him" – **Psalms 89:7.***
- Why do we need to *"fear the Lord"*?
- So that we will be sure to *"work out our salvation with fear and trembling."*
- The warning is necessary, for as it is written in **Hebrews: 4:1-2** – *“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.”*
- And again... **Hebrews 4:11** – *“Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”*
- With the proper *"fear of the Lord"*, we will *"labour...to enter into the heavenly rest."*
- "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."*

F. We all need to think about and strive to *"perfect holiness in the fear of God."*

V. In the fear of the Lord we find a strange melding of opposing ideas – fear and comfort.

- A. Those saintly Babylonian Jews yearned for this. They wanted its positive effects.
1. These brethren from Shushan yearned for the comfort which comes from proper fear.
 2. They wanted to be *"walking in the fear of the Lord"* – but their circumstances made it difficult
 3. Is that the same thing to which Paul referred in writing to the church at Philippi – *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obey, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."*
- B. The concept of *"fear and trembling"* in connection with God is not a popular concept today.
1. People prefer to hear about God's love, longsuffering and mercy, rather than things about the Lord which should make them afraid.
 2. Sometimes, when God's righteous indignation, holiness, and justice, are highlighted people reply – *"But MY God is not like that!"*
 3. The emphasis on God's love and mercy today is probably a reaction to the *"hell, fire, and brimstone"* preaching of earlier generations.
 4. But we have gone to the opposite extreme – where there is no concept of *"fear and trembling"* as it relates to the Christian.
 5. Today, even among relatively good Christians, Jehovah is more of a friend than the Almighty God.
 6. If the Lord showed up in some people's churches, the members would try to give Him high fives to thank Him for forgiving their current sins.
- C. Could this minimization of the fear of God be why many Christians are so apathetic in their service of God?
1. Could it be we have forgotten **Whom** we should fear and **why** we should fear?
 2. Do we fear the election of Joe Biden more than we fear Jehovah?
 3. I'm afraid that many Christians do.
 4. Aren't David and Paul correct when they said that the transgression of the wicked declared, *"There is no fear of God in their hearts?"*
- D. I hoped to accomplish three simple things in this message tonight:
1. First, I wanted to define once again the *"fear of the Lord."*
 2. I wanted to point out why the *"fear of the Lord"* was so important to Nehemiah and his friends.
 3. And then I wanted to suggest that we can develop a healthy *"fear of the Lord"* without going to extremes.