

The God Who Must Be Feared, #1

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Well, to be honest and don't you think honesty is important? I wrestled with what to speak on today. I wanted to acknowledge the occasion perhaps with something a little bit unique and distinct and I believe that the occasion of this great moment in the life of our church calls for a great theme and that's what I wanted to aim at was a great theme that would sound forth and set the stage, as it were, for what this pulpit symbolizes. What it symbolizes is the truths and the commitment that we have to honor God's word going forward as we look forward to many, many years of proclaiming God's truth and teaching God's people God's word in this beautiful room. And what theme would rise to the occasion such as that when we recognize a wonderful day and yet also realize the greatness of the path that lies ahead of us as a body in Christ.

Well, my heart settled on this theme and I would invite you to turn to the book of Proverbs 1. This is actually going to be the first of a two-part message, the second part being on this coming Tuesday at our Tuesday night Bible study. For some of you to hear the concluding message may be something new in your schedule, if so, we invite you to be with us on Tuesday as we complete this. But our theme for today and our text for today is the fear of God. Proverbs 1:7 says this,

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

This verse says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. It doesn't have the sense that you start here and then you move on and advance to more important things, no, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge in the sense that concrete is the foundation of a house, it is that upon which everything else rests. As we gather together as Christians week by week, as we gather together today, we must understand as we go through our individual lives even that the fear of the Lord is the controlling principle of true worship. It is the fear of God alone that can give right direction to an individual life, to a body of believers; it is only the fear of the Lord that can set a true trajectory for a nation. It is the fundamental element of life. When a man fears the Lord, he will come to his word. When a man fears the Lord, he will see his sin and humbly seek a Savior. The fear of the Lord is the core of responding to God and that's why Scripture calls it the beginning.

The news of the past week brings one thing into crystal-clear focus for us: we live in a society that does not fear God. We live in a culture where our leaders have rejected the fear of God and spurn it and will have nothing to do with it. Why is it that men can celebrate drunkenness? Why is it that people feel free to parade their perversion in the streets? Why is it that young men are lazy? That marriages are filled with deceit? Why is it that immorality is celebrated as entertainment? Why is it that homosexuality is lifted up in our midst? It all comes down to one fundamental aspect, my friends: it is because men do not fear God. If they did, everything would be different.

So it is the absence of the fear of God that marks what we see happening in society around us. By contrast, in positive contrast, why is it that this church has come into being? Why is it that so many of you gather together to hear a 60 minute or more message from God's word and you sit patiently through that and take notes and receive it and think about it during the week? Why is it that this church exists when it didn't 3 1/2 years ago? It's because people like you fear God. That's right, it's because you respect and reverence his word. It's because you realize that you are guilty before God and you have feared him and you have fled to Christ for refuge, knowing that you needed a Savior to redeem you from the certain wrath of God upon your sin. This church exists because there is a group of believers in the Eastern Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky region that fear God and I praise God for you. I thank God for you. I love this church and I love what this church stands for and this church would not exist but for people just like you.

Our culture, by contrast, is defined by what the Bible says in Romans 3:18, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." The battle lines are drawn and it's not over legislation or a silly Supreme Court opinion. The line in the sand is really the fear of God. But let's not kid ourselves, even within our smaller subculture of so-called evangelical Christianity in our Western culture, it's not much better in the church. It's the same problem, the same fundamental problem, it's just that the symptoms manifest themselves differently with people who have a superficial veneer of religion painted over their external lives.

Why is it, why do you think that Christian leaders, so-called pastors, have turned the thrice holy God into a means of personal fulfillment, promising people that their best life is here now on this sinful sod? Why was it in the middle 80s that spiritual leaders turned to a desire for political power and moved away from the Gospel? Why is it? Why is it, we ask, that to this day there are churches who consciously center their philosophy of ministry on trying to please whoever walks through the door and cater their ministry to the carnal desires of unbelieving people just so they can get pants in the seats of their pews and money in the coffers of their accounts? Why is that? It's because there is no fear of God before their eyes. It's a cosmic crime. All of it is a cosmic crime of which we will find ourselves acquitted here in this room. We will fear God in this church. We will fear God as a people. We will fear God in this pulpit. We will reverence his word.

Thinking back to the spiritual experience that I know some of you have which I don't criticize with what I'm about to say but I do want you to see things and have a perspective on them. Many of us in our younger days were conditioned, we were taught for our own selves and for how you would share the Gospel with others, to think in this way: that the

first spiritual law that anyone needs to know is that God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life. Beloved, that's not true. That is not the first law. The words of Scripture itself plainly repudiate that mindset that is nothing more than an attempt, a misguided attempt to try to attract people with sugar before the demands of God's law has come down with power upon their conscience. No, Scripture says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Until you fear God, you cannot know him at all.

So for today's message, there is one simple take-away that I have for you. If your kids are taking notes and they just write down this one thing on their sheet of paper, we'll congratulate them on getting the point. For the rest of us, for this one thing to center into our consciousness and be driven deeply into our hearts as that which shapes our life, that which defines our church, that which shapes the way that we view the world around us, it would be this one fundamental thought and everything that I say today supports this one great theme: God is a God who must be feared. God is a God who must be feared. As I said, we will cover this more on Tuesday but don't let anything else today obscure this fundamental point in your mind: the God of the universe, the God who created all, the God who rules over all, the God who is moving world history to accomplish his purposes, the God who will culminate it all and bring all that we see in the heavens and the earth to an end in a fiery judgment before he ushers in his eternal kingdom, that God is a God to be feared.

Let's look at Scripture this morning and we're going to kind of pivot this message on 2 fundamental points here. First of all, I want you to see from Scripture the call to fear God. The call to fear God. And beloved, I would say this to you as we begin here this morning and as we dive into the Scriptures, it will probably surprise you how prominent and dominant this theme is in Scripture because it is neglected, because both in our world and in the broader church at large, because men fundamentally do not fear God, it's not surprising that they don't talk about it. And because it is not emphasized, then it's easy for us as believers to read through Scripture and miss this overarching, fundamental, cornerstone theme in understanding the Bible. So what I want to do here in the next few minutes is to take some time to point you to a variety of passages in the Old and New Testament to simply show you how much Scripture points us to this one fundamental theme. God is a God who must be feared and I want you to see that this is not an overly ambitious preacher this morning laying upon you something that really isn't talked about in Scripture. Far to the contrary, this is fundamental to the way the Bible says you should frame your life. If you have never really thought about God in terms of fearing him, if you have simply viewed God as someone that you ask for help in times of trouble, you ask God to help you and to kind of massage your earthly circumstances so that you can walk through life with a maximum amount of comfort and a minimal amount of disease, this is going to rock your world, gladly. This is going to overturn your whole way of thinking about life if you've never thought about this, if you've never seen this in Scripture.

Let's look at the call to fear God, first of all, from the Old Testament. Look at Psalm 111, if you would and, beloved, it's not just the fact that the Bible talks about the fear of God that I want you to see here today. It's the priority that Scripture always gives to the fear of

God when it discusses it. That's what you must see. You must see that this is established as a predominant priority in thinking rightly about life. This is a fundamental theme of Scripture and as we said earlier, Scripture is God's word. When we read God's word, we see the mind of Christ on display. Well, what is the mind of Christ who by his Spirit inspired every word that we read? What is his mind about the priority of the fear of God?

Psalm 111:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." A man who does not fundamentally fear God, who ignores him or thinks of him as a manageable deity to simply be called upon like a genie in a bottle to grant our wishes, as if we were here and God is the genie that we call upon and send him on our errands to accomplish what we can't do in our human strength with no sense of fear and reverence, if that's the sense that we have of God, we've got to start all over. Look at what Psalm 111:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever." It's the beginning of wisdom. It's the foundation. It's the first principle of a proper worldview. Notice that it ties it to obedience. You start to understand the fear of God when you realize that the fear of God has implications upon your volition, upon your very will, that the fear of God compels your obedience to him.

The fear of the Lord is utterly essential to understanding the book of Proverbs. Turn over to Proverbs 3 with me. Proverbs 3:7 says, "Do not be wise in your own eyes." Don't have an elevated view of your mental faculties or of your judgment. Don't take pride in your own thinking and ability, Scripture says, but by contrast, "Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." You see it there again: fear the Lord and what? And turn away from evil. Those of you that are dominated by sin in your life, do you know what your fundamental problem is really? Really what your problem is? Your problem is you don't fear God enough. If we feared God properly and we saw sin for the black heinous crime against him that it is, if we revered his holiness, if we honored his purity, if we respected his law, we would turn away from evil. Those who can settle into comfortable patterns of sin without any compunction of conscience and wonder how their life ever got to this point go back to here, go back, beloved, go back to the very beginning. The very beginning is the fear of the Lord and when we find ourselves trapped in patterns of sin, this is where we go back and start at. We fear the Lord and we turn away from evil.

Proverbs 9:10. There is almost a progression here. As you turn away from evil and you seek spiritual growth, you want to be a godly Christian, understand that it's the same principle that drives the godly heart. Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." There it is again. Do you see the cornerstone, the foundation? We start right here. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

Proverbs 15:33. The sound of turning Bible pages will always be sweet in this place. Proverbs 15:33 says, "The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor comes humility." We humble ourselves before this God. We bow before him. We submit ourselves to him in mind, body and spirit. We love him with all of our heart, soul,

strength and mind and we revere him as the focal point of the universe, as the focal point of our heart, and we give him the reverence that he deserves.

I realize that I am repeating myself. I realize that I am taking you to many Bible passages that are repeating the same thing. Do you know why I do that from time to time? I don't always do that but on a theme like this where the fear of the Lord has been so neglected, it is crucial for you to see that it is not an isolated single text ripped out of context that really isn't as dominant as we think it is. It is crucial for you to see that this is woven throughout the Bible so that you will respond to it properly and give this theme the seriousness of consideration that it deserves.

Go a little further in your Bibles to the book of Ecclesiastes 12. Ecclesiastes 12, the final 2 verses, which sum up the whole purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes. Chapter 12, verses 13 and 14, "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." And so Scripture has shown us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning, it's the foundation, it's the cornerstone of wisdom and here in Ecclesiastes after a book that examines the whole nature and purpose and vanity of earthly life, it comes and says, "This is the conclusion. This is the end. This is the summary. This is what pulls everything together is to fear God and to keep his commandments." And this isn't simply a matter for Christians to hear who are super spiritual. Solomon says this applies to every person and ties it, again, to obedience to the keeping of his commandments, to a recognition of the authority of his law and conforming your life in response and there is this warning that is tucked in there as it discusses the fear of the Lord, that "God is going to bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden whether it is good or evil." You know, on an encouraging note on that, those of you that seek to honor God in the privacy of your life and with hidden deeds of devotion and kindness and obedience, perhaps you are misunderstood for that by family or friends, understand that God sees that. God sees what men don't see and will honor you for that but at the same time, we all need to be brought short by the fact that God sees those hidden lies as well. He sees the deceit which some of you base your life upon. He sees your indifference. He sees all of your sin and Scripture says, "Be wise, take into account, you should fear God because he will bring every act to judgment." We live with a final accountability before this holy God looming over our existence.

Now, someone might say, "But that's the Old Testament. I believe in the New Testament, don't you? So I'm not so concerned about the Old Testament because, after all, you know, what do you need besides the Gospel of John and the first 8 chapters of Romans, right?" You've heard that before in the past probably. No, it doesn't work that way, beloved. It does not work that way because the New Testament also demands the fear of God. It also points us in this direction.

Look at the book of Acts 9 in your New Testament and we're just simply seeing just by way of reminder as we go through these verses, we're seeing the biblical call to fear God so that we would understand that God is a God to be feared. That's what we're doing here this morning in this particular part of the message. Acts 9:31 says, "So 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." The early church was marked by its reverence for God, not its flippancy. I'm rejecting the temptation to pound this pulpit right now. Not for flippancy. Not for humor. It was known and it was recorded by God in the Scriptures describing the early church that they were known for their fear of God.

Look over at 2 Corinthians 5, beginning in verse 10. I'll give you a moment to find that. I'm so glad you are all with us here this morning. 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 11, and you see that the fear of God is something from this passage that transcends just our earthly existence. There is an eschatological dimension to it that informs the way that we think about life and the way that we live. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:10, speaking to believers, by the way, he says, "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." Look at verse 11, what do we conclude from that? What do we conclude from the fact that we are all headed toward a destiny, an appointment at the judgment seat of Christ where we will give an account? What are we to take from that? Verse 11, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord," this promotes a fear of God within us that causes us to persuade men. It causes us to live a holy life and then to go out and persuade men with the power of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. "We persuade men," Paul says, "but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences." He says, "We know the fear of the Lord because we know that we are headed toward an appointment with the judgment seat of Christ."

Look at chapter 7, verse 1 and notice how the fear of God, once again, is tied toward an obedient, sanctified life. 2 Corinthians 7:1 says, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." So Paul addressing believers as beloved, addressing them as those whose salvation he recognized and affirmed, nevertheless said we must perfect holiness in the fear of God. Whether as an unbeliever or as a believer, we are called upon to live life in light of the holiness of God which promotes a sanctified fear in our hearts. The silence can get a little uncomfortable, can't it? That's okay. The silence symbolizes for us the holiness and revered presence of God. Scripture says, "Let all men fall silent before him," Habakkuk 2:20. We're so used to background noise, so used to having radio or music or television blaring in the background as if we're afraid of a moment of silence. Sometimes silence is what it takes to burst in that this would sink into our hearts and thinking. The familiar passage of Philippians 2:12 says, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Old Testament, New Testament. God's word. The message resounds: God is a God who must be feared.

Now, let's ask a second question or make a second point maybe is a better way to put it. Here's the second point in the message: what does it mean to fear God? I haven't defined it yet for you, have I? What does it mean to fear God? If this is fundamental to understanding life, if this is fundamental to wisdom, if the fear of God is what motivates us to live properly in light of the coming judgment seat of Christ, doesn't it seem that it must be pretty important to understand what it means? What does it mean, fear God?

Many will say and I would be willing to be confident, I'm not going to say bet or wager, that just wouldn't seem appropriate at this point. I'm pretty confident that many of you have heard messages somewhere along the line that loosely, briefly referred to the fear of God by saying it means this: reverential awe. Have you heard that? Have you heard that definition? The fear of God means reverential awe? Now, there is nothing wrong with that definition, per se, but I find it utterly useless to have any practical sense of what it actually means. We don't talk that way. What is reverential awe? Honestly, I don't know what people mean when they say that. I suppose there is nothing wrong with it but I don't believe that it really expresses the biblical teaching on the fear of God. It doesn't get down to the brass tacks. It's a loose, maybe convenient term but does the concept of reverential awe if you even know what that means, if you know what that means see me afterward and teach me, explain that to me, that would help me. But does that term "reverential awe" strike fear in your hearts? It sanitizes it in a way that I'm not happy with.

Well, what we're going to see for the rest of this message and also on Tuesday and I know I'll see all of you back on Tuesday and I'm so happy to know that because I know you'll want to hear both sides of this: the fear of God has 2 different senses, s-e-n-s-e-s, 2 different aspects of meaning that I think we need to bring out: one for the unsaved and another for Christians and I'm going to talk about this on Tuesday and it's very important for you to understand. You know, Scripture says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and yet some of you may be thinking in the back of your mind, "Yeah, but isn't there a verse in 1 John that says there is no fear in love? And perfect love casts out fear, what about that, preacher?" We're going to talk about that aspect of it on Tuesday and address this and bring it all together in a way that is very helpful to you, I trust. But today what we are going to do is we're going to address what the fear of God means for unbelievers because we need to start here because we are born into this world in a sinful, unbelieving state. Every boy and girl born into the world is born with a sinful heart which, unless the Spirit of God moves on them and converts them with power toward repentance and faith in Christ, they move on and live their life headed toward a miserable eternal existence. You and I were all once unbelievers.

So what does the fear of God mean for an unbeliever? Let me preface it with saying this one little thing: on the day of my conversion, on the moment, the very moment of my conversion, I remember being struck with this kind of fear that I'm going to define for you in just a moment. I woke up after a night of disobedience to God and I looked in the mirror and for a moment enjoyed the memory of the sinful things that I had done. And in the very next moment, I was struck with an overwhelming sense of abject terror because for the first time, my mind had been opened to recognize that I had just sinned greatly against a holy God and that therefore I was in immediate deserving of great eternal judgment and I was overwhelmed with the thought if I did not get immediate relief from this judgment that I deserved, I would go to hell forever and rightly so and I don't mind telling you that thought terrorized me. It was a fearful thought to realize I was rightly under the judgment and wrath of God.

For the first time in my life, on that day in November, I feared God like this with what I'm about to describe to you. The fear of God, here's a definition if you're taking notes, the fear of God describes the abject terror that arises when you understand that he is a threat to your well-being. Let me say that again: the fear of God describes the abject terror that arises when you understand he is a threat to your well-being. Beloved, it is not until you get that order of the universe straight in your mind that you can begin to understand anything about life, about Scripture or about your destination or about your place in the universe. Until that is clear in your mind, nothing else adds up. You can't understand a cow in the field without understanding the fear of God.

"Terror? Terror, preacher?" Yes. Absolutely. That is exactly what I mean. Sheer abject horror and terror and when you think about biblical teaching, it could be no other way. It's obvious that sinners who have not turned to Christ in an objective sense of the reality of the universe as defined by God's word, sinners should have an intense alarm at the presence of God because they are afraid of his judgment upon their sin. Until you understand yourself in the presence of God that way, that your sin incites the judgment and wrath of God upon your soul, until you start there, you have not begun to understand your relationship to a holy God and I want to illustrate this for you with biblical examples, several of them even.

Turn over to the book of Genesis 3. We'll find an answer for this theme in Genesis. Genesis 3:10. You know the context of this, don't you? God had created the heavens and the earth in 6 days. He placed man in it. He gave him work to do to tend a garden. He brought a helpmeet with him and blessed them and everything was perfect and then the serpent tempted them and they fell into sin and for the first time a man knew what it was to be afraid. Genesis 3:8, "They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'" It's not that God needed information, he was drawing the man out. God knew where he was at. Look at what Adam replies, "He said, 'I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.'" From that very first sin, the presence of God comes to bear upon the man and what does the man do? He hides. Why does he hide? Because he is afraid. Because he intuitively intrinsically knew that his sin made him guilty before God and that therefore God was entitled to deal with him according to judgment and he was afraid. He didn't need revelation to teach him that. He hid from his prior fellowship with God out of fear because now he was a sinner.

Let's see it in another Old Testament example. Turn to the book of Isaiah 6, and as you are turning there, we'll look at a few more examples but as you're turning to Isaiah 6, remember the response of Peter in the boat when Jesus had brought in loads of fishes in the nets when these professional fisherman on the night before fished all night and caught nothing. Do you remember what Peter said? He said, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man." He wanted the presence of God removed from him because he was conscious of his sin. Isaiah 6:1, "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above

Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke." What was the human reaction to this unveiling of the glory and the holiness of God? Well, you know those crazy prophets, they put on jeans and a Mickey Mouse T-shirt, right, and stood up and proclaimed God's word like some imposters have done in our day. Is that the response to a holy God, I ask you? What did the prophet do in response to this vision of the glory of God? What was his inward reaction? Verse 5, "Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.'" His response to the unveiled glory of God was abject terror and he said, "I am ruined in the presence of this holiness!" Why? "Because my mouth is unclean and everyone I live with is just like me." The holiness in the presence of God was not a trivial matter to him. It invoked fear in his heart of such a deep degree that all he could say is, "Woe is me! I am ruined in the presence of this God!"

I ask you, friends, every one of you, do you know something about that kind of fear because it's the beginning of wisdom. It's the beginning of the knowledge of God. Scripture has made this clear to us repeatedly. Do you know something about that fear? There is no room for jesting in this theme, is there? There is no room for triviality. Apparently God's holiness is to be taken seriously and apparently to take it seriously means that inward you feel a sense of terror and alarm because you realize that you are not fit for that holy presence on your own.

You say, "It's Old Testament, pastor. Old Testament. We're under the new covenant now, remember?" I remember. Let's go to the New Testament then, Acts 5. The problem is that men have mistaken God's mercy and grace as an indifference to his own holiness. That's not true. They have misinterpreted the patience of God in the face of their sins as though he condones it or will pass it by. Not true. Massive deception because the knowledge of God promotes fear, not indifference and flippancy. Acts 5:1, you know the story, "A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property," and they came into the church to make a public display of their giving, "but they had kept back," verse 2, "some of the price for himself." It's like the people who say, "If I could only win the lottery, I'd give 90% to the church. I'd give 90% to the purposes of God." What are they really saying? "I'll take 10%." It has nothing to do with any kind of genuine desire to be generous to the purposes of God. It was all about greed.

Verse 2, "they kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.'" Have you no fear of God? Don't you understand his searching omniscience? And you would lie to him for the sake of greed and pride before men? What happened? Verse 5, you know, "And as he heard these words, Ananias

fell down and breathed his last," he died, "and great fear came over all who heard of it." Great fear in response to the judgment of God.

Look at verse 9, same chapter, actually let's start in verse 7. His wife comes along three hours later. As one pastor often says, she was just coming for the main service, not for Sunday school also. "Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter responded to her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?' And she said, 'Yes, that was the price.' Then Peter said to her, 'Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.' And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband." And what happened? Verse 11, "Great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things." God had manifested his judgment. His holiness had been vindicated by deceit in and amongst his people and people were terrified as a result.

Finally on this point, turn to the book of Revelation 6 in a passage that speaks to the hubris and arrogance of modern-day leaders, those with authority and power who disregard the clear teaching of God's word. What is to be the outcome of them? Revelation 6:12 as God's judgment is being poured out in the end times. The Apostle John who saw these visions writes, "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man." Stop there for a moment. Let it be said with clarity that our leaders of this day who perpetrate the things that have been done in these past days find themselves right here in this passage. And beloved, let it be said that we fear God more than them because we see the ultimate outcome for the greatest men on earth when they don't fear God. What is the outcome? They learn terror. Verse 15, what did they do? "They hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'" Abject terror. Those with the great bars on their uniforms who don't know Christ. Those who raise their nose in power now over men are going to shake like women when God makes his presence known.

Yes beloved, mark it, write it down for clarity in your mind that at the end of the age, the greatest men on earth will be undone utterly in terror before the wrath of God. You see, when we talk about the fear of God, do you see now why I say I'm not satisfied with the definition "reverential awe"? When it comes to unbelievers, they need to understand the concept of blind terror before a holy God and it is not our place as Christians, it is not the place of this pulpit to minimize and mitigate against that and try to shave the corners off so it sounds a little bit more palatable to unbelieving ears. It is not loving to diminish this

before those who are destined for it and that's why we will never, ever be silent on this point. That's why this pulpit will never, ever shave the corners on what lies ahead for sinners. To do that, to minimize the threat so as to diminish the terror that sinners should feel in the presence of a holy God is a betrayal vertically and it is a betrayal horizontally. No one does a sinner any favor when he hides the wrath of God from him and no one can be faithful to this precious word who never, ever says anything about that theme. It's cosmic treason. We'll have none of it here, just so you know.

It's no wonder that Scripture urgently calls sinners to fear God. Listen, don't turn there as I read Matthew 10:28. What were the words of Jesus? Oh, let's talk about Jesus for just a moment as ignorant sinners in this day in which we live say stupid things and yes, I use that word from the pulpit, say silly things like, "The Jesus I know would never do anything like that. The Jesus I know would never condemn sinners or provoke fear in their hearts. The Jesus I know is loving and accepting." My response to that is, "The Jesus you know is a figment of your own imagination," because what did Jesus say? Matthew 10:28, he said, "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." We have it from the lips of Jesus himself. Fear him, sinners.

So you see, when we talk about the fear of God, we're not talking about the startle reflect that some of you have when someone bumps you in the night or you turn the corner, "Oh!" No, it's not that. This fear is biblically described as terror. Listen to Hebrews 10. Hebrews 10 says, "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." Verse 31 of Hebrews 10 says, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

So what do we say about that, beloved? Let's frame the question this way: why do you and I need the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, terrifying judgment is coming one day upon sinners everywhere and why do we need Christ? Why do you need Christ today? You don't need Christ so that you can have a better life now. It's not that you need Christ so that you can be personally fulfilled or that somehow Christ will bring about social justice and do away with hunger everywhere. No, no, you and I need Christ because in him alone can we be saved from the terrifying wrath of God. That's why the Gospel is good news. That's why the Gospel matters and you don't appreciate the Gospel, you don't value Jesus Christ, you don't value his righteousness applied to your account, you don't value the shed blood that washes away your sin until first you have come to realize that there is a terror upon you because of your guilt. Jesus said, "He who has been forgiven little," what? Loves little. Until you have come to know great fear, you won't have great love for Christ who delivers you from the wrath to come. That's why we need Christ. It's because he alone is the answer to this terror that all men should feel.

Romans 5:8 and 9 speaks to this. You don't need to turn there but Romans 5:8 and 9 says this, it says, "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." 1 Thessalonians 1:10, speaking of

Jesus says, "He delivers us from the wrath to come." Beloved, the fear of God starts with understanding that he is a threat to your well-being because of your sin, because you're not fit for his presence. And that fear is meant to be the tutor, in the language of Galatians 3:24, the law has become our tutor, that fear is designed to shake you out of your indifference and your pride and your self-righteousness. The terror of God shakes you out of all of that so that you see reality. That you see your guilt and the wrath that it calls upon you and the terror that will come upon sinners like you who do not repent. Only then do we begin to understand the order of the universe. Only then do we humble ourselves completely before Christ and say, "Have mercy on me, the sinner." Only then. And when a man cries out to Christ in complete self-denial and says, "Save me from the wrath to come," only then has that man for the first time exercised wisdom in his life. Everything else is a show. It's a game. It's a charade. It's a false front doomed for destruction.

If you're feeling the fear of God today in response to his word, know that the Gospel is the answer to that. Jesus Christ came to save sinners like you. He poured out his blood for guilty ones just like you and says, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest." He's not talking about just making life better, he's saying, "I'll give you rest from the threat of judgment." You find an all-sufficient Savior in the Lord Jesus Christ if you come to him and give yourself over to him and trust in his blood atonement for your salvation. He'll save you. He'll gladly save you if you come to him in repentant faith.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, today we can be especially grateful that we don't fear God like that. The whole point of salvation, the whole point of God saving you was to deliver you from that wrath which provokes that kind of terror. You and I who know Christ are free from that fear of judgment. We owe to God not the fear of terror but the fear that is better known as worship and we'll talk about that on Tuesday when I know I'll see every one of you here today, that day, I should say, in 2 days, as we discuss it and see that from the Scripture because that fear will be our subject on Tuesday. But the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and in this new beautiful room, from this pulpit, it will be our prayer that God would use us to teach people his fear that it might be the beginning of wisdom to them.

Bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, with the psalmist we ask, "Who understands the power of your anger and your fury, according to the fear that is due you?" Lord, we ask that you would teach us to number our days that we may present to you a heart of wisdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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