

Josiah Bell: 19 June pm

(Sermon Summary)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
(Proverbs 9:10)

When we go on a journey, if we start out in the wrong direction we are sure to end badly. This proverb tells us how to start well in our Christian journey, so that at the end of our days we will bless his holy name forever and ever (Ps. 145:21).

Priceless wisdom

Wisdom is the most precious commodity that we can possess. It is better than rubies, and nothing we desire can compare with it (Prov.8:11). Wisdom brings true riches that are more precious than gold and silver (Prov.8:19). To reject wisdom is to love death and ruin. So it is vital that we learn how to become wise. We do not have to embark on a quest or go on a 'mystery tour' to find wisdom; God has clearly revealed the way in His Word. He tells us that the path to wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord.

What is the fear of the Lord?

Throughout the Bible, the Lord tells us *not* to fear. Our lives are full of worry and anxiety, and the Lord tells us that this is wrong. Nevertheless there is a fear that we must have; a fear that has no anxiety in it. The fear of the Lord is a life of obedience that holds together great boldness with great reverence, and real love with true humility.

Isaiah 6 helps us to understand the true fear of the Lord. Isaiah was terrified when he saw an awesome glimpse of God's holiness and realised that he had unclean lips. But then the coal touched his lips, his sin was taken away and he understood God's grace and mercy. From then on he had a confidence and willingness to serve God. If you fear the Lord, you will have a true reverence for him, along with willing obedience. It is not about compliance with rules in order to avoid punishment.

“Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:11). When you come to know God, the trembling doesn’t go away, but now there is joy in it. The fear of the Lord does not mean that we stay away from Him; instead we are attracted by His greatness and power. Once, on a family holiday, I went swimming at Kynance Cove in Cornwall: the waves were big and powerful, but this very quality of ‘unsafeness’ made it exhilarating. The New Testament churches were “walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:31); the fear and comfort go together. The apostle Paul bows his knees in reverence to God in the context of experiencing the love of Christ ((Eph 3:14-19).

Does our Christianity match up to this?

Have you got this wisdom that begins with the fear of the Lord, and if you have started with it, have you slipped? Do you come to God thinking ‘What can He do for me?’ Jesus does not ‘top up’ our lives, giving us some extra benefits. He takes our cup, empties it and then fills it with Himself. He must be my all in all, and my Christian life must be about Him, not me.

Many of us have Bible calendars or phone apps with a reassuring verse for each day. They tell us that God is our friend, our shepherd, our refuge, etc. All this is true, but if we only think of God in this way, we will have an unbalanced Christianity - a bit like a bird trying to fly with only one wing. Our God is a consuming fire, the one far above the earth to whom the nations are like dust (Isaiah 40:15). It is only as we perceive the whole picture about God that we will really benefit from the comforting verses, amazed that such a mighty God should care for us. The fear of the Lord is not terror, but will always have an aspect of trembling.

Trusting God in the dark times

To fear God, and truly know Him, means that we are on the way to Heaven, but the Christian life is hard. We have to make war with the flesh and the devil, and sometimes we walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23) The Bible is clear that there will be times when those who fear the Lord will walk in darkness. “Who among you fears the Lord?...Who walks in darkness and has no light?” (Isaiah 50:10). Sometimes you have to walk without a strong sense that the Lord is with you. Several difficult circumstances come together, and your prayers seemingly go unanswered.

What are we to do in those times? “Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God” (Isaiah 50:10). The name of the Lord reveals His character: full of loving kindness, mercy, justice and grace. Remember who God is! Though we may not have had a mighty experience, we do know Him and by faith, have seen Him.

The end of the journey

Psalm 145: 17-21 describes the end of your life if you have feared the Lord: “My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh shall bless His holy name for ever and ever”.