

### Introduction:

I'm sure if I were taking a communications course, I would be told that this is one of the absolute worst ways to begin a presentation. I want to begin by apologizing. I am neither wise enough, mature enough, nor humble enough to speak on today's subject in the thorough, profound, or powerful way it deserves to be presented. Having said that, however, I can assure you that none of you are either, and that none of us knows anyone who is. So, I'm going to take a stab at it because it needs to be discussed if only in the halting, broken sentences of one who is no more than a toddler wading about in the shallow end of the subject. Sadly, my words will stumble short of the fullness of this topic. Understand that whatever you get out of today's lessons, we will only have made ripples on the surface of the depths to which we will eternally grow in this subject. In fact, I am not sure any human language contains words profound or powerful enough to convey the fullness of the subject we need to look into during this lesson.

Further, I'm sure if I were taking a communications course, I would be told what I'm about to do next is one of the worst things to do in a presentation. I am going to introduce our topic by sharing something with you I don't think you will like. I don't think you will like it because to be transparent, I don't think I like it. Perhaps you have heard the beautiful song "I Can Only Imagine." The singer asks a series of questions in the chorus: "Surrounded by your glory, what will my heart feel? Will I dance for You Jesus or in awe of You be still? Will I stand in Your presence or to my knees will I fall? Will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all?" I think this song causes us to ask some tough questions, but I'm certain the answers are not as mysterious as this song suggests. And I fear that the fact that we ambivalently vacillate between the options presented in this song demonstrates that we may have lost some understanding of our God. I can only imagine, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, that when we are surrounded by the true glory of God, we will respond exactly the way everyone else has responded when they have come into the presence of God's glory or even into the presence of those who might be carrying even a representation of the glory of God. Have you ever noticed what people do when they come into God's presence? They don't dance, shout, and sing. They don't run up to God, giving Him a hug, a handshake, or a high five. Their bodies become weak and fall to the ground as if to involuntarily force them into the worshipful position the presence of God demands.

Consider a few examples of this. Daniel merely met an angel of the Lord (or perhaps the pre-incarnate Christ), but notice his reaction in **Daniel 10:8-9**. He was so afraid, he passed out. The being touched him and stood him up. But in **Daniel 10:11**, Daniel stood trembling. In **vs. 12**, the being told him not to be afraid because he had been heard by God. But in **vs. 15**, he was still unable to speak. In **vs. 16**, it took the miraculous power of one of those standing near to loose Daniel's tongue, but even still he was weak and afraid. It was not until **vs. 19**, that Daniel was strengthened and that was because of the powerful grace of the one speaking to him.

What about Ezekiel? According to **Ezekiel 1:28**, Ezekiel was only shown "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (ESV). But what was his response? "And when I saw it, I fell on my face..." (ESV). In **Ezekiel 2:1-2**, God told Ezekiel to stand on his feet. However, even with this divine command Ezekiel could not obey until the miraculous power of God through the Holy Spirit entered Ezekiel and sat him on his feet.

And what about the apostle John? If the common tradition is correct, John was the disciple whom Jesus loved. He was part of Jesus' inner circle. He had walked and talked with Jesus for three years. But in **Revelation 1:12-17**, when he came face to face with Jesus in even just a modicum of His glory, we see a shocking response. John did not run up to Jesus, give Him a bear hug, pat Him on the back, and start reminiscing about old times. He fell at Jesus' feet as if dead. He was unable to get up until Jesus touched him.

It may be that at some point in eternity's future, we will stand, shout hallelujah, and dance in the presence of God surrounded by His glory. But that will only come after God's miraculous power helps us overcome the natural reaction of being surrounded by His glory. Trust me. If God were to break into this world today, peel back our roof, and let us see Him or even a taste of His glory, there would be no singing, shouting, dancing. There would be no joyful raising of hands. There would be awe, terror, dread, and fear. We would fall to the ground, limp and lifeless as noodles, unable to command our tongues or our limbs. Everyone, whether faithful believer or rebellious atheist, would respond in kind because when face to face with the glory of God, there is no other reaction possible, except by the miraculous power and grace of God Himself.

And this brings us to our topic. A topic we don't like. A topic we can't quite put our finger on. A topic most of us would like to push back into at least the 1950s if not the Middle Ages. We need to talk about the Fear of the LORD.

## Discussion:

- I. The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Victory.
  - A. When we think “fear of the Lord,” we think hellfire and brimstone preaching that we wish to dismiss and disregard. We have become enlightened and learned that this doesn’t motivate anyone for long. Why would anyone well-versed in our modern wisdom even want to bring up this backwards, old-fashioned notion? First, because this notion of the fear of the Lord is not really biblical, but second because not one of us will have the victory we so long for without the truly biblical notion of the fear of the Lord.
  - B. Consider **Proverbs 4:3-9**. What must we get? We must get wisdom. Why? Wisdom will guard us, exalt us, and crown us. Does that sound like victory to you? In **Proverbs 1:20-33**, wisdom herself speaks to us and concludes by pointing out that when we listen to her we will dwell secure without dread of disaster. Does that sound like victory to you? In **Proverbs 8:1-36**, we hear wisdom’s call. She concludes in **vss. 34-36** explaining that she brings blessing, favor, and life. Does that sound like victory to you?
  - C. You can probably already tell where I’m going with this. Wisdom is the beginning of victory, but what is the beginning of wisdom? **Psalms 111:10** and **Proverbs 9:10** both explain, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” (ESV). The first step in our journey toward victory is the fear of the LORD. Without it, we won’t have wisdom and we won’t have victory. It is not wise for us to stuff the fear of the LORD into the past and claim we have become enlightened and don’t need the fear of the LORD anymore. But perhaps, we need to learn what it is so we won’t think we are above it.
  
- II. A picture of the fear of the LORD.
  - A. I’d like to tell a story. It is a love story between a vinedresser and his vineyard. The vinedresser loved His vineyard. He cared for it. He wanted to see it produce successfully. He worked hard to prepare the vineyard to be all that it could be. He set it on a fertile hill. He dug it and cleared out the stones. He put a wall around it to protect it from predators. He hoed the weeds and pruned the unnecessary shoots. He planted only the choicest of vines in it. He placed a watchtower within it to watch its success. He prepared it for success, hewing out a wine vat in it, expecting it to produce grapes capable of choice juice. But the vineyard did not respond to the vinedresser. It produced wild grapes. Grapes not worth eating and whose juice was not worth drinking. The vinedresser removed its hedge and broke down its wall. He ceased hoeing and pruning. He allowed it to be devoured by the animals trampled down. He was even able to stop the rain from falling on it. It was of no use to anyone and produced only briars and thorns.
  - B. This is the story found in **Isaiah 5:1-7**. It is the story of Israel and Judah and the vinedresser, the LORD. Perhaps you think in this you have seen the definition of the fear of the LORD, but you haven’t. Not fully. In **Isaiah 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21-22**, Isaiah pronounces the woes upon the vineyard. Woe upon them for trusting in their own building and strength. Woe upon them for rising early to party and sing, but not taking time to meditate on the great deeds of the LORD. Woe upon them for pursuing sin and challenging God to do something about it. Woe to them for calling evil, good, and good, evil. Woe to them who were wise in their own eyes. Woe to them who allow strong drink to inhibit their justice. Certainly, they should be very afraid. But we still haven’t seen the real picture of the fear of the LORD.
  - C. Then comes **Isaiah 6**. It seems to be a new section, and we may be tempted to draw a line in the sand and think we are moving on to new things, the earlier texts can be forgotten. But **Isaiah 6** is written in the context of the woes on Israel and Judah. In **Isaiah 6:1-4**, Isaiah “saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple” (ESV). He saw the angelic seraphim with wings that covered their faces and their feet. He heard them cry out: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (ESV). He felt the earth quake and he saw the house filled with the smoke which represented the presence and glory of the LORD in His temple.
  - D. And how did he respond? “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (**Isaiah 6:5**, ESV). My friends, there is the fear of the LORD. Isaiah, a prophet of God, who might like to explain how much better he was than the rest of Israel and Judah. Isaiah, a man of God, who might like to pronounce woes upon all others for their sinful rebellion. Isaiah, a proclaimer of God, who might like to highlight how differently he had behaved than the people surrounding him. When all he could see was the vineyard of the LORD, Israel and Judah, it would have been easy for him to think those things. But when he was surrounded by God’s glory and given a glimpse of God’s holiness, he could no longer think about how much better than Israel and Judah he was, he recognized how much less than Jehovah God he was. All he could say was, “Woe is me! Woe is me!” Yes, he was in the midst of an unclean people, but he came face to face with the fact that he was one of them. He was part and parcel with the worst of sinners that surrounded him.

- E. My brothers and sisters, how easy it is to decry the unholiness of the people who surround us. We rail against the immorality that surrounds us. We cry out against the adultery, the murder of abortion, the pursuit of homosexual behavior and calling it good and sanctifying it with the term “marriage.” We speak against the drunken parties. We know the world is filled with lying hypocrites, who look at pornography, pursue malice, love wickedness, and don’t care about God. Here we sit on a Sunday, worshiping and praising God and we may begin to think that somehow we have done something grand. We may begin to think that we are better than our worldly counterparts. We may think that what we are doing has earned us some ability to stand before God. But if God were to break through our roof as we sat here, and we were to see His throne, His train, His seraphim, His glory. When the ground shook and the smoke filled the room and the voices of seraphim thundered around us, when God’s holiness and glory surrounded us and were on display before us, the truth would be revealed and we would fall to our knees and say along with Isaiah, “Woe is me! Woe is me! I am lost. I am surrounded by unclean people, but I’m one of them.” That, brothers and sisters, is the fear of the LORD. That recognition of His awesome holiness and glory, that understanding of our wretchedness and powerlessness, that humiliation of uncleanness. We have all fallen short of the glory of God and when we are surrounded by it, we will truly understand how terrible and fearful **Romans 3:23** is. We like to think we are a choice vine in the vineyard of the LORD, but we are as wild as all who have gone before us. Woe are we!
- F. Praise the LORD, the story of Isaiah doesn’t end there. In **Isaiah 6:6-7**, one of the seraphim breaks off from his thunderous praise. He takes a burning coal from the altar and presses it to Isaiah’s lips and proclaims that Isaiah’s lips are cleansed, his guilt is removed, and his sin atoned for. And because of this, in **Isaiah 6:8ff**, Isaiah’s life is repurposed as a prophet whose lips can proclaim the judgments and glory of the LORD. No doubt, through the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we too are atoned for, our guilt is removed, and our lips are cleansed so that we can proclaim the great gospel of God.

#### Conclusion:

There is more for us to learn about the fear of the Lord. We’ll cover some of it in our next lesson as we consider what this fear looks like in practical ways. As we take a break in our consideration of this topic, I hope we can walk away with this. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, as C.S. Lewis explained in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, is not a tame lion. Our God is not a tyrannical dictator, but neither is He an impotent figurehead. He is the awesome God who reigns in heaven and we have fallen far short of His glory. We must not think that because we are here in church we are better than all those who are not. We must not salve our consciences by comparing ourselves to the worldly. Rather, we need to be broken by comparing ourselves to God. Only then can the miracle of Jesus’ atonement work in our lives and we be repurposed to proclaim His good news. If we go out there trying to get people to convert to being better like we think we are better, we have castrated the gospel. Only when we go out into the world knowing our own woe and poverty, can we bring the true power of the gospel to bear in the lives of others. Only when we know our own woe and poverty of spirit can we experience the true power of the gospel in our own lives. Let me end with a question. We are in the very presence of God right now. How do you feel?