

CB - 8/7/66

Foray memo - 9/18/66

THE FEAR OF THE LORD - WHAT IS IT?

Psa. 103:11, 13, 17

Intro: Three times David uses an expression in this Psalm which is used quite often in the OT. But in spite of its frequent usage, it is not well understood. It is the expression, "them that fear him."

(Read vv. 11, 13, 17.)

All three are promises.

The three promises not only depend on knowing what the expression means, but it also involves being the kind of a person who fears the Lord.

If we look at the context of this expression as it is found in these verses, we must link the words "us" and "our" (vv. 10, 12, 14) and "we" with "them that fear him."

It would seem that we would all have to agree that David is talking about all of the Lord's people.

However, there are differing degrees to which we as the people enter into various truths.

A Christian is a believer, but what different degrees of trust you find among the Lord's people. We are saved by trusting the Lord, and our lives are to be lived trusting him. But Christians are very different at this point.

You see the same difference when you speak of love, joy, or peace.

The same is true with regard to this expression, "them that fear him." TO SOME EXTENT WE ALL AS GOD'S PEOPLE FEAR THE LORD. BUT THE ENJOYMENT OF THESE PROMISES ARE RESERVED FOR THOSE WHO ENTER MOST FULLY INTO THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF FEARING THE LORD.

Is there not a rather hollow sound to Jonah's witness to the mariners who asked him, what his job was, where he came from, what his country was, etc.? He answered,

"I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9).

When we are finished this morning I think you will agree that Jonah meant by this, "I know the Lord," but that there was truth bound up in this expression which Jonah was contradicting.

In consulting various parts of the OT I discovered that there are five facets to this wonderful expression which I want to consider with you this morning. And, as we consider them, will you seek to evaluate the extent, the degree, to which you fear the Lord?

I. The fear of the Lord means that we know the Lord. Fear and knowledge mean the same things in this sense.

Cf. Prov. 9:10. Note the parallelism.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:
and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."

Fear goes with knowledge.

Lord goes with holy.

Wisdom goes with understanding.

Let us exchange the words fear
and knowledge, so that we have,

"THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD IS
THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM."

It is not just knowing about
Him, but knowing Him, the Lord,
the Holy One.

Isn't this the way David began
Psa. 103? "Bless his holy name."

It is Jehovah who is holy.

He is never anything else.

Is this not what Moses was
being taught at the burning bush
(Ex. 3:5)?

and is this not what impressed
him at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:11).

STILL LEARNING. You can see
that there are degrees to which
we realize this - and yet we can
never exhaust it.

This leads to my second point.

II. To fear the Lord means to tremble
before Him.

In fact, this is the basic
meaning in the Hebrew word, to
fear: to tremble.

This carries with it the idea
we usually attach to the word fear.

Cf. Jer. 5:22, noting the parallel between "fear" and "tremble."

Note Isaiah's warning in Isa.

2:10, 19, 21.

CF. NAHOM

1:3-6,
8-11

Have you ever been so overawed at the majesty of God, His glory, that you have trembled before Him?

Peter did. Cf. Luke 5:8,

"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

And this all happened when the Lord gave them a miraculous catch of fish. Peter was being taught the fear of the Lord.

Read Jonah 1:16 after the storm was stilled:

"THEN the men feared the Lord exceedingly."

CF. EX. 15:
14-16

How this is needed today!

There is such a thing as doing the will of God because we fear the consequences of doing anything else. Such fear brings submission, trembling submission.

But this leads to a third phase.

III. To fear the Lord means loving worship.

Cf. Rev. 15:1-4, esp. vv. 3, 4.

This is apparent also in Psa.

103 - fearing the Lord meant that David was a worshipper, a loving worshipper.

Cf. Psa. 89:7.

"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."

Cf. Psa. 96:4.

"For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods."

Humbling passes into delight in His presence.

The man who fears the Lord is a worshipper. The Psalms are full of this.

But there is another factor.

IV. To fear the Lord means trusting obedience.

The greatest test in Abraham's life came when God called for the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22).

All of God's promises were bound up in Isaac; and yet God requested him as a sacrifice.

(Follow the details of the story.)

Right at the crucial moment

God stopped it with these words,

"And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Gen. 22:11, 12).

What trusting obedience which in itself was AN ACT OF WORSHIP!

And do you remember the report of this event give in Heb. 11: 17-19?

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence, also he received him in a figure."

Just yesterday morning I read in Psalm 112: 1,

"Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments."

Moses told the people of Israel,

"Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged." Cf. Deut. 6:1, 2.

This he said to the Israelites again and again.

But all of this adds up to one final point.

V. Fearing the Lord means that we hate evil.

Cf. Prov. 8:13:

"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate."

Cf. Jer. 2:19

"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.

Please turn to Job 1, and look at vv. 1+8; then 2:3.

Job proved that he feared the Lord by hating evil.

How different from our day when we excuse sin, and often even God's people take liberties with sin!

Like Jonah we can be running away from God, but piously say, I fear God.

Cond: Where do you stand, child of God? Is there evidence in your life that you fear God after looking at all of these facets of the truth, that to fear God means

- knowing Him as the Holy One,
- trembling before him
- loving worship
- trusting obedience, and
- hating evil,

let us go back to see the promises which belong to "them that fear Him." (Read vv. 11, 13, 17).

May God enable us to be a people who fear Him, as David did, and who experienced His blessings as a result!