

LEARNING TO FEAR THE LORD

Psalm 34:11-22

Intro: As I was return from a hospital visit this past week, I was listening to a very conservative talk show host. He started to talk about Easter and also about God. He said that Easter was meant to be a time when churches remember Jesus Christ Who was supposed to have been crucified and raised from the dead. He said it all depends upon how you interpret what the Bible says. He said there could be another interpretation besides the literal one which claims that it really happened.

And either from that, or leading into what he said about Jesus, he said that he had always believed in God, but that His idea about God was that He was a God Who was always angry, and that you had to do what He wanted you to do, or you would be in trouble.

Obviously this man who is a very intelligent man, and who said he often read the Bible, does not believe that the Bible is actually the Word of God. If he did believe that the Bible is God's Word, he would believe that Jesus was the Son of God Who came to earth, born of the virgin Mary, really was crucified, that He died on the Cross, and that three days later He literally was raised from the dead. The Bible leaves no doubt but that He really died, He was buried, and He was raised from the dead. Moreover the Bible tells us that God sent His Son for this very purpose, not because He was a criminal, but because He was dying for the sins of all who believed in Him before He came, and for all who would ever believe in Him in time to come. He came to save His people from the penalty that they faced because, as the Bible says, "all have sinned," and all must pay the penalty for their sins UNLESS someone would come and die for them Who Himself was not a sinner. That is why God sent His only begotten Son, Who had no human father, but who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He could die for sinners because He Himself was not a sinner. That is why it is very, very important, extremely important to know that Jesus really died, and that he was really raised from the dead. If He wasn't the Person that He claimed to be, and if we didn't do what the Bible says He did, then there is no salvation from sin's penalty.

But now the nature of God and the death of Christ are two truths that are tied together. It was because God is Who He is, that He sent His Son to save us from our sins. I wonder if this commentator that I was listening to had ever read John 3:16. (Quote it.) Of course God gets angry, and

that which makes Him angry is human sin. He destroyed everybody on the earth at the time of the flood because God saw the terrible way that people were continually sinning. He specifically prepared hell for the Devil and his angels, and people who live their lives without trusting in Jesus Christ, and His work on the Cross, are going to go to hell too. But if God were just an angry God because of man's sins, He never would have sent His Son to earth, born of a virgin, so that His Son as a Man could die to save sinners from their sins. This was the greatest act of mercy and grace and love that the world has ever seen.

One Bible passage that describes the character of God is Psalm 103:8-13:

8 The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.

10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

In Psalm 107 the Psalmist lamented, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men" (vv. 8, 15, 21, and 31). The prophet Nahum said in Nahum 1:7, "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." Twice in 1 John the Apostle said, "God is love" (4:8, 16).

It is true that God is also a God of wrath and anger. That is because He is holy and righteous. In the Tribulation Period the Apostle John predicted that with the opening of the sixth seal, this would happen in Revelation 6:15-17:

15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to

stand?

The Bible is preeminently a book about God – all the way from the books of Moses at the beginning of the OT to the Apostle John’s book of the Revelation at the end of the NT. The person who says that God is always angry and only angry, has not read the Bible. Hebrews 10:31 says that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” but Psalm 46:1 also says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” The difference can be seen when we know God, and want to please Him, or we have no place for God in our lives and do what displeases Him.

Every Sunday Christians meet together because that is when the early Christians met in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ Who was crucified and then raised from the dead. These are historical facts. But we also see the wrath of God at the Cross where the Father poured out His wrath upon His Son Who suffered and died that we might be forgiven of our sins.

Now let me get back to my text in Psalm 34. Those of you who were here last week as we considered the first ten verses of this Psalm that King David’s heart was full of praise which David expressed in the first three verses because of what the Lord had done for him according to verses 4 through 7. This saving that he talked about could and probably did refer to the Lord saving him from sin, but it also had to do with being saved from various troubles he experienced as a child of God. Then in the light of what I have just been talking about, look at verses 8, 9, and 10.

Now in verse 9 he wrote, “for there is no want [no lack] to them that fear Him. And then as we moved on down to verse 11 which is the beginning of my text for today, look at what he said. (Read verse 10.)

One way we can divide the human race in any generation is that there are always some who know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, and so are in the family of God – sinners saved by the grace of God, saved from the eternal penalty of sin, and saved presently from the power and dominion of sin. There are others, many others, probably more than are in the first group, who do not know the Lord – sinners who are still under the judgment of God because of their sin. These have every reason to fear the wrath of God.

But King David was talking here in verses 9 and 11 of a different kind of a fear, the fear that God’s people have for God and for Christ. It is a

loving fear, a reverential fear, an awesome fear, a fear of displeasing the Lord. It is a fear we have because we love the Lord, and because we know that He loves us. It is, as Jerry Bridges described in his book on the fear of God, a joyful fear. It is a fear that you read about all through the Bible. The people of God are to be a God-fearing people. When Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt to buy food, and they stood before him, before they knew who he was, as he was talking to them he said, "I fear God" (Gen. 42:18). It was like we would say today, "I know the Lord," or, "I belong to the Lord."

King David's son, Solomon, wrote the book of Proverbs in the NT. He had much to say about fearing the Lord. At the beginning of the Proverbs he said this in chapter 1, verse 7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." And then in chapter 9, verse 10, he said this which is very similar: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy [or, the Holy One] is understanding." Most of our educators today would laugh at you if you were to read this to you. But it was true a thousand years before Christ when Solomon lived, and it is just as true today over three thousand years later! Until people learn to fear the Lord, to give the Lord the rightful place in their lives, their knowledge, their wisdom, is going to lead them in the wrong direction. This basically is what has been wrong with the world since the day that Adam sinned, and it continues to be our #1 problem today.

With all of the problems that face us in the world today, how many of our leaders, how many politicians, how many counselors, do we have who are telling us that we need to learn to fear God? The absence of any talk about God or Christ today, about knowing Them, or pleasing Them, is alarming because it is almost non-existent. Those of us who know the Lord recognize that percentage wise it is unheard of.

King David was of a different breed. He loved the Lord, he feared the Lord, as even few of the Lord's people fear Him. I mentioned to those of you who were here last Sunday that the Lord's Name appears over and over again in Psalm 34, and when you add to His name, the pronouns (him and his) which refer to the Lord, the Lord occupies an place of key importance in this Psalm. We are going to observe the Lord's Supper this morning as we do on the first Sunday of every month, and one of the Lord's main purposes in establishing this Supper was so that we would not forget Him. He said, "This do in remembrance of Me."

Fearing God in this way is such a new thing to all of us when we were first saved, that this is one of the first things, if not the very first, that we need to learn as Christians.

King David knew this. He knew it very well, and so he said, as we begin reading verse 11, “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.” And he wasn’t going to charge them any tuition! Just think, here is the King of Israel, inviting anyone in his kingdom, however many might respond, to come to him so that he could teach them the fear of the Lord. To be sure he would have had to set aside other important things to do this, but to him there was nothing more important or desirable than to have a whole nation of people who lived in the fear of the Lord.

Who do you think he had in mind when he said, “ye children”? Franz Delitzsch suggested in his commentary that there might be a connection between the “children” in verse 11, and what King David had just said about “young lions” followed by a reference to those “that seek the Lord.”

I don’t claim to have the answer to that question because it may have been that King David was getting on in years and so was inclined to look upon everybody among the Lord’s people as “children.” Or, it may have been that he was thinking especially of young people, or those who were “children” in the faith. I know without any question that King David knew that the Lord’s “children” could not start too early to live before the Lord in fear of Him, wanting to please the Lord as their main object in life.

What qualification did you need to have in order to apply for such a course? You see that in verse 12. “Man” must be generic here, and by that I mean that he would include ladies, young people, and even children. What person would you ever expect to find who would say that they did not want to live long especially if they might “see good”? There can’t be any worse thing than to come to the end of your days only to realize that you had spent your life on things that you regret. So it is especially good to get a good start in the right direction. And there isn’t any better way than to live in the fear of the Lord.

Now what is the first class in Fearing God 101? How do you get started? Our answer is in verse 13. You start with the tongue. (Read verse 13.) To keep is the verb that applies to the whole verse. It means to stand

guard on your tongue and upon that which comes out from your lips. There are two problems that we have to be careful about. One is evil; the other is guile. What do these words mean?

“Evil” is one of the OT words for sin. It speaks of taking something that is good, and spoiling it by using it for something bad. “Guile” is anything that is not true, basically, a lie.

James, in his epistle in the NT, had some very basic, some very important instruction for us about the tongue. James chapter 3 is a chapter that all of would do well to commit to memory. We need to read it often. But right at the beginning of chapter 3, in verse 2, he said this:

For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

So King David was speaking of a major problem that every child of God has had to cope with, the problem of the tongue. It was the Devil’s tongue which he used to deceive Eve, and which led eventually to Adam’s sin which brought sin and condemnation upon the whole human race. Cf. John 8:44-47.

Verses 12 through 15 are quoted in 1 Peter 3:10-12. Notice that the word “evil” appears in Psalm 34, verses 10, 11, and 12, and it is always the same word in the Hebrew text, just like it is the same in our Bibles. And this shows that if we are to live in the fear of the Lord, we are not to say what is evil, we are to separate ourselves from all that is evil, and we are not to do what is evil. And so one of the first ways to recognize a child of God who fears the Lord, is to see how he deals with sin. Even a child of God is still capable of evil, of sin. Temptation is constantly a problem for us. And we live in a world where sin prevails. All sorts of evil and sin are possible for us, as King David’s own experience showed. The more we fear God, or to state it this way, the greater our desire to live for the glory of God, the more we will seek to stay away from sin. The person who lives in sin is demonstrating that he does not know the Lord.

I am going to have to finish this next week. But before I close let me point to the latter part of verse 14 in which King David gave us three safeguards against sin:

- 1) “Do good.”
- 2) “Seek peace.”
- 3) “Pursue it.”

Psalm 34:11-22 (7)

As the Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:21, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” “Good” is that which is pleasing to God. “Good” is obedience to the Word of God. The same emphasis is in Romans 12:2, “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . .” We will never defeat sin except by doing the will of God.

What does it mean that we are to “seek peace”? Seek it where, with whom, and how? In Psalm 119:165 we read, “Great peace have they which love Thy Law, and nothing shall offend them,” or cause them to stumble into sin. Sin never brings peace. In fact, it destroys peace. But when we are walking with the Lord, in obedience to His Word, our hearts will be at peace.

But then King David added, “And pursue it.” As you might think, this means to *go for it*. Get it, and keep it. The battle is not over until we are in heaven with the Lord. Paul expressed it in these words which are found in Colossians 3:15-17:

15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

God’s peace in our hearts is His way of keeping on with the way we are living. If we have peace with God, then we will be at peace with others, especially with our fellow believers, and that gives us peace in our own hearts.

These are some of the first lessons we need to learn if we are to learn what it means to fear God. But there is more to come before we see the end of this Psalm.