

Joy for the Journey: The Fear of the Lord

(Exodus 20:18-20)

I. Introduction

- A. Our Sunday morning worship usually has a theme developed in song/scripture
1. This morning our songs have stressed that God's grace takes away FEAR
 - a. We also read from **1 John 4:18** that "*perfect love drives out fear*"
 - b. We don't fear because we're adopted as God's children (**Rom 8:15**)
For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."
 - c. At the cross, Jesus destroyed the one who held us in fear (**Heb 2:14-15**)
so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.
 2. We are NOT slaves to fear because we've become children of the heavens
- B. But there is a **second way** the Bible uses fear; we are told to "*fear God*"
1. That is theme statement of the book of Proverbs (**Prov 1:7**, repeated **9:10**)
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.
 - a. That is also the main point and conclusion of Ecclesiastes (**Ecc 12:13**)
Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.
 - b. This isn't just OT language; Jesus warns us to fear God (**Luke 12:5**)
But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.
 2. All in all, 180 verses in NIV (250 in KJV) use "*fear*" along with "*God*."
 - a. The Hebrew *yir'ah* and Greek *phobos* both mean "*extreme fear or terror*"
 - b. When applied to God, they both mean "*reverence, respect, honor or awe*"
 - 1) But the root meaning of "*terror*" still attaches to the word (**Psa 66:3**)
How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you.
 - 2) TEV has "*wonderful*," the NCV "*amazing*" and the RSV "*terrible*"
 - c. God is all those things, and we had better tremble— we must "*fear God*"
 3. Our series is *Joy for the Journey*, true joy vs happiness of what's happening
 - a. This morning, we'll look at **Exodus 20** & giving of ten commandments
 - 1) It was here that these newly freed slaves truly become a nation
 - 2) They received the law, but they also got a picture of God Himself
 - b. There's something here we must see before we can see the joy of the Lord

II. The Law Begins with God

- A. The Law begins, “*I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt*”
1. When “LORD” appears in all SMALL CAPS, it is covenant name Yahweh
 - a. This is the name God gave Moses, “*I am [will be] who I am*” (**Exo 3:14**)
 - b. Jews never spoke this name, but the substituted the name *adonai* (Lord)
 - c. Before the Jews could see God’s law, they had to first know who was God
 2. So God’s Law begins with person of God Himself— He is basis of Law
 - a. If we don’t see God, then there is little chance that we follow his law
 - 1) Paul’s describes his world like we might describe ours (**Rom 1:28**)
Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.
 - 2) When we forget God, then we forget his law and anything goes
 - b. Sartre paraphrases Dostoevsky, “*If there is no God, anything is permitted*”
 - c. That sums it up! Ignore God’s law, you’d better be sure there’s no God!
 3. So when God gave Israel’s law, He first made sure they knew who is God
 - a. Jews who saw Sinai shake don’t ask, “*What gives you a right to give law*”
 - b. God begins with the fact that He is God—the Law begins with God!
- B. God is thus to be our **CENTER** and **CIRCUMFERENCE** (Shelly, *Written in Stone*, 40)
1. God is our **CENTER**, so all of life must be filtered thru and focused on Him
 - a. Greatest command is to love God heart, soul, mind, strength (**Matt 22:37**)
 - 1) That doesn’t mean that we sit all day in idle contemplation of God.
 - 2) What it means is that our work, school, play—everything is God’s
 - b. If God is truly the center of life, then everything we do is an act of God!
 2. God is also our **CIRCUMFERENCE**, He provides a boundary of behavior
 - a. If God is the center of our life, we accept His sovereign rule over our lives
 - b. We will live a life of dedicated discipleship based on His revealed will.
 - 1) Remember Jesus said, “*I you love me, keep my commands*” (**Jn 14:15**)
 - 2) 10 Commandments were chapter headings for Israel’s circumference
 3. Not all moral issues are crystal clear; we will often puzzle over God’s will
 - a. Professor was assigned, “*The Bible and In vitro fertilization.*” *Glad it’s him!*
 - b. Issues will always confuse, but we always know where to start... God!

III. The Law Begins with Fear

- A. The context of receiving the law of God was experiencing the Fear of God
1. Quickly skim the events leading up to giving the law (**Exo 19:10-25**)
 - a. **First**, there was a three day process of **preparation** and **purification**
 - b. **Second**, there was the shock-and-awe that showed the presence of God
 - 1) Sinai was shrouded with smoke and burned in fire as God came near.
 - 2) Mountain trembled violently, the sound of trumpet blasted over it.
 2. Context of receiving the law was coming to know the fear of the Lord
 - a. God warns them not to rush up the mountain (**19:21**). *That a problem?*
 - b. Then God calls Moses and Aaron into the middle of spectacle (**19:24**)
- B. Before God gives Israel His Law, there is a sacred spectacle of His presence.
1. Again, He is making sure Israel know who is God (*they will forget easily*)
 - a. People are rattled to the point where they don't want any more (**20:18-19**)
¹⁸ When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."
 - b. For this one shining moment, Israel knew what it was like to fear the Lord
 - c. This was extremely important for Israel; sadly, the lesson would not last
 2. Moses say that they needed God's sermon and must never forget it (**20:20**)
²⁰ Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."
 - a. So the fire on the mountain, the earthquake, the smoke was all a TEST
 - 1) Same word used of God testing Abraham to offer Isaac (**Gen 22:1**)
 - 2) Word is often used of Israel testing God with her rebellion and sin.
 - b. **Purpose:** It was to connect the LAW with the GOD who gave the Law
 - c. They were moved by "*the fear of God*" so that they would follow His Law
 3. Remember two uses of word fear? They are BOTH used in this one verse!
 - a. Moses says in same verse, "*Don't be afraid; just be very, very afraid!*"
 - 1) **Don't Fear:** Don't dread God's nearness or be terrified of nearness
 - 2) **Fear God:** Must fear God as God so you obey Him and do not sin
 - b. Without this fear of God, the Jews wouldn't follow Law. *Neither will we*
 - c. We need to know that God is really God—we need the fear of the Lord

IV. Conclusion

- A. We need to know that God is God, and we need to be very afraid
1. The message of the cross is that God forgives sinners—AND HATES SIN
 - a. God detests sin so much that His Son died to destroy it! God HATES sin!
 - b. We should be afraid – VERY AFRAID – of that which GOD HATES!
 2. We need to go back to the mountain and remember who is really God
 - a. We need to smell the smoke and see the mountain shake (**Hebrews 12**)
 - 1) Writer alludes to Sinai and the awesome experience there (**12:18-21**)
 - 2) Then he calls us back to mount to see who is God (**Heb 12:22-23**)
But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men...
 - b. We need to shake with holy fear in presence of our God (**Heb 12:28-29**)
²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,²⁹ for our “God is a consuming fire.”
- B. OK, what does this fear of God stuff have to do with series *Joy in the Journey*?
1. **Question:** What do you do when you go to a good all-you-can-eat buffet?
 - a. What I do is walk around and look it over so I know what they have
 - b. Then I try a little of everything, and go back 3-4 times for best things
 - c. **Result:** I end up miserable because I couldn't decide and tried to eat it all
 2. World is an anything-goes, have-it-your-way, all-you-can-eat moral buffet
 - a. Many throw in with Sartre, “*There is no God, so all is permissible*”
 - b. Others see God as a cosmic Sugar Daddy who just wants us happy
 - 1) He used to be against sin and into brimstone and divine retribution.
 - 2) But God has been domesticated; He no longer gets angry over sin
 - 3) Like at a buffet, we can pick and choose among many moral choices
 - c. And like at the buffet, we take some of everything—and it makes us sick
 3. We will never be happy/joyful/content until fear/respect God as God
 - a. If God is our CENTER, then the idols of this world can't be at center
 - b. If God is CIRCUMFERENCE, that makes some options no option at all
 4. **Moses:** “*Do not be afraid... fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning*”
- C. Is it possible that in an age of grace, what we really need is the fear of God?