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The Fear of the Lord

In the last several weeks I've been thinking a lot about several things that I think all fall under the category of the fear of the Lord. I just want to share some of those thoughts with you today, and look at some verses.

Sometimes before I share something like this I start to feel worried or guilty, because this is certainly not a very naturally uplifting subject. This isn't the kind of sermon I'd give at a wedding, or to a group of visitors. But this is the type of sermon I'd give to a bunch of old friends in Christ who are watching natural life whiz by at an alarming speed, and wanting to live for what is real.

I don't know exactly why, but for many years now, since I was young, I've had this pretty constant fear of wasting my life. It's not an uncomfortable fear, or a scary fear. It's just this ever-present awareness that time never stops moving, and just as sure as time brought something before my eyes, it will soon take it away from me. Oh, I know that's a bit depressing. I don't want to depress anyone this morning. But don't you think we should just talk candidly about these things sometimes? Time takes things from us, everything. And the awareness of that is always a check in my heart about how much I should really be enjoying the things that time takes away, and how much of my heart should be invested in those things. And, on the other hand, there is the constant realization that I should be learning to see and enjoy the things that time can never take away. That just seems really smart to me, really reasonable.

I was talking about this to somebody the other day and they were agreeing with me and saying that nobody stays at a motel and starts decorating their room. Nobody runs out to Home Depot and starts a bathroom remodel, or hangs pictures of their kids on the wall of a motel. Why? Well the obvious answer is that it is just a very temporary arrangement. You're on your way somewhere else.

This may sound strange, but I think about the hour of my death often. I usually think about it many times each day. And I think about presenting my soul, my vessel, before the Lord and giving an account for the time I have had here. You know, there is only one Psalm in the Bible written by Moses. Most are written by David, and a few by other folks. But as far as we know, Moses us wrote Psalm 90. There are a variety of different translations of verse 12, but the NASB translation is the one that gripped my heart a number of years ago. It says,

Psa 90:12 *"So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom."*

At the end of my life, I would like to present to the Lord a heart of wisdom. I don't know exactly what that means. But I would guess it has a lot to do with presenting to Him a heart that is filled with the fullness of Christ, a heart that is saturated with and changed by the transforming life of the Son of God. I want to say, "Here you are Father, here is a heart that you will recognize, because You have been slowly filling it with your own life and nature and purpose". Or "Here is a heart that you have crucified to the world, and in which you have formed your very life". That all might sound a bit romantic or fairytale-ish, and maybe it is. But nevertheless, it comes to my mind often. I don't really know what Moses had in mind when He wrote that Psalm. But I know that Moses had a pretty good view of the Lord, for someone in the Old Covenant, and I don't think he wasted his life.

I don't want to waste my life. Now, I don't want to feel overwhelmed or condemned by this issue. I'm not talking about figuring out things God wants me to accomplish and checking them off a list. I'm not talking about fulfilling my destiny or being all that I can be for God... at least not in the way that most people talk about it. This has nothing to do with works of the flesh or man's zeal and determination. I'm not trying to start a ministry, plant a church, or be an apostle. It's not really about what I do or don't do. It's much more about what I am, what I become inwardly, what life I'm living, and why I'm living it. I'm not looking to be anything that man can see, or accomplish things that humans would recognize or appreciate. I'm just wanting to live for the purpose for which I was created and redeemed. And I can't escape the idea, the awareness, that I was created with a purpose in mind. I mean, I don't have the right to imagine or invent my own purpose. I was created with purpose, and saved for a purpose. And the purpose that I have for my life must ultimately align with and be governed by God's purpose for me. I know that that is true.

So these kinds of things get me thinking about the fear of the Lord, and what it means to walk in the fear of the Lord. There are lots of verses that speak of the fear of the Lord. We all know that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." We've all heard that, but what does it mean? Well, it seems to mean that wisdom doesn't even begin until a heart has come to some measure of the fear of the Lord! Wisdom is built upon the fear of the Lord. Wisdom has a foundation, a place to rest, a place to grow, only in a heart that fears the Lord.

Here is another verse that I love:

Psalm 25:14 *The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, And He will make them know His covenant.*

I want to know His covenant. That is to say, I want to know, understand, and walk in the relationship that He has given me in His Son. I don't want to live my life contrary to that covenant. I don't want to love things and serve things outside of the boundaries of the covenant. That's how Solomon lost his wisdom, and Samson lost his strength. The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him.

Sometimes people have negative thoughts or emotions associated with the term "fear of the Lord." If we feel that way I think that means we don't understand it. In fact, in my Spanish Bible, after every mention of the fear of the Lord, this Bible inserts the word "reverence" in parenthesis. It does that I'm sure to soften the word, to make it seem more palatable for readers. That's not a crime... but I think it takes away something from the word. Reverence can be superficial, religious, and distant. But fear really touches the heart. Fear grips your heart and changes how you think and feel and act.

So, what is the fear of the Lord? When I think of the fear of the Lord, the first thing that comes to my mind is the fact that **all things must eventually confront, recognize, and align with God's perfect truth. What I mean is that God's view of all things, whether we can see it or whether we agree with it, will ultimately be the only thing that remains, the only thing that matters.** God's perspective isn't His opinion, its the substance of objective reality. God's perspective is just another word for the truth. He sees what is real. He knows all things as they truly are. All other thoughts, all contrary things are simply not the truth, and they will eventually give way to His view. They have to. One day, one way or another, God's perspective will be the only thing left. In a sense, its already that way now. From God's point of view all things are obvious and clear, and mans opinions and blindness doesn't change anything. The question for us is whether or not we want to see with His light, to walk in that perspective, to live in what He sees, and let our hearts lose the things that He does not see.

Whatever I may think about God, about life, about purpose, about church, family, Scripture... none of it is even remotely relevant unless my view has become the sharing of His perspective, the seeing in His light. Do you ever think about that? For some reason I can't stop thinking about it! I can't stop wondering how many of my ideas, emotions, plans, definitions, interpretations, simply do not exist in his light. And I know that one day they will no longer exist in me... no matter how much time, sweat, and tears I give to them during my time on earth.

In my heart, that has to do with the fear of the Lord. It's like Abraham hearing the promise of God about a son, creating that son with Hagar, raising and grooming that son for 13 years to be his heir, and then one day hearing God say "who's Ishmael?" Or its like God multiplying his people in the land of Egypt, visiting ten plagues upon Pharaoh and his kingdom, taking his people out with a mighty outstretched arm through the midst of the sea, and then, when they refuse to know Him and His purpose saying, "Moses, step away from them. I will consume them together as one man, and create another nation out of you." Or it's when the Lord says,

Mat 7:22 *"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'*

Or the parable (Luke 12:16) that Ryan mentioned recently, the man who filled his barns with all sorts of good things that he was saving, and when they became full, he tore them down and built even bigger barns. "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

We don't get to design or define our purpose. But are called to know it and to live in it. It's not a choose your own adventure book, where we get to make it up as we go along. The purpose for our lives existed before we did. God desires to reveal it, but the secret of the Lord belongs to those who fear Him. Those you don't fear Him are not afraid to waste their lives doing whatever is right and relevant in their own eyes.

You know, this is really what the revelation of Christ is all about, and why it has such a great affect in our hearts. When you see something in the light, you are seeing things as they are. To the degree that you see and walk by faith, you are walking in what is real. And to whatever degree that you are not walking in the light, you are walking and living in something that is not real. You are stumbling in the darkness, living things that are not true, thinking things that are not real.

The revelation of Christ is not just about learning new things, fixing wrong ideas, or gaining an understanding of the Bible. The revelation of Christ is the shocking, life-altering experience of seeing and aligning with God's view, and being liberated from all other false things. The revelation of Christ is the only way to be free. The light rips up your ideas by the roots, and places your heart in a view that God has had from before the creation of the world. The light shakes you awake from a long adamic dream, and it makes the dream seem so absurd and foreign. Have you ever noticed that strange and silly dreams only seem strange and silly after you wake up? You can do all kinds of bizarre things in a dream and it feels totally normal, until you wake up.

Why do I need the revelation of Christ?... the answer for me is that, to some extent, I fear the Lord. The fear of the Lord keeps me turning to see Him. In a sense its not even really the fear of Him, as much as it is the fear of myself living without His light. Its the fear of what I must be thinking, wanting, doing, in the light of my own dark perspective.

Do you see what I mean? For me, the fear of the Lord is the awareness that only God's perspective and assessment will remain. And I'd better, if I know what is good for me, come to see as He sees and know as He knows because everything else is a lie. His view is light, and all other views are darkness. Nothing will change that.

That frightens me... but in a very good and clean way. It changes how I look at the world. It changes what I let myself grow attached to, what I live for, what I want. I suppose that's why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. In me it seems to be the beginning of perspective. Without the fear of the Lord any old idea makes sense in my mind. Without the fear of the Lord, any desire, any pursuit, goal, identity, purpose, activity, ANYTHING makes

as much sense to me as anything else. But the fear of the Lord changes that. The fear of the Lord kills certain ideas and creates others. It nullifies certain goals and exposes all kinds of emptiness. Speaking of the wilderness generation, Jeremiah said

Jer 2:5 *Thus says the LORD, "What injustice did your fathers find in Me, That they went far from Me And walked after emptiness and became empty?*

Some translations say "they walked after vanity and became vane." I don't want that to be the story of my life - "Jason walked after emptiness and became empty." But I think that's where we all naturally go without the fear of the Lord.

We live in a culture where we are taught that everyone's opinions, perspectives, and beliefs are worthy of respect and acceptance. To some extent that has an appropriate place if we're talking about natural things. My opinion about music is no more valid than yours, etc. But when it comes to spiritual and eternal reality, God has no regard for our opinions, perspectives, and beliefs. He doesn't care what we think, unless our thoughts are the byproduct of His light. Unless our thoughts were created and constrained by His eternal purpose.

More and more, over the last several years, I've come to the conclusion that the way to live here during our time on earth is in the fear of the Lord. That's the only way to have any perspective. That's the only way to see anything rightly.

In the last several weeks I've shared some verses in different groups. A couple verses are from Ecclesiastes, and just seem to be statements that come out from true perspective. The last one is a type and shadow from Deuteronomy that we talked about a couple weeks ago. I'm going to read a few this morning and mention briefly what they are meaning to me.

Ecc 5:7 *For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.*

This verse just seems to describe so much of what we are about as natural men and women. Lots of words and big dreams. We talk excitedly about everything we're involved in. We talk about the new thing, the next thing, the old things that were better, the coming things that will be amazing. We're full of so many goals, things we are reaching for, hoping for, living for. There are so many things that seem so promising. But we all know the story, even when we catch those things, we're never content and we're quickly on to the next thing. It's the pursuit that we like, the hope, the idea... not really the actual thing. This is vanity.

Ecc 5:10 *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity. 11 When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?*

This verse just seems to say it so clearly. When nice earthly things are available, we give ourselves to the accumulation of these things. But, at the end of the day, what is the benefit that we gain from accumulating these things? We just look at them. We see them with our eyes. We don't truly possess them. You know? I mean, you can't actually lay hold of them, join yourself to them, make them a part of you. They are always external to you, sitting there in front of you, and what is the advantage except to look on.

There is really only one thing that a human soul can possess. Maybe you've never really thought about this. But the only thing that a human soul can truly possess is the one thing (the one Life) that can join to it, fill it, become one with it. Everything else is external and and very temporary.

The last one here is from Deuteronomy. The Israelites have been circling a mountain for 38 years and it is finally time for the second generation to go in and inherit the land. God says to them:

Deu 2:2 *"And the LORD spoke to me, saying, 3 'You have circled this mountain long enough. Now turn north, 4 and command the people, saying, "You will pass through the territory of your brothers the sons of Esau who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful; 5 do not provoke them, for I will not give you any of their land, even as little as a footstep because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. 6 "You shall buy food from them with money so that you may eat, and you shall also purchase water from them with money so that you may drink.*

What strikes me in these verses is simply that the sons of Israel were not to expect any inheritance outside of the Land of Promise. In other words, their only true inheritance was in Christ. They had to pass through some places along the way, but not one footstep of those lands that belonged to the flesh (the sons of Esau, Lot, etc.) was given to them as their possession. They could buy food and water along the way, but could possess nothing outside of the land. To me, this is a picture of wisdom in our relationship to those things that are not in Christ. We do what we have to do in this realm, but this is not our home. We buy water, food, homes, raise our children, mow our lawns, etc... but we will receive not one footstep as our inheritance.