

The Fear of God

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[0 : 00] Exodus 20, the end of the Ten Commandments is where we find ourselves today. And our title for our message is the fear of God.

I'm sure I'm not the only one who has a fear of wasp. I like a lot of things that God has created. Wasp are not one of them. I feel they came from the fall or after the fall. The reason for that fear is you can't reason with a wasp.

You can't become friends with a wasp. And unlike other bees, they seem to always be in attack mode, right?

So you can't just get close and observe them. They also are unlike honeybees in that they can just keep stinging you, unending. So that has instilled a fear for me that makes me not want to get close and do anything near around wasp.

[1 : 09] Our passage this morning, our sermon, is about the fear of God. There's aspects around that type of fear of wasp and anything else that's scary that's similar to the fear of God.

But there's so much more to the fear of God that is very important to us as Christians. And so my prayer and my hope is as we go through this passage and we look at this, that it will be important. It will be helpful for our lives as we move forward. A proper fear of God is one of our greatest weapons against sin.

The fear of God, a weapon for us to fight against sin. Let's open in prayer this morning and then we're going to read our passage.

Lord, as we come to you this morning and as we read your word and as we open it up, we ask that you would meet us, that you would teach us, that you would show us different aspects of you and the fear of you and what that means.

[2 : 29] May you take away distractions. May you encourage us where we are. And we ask these things in your name. Amen.

Exodus chapter 20. We're going to go from verse 18 to the end of the chapter. If you would stand with me as we read this together.

Starting in verse 18. Then when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled.

And they stood far off and said to Moses, You speak to us and we will listen. But do not let God speak to us lest we die. Moses said to the people, Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.

The people stood far off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. And the Lord said to Moses, Thus you will say to the peoples of Israel, You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven.

[3 : 46] You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. An altar of earth you shall make for me, and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen.

In every place where I cause my name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you profane it.

And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it. You may be seated. If you remember back just one chapter, chapter 19, God called the people to Mount Sinai, and they were experiencing some of these same terrifying elements that we see here in our passage.

The thunder, the lightning, the sound of trumpet, the mountain shaking and smoking. God's presence had come down on the mountain, and his presence was unmistakable.

If you had been in the area, anywhere nearby, God's arrival would not have been missed. The Israelites here were witnessing the glory and the majesty and the power of God Almighty coming down to them.

[5 : 13] Even to be able to stand and experience this event without being driven to their knees in fear or knocked to the ground by the sheer force of God's presence coming before them, really is just a grace of God to them.

It is because God decided to come down and speak to them that he gave them the ability to even stand where they were at the foot of the mountain.

He came to his people to give them a fuller picture of himself, to lay out for them how they were to live. See, God had chosen them to be a holy nation, but now they needed to know how to live as a holy nation.

The God of heaven and earth came to them and spoke words to them. The Ten Commandments that we've been talking about. They were given to the people of God.

As we look at verse 18, it says, Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountains smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off.

[6 : 29] It says that they saw these things. Now not all of these are things that we see. You can't see thunder. You can't see the sound of a trumpet. But what is meant is they experienced all these things together.

The sound and the shaking that comes with thunder. You've felt that before as you're close to lightning when it goes off. God had descended down on this mountain in fire.

Was something burning in that? Was there a smell that came from that as the mountain is on fire? As the mountain shook and the ground and the rocks were moved by the very presence of God coming down.

What was that even like? God rocking the wilderness visually, audibly, physically. Thinking of that, it's no surprise that the people were afraid and trembled.

Back in chapter 19, as they came to the mountain, remember that the people took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

[7 : 43] It says that. That's where they started out. But it's not where they ended up. It doesn't say in the Bible, but it's possible that after every commandment that is given, that God breaks out with the trumpet.

That thunder and lightning sounds signifying that the word of the Lord had been spoken. So every time a commandment is given, they're terrified more, and so they step back.

So that after 10 commandments, they're no longer at the foot of the mountain. They're quite removed. They're at a distance. They're now far off.

And in verse 19, they say to Moses, you speak to us. We'll listen. But don't let God speak to us, lest we die. They said, Moses, you're okay.

We can deal with you. We can connect. We can relate to you. But not God. He's too much. We might die.

[8 : 51] Now, I'm not saying that what they experienced wasn't terrifying. And I know it's easy for me to stand here not being there and judge them by what they did.

However, there seems to be a breakdown in their understanding of what is going on. Of what God wants to teach them.

And the reason why I say this is for two reasons. First, for them to think that they might die means either that they don't trust God or they don't completely understand his calling of them to be his people.

Because remember back at Mount Sinai, before the 10 commandments, just one chapter ago, Moses goes up to the mountain. He meets with God. God gives him a message back to the people. And it's this. You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples.

[9 : 56] For all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. So as they heard that, there's an aspect of that that they missed because if they had gotten it properly and completely, then they would not have thought that God was going to kill them.

And how else would they be, would they think that they were going to die? Were they worried that they might get struck by lightning? Were the mountain would shake too much and fall on them? Did they not trust God that he was in control over all of nature? I think he proved that point out through the ten plagues and the parting of the Red Sea.

So that's one reason. Another reason why I don't think they understood God's intentions is because Moses comes back and has to explain this to them. And it's very helpful.

He says this in verse 20. Do not fear, for God has come to test you that the fear of him may be before you that you may not sin. And now at first, this verse sounds a little like it's contradicting itself.

[11 : 09] Do not fear. God's testing you that the fear of him may be with you. Don't fear, but fear. Let's take this verse and look at it a little bit closer.

Do not let God speak to us lest we die. That's what they just said. And to that, Moses is saying, do not fear. He's not going to kill you.

He's telling them not to be afraid of God ending their life at this point. That's not what this is about. Rather, he's saying, God has come to test you.

To prove you. That is, to see if God's presence will produce in you a fear, a reverence, an obedience that God is calling for from his people.

Now, God could have decided from the very beginning that whenever he spoke and came to a human, he would do so in a soft voice.

[12 : 24] Maybe in a calm and a very relatable fashion. So that man felt at ease with God and their relationship together. And we can see that a little bit even in the Garden of Eden as God comes to Adam and they walk together in the cool of the day and they have a relationship.

That sounds nice. However, it fails to display and to describe the very attributes of God that are important for us to understand.

See, as sinful humans, we're always striving to be God, right? We're striving to be the one in control of our life.

We want everything to be under our control, our decisions, what we want, not God. We'll pull God out when we need a little help, but I'm the one steering this plane, right?

That's just our natural bit as Christians. So, we need to have a right and a proper view of God in order to put that in its place.

[13 : 41] We can be told how to show reverence and honor to God, that is true, but it falls tragically short if we miss out on the God-centric attributes of himself.

Like the prophet Isaiah, when he's given this vision of the Lord, he sees the Lord high and lifted up. His robe is filling the temple.

There are seraphims that are flying around and are praising him. The temple is shaking and full of smoke. God doesn't even speak and Isaiah is undone.

He sees his uncleanness before God. He sees how he is here and God is so out there and he just loses it.

We need that. We need to understand the power and the majesty of God. We need to grasp the holiness of God, his perfectness, his set-apartness. We need to understand how the wrath of God is situated towards sin.

[14 : 55] It can't be with sin. And so our view of him would be incomplete and weak without knowing those things. No, we need to see and we need to know God as he has revealed himself in scripture, awesome and majestic and terrifying at times because that's who he is, holy and separated and not like us.

He is God and we are not. Moses says, do not fear for God has come to test you. Why?

That the fear of God may be before you, that you may not sin. Having a proper fear of God will keep us from sin. Fear for the unbeliever?

That looks a little different. That's fear of God's judgment. Knowing that you are not in the will of your creator. Jesus says this in Luke 12 verse 5, but I will warn you whom to fear.

Fear him who, after he is killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Jesus is talking about, of course, God, the only one who can cast into hell.

[16 : 17] God. However, the fear for a believer is different. It's an awesome reverence for God.

It's knowing who he is, knowing who we are, wanting to obey and honor him while having that full understanding of who he is and how he has condescended to us out of love to save us.

Christian author and pastor Randy Alcorn says this, the fear of God is a profound respect of his holiness, which includes a fear of the consequences of disobeying him.

It shouldn't scare us out of our wits, it should scare us into them. And that lines up with Proverbs 14, verse 27, it says this, the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life turning a man from the snares of death. The fear of the Lord for a Christian helps to refocus us on God Almighty and not ourselves. It puts our lives and our sins and our thoughts in perspective before God.

[17:41] Noah obeyed God, he walked with God, but we read in Hebrews that he had a reverent fear of God. Joseph, after having a lifelong, a lifetime filled with fear, fear, this guy went through everything.

He's the one that we would think would struggle with so many things, who would go off the rails, who would struggle with anger and resentment, even who, when tempted by a woman to sleep with her, you would think in his condition, in all that had been taken away from him, and how he would have thought I deserve a little bit of something good in my life, who's around me.

He still fled, he still did what was right, he still followed after God through jail, through his family, through women, through all of it, from all that he was given and all that he was taken away.

And in Genesis 42, it says that he feared God. It was his fear of God that kept him where he went.

He didn't have the New Testament, he didn't have Jesus Christ or the gospel, he didn't have podcasts that would encourage him when life sucked, he had the fear of the Lord.

And we see this fear also in the New Testament as we look at Acts 9, verse 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied, it being the church, the church multiplied as it walked in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

[19:51] There are many fears that we can struggle with in life. We can't list them all, it seems that they never end. But the big ones, the fear of man, the fear of death, the fear of losing control, the fear of failure, fear of losing my identity, all those we struggle with.

But having a fear of God is most important. Because if we have the fear of God and we understand it and we ground ourselves in it, it will help keep all those other fears in their rightful place.

Not governing our lives, not controlling our lives, but in a place of rightness before God, in a place of peace, knowing that you are in his will.

And this fearful God is a God that loves you and protects you from those other fears that we struggle with. Let's move on to verse 21.

So the people stood far off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where Jesus was. It's helpful, I think, to observe in this passage that there isn't any judging going on towards the people, towards the Israelites, they may be slow to understand, they may not know exactly what's going on, but there is no blame that I see here towards them and how they were fearful and what they do with that.

[21:33] Even as they request not to hear directly from God, and we want to go back to Moses, you be our mediator. Even in that, we don't pick up anything in this passage that seems to say that they're wrong or to judge them for that.

So Moses goes back to being the mediator now. And as this shift goes back, we look at the middle of verse 22. God's still not done speaking and so it's almost like a little blip and it keeps going.

They saw God, God spoke to them, and now they're like, okay, Moses, you got this and we'll just listen directly to you. And so God continues. He says, you have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven.

At first, this statement seems a little bit like, well, yeah, we know. But I think it's meant for more. It's meant to be a reminder to the people about what had just taken place, right?

God had spoken to them. Their God had just come down from heaven and spoke directly to them. All of them. All together.

[22:48] Not different messages. They all experienced the same thing. Words to them from God. There's a couple things that I just want to unpack in that.

First is, the people of Israel had a God that spoke to them. How loving and personal that is if we just think about that for a second.

Their God, this is not new, their God is our God. One God, no other gods, he speaks to his people. What other religion that you know of has a God who speaks and cares for his people?

Condescends from his throne, his mightiness and comes down to us and speaks to us that we

might understand.

God continues in verse, oh, I'm sorry, that was the one thing, the second thing that I wanted to bring out was that since God had spoken to them in the Ten Commandments and their response to that was like, that's too much.

[24 : 06] I want you to go through Moses and we'll listen to you. God wanted them to understand from that point, this is their agreement, every word that he gives to Moses and Moses portrays to them, he wants them to understand those words are from God.

So though you may not hear from me directly now because you chose not to, that fear, that awesomeness, that reverence that you had for the Ten Commandments, when I continue to speak, I want you to understand that those are still my words.

They'll come through Moses but it's the same thing. And I think it's important that they understood that. So God continues to speak in verse 23, you shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.

God here giving them a reminder, a summary of the first two commandments if you remember.

They are not to make gods to be with him and there is nothing that is to share that is to be on the same level as God.

Instead of looking to things, whether they are things of this world or idols that we make, none of those things should replace God.

[25 : 40] None of those things should represent God or be worshipped like God. Instead here God is saying I want you to build an altar.

At first this section seems a little odd coming from just after the Ten Commandments but what we see is a reminder of the priority of worship.

God saying worship me first. Worship your God. We saw it in the Ten Commandments the order that they were given in and we see it here. Our worship of God, our relationship with God, that is paramount.

That is first priority. That must come first. And then after that comes how we are to live and to relate to one another. And so those will be some laws that we'll get into in the next few weeks.

Laws that were to govern how they were to relate to one another. But first and foremost it was their worship. It was their relationship to God. Do not make anything that will be placed on my level, God says.

[26 : 50] Nothing that will represent me. Instead, verse 24, an altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings, your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen.

Now we know from other passages at this point in the Old Testament that sacrifices and offerings were already known. This wasn't a new thing. So Moses isn't giving them something they don't know about.

There were sacrifices already made. There were burnt offerings that were given. But there were laws now. There were rules that God wanted to put in place as they sacrificed.

Verse 25, if you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you profane it. They were not to add to what God had created and said was good.

Even a stone. God created a stone. They were not to elevate their craftsmanship or the altar they created in any way.

[28 : 04] In any way that might elevate themselves more than what they were. By bringing maybe a higher level of workmanship or piety or some higher standing before God, they came to God just like we come to God sinful and there is nothing we can add to ourselves or to the altar or in our worship that would change that.

The altar held the sacrifice that was given to cover their sins and they couldn't add to that. All they could do is come and bring it. And we see in verse 26 another law that God adds on to this as well. He says, you shall not go up by steps to my altar that your nakedness be not exposed on it. So after Adam and Eve sin in the garden, the exposing of one's nakedness is an indication of sin and shamefulness.

God created Adam and Eve and they did not have clothes on. They saw each other before they sinned and they were naked and there was no problem with that.

But then sin came in. Adam and Eve sinned. Adam and Eve decided to make themselves like God thinking they were being left out and so they disobeyed God and that affected the world.

[29 : 34] It affected their view of themselves and in Genesis 3.10 when God comes looking for Adam this is what Adam said. I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself.

That's the same nakedness that was fine before but now there's shame there's sinfulness in that exposed nakedness. In Genesis 9 we get this brief story if you remember of Noah after the flood he gets wasted and he finds himself passed out naked on the full ground of his tent.

One of his sons Ham shows up and we're not given a lot of details but it wasn't properly handled when he saw the nakedness of his father father.

But his other two brothers Shem and Jaheth when they learned of it they got a piece of cloth a robe or a blanket and they walk backwards into the tent and they lay it over their father and they walk right back out because they knew it was shameful to look at the nakedness of another person other than their wife that they weren't allowed to look at.

And from that we see that Ham is cursed and his other two brothers are blessed. There's something in that nakedness that was it was special it was forbidden it was handled this rightly because it wasn't handled rightly in the beginning with Adam and Eve.

[31 : 17] And so for that reason God is saying I do not want you to have steps walking up to my altar because when you walk up to my altar you're under parts are exposed and so you bring shame and sin to this holy place of worship.

As we think about these last few verses as we think about the altar one thing that stands out in these verses is the ownership of the altar verse 25 God says if you make me an altar of stone and then in verse 26 you shall not go up to the steps of my altar the altar belonged to the Lord even though man built it the sacrifices the offerings they belong to the Lord the reverence given was the Lord's the forgiveness that God gave to them belonged to the Lord and so it's for those reasons that God had requirements on these altars in this time of worship before him so as we think about that thinking about the fact that we are sinners and that we all fall short of what almighty

God deserves of his people not only do we fall short we saw the Israelites fall short their sacrifice falls short our sacrifices fall short our worship before God falls short but God that's where God stepped in that's where God did not leave us that's where God stepped in with his only son Jesus who became the last and final sacrifice for our sins never again we don't have to go back like the people of Israel and make sacrifices all the cleansing all the giving up of animals all the blood all that goes away why because Jesus became our sacrifice once and forever offered to God on our behalf he made that sacrifice for our sins to be covered we have to accept that gift from Jesus Christ we have to believe if there's no belief in Jesus Christ that he covers our sins with his sacrifice then we can't be covered and the wrath of God still remains on our sins Hebrews 12 28 and 29 I believe captured this idea of the fear of God in a very helpful way let us therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken that kingdom of God for believers that we get to be a part of through our belief in Jesus Christ that kingdom is the kingdom that cannot be shaken and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and all for our God is a consuming fire that's the fear the fear is realizing who God is and yet God still loves us and accepts us a right fear of

God will keep us from sin not perfection but a fear that is healthy and right will cause us to run away from sin and run back to God remembering who he is and what he did for us that will keep us grounded in his loving arms that accept us back when we make mistakes and when we sin and we ask for repentance I want to end with a quote from Charles Spurgeon famous preacher from the 1800s he says this blessed is the man whose heart is filled with that holy fear which inclines his steps in the way of God's commandments inclines his heart to seek after God and inclines his whole soul to enter into fellowship with God that he may be acquainted with him and be at peace let's pray Lord we pray that you would continue today and every day remind us of who you are help us to get an accurate and a real grasp on having a right fear of you to keep us from sin to keep us from ourselves help us in our struggles help us in our temptations and sin help us to look to you

[36 : 35] God thank you for your love and your mercy and your grace and your salvation that we could never do for ourselves you did for us Lord we thank you for those things and we want to live for you glorify you in all that we do and in your name amen too i we we my we have to run our