

Fear of the Lord

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 February 2021

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Amen. Amen. Amen. Can you all hear me? All right. I've been told that I have a deep voice and sometimes I get into a little rumble and all you hear is a little rumble and you can't actually pick out what I'm saying. So if that happens, just!

someone just say, you know, yeah, yeah, go like this and, you know, I'll try to, and that's it better. It's a delight to be among you this evening. As Raymond was saying, I did want to speak on this. I'm, I'm, I'm gracious. I'm thankful that he was gracious to, to, to let me speak on it, um, on this topic. And it's a delight to be, to give the first talk in your Lenten series, Approaching God with Fear. I bring greetings from my wife, Lisa. She would have loved to be here, but she is eight plus months pregnant. So it's quite an ordeal to travel, uh, being that far along with three other kids in tow. So, um, yeah, so she, she obviously couldn't come, but, um, uh, in God's mercy, we'll be expecting our fourth child in mid-March. Uh, we'll be another boy. Uh, we have three boys so far and we have a fourth boy. So, yeah, so I can use, I welcome all the prayers for, for Lisa and I.

Uh, so, um, so as we talk about the fear of God and approaching God, um, with fear, I think it's first important for us to actually talk about what it is, what does it mean to approach God?

Um, what is it, what do we do when we approach God? Um, is it, do we approach God the same way we, for example, I approach Jack here? Um, uh, do we approach God the same way we approach our friend over coffee or, you know, over pint? Um, is it that kind of gathering together with God? Or is it, what language are we really talking about? And I think it's important to really see that approaching God, we're really talking about worship, isn't it? When we talk about approaching God, we're talking about worship. How do we worship God? How do we, because every time we are in the presence of God, we are to worship Him. Isn't that, it's to that end that we were created, isn't it?

To worship God and to glorify Him. It's to that end. So, when we talk about approaching God, we're talking about worship. So, it's important to us to see all of, in fact, this topic today and all of our topics, I will, I will, um, be so bold to say in the next few weeks as in the context of worship.

[2:39] Um, what are we talking about when we say we're approaching God? How do we worship God? But I should also say that worship is not limited to what we do every Sunday, uh, between the hours of 10 and noon on the Lord's day. Worship, as the Bible makes it clear to us, is, is a posture before God every day, every hour, every second. We are to worship God with our lives. So, so when we talk about worship, we're not only talking about the Sunday morning worship, we're talking about our disposition to God, be for God, as people who were created for that very purpose, to worship Him.

We live, Coram Dale, we live all the time before His face. And so, how do we then respond to who He is and what He's created us to be? So, we, we talk about approaching God with fear. I think it's helpful for us to, um, I don't know if that's someone else's Bible, so I'll grab my Bible here. Um, it's helpful for us to, to look in the Old Testament, um, first, uh, at a, a really paradigm of what He means to approach God in Exodus, Exodus 19 and 20. So, if you have a Bible, you can open along or you can listen to it as I read. Um, I'm not going to read book chapters, don't worry. We'll never leave here today. But I want to give us a picture of what's going on in, in, in the Old Testament. Um, as you know, Exodus is, uh, the people of Israel have already been delivered from Egypt by God's great miraculous end, not by anything they've done. Uh, they are now on their way to the promised land. And God, through His prophet Moses, brings them to Mount Sinai. And they're at Mount Sinai, at the foot of the mountain. And God is now coming to His own people, to His covenant people, to give them the law, to give them the Ten Commandments. So, this is the context of chapter 19 and 20. Um, and, and in chapter 19, God is, has been speaking to Moses already on the mountain. And God tells Moses, tell these people when I come down, I will come, I will come, the language is

actually quite moving. I will, God says, I will come down, but it says, I will come down to the top of the great mountain on Mount Sinai to, to speak to my people. And when I do come down, you will come up,

God says to Moses, to meet me. But the people are to gather around the mountain, but they should not come to the mountain. Warn them, God tells Moses. Warn them to not touch, to not venture anywhere near the mountain, because I will strike them down. God, it's, it's a foreboding warning to, to, to Moses, uh, to tell the Israelites, I will come, I am coming to commune with them, but warn them that they should be careful in the way they approach me when I come down. So this is the context. We go to chapter 20, and God does come down. And what does it look like? There are flashes of thunder. There is, there's fire and cloud, right? And smoke. It's like a pyrotechnic, but not the cheap ones that we see on the 4th of July.

God himself is coming down. I don't think you can, I'm, I would have loved to be there, but we can't even imagine what it would have looked like for the Israelites to see that God has come down, and there is flashes of lightning, there is thunder, and there's fire on top of the mountain, and the people are gathered. Now, God already told Moses, build a barrier. Don't let them come near. Now, what happens is that as they see this, as they come, the people see it. They see all of this. They see God coming in communion with them. And so, I'll read verse 18 and 21. This is their response to seeing God, um, to being in the presence of God, to approaching God, even at a distance. This is their response to, to, to that.

By the way, God has already given them, in the beginning of chapter 20, the commandments. The Ten Commandments has been given. He's told them what he has done for them, and what they ought to do. And now, the people respond in verse 18. Now, 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. And 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. Right? You see their response to the presence of God, as they approached God.

[8:18] God came down to his people. And notice the three-fold response of the people here, to this theophany, to this God appearing. It was emotional, right? Says they're afraid.

It was physical. The response was physical. They were trembling. And it was spatial. They were already told not to come near the mountain, but willingly, they removed themselves, even further away from the mountain. So I can imagine, the Monsanus there, they're gathering around the temple, they saw it, and they all just went even further back, away from the mountain. And in fear, they tell Moses, well, yeah, you be a mediator, and speak to God for us, and tell us, and we will listen to you. But do not let God, don't let that happen again. Can you imagine that? You would have thought, what a privilege. You would have thought they were all gathering, like, oh man, come on, let's go. No. Well, they're wrong then, to have this reaction to their parent of God. I want to say that I don't think this is a wrong response by them.

This is the right response that they had, that Israel has had. Why is it a right response? Because I think they recognize something about themselves. And they recognize something about this God, who he is, what he is, and who they are. They recognize that God is a holy God. And when you think about the attributes of God, the deepest attribute, the one, the one that exemplifies who God is, is his holiness.

He's Christ holy, isn't he? Is his holiness. And we are not. And the Israelites recognize, by the way, this is before they've sinned. This is right after the Ten Commandments was given. They didn't have time to sin yet. They will. They will soon enough. But they haven't had time yet to do anything to, to, so it wasn't out of, oh, we, we've broken any of these commandments. It was right after it was given. But even then, they recognize we are sinful people before a holy, fearful, consuming fire, who is God himself. And so they were rightly afraid. But verse 20 is informative for us.

[10:39] Moses' response to them is, Moses said to them, do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin. That's a very confusing verse, statement by Moses. Do not fear, he says to them. God has come to test you. Do not fear.

That the fear of him may be before you. I thought you just told us not to be afraid. But now you're saying that the fear of God may be before us, that you may not sin. So it seems contradictory at the surface level if you read it. But the Hebrew word for fear is yare. And it's the same word, actually,

that Moses is saying. So imagine Moses. So it's not a translation error here in English. Moses is saying, do not fear. The same Hebrew word. So do not be afraid, but that the fear of God may be before you. So which is it? What is Moses discouraging them from? What is he trying to encourage in them? I think the essence is that he's saying, do not fear, in the first instance, the kind of fear that keeps you away from God. The fear of terror. No, that's not what God wants. He doesn't want you to be terrorized by him so that you are fearful of him and you power. Imagine, we think of our first father, Adam. Do you think Adam was afraid of God when he was in Eden, when God communed with him? I think, actually, based on God's interaction with his creation, there's a reverent fear in Adam. But what he never experienced before in a state of perfection, before sin, was a terror. But he experienced it after he fell, after he sinned and disobeyed and listened to the serpent. He experienced it. So he hid in terror, in fear. That is, I think, an emotion that we can all identify with, right? That terror. But that's not the fear. So when Moses says, do not fear, he's saying, do not be terrorized by God. Do not fear him because he has come to test you. That the fear, so what is the second fear? It's the fear that brings us close to God. It's the fear that brings us close to God. But it's the fear that brings us close to God very carefully, right? God isn't to be trifled with. If you're writing that in capital letters, put it on your mirror. [13:31] God is not to be trifled with, right? He's no mere man. In fact, he's no mere God. He's not like the gods of the Canaanites that the Israelites will have been aware of, right? He's not to be trifled with. So God is saying, come to me, but do it very carefully. And you see then, attending the rest of Exodus and the other Pentateuch, is God giving his people, his covenant people instructions about worship. What they ought to do, how carefully they ought to approach him with reverence and fear.

How they need to cleanse themselves, the ritual cleansing that he gives the Israelites in order to worship him, right? And so God wants us to draw near to him, but he wants us to do it in reverent fear.

So the essence of worship is to draw near to God. That is what God wills and wants for us. It's vital, though, that we have this first kind of fear. That it is not drawing near to God is not a thing that is lightly done. And we also ought to see that this kind of fear, which I'll start to refer to as reverence and awe of God, is a healthy motivator for us. It should be for the people of God. This is why throughout the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, the Bible says that the fear of God is what? The beginning of wisdom. It's not the end of wisdom, but it is the beginning. It is the minimum in approaching God. It is the beginning of wisdom, the fear of God. So we see this picture in the Old Testament of the, if you read the rest of the Pentateuch and the instructions given through Moses to the people of the way they ought to worship God, you recognize that they ought to do with fear and trembling, with reverence to who God is and who they are as sinful people. They need to be prepared.

Coming to God is not something that they do lightly. But what about the New Testament? What about when Jesus has come to make all things new and reconcile those with God? Of course we don't approach God in the same way they do in the Old Testament. We don't do all the retro ritual cleansing and all of these things that is required of the saints in the Old Testament.

[15:59] But how do we approach God in the New Testament? Is fear and reverence, does it have a place now after Jesus? Let's look at Jesus himself as a picture of reverend or of his own father.

I think of Hebrews 5-7 when the author of Hebrews talks about Jesus at the garden at Gethsemane as he's praying to his father and he's praying to his father that his father would vindicate him, right? As he goes before the cross. That his father would vindicate him and approve and accept his offering of himself. And the author of Hebrews says that God listened to him, the father listened to Jesus, the son, because of his godly fear. The Revised Standard Version translated as because of his Godly fear. The Hebrew word is because of his reverent awe and fear. That the son himself in praying to his father as a human being, as a representative, worships him as in reverent fear and awe. And this then points us back to Isaiah 11-3. This is what has been prophesied about the Messiah who is to come. That the Messiah would delight in the fear of the Lord. Right? Jesus delights in the fear of the Lord.

That's a good paradigm for us to see how we approach God, to which we approach God. Jesus delighted in the fear of the Lord. Right? So it's not something to be terrorized about, but it actually is something to be to have delight over. And isn't it the very essence of man's rebellious man's total depravity that Paul himself was able to say in Romans 3-18 that there is no fear of God before their

eyes.

When he gives the fallen nature of man, no one is righteous. No one loves God. No one... And he says that there is no... This is how you know of a culture and a world and a person that is alienated from God. It is because there is no fear of God before their eyes.

Think also of the repentant criminal. Look at the admonition he gave. The two thieves on the cross. What does he say to the other thieves that was... He says, do you not... Don't you fear God? Right? [18:42] Don't you fear God? That you will speak to this innocent man this way. And then he, inspired by the Holy Spirit, asked for forgiveness and asked God to remember him. And he was saved at that very moment.

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. So, when our Lord wanted to indicate for us the character of... In his own parable, as he's speaking to us, when he wants to indicate to us the character of the unjust judge in this parable in Luke 18, he says that this unjust judge neither feared God nor cared about men.

Right? So, see the tie-in to the fear of God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of God informs how we treat our fellow men. Right? This unjust judge neither feared God nor cared about men.

And what is the admonition for God's people in the New Testament? Even under this covenant. How are we to treat? How are we to relate to our God? Acts 19, Acts 9, 31 talks about the new church as people who are living in the fear of God.

Right? They lived day to day in the fear of the Lord. Right? The risen and ascended Christ has poured out his spirit upon his church.

[20:07] And as we have seen from Isaiah's prophecy, the spirit of Christ is the spirit of the fear of the Lord. Right? This is the new dimension under Christ now.

That although we do not live in the Old Testament, we have to have all these rituals in order to approach God, the reverence and awe that we ought to have before God is to still mark the people of God.

But we have this benefit, this great gift by Jesus himself in sinning the Holy Spirit. That the spirit of Christ himself is the spirit, as it's put in the New Testament, is the spirit of the fear of the Lord.

The spirit of, the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin. How does that happen in the life of the believer? When you sin, when you, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, and you sin and you fall short of, of the glory of God, what comes upon you?

Is it indifference? No. You are sorrowful over it. You're, you have a reverent fear of God. Who's, who you've, who you've, you stand before him and you know that you've, not, not a fear of terror because you've been forgiven.

[21:30] Haven't you? Christ has paid the price for your sin. The punishment for your sin has been paid on the cross. You're no longer condemned. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Yet, where does that, what is that fear then that comes that the Holy Spirit instills in us, who are believers, who have been indwelt, who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit? It's the fear that you're living outside of your creative purpose for which it is to worship God.

And so the spirit of God is a spirit of fear, right? A theologian by the name of John Murray says this about the centrality of, of, of fear, of reverence and awe in the life of the believer.

He says the fear of God is the soul of godliness. If we are thinking of the marks of biblical piety, none is more characteristic than the fear of the Lord.

There is nothing that is more characteristic of biblical piety, of godliness, than the fear of God. You can't live a godly life.

[22:33] You can't even attempt to begin to live a godly life without having the fear of God before you. So this is important. It's actually, it's great that we're starting off this Lenten season about approaching God.

You see now why approaching God, you must first have the fear of God. A reverent awe of him before you. Before another for you to approach him.

The apostle Paul says to the Christians in 2 Corinthians, he admonishes them to make holiness perfect in the fear of God. To work out.

He also says in Philippians 2.13, 2.12 I mean. He says for them to work out their salvation. With what? With fear and trembling. Right? That's one of my favorite passages of the Bible.

It was confusing for so long. It took me a lot of work to understand it. That's why it's one of my favorite verses of the Bible. But to work out their fear. To work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

[23 : 32] Now look at what Paul is saying here. He's not. It doesn't mean that their work saves them. When he says work out your salvation. The salvation has already been given by what Christ has done on the cross.

It's a gift. They've been saved freely by God's marvelous grace. But he still admonishes them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. What does that mean in the context of what Paul is saying?

But to say that this salvation. This great gift that you've received. You don't trifle. It goes back to the idea of not trifling with God. He's not to be trifled with.

You approach him with fear and trembling. You work out your salvation with fear and trembling. And Paul goes on. Peter goes on and admonishes the people of God as well.

When he talks about them as. He calls them strangers in the land. Right? Christians. It doesn't mean that they're strangers. They might be citizens of the country living. But because they're now citizens of God's kingdom.

[24 : 32] They are exiles. Some of them are actual exiles. But they're all exiles. Because they're not part of a different kingdom than the earthly kingdom. But he says to live out their lives as strangers in the world.

In reverent fear. So you see throughout the New Testament. That the language of fear. And the reverence and awe of God. Is there throughout. So it's not just an Old Testament thing.

As the covenant people of God. We ought to relate to God with reverence and awe. When we come before him. So how do we think about the fear of God today then.

In our context. It seems sometimes that. One of the root causes of the problems in American church. Or should I just say the evangelical church.

Is that. There is no. There's a. There's a flabbiness. And. A. A.

[25 : 33] A. Triviality to our worship. Of God. And that. Communicates something to the world. Around us.

We approach God with. In a. Traffling manner. If we're honest with ourselves. Sometimes. Um. I. I should say. One of the reasons why I like.

I love. Anglican. Polity. And worship. Is that. It has. Odd wired in. For lack of. Better words.

Odd wired in. A. A sort of reverence. For God. When we come before him. But that shouldn't make us. Just trust. So I don't. I don't. I don't say that. For us to then just say.

Oh yeah. We've got the liturgy. We can come. And as reverend. That's enough. Remember what God says. About what it. What it means to be a true worshiper. To worship him in spirit. And in truth. Right. It's not the outward.

[26 : 28] Sign of piety. That. That determines. Well. We're approaching God. Rightly. It's. The disposition of our heart. I do think though. One of the strengths of us.

Of our form of worship. Is that it allows us. To remember. Who it is that we come before. Who we're approaching. It reminds us. Even when we're prone to forgetfulness.

And this is why. I'm speaking. In an agland setting. Why. We should guard. This treasure. Friendly. There's this. This. Triviality of.

We live in a culture that is trivial. Right. Everyone. It's. You know. Everyone is. I should confess.

One of my. I wasn't born in. I wasn't born in the U.S.

I was born in Nigeria. And I. I was born. In a culture where. There's just an. Odd wide in. Right from. You know.

[27 : 24] You're young. Is the. The reverence that you. Show to elders. People older than you. So you can be a year older than somebody. And you still demand. Oh yeah. I'm older than you. You should respect me.

And now. Your dad. Yeah. You should respect him. He's like three months older than you. There's an odd. Why. Demand. Almost. For. For. For reverence.

For those who were. Who were. The cultures instilled. And it was jarring. Growing. And even when I was growing up in. In the States. I. I moved in when I was about 10. Growing up.

I lived in two cultures. I live in the Nigerian culture. My home. And then I lived. In. In the. Wide American culture. Outside. And I always have to remember. Hey. I'm coming back home.

And I got to. You know. Park the American culture. At the door. Because if I were to approach my parents. In a way. That shows lack of reverence.

[28:17] Oh. I'm going to. I'm going to. I'm going to be in trouble. I say that. To. To remind us of. In some ways. We live in two cultures. As believers in Jesus Christ.

We live in. And we live in a culture. That trivializes everything. And there's a familiarity. And that's actually welcome. And there's strengths to that. It's not all bad. But.

We cannot transpose that familiarity. And triviality. When we come before our holy God. When we approach God. We must remember who it is we're coming before.

Now. It is important to remember. And I think. Before we get there. I think. As you say this. I think. You see it.

Even in the church. Sometimes. You see it in. In. In. In. In some people. Are men of God. As the. New Testament. Talks about.

[29:13] About. About shepherds. Under shepherds. Under Christ. When they're caught. Who are supposed to be men of God. Who live. As if they're children of the devil. Right.

When they're caught in sin. In flagrant sin. Hidden sin. That becomes public. One of the first things. I don't know if you think about it.

Is. One of the first questions you ask. Do they not fear God? Do they not have the fear of God. Before them. These are people. Who are.

Purporting to speak for God. And they are living. As children of the devil. These people. That are purporting. To lead people. To Jesus.

And their wolves. In sheep's clothing. Do they not fear God. And the question. The answer is. Rightly. Yes. They do not. They are. And so. And so. It makes us examine ourselves first.

[30:11] First and foremost. Our disposition before God. So. It's important for us to think of. Of how we approach God.

But. Fundamentally. At the end of the. In the New Testament. As we think of all of this. And the approaching of God. We have this two. Pictures before us. There is a. Fear.

Terror. Forboding. Fear of God. That. People who are not. Under the covenant. Should have. Rightly. But because the fear of God.

Is not in that. Before them. Ironically. They have. Further alienated. And then. Giving themselves. Into destruction. And God's wrath. But for those.

Who are under the covenant. Who knows God. Who have been. Called out. From darkness. Into his marvelous light. For those people. We ought to have. A reverent fear of God. And we.

[31:06] But then. How do we. Manage the two. How do we not. You know. We. We're not perfect. We're like the Israelites. Aren't we. We recognize. This is a holy God.

Right. Again. We should not. Trivialize the approaching. Of God. He's a holy God. The same consuming fire. Actually. It's in the New Testament. That God is referred to. As a consuming fire. Right. As well. So. We ought to approach him. But how do we approach him. And draw near to him. Without. Fear. We.

We have to. We have to. Approach God. Through Jesus Christ. Right. Think of. He's the one that has lived. In perfect. Reverend fear. And worship.

Of God. And his perfect. Holiness. His perfect life. Lived. He lived it. For you and I. For. And then he died. Our death.

[31:59] On the cross. Bore our shame. And the wrath of God. Upon himself. For you and I. So then that we can now. Approach. And so now. It's not.

Longer. The judgment seat. For those who are in Christ Jesus. It is a judgment seat. That throne of God. For those who are not. In Christ Jesus. But for you and I.

If we are in Christ Jesus. It's no longer the judgment seat. So that's why the author of Hebrews. Can say to the. To Christians. Let us then. With confidence. Imagine that. That's not like the Israelites. They were afraid. They shook the back. When God came. But we admonished. As a new covenant people of God. Let us. Therefore. With confidence. Confidence in what?

In our righteousness? In our perfection? No. But in Christ. In what he has accomplished for us. As our great eyed priest. Let us come. Draw near.

[32:56] Not to the judgment seat. But to the throne of grace. There's a different word there. That's not no longer the throne of mercy. But it's the throne of grace.

We've been shown mercy. Now we come. We draw near with confidence. To the throne of grace. That we may receive mercy. And find grace. To help in time of need.

So how do we approach God? Do we approach God? That's the first question. Yes. Do we approach him? Yes. We draw near to him. The New Testament tells us. We come before him. We run actually. Unlike the Israelites. To the foot of the cross. We run into his house. Right? Because we can do it with confidence.

Because Christ has redeemed us. But we do so still. Reverently. With awe and fear. Not the fear of terror. But the fear of recognizing.

[33:51] And also there's a fear that comes with gratitude. Right? Look at this mighty. Marvelous salvation. This great salvation.

That Christ has wrought for us. Look at the price. What it took. For my sins. And your sins. To be forgiven. If that does not make you reverent.

And give you awe. Before God. A just and holy God. I don't know what will. So let me read again. Hebrews 4.16.

As an encouragement. To the people of God. As we think about this. Let us then with confidence. Draw near to the throne of grace. That we may receive mercy. And find grace.

To help. In our time of need. May the Lord grant us. His grace. To do so. With boldness. And confidence. Amen. Amen.

[34:48] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. sin. name. To and not. know.'t. don't. 1-n.