

Do Not Fear So that You May Fear

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Do so. I know you just got comfortable, but Exodus 20, 18 through verse 21. Watch what happens here. 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 they trembled, and they stood far off.

[2 : 01] They said to Moses, you speak to us, and we'll 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.

Let's pray together. Lord, thank you for this time together to study your word. I know just even in my own heart, I know even in my own story and walk of faith, Lord, this has been a very real struggle for me.

And I know there's many in this room and some that will watch online that struggle with this as well. And so give us freedom tonight. Show us the hope and the confidence that is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. And God's people said, amen. Amen. You can be seated. Well, if you ever visit the island, you have to go watch them dance.

[3 : 17] It happens every evening around sundown. There at the beach at Phillip Island, Australia, where the water and sand meet, one by one you can watch these little heads emerge until the coastline is covered with penguins.

The event, some of you have studied this or you've watched a documentary on it, the event is the evening penguin parade. Every morning what happens on the island is that these penguins will gather there on the shoreline and then they head out for the day to catch fish.

And they're out all day at sea and there the penguins are very confident. They're very fast swimmers. They travel in a large group. And they're able to gather up enough food to bring home to the baby penguins.

And all God's people said, aww. But something changes every evening when they get back to the shore.

That's when the penguin dance begins. What happens is these penguins gather there at the edge of the water. And then as a group, they will begin to slowly march up the beach.

[4 : 38] And then something happens and all of a sudden a few of them will turn around and run back to the water's edge. They'll wait and do it again.

Slowly marching up the beach, quickly running back to the water. And this will go on and on and on for quite some time until eventually they make it safely back to their burrow.

Now you say, why this strange routine? Why this back and forth? It's because they are afraid. In the water, they're safe.

But on the land, they are prey to all kinds of predators, whether they be from the sky above or whether they be on the land.

And so as they cross the beach, the moment they see a shadow, the moment they sense anything overhead, the moment they hear a strange noise, they run away in fear.

[5 : 46] And the entire time they cross the beach, they are consumed with this fear. And as a result, their whole life on the beach is characterized by the penguin dance.

Moving forward, retreating back. Now let's be honest tonight. The penguin dance is not only for penguins, is it?

You and I do the exact same thing. What I mean is, there are areas of our life where fear makes us run to whatever gives us safety.

You're about to make that really big purchase, and you get afraid, so you run back to the spreadsheet and make sure it's in the budget. You've been dating for 10 years, you're about to pop the question, and then you get nervous and you chicken out.

You're about to trust someone again, but then you shut down because you've been hurt before. You have the opportunity to change jobs, but instead you decide you'll run back to 20 years of security.

[6 : 54] You're thinking about getting involved in church, but you remember how you've been burned before. You want to surrender your life to Christ, but you're afraid of what everyone else might think.

And on and on the examples go that life is like this penguin parade. One moment we're marching forward, and the next minute we're retreating back.

Faith and we, that is exactly what's happening here in the nation of Israel in Exodus chapter 20. Look back at chapter 19 and verse 16. Notice what it says.

That on the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning, this thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

Now notice this. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

[7 : 58] Here's what's going down here. Here's what's going on. Israel has been brought near to the mountain of God. They are near God's presence. They are near God's glory.

God has miraculously and graciously invited His people into His presence. And listen, as soon as they get close, they retreat in fear.

Chapter 20, verse 18. Notice it. 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, say it?

Okay, you can do better than that. They were what? Afraid. And they trembled. And what did they do? They stood far off. They're doing the penguin dance.

Their relationship with God is described as moving forward, coming to the mountain of God, being close to God, only to retreat in fear.

[9 : 02] In fact, these people are so afraid, the text tells us that they tell Moses, we don't even want to hear from God. We'll listen to you, but we don't want to hear from God because we're afraid if we do, we might die.

And keep in mind that these are God's people. These are the people that God has sovereignly chosen, redeemed out of slavery. It's the people that He has brought out of Egypt on eagles' wings. And just when they get close, they are terrified, they are trembling, and they are running away from the presence of God.

Listen, I said in my prayer earlier, I relate to this. I know some of you relate to this because if I'm not thinking gospel-centeredly, I will do the same thing.

That just when I get close to God, just when I come into God's presence, just as I enter into worship, I'll think, well, I better not get too close based on what I've done.

[10 : 04] Or how confident can I really be that God loves me? Or how do I know for sure that I'm truly forgiven? Or am I certain that God would accept someone like me?

Am I the only person that struggled with that? I didn't think so. It's the penguin dance. We come close to God, and then all this fear begins to well up in us, and we retreat.

Now notice Moses' response to their response, verse 20. Moses says to the people, say it with me, Do not fear.

For God has come to test you that the, here it is, fear of him may be before you that you may not sin.

Moses essentially says this. Listen closely. Listen, Moses tells the people of Israel, Do not fear so that you will fear. I don't even know what that means.

[11 : 05] No one knows what it means, but it's provocative. No, it's not. It gets the people going. No, that's enough. Seriously, what does that mean? Fear. Don't fear so that you will fear.

Like, I wonder if Israel's facial expression looks something like this when Moses says that. Like, huh? What? What are you talking about? What do you mean don't fear so that you'll fear?

On the surface, it really seems confusing. It even seems like a contradiction. But first, let me say that Moses' response is not this.

I'm not afraid. Yeah. You will be. You will be.

I'll give it up for the Star Wars clip, right? Moses, little Yoda, right? He's not saying, oh, you should be afraid. Oh, you know this fear that you're feeling?

[12:05] Oh, that's how you should feel. You should be very afraid. It's not what he says. What Moses says is, you should not be afraid so that you can fear.

What in the world does that mean? I'm going to invite here Charles Spurgeon, who once actually preached a sermon well worth your read, entitled, A Fear to Be Desired.

A Fear to Be Desired. In that sermon, Charles Spurgeon says this, quote, Human language is necessarily imperfect. Since man's fall, and especially since the confusion of the tongues of Babel, there has not only been a difference in speech between one nation and another, but also between one individual and another.

Probably we do not all mean exactly the same thing by any one word we use, right? There's a shade of difference between your meaning and mine.

The confusion of tongues went much further than sometimes we realize. It was so confused our language that we do not, on all occasions, mean quite the same thing to ourselves, even when we use the same word.

[13:21] Hence, listen, fear is a word which has a very wide range of meaning. There's a kind of fear to be shunned, to be avoided, that fear which perfect love casts out.

But there's another sort of fear which has its very essence of love, and without which there would be no joy, even in the presence of God. Instead, perfect love casting out this fear, perfect love nourishes and cherishes it and derives strength from it.

Is everybody following me? In other words, there's two different types of fear. When Moses says, do not fear, he's addressing a kind of fear you should not have, so that you will fear.

There's a kind of fear that you should have. If everybody's got that, say yes. That's what's happening here. This isn't confusing. It's not a contradiction. It's two different types of fear.

There is an unhealthy fear of God that the people of God can have. There is a healthy fear of God that the people of God should have.

[14:34] And Moses wants them and us not to have the wrong kind of fear. Don't fear. But instead to have the right kind of fear.

So what's the difference? Somebody say, preach, preacher. Listen, I may be the only person tonight that this helps, but this has been something that's been so comforting for me to study in God's Word this week in preparation for this message.

And I just know that there are some of you tonight that will get freedom, and that is worth it. Amen? Here's number one. Number one, an unhealthy fear of God is the kind of fear that drives you from God.

You tracking with me? An unhealthy fear of God is the kind of fear that drives you from God. When Moses says, do not fear, he's referring to the kind of fear that's making them flee, that's making them retreat.

And what is the basis of this fear, this unhealthy kind of fear? Well, we know that it does not have anything to do with God. Let me explain what I mean by that.

[15:42] Look at Exodus chapter 20 and verse 1. God spoke all these words saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Here's my point. Everybody listen. When God, here in Exodus 20, appears to Israel, he does not appear to them out of anger, but out of love.

His very first words here in this chapter are, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. These are gracious words. These words are meant to arouse great memories of God's redemptive work in their life.

God is reminding them of his loving kindness to them. The Lord has not brought them to Sinai to kill them. I've said this probably 10 different times the last few weeks.

He brought them to Sinai to marry them, to enter into a covenant with them. You say, Pastor, what's your point? My point is this. Their unhealthy fear cannot be based on God's anger or God's judgment.

[16 : 56] After all, why would God intend to scare them when the whole purpose of the law is to be in covenant with them? Are you with me?

I think three of you are with me. But I'm with me. Okay, so at least someone is. Instead, their unhealthy fear of God is not based on God.

It is based on themselves. Why? Because what does the law reveal? I've shown you this every single time we walk through the Ten Commandments.

The law reveals their sinfulness. Israel's fear, their unhealthy fear of God, is based on this.

Listen, listen. For those of you like me that have struggled with this, their basis of the fear is, who am I to be in the presence of God?

[17 : 52] I shouldn't be here. That's why I'm running. That's why I want to retreat. I shouldn't be in the presence of God. Oh man, this will preach.

Notice it on the screen. An unhealthy obsession of your sin will cause you to have an unhealthy fear of your Savior.

That's what's happening here. An unhealthy obsession of their sin makes them want to retreat from the very one that redeemed them out of Egypt. And Moses is saying, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Don't have that kind of fear. Don't retreat. Don't run away. The result here is this kind of unhealthy fear causes you to do the last thing God wants you to do, which is run away.

The whole purpose of this moment is to bring Israel near, not cause them to run.

[18 : 57] I could give so many examples of this, but you don't really have to go very far in the opening pages of the Bible to see this. When Adam sinned in the garden, what did Adam do?

He hid. He retreated. He hid in what? His shame and guilt. He tries to cover himself up, right?

And God is coming after him. God is coming to him. Again, I have no doubt that there are people in this room familiar with this kind of fear. Once you become aware of your sin, once you become aware of your struggle, you're consistently falling short of God's standard rather than draw near to God and confess your sin to God and rest in the forgiveness of God, your impulse is to run.

You feel safer that way. And what Moses is saying here is any impulse that causes you to withdraw from God is focused on the wrong thing.

Moses gives us more insight to this quickly. Again, in verse 20, look at it again. He says, we're going to focus on the last phrase. Do not fear, for God has come to test you that the fear of him may be before you, that you, everybody say it with me, may not sin.

[20 : 19] Listen, according to Moses, what does the right kind of fear do? It produces obedience. The right kind of fear of God produces obedience.

And you don't need a degree from seminary to know this. Running from God is disobedience and running to God is obedience. Amen? So the whole purpose of the fear, the right kind of fear, is to produce obedience, not disobedience, to come to him, not run from him.

So any fear of God that produces disobedience in your life is not the right kind of fear. So that's the do not fear phrase.

Let's look at the next. So that you will fear him. Point two. The healthy fear of God is that kind of fear that drives you to God.

The unhealthy drives you from him. The healthy fear drives you to him. Now there are several keys in this passage that I think help us understand a healthy fear of God.

[21 : 28] I'm going to first define what I mean by a healthy fear of God. I'm going to argue it from the text and show you first define it and then explain it.

So here's the definition that I would give you. Is a healthy fear of God is this overwhelming worship of God that is directly tied to a response both to his glory and his grace.

Track with me. Hang with me. A healthy fear of God is an overwhelming worship of God and awe of God, adoration of God in response to his glory and his grace.

So that's the definition. Let me break that down. First, the healthy fear of God is an awareness, if you're listening, say yes. It's an awareness that you're in the presence of the greatness of God.

The healthy fear of God is an awareness that you are in the presence of the greatness of God. This is what I mean by it's the overwhelming worship of God in response to his glory.

[22 : 40] What Israel is seeing here is the glory of God being manifested. Why did God save them and why is he doing all these signs and wonders? Why all the plagues in Egypt?

Why the thunder and lightning? Is God just showing off? No! God's not showing off. He's showing his people who he is. All these manifestations are happening.

Why? So that you will know I am. I want you to know who I am. I want you to see my glory. I'll take you back to Exodus chapter 6, verse 6.

Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord. I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

I will take you to be my people. I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

[23 : 46] God did all this so that Israel would see the greatness and glory of God. Listen to me, faith family. When you see the greatness of God, you will fear God.

When you see the glory of God, you will fear God. And it will not make you want to run. It will make you want to worship.

That's how you know if you have a healthy fear or an unhealthy fear of God. The unhealthy fear of God sees the glory of God and says, I shouldn't be here given who I am.

Which that's true, by the way. I'm not saying it's not right. I'm saying that the reaction then becomes, I'm going to run away rather than draw near. And God is drawing them and us near to Him because He wants us to see Him, behold Him, and glorify His name.

That's the fear of God. There's a second aspect to the definition I'm giving you. And that is not only is the fear of God an awareness that you're in the presence of the greatness of God. But the fear of God is also, listen, listen, this is the part we struggle with.

[25 : 03] I don't think anybody would deny the first part of it. It's the second part of it we struggle with. The fear of God, healthy fear, is the overwhelming acceptance that you belong to Him.

It's this overwhelming, how can it be, acceptance that I belong to the people of God. Listen, all these signs and wonders are happening in what context?

I've told you again a thousand times, God is entering into covenant with His people. You see, it's not only the recognition of that God is great, it's also the overwhelming realization that I'm His.

I'm in relationship with Him. I'm in covenant with Him. I belong to God. I can't believe it. This is what the fear of God does.

It becomes this overwhelming worship of the greatness of God and the overwhelming acceptance of the grace of God that causes us to draw near to God.

[26 : 13] You still with me? I can't tell. Let me show you how Psalm 86 connects all this so you don't think I'm just pulling it out of thin air. Psalm 86, verse 8.

This is so good. There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations that you have made shall come and, say it with me, worship before you, O Lord. And what else will they do? They shall glorify your name.

So we've got worship happening. We've got glorifying His name because of how great He is. Verse 10. For you are what? You are great.

And what do you do? You do wondrous things. You alone are God. So we've got worship. We've got glorifying Him because He is great and He is wonderful. And then what does the psalmist say?

[27 : 11] Verse 11. Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in Your truth. Unite my heart to say it.

Fear your name. Do you see the connection? Do you see the connection? Worship, glorify for how great and wondrous He is.

There are no gods like the one true God. Teach me to fear it. Teach me to fear Your name. Teach me to have a life that draws near because I am overwhelmed at how great You are and I can't believe I'm Yours.

Not run away because of my sin. Though my sin is true, no one's belittling that, but it falls short to the glory and greatness of God.

Faith family, if you find yourself today trapped in a pattern of sin, paralyzed by guilt and shame, feeling hopeless, there is hope for you and that hope is found in a very unexpected place.

[28 : 22] The fear of God. And this is not only true for the nation of Israel. Guess how much more true this ought to be for us given that we live on this side of the cross and resurrection.

Listen to me. We are, if you're a Christian, if you're a follower of Jesus, if you put your faith in Christ, we should never, never, never, never, never, never, never respond with an unhealthy fear of God.

Never. Let me say it again. We should never respond with an unhealthy fear of God. Listen to what the writer of Hebrews does in Hebrews chapters 12 as he takes this very event that happens in

Exodus 20 and he compares it to something else.

The point, notice Hebrews 12 verse 18. You have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest, a sound of a trumpet.

That's Exodus 20. A voice whose words were made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. That's Exodus 20. For they could not endure the order that was given.

[29 : 38] If even a beast touches the mountain it shall be stoned. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I tremble with fear. The very guy that says don't fear, fears.

But you, that is Christian, in light of Jesus, what do you have? You have come to Mount Zion to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable angels and festal gathering and the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven and to God, the judge of all and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

Oh, somebody say, preach, preacher. Here's the third. The first point is an unhealthy fear of God drives you from him. A healthy fear of God drives you to him. Thirdly, a healthy fear is a fear derived from the gospel.

The whole letter of Hebrews is one of my favorite New Testament books. The whole letter of Hebrews is essentially to ask this one question. Why would you go back when you can draw near? Why would you go back? Why would you ever retreat when you can draw near? And you know what he does? He begins to compare all these things in the Old Testament to what Jesus has done now and fulfilled and now what we have in him.

[31 : 06] I mean, think about the priesthood. Think about the sacrifices. Think about the law. Think about the covenants. And he compares them one after one and one after the other and he makes this point.

Jesus is greater than that and Jesus is greater than that and Jesus is greater than that. And what he's doing here is he's comparing not priesthoods, not sacrifices.

He's preparing two mountains. He's comparing two mountains. One, Mount Sinai, Exodus 20. to what he calls Mount Zion which is what we have in Christ.

And here's what he says. Lord, set us free tonight in this truth. Mount Sinai was a terrifying place. Do you know why Mount Sinai was a terrifying place?

Because Israel was given the law and through the law their sin was exposed in the presence of God's greatness.

[32 : 12] So much so, they wanted to run away and even did. They retreated from God. But you have Mount Zion.

You've been brought to a different mountain. You have something greater. Somebody say, preach preacher. Come on, here we go. Notice it on the screen.

Come on. You weren't given the law that exposed your sin. You were given at Mount Zion a lamb who was slain for your sin.

Track with me. Israel is given the law. The law exposes their sin. Their occupation becomes, a preoccupation becomes their sin.

So much in the greatness of God, what do they do? They run. But out Mount Zion, you don't have a law that exposes your sin. You have a lamb that was slain for your sin, which means you never have any excuse but to draw near.

[33 : 15] Never run away. You should never have an unhealthy fear of God that causes you to want to run from God. You should always have a healthy fear of God that runs to His throne.

The gospel, much more than the Old Testament law, should produce in us a healthy fear of God that is an overwhelming worship of God in response of His greatness and His grace.

It is why the writer of Hebrews says this in Hebrews 4.16, let us then with, say it, confidence, do what?

Draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. in light of the gospel of Jesus, in light of what He has done on the cross and through the empty tomb, there is no reason ever, there is no justification ever for a Christian to have an unhealthy fear of God.

[34 : 21] And it reminded me as I thought about this, about the woman in Mark chapter 5. You remember her story.

She had a bleeding condition for 12 years. According to the law, she's condemned. She's isolated. She can't, she can't, she can't come near.

For 12 years, she's had no friends, no hugs, no love, no hope, and she has spent every penny she has and it has only gotten worse. She is an outcast and she is cast far out unclean.

She hears rumors about a man in town who can change your life forever. One day, she decides while Jesus is in town that she's going to break all the social rules and she'll make her way through the crowd and she'll touch what according to the law can't be touched.

Immediately, that is Jesus. And immediately, her bleeding stops. And Jesus turns, you remember Jesus, who touched me? Who came near?

[35 : 39] Who dared come near the real mountain of God? Here's what happens. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth.

Why this kind of fear? Why this kind of trembling? Because she is a first century Jewish woman who has only had a Mount Sinai relationship with God.

She knows you're not supposed to come near. Who the, do you think you are? You're unclean! You don't get to draw near!

And that was her mindset. And instead of judgment, she gets this. Jesus said to her, daughter, your faith has made you well.

Go in peace and be healed. that's Mount Zion. That's Mount Zion. Mount Zion is come condemned person.

[37 : 03] Come isolated person. Come unclean person. And in Jesus Christ, draw near to the presence of God with confidence.

Not because you deserve it, but because He is great and full of grace. And that woman on that day experienced the mountain of God.

So I ask you, I ask you sincerely, are you a Mount Sinai Christian? Or are you a Mount Zion Christian?

Let me explain and then I'm done. A Mount Sinai Christian is the kind of Christian that's still living under a law-based idea, a performance-based acceptance of God.

You struggle with an unhealthy fear of God because you obsess more about your sin than you do His grace. Or are you a Mount Zion Christian where you know you are not under law, you are under grace and you have received the forgiveness of God and Jesus Christ that you have been fully accepted not based on what you have done but because of what Christ has done and that gives you the confidence no matter what and no matter when to draw near to the throne of grace.

[38 : 33] What breaks my heart and it's still true in my own heart is that many new covenant Christians are still living like they're under the old covenant and it is costing you your freedom.

Draw near. Draw near and any impulse that you have to not draw near to God is the wrong fear of God because as I might remind you tonight there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Faith family here's what I'm saying stop doing the penguin dance. Stop doing the penguin dance. Stop looking at your relationship with God as moving forward worshiping him getting closer things are going well oops I did that I better retreat and withdraw and run away.

No. You have confidence to draw near to the throne of God and what gives you that confidence I'll tell you what gives you that confidence a savior who when it came to the decision as to whether or not to drink the cup of God's judgment or let it pass you know what he didn't do he did not retreat from the wrath of God but for the joy set before him endured the cross and he is all the confidence you need to always draw near and all God's people said amen let's pray Lord thank you thank you for your word to us tonight maybe there's three of us here tonight that needed this I have no idea but I have a feeling there's many of us here that if we're honest we spiritually do the penguin dance we draw close and then we run away and thank you for how the gospel shows us that our response should never be retreat when it comes to drawing near to your throne of grace

[40 : 51] Lord would you rid us by your grace of any Mount Sinai thinking and would you give us Mount Zion thinking the kind of Christian that lives with the confidence not in our own righteousness but in the righteousness of Jesus and because he is our high priest who intercedes for us that kind of confidence to always draw near and I pray we do that right now as we enter into this time of remembrance as we bring our minds attention to the cross I pray that this would be a moment of drawing near to your throne in Christ's name Amen skill skill