

Stand In The Fear Of The Lord

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[0 : 00] Special delight and the work that Yauman and Noriko are doing with international visitors to Vancouver. And I'm very grateful for their ministry.

Liz Puddy, who has come out of nowhere to run our youth group, is doing a wonderful job. And Peggy Friesen is very obviously a gift to us from God. So we have much to be thankful for as a congregation.

It's Pledge Sunday this morning. I'll leave you to work that out.

I want you to look now at Jeremiah chapter 5 verse 22. And it's a great verse and I've looked at it all week.

And I... You know those wonderful movies that you go to and they catch you in the drama of them and they carry you along. And then at the end they cut it off and it's over and you wonder what it was all about.

[1 : 12] And, well, that's what this sermon is going to be like. And my wife told me not to try and change that, just to leave it. And so you really have to help me with this verse to try and figure out what to do with it.

Because there is something that seems contradictory at the heart of it. And I don't know whether we can get through to the other side or not. The verse reads, and Jeremiah is speaking, but he's quoting the Lord when he says, Chapter 5, verse 22, page 668.

Do you not fear me, says the Lord? Do you not tremble before me? And then he gives this magnificent illustration.

But why it's relevant is not easily apparent. But it's a beautiful illustration. He says, I placed the sand as the bound of the sea.

A perpetual barrier which it cannot pass. Though the waves toss, they cannot prevail. Though they roar, they cannot pass over it.

[2 : 24] Well, this verse brings to an end the series in Jeremiah that's been going on since the 1st of October. And the title of the series was A Nation in Crisis.

And that was the nation of Israel to whom Jeremiah addressed his remarks. And it's certainly true of our nation of Canada. It's true of Judah, of Israel, and of Canada.

Last week I talked about the two vagabond sisters, the two harlots, Judah and Israel. Judah was false and Israel was faithless.

Faithless because she ignored the covenant. False because she pretended to keep the covenant. And we concluded, if you remember, with saying that the purpose of God in all this is to establish with his people a new covenant.

A new relationship by which we relate to one another. And this, in a sense, comes out of the frustration that the Lord seems to express in 522 when he says, Do you not fear me?

[3 : 47] Do you not tremble before me? We say, no, I am not particularly. There's other things that concern me and fill my mind.

But frankly, you're not one of them. You have your job and I have mine. You do yours and I'll do mine. And we can ignore each other pretty well. But you see, there isn't the essence of that personal relationship to God before whom we stand, whom we fear, and before whom we tremble. That's not there. That's just not a part of our lives. We are the in-control people. We have it in our hands to do what we want. And that's why Jeremiah announces from the heart of the Old Testament that God is going to establish a new covenant.

And this is how he describes it. And I'm reading from the Jerusalem Bible this time so that you will hear it slightly differently than you're used to it. Deep within them, the Lord says, I will plant my law, writing it on their hearts.

Then I will be their God and they shall be my people. There will be no further need for neighbor to try to teach neighbor or brother to say to brother, learn to know the Lord.

[5 : 19] They will all know me, the least no less than the greatest. I will forgive their iniquity and never call their sin to mind.

Now that's the covenant that God has made with his people. Well, you might say, well, who are his people? Surely not the Israel of the Arab Israel wars of today.

Surely not the church made up of hypocrites, of falseness and faithlessness. Well, in fact, it is.

That's whom those are the ones with whom God has seeking to establish his covenant. How can he do that?

How can we come under the covenant that God wants to have with us? You see, the thing that makes us people of this earth, of this planet, different from clouds and from trees and from birds and cats and dogs and cows and horses, the thing that makes us different is that God calls us to enter into a personal and conscious relationship with him.

[6 : 44] That's the meaning of your life. If you don't have a personal and conscious relationship, intimate relationship with God, then for all you might achieve, you haven't figured out what life is all about.

What is the meaning of our life? That we live in a covenant with God. And that covenant finds expression in our relationship to one another.

I've been warned several times by members of this congregation that the practice of turning and shaking hands with your neighbors is not very acceptable to me. And I don't like doing it.

I know you don't. But I think it's still important to do it. Because the basic covenant with our God needs to find expression in our relationship to one another.

And if you're having trouble with the person in the next pew, that may be an indication that you're having trouble with the Lord. Now, I'm not saying that's true, because naturally you're nice people and you're shy and you don't like doing that kind of thing.

[7 : 59] But it may still be symptomatic of something like that. That we don't have that conscious relationship.

It's a profound relationship which is based on the fact that we're not to be faithless and ignore God. And we're not to be false and pretend to obey him. You see, the problem with the world's religions, and Anglicanism is included, is that they tend to restrict the terms of that relationship.

They tend to put up a cover behind which we can hide. And that we don't come to the place that Jeremiah says we should come to.

And that is, we stand in fear before the Lord. And we tremble in his presence. See, that's highly emotional.

[9 : 04] That's not just a rational thing, is it? That's not just an accommodation with our neighbor down the street. There is a profound emotional, spiritual reality.

That we fear the Lord. And we tremble as we stand in his presence. William Temple has said, when a person says, I believe in God, he ought not to mean that after a careful review of the evidence, he inclines to the opinion that there probably exists a being who may not improperly be called God. That's not what we mean. Temple goes on to say, he ought to mean, I put my trust in God, I am determined to live in reliance on his love and power.

That a Christian trusts in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, in the universal church, in the fellowship of saints, in the promise of the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

That's what it needs to be. So Jeremiah says, this is the question. Do you not fear the Lord? Do you not tremble before him?

[10 : 30] Now, I know that fear, I mean, I tried this at 8 o'clock and I didn't like it. And nobody likes this word fear.

You know, and I think it's because we have a thousand fears already. Why go to church to get another one? You know, what I would like you to think of the church as is a kind of place where you can bargain.

You know, you can bring your fears, all of them, by the wheelbarrow load and dump them here at church and take only, take home only one fear.

And that's the fear of the Lord. You can make that exchange. Perhaps you will make that exchange this morning. I would encourage you to. You see, it's, the problem is, I mean, the New Testament isn't even in agreement with Jeremiah because the New Testament apparently says 75 times, fear

not.

And I'm telling you to fear. But I think they're both true. I think our fears are always of the wrong thing. Because at that point, at which God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, when we draw near to that point, we can be fearful of the wrong thing happening.

[11 : 51] And that's, I think, basically why a lot of people in our society scrupulously avoid going to church on Sunday morning. simply because they are, they're in control of their world.

And they don't want to come into a place where they lose control or turn control over to somebody else. Allow somebody else to do with him whatever he wants to do in his purpose, for his glory, in fulfillment of who he is.

And so, and so we hide rather than to confront the God before whom we are to fear and to stand trembling.

We spend a lot of money and time trying to find a place where we can, in a sense, escape from his presence. We have to stop running.

We have to stop pretending. You know that, that lovely, lovely song which says, Whither shall I flee from thy spirit or where shall I go from thy presence?

[13 : 09] To the uttermost parts of the sea, beyond the dawn, into the darkness. There is no place you can hide from the presence of the Lord.

And the presence of the Lord in some way demands of us fear and trembling. The problem is, and this is what William Temple says again, he says the problem, or what he says in fact is the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.

And that we bring our hearts, the deepest part of our lives, into this relationship with God. The God who establishes the covenant and says, deep within them I will plant my law, writing it on their hearts.

It must take infinite patience for somebody to go to a tattoo artist and have some dragon painted on their back or something. You sit there and allow yourself to be abused by the artist for a long time with his pins and colors and things.

But God has a much deeper work to do in our hearts and we must sit still and allow God to write his law on our hearts so that we're not obeying something that is imposed on us from the outside.

[14 : 37] we are giving expression to something that is deep within us. The law of God which he has written on our hearts. That's what needs to happen.

And you see that's why God wants I mean what we understand is that God seems to want a deeply personal relationship with each one of us.

That at the deepest level of our conscious being we should be in fear and trembling before the Lord. That's what I think he wants there.

Well, now we come to the second part of the chapter the verse which I call the Long Beach picture. Picture Long Beach and you'll be able to understand this.

Long Beach I place the sand as the bound for the sea a perpetual barrier which it cannot pass though the waves toss they cannot prevail though they roar they cannot pass over it.

[15 : 48] It's magnificent, isn't it, to stand on Long Beach and see a million tons of water smash against the rock and break and spray high into the air as these rollers come in from right across the Pacific.

And if you ever got caught in that you would be crushed like a mosquito and even a great 70 foot yacht would be reduced to splinters with this terrific force that's coming in.

But then it's broken and it's subdued and within half a mile as it continues to roll it's reduced into something lovely that even a child can play in at the edge of the sea.

That's what it means when it says I think I place the sand as the bound for the sea a perpetual barrier which it cannot pass and though the waves toss they cannot prevail though they roar they cannot pass over it.

And that you see is a picture of I think of us. We toss and we roar and we pound and we try and break down the limits of our human existence.

[17 : 13] We try and smash them. We try and break out. We think our freedom is to be found in not being contained by anything or anybody.

We discover a great freedom over which we must have control and we're not to be subdued. but you're dealing with the God who can take the mighty rollers of the Pacific and bring them to the place where they serve his gentlest purpose.

That's the God you're dealing with. And so for all your violence and for all your roaring and for all your tossing for all the attempt we make to do it our own way and in our own strength for all that we do that God has set limits and God's purpose is to bring us to the place where we will live within those limits and those limits have been declared by his covenant with us that he will put his law deep inside us.

He will write it in our hearts so that we will live in submission to him. well that's that's what God wants to do to take our our wild and furious and tossing and surging humanity and to bring it into a place of submission and obedience to his purpose of love.

He wants to do that with us and that's what he has done for us but we have to we have to somehow come into it.

[19 : 00] The smashing force and the terrible undertow and the violent surges of our life.

Remember the picture that Peggy painted for us this morning of Christ saying peace be still and the disciples were filled with awe and wonder perhaps even fear.

even the wind and the sea obey him. Jeremiah says stronger than the wind and the sea is the rebelliousness of the human heart and Christ has come to deal with our hearts and to bring us into a place of standing in fear and trembling before him.

well that's what I think this verse is. That's what I think our country needs. That's what I think we need.

There's no use going on in being fearful of a thousand things and disdainful of God. we need to abandon our fear of the thousand terrors that surround us and find the ability to stand before the Lord trembling and fearful and to know his just condemnation falling on us.

You know that's what we need because it's in that place that we discover the forgiveness of God the mercy of God.

[20 : 47] It's in that place where we discover the love of God and that's why I think there's no harm in telling people to fear the Lord because if we don't understand the reason we should fear him we probably won't understand the reason that he loves us and has given his son Jesus Christ to die for us.

I don't think we should be able to say and I know we can but I don't think we should be able to say our father who art in heaven except with a sense of fear and trembling thy kingdom come thy will be done deliver us from evil forgive us as we forgive that if we could just by God's grace recapture that sense of fear and trembling of his law written deep within us written in our hearts then I think I think we would as people and as a nation come within the bounds he has set for us come within the terms of his covenant and it would be our hearts desire it would be the desire from our hearts to serve him and obey him amen him you him you you you you you you you you