

# THE FEAR OF THE LORD PART I

Tim Maurice, prepared for the Presbytery fellowship word, 25 September 2022

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

## **The fear of the Lord and trembling at His word**

I will be speaking to you for the next couple of weeks on the subject of 'The fear of the Lord'. It will be helpful at this time, as the Lord is speaking to us very clearly on a range of matters to gain our attention, and to receive, by His wisdom, what He is saying to us.

By way of orientation, and to encourage us in the way in which we should be hearing, I will begin by considering a key phrase in Scripture, which is 'trembling at His word'.

In the book of Isaiah, the Lord declared, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being", declares the Lord. "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word". Isa 66:1-2.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, 'And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.' 1Co 2:1-5.

Finally, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul exhorted them, 'So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.' Php 2:12-13.

## **What does it mean to tremble at His word?**

'Fear and trembling' is a subject that we need to understand, but what does it actually mean? What is the fear of the Lord actually doing to us? What is it when it comes to us? What does it mean to 'tremble at His word'?

We will begin with 'trembling', and then we will move on to 'the fear of the Lord', and its impact on our repentance.

Let us consider 'trembling at His word'.

We *fear* the Lord when we tremble at His word. That is, when the word comes to us, we recognise that the word is life to us but, equally, that we do not have the capacity within us, inherently, to obey it.

We are, therefore, trembling, because we see, immediately, that we have a problem. We know that we must live by faith, and that the faith of Christ is *sufficient* to take us through the whole of His offering journey.

## **Demonstrating that we are a God-fearer, by receiving and believing His word**

As a righteous person, we are to *live by faith*. This is seen as we do *not* draw back from the fiery eyes of the Lord.

Thus, when the word comes to us, we are identified as God-fearers as we believe the word - and by nothing else!

We are not God-fearers because we feel afraid of going to hell, only - although that is certainly an aspect of fearing the Lord. We demonstrate, daily, and in the ordinary course of life, that we are a God-fearer, *by receiving His word and believing it*.

## **The fire of God burns in His word to us**

Giving ear to another voice is evidence that we do not fear the Lord. It means that we are attempting to service an agenda other than our sanctification to the will of God.

When *the fire of God* visits us, it is because the Holy Spirit is burning on specific issues which the word has identified in our life. This happens from week to week, and day by day. As the word of God identifies something in us, the Holy Spirit begins to burn upon that issue.

Our works, then, as the word comes to us in this way, are to *believe* that word, in the day that is called 'today'. *That* is when He appoints our hearing for that word.

If we hear that word, this will cause us to tremble at the word of the Lord, which is a response of humility and fear. We need to turn from an emotional sense of response, because trembling does not mean that we have an emotional response to the word.

### **Trembling – choosing to receive and believe His word**

‘Trembling’ is our *disposition*, and our *choosing to believe* it as an absolute, and as the life that is saving us today. It is saving our souls *today*.

Every time that the word is proclaimed, we are being offered the opportunity to *receive the faith of Christ* to join His offering, so that we can walk in the victory of His once for all sufferings.

### **Our salvation in the engrafted word**

Salvation is the engrafted word itself, coming to save our souls, at *that* point, over *that* issue that has been identified.

If we refuse so great a salvation, we are foolish, and we despise the instruction of the Lord. The ‘fool’ is not a God-fearer. His end is destruction.

‘The wise man’, on the other hand, fears the Lord and trembles at His word, because he knows that this word is bringing the full salvation of God to Him, today.

### **The culture of fellowship**

This is *knowledge* that we obtain. This knowledge is the evidence that a person has been converted to a *new culture and way of life*.

This culture and way of life is one of living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

This is *the culture of fellowship*.

It is not merely a culture of believing things that are taught.

It is actually that we are *receiving* the word that is calling us into fellowship, and we are *joining* that fellowship.

### **Choosing to remain joined to the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

The proceeding of that word is something in which we *rejoice*.

Satan’s first temptation of Jesus was an attempt to disengage Him from the life that is found in the fellowship of the word.

Adam fell for this temptation and brought the whole of the old creation under the power of death.

As the New Creation, and the Man of perfect love and faith, Christ *chose* to remain joined to the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

After He had been baptised, He went out into the desert. The Spirit led Him out there to be tempted. Christ chose to remain joined to the fellowship of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

### **Proclaiming the word of grace and truth, in fear and in trembling**

The apostle Paul brought this fellowship to every place that he visited, proclaiming the word *in fear and in much trembling*.

He knew that every proclamation of the gospel is a demonstration of the power of God, to salvation. The word is coming to save our souls. This proclamation of the gospel is a daily reality or a daily call to salvation.

Paul did not speak mere words. He proclaimed the incarnate Word, who is *full of grace and truth*.

The word comes with the *grace* to be received by whosoever might *choose* to believe it. That is by the grace of God.

The word reveals the *truth* that Christ is the only way to the Father. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

### **Trembling at the declaration of the word of God – our culture**

We see the significance of trembling at the word of God, at the point when the Lord proclaimed the ten commandments to Moses.

‘All the people perceived the thunder and lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, and when the people saw it, they trembled. When the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But let not God speak to us or we will die”. Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin”.’ Exo 20:18-20.

We note that the people trembled at the declaration of the word of God. Moses told them

that the Lord had come to test them and, also, so that the fear of Him may *remain with them*.

This last statement literally means, 'the fear of Him may be before you'. The Lord desired that the people learn *the culture of keeping the fear of the Lord before their eyes*, or before their face. Rom 3:18. Psa 36:1.

Moreover, this culture was intended to address the people's propensity to sin.

However, the Scriptures record that, because Moses was delayed on the mountain, receiving revelation from God, the people 'rose up to play', and fashioned the golden calf.

Commentators speculate that it was in response to this incident that the book of Hebrews referred to Moses' own experience of fear and trembling. It is speculation, which is interesting, because there is no such reference in the Old Testament.

But we do read in the book of Hebrews, 'And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling".' Heb 12:21.

It is possible - and perhaps more likely - that these words were spoken by Moses in response to *the revelation of the word that he received on Sinai*. In fact, it was the preparation for his receiving that word.

'Fear and trembling' - the apostle Paul quoted these words, which must have come to him via direct revelation. Paul then used the phrase, 'fear and much trembling', to describe the mode of his own ministry.

As we have already read, he instructed the Philippians to work out, or to work on, their own salvation in the same way.

That passage in Hebrews then continued, giving us the context of how we should read those words of where fear and trembling are operative *in the body of Christ*.

'But *you* have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church 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, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse him

who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from him who warns from heaven [via the proceeding word].' Heb 12:22-25.

### **Working out our salvation as we remain joined to His offering in the fear and trembling**

Next week, we will look at being 'warned from heaven'. The subject of 'Warning' is an aspect of receiving the fear of the Lord.

The word that comes to us from the fellowship of Yahweh comes from heaven. It is the prophetic word of the Scriptures 'made more sure' in the word of present truth, which is the proceeding word.

We tremble as this word comes to us from heaven, as recipients of the sprinkled blood of Christ, which is bearing witness to the resurrection life that is available to us in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

We 'work out our salvation' as we remain *joined to His offering in the fear and trembling* which characterises the culture of the city of the living God.

That is our orientation today.

### **Receiving the Lord Himself as 'the Fear of the Lord'**

We will now turn to the subject of 'The fear of the Lord, in repentance'.

We read, 'The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow, let *Him* be your fear, and let *Him* be your dread.' Isa 8:13.

The Lord proclaimed, through the prophet Isaiah, that the Lord Himself is to be our 'Fear.' This highlights an important point; namely, that the ministry of the fear of the Lord involves a *personal and relational encounter with Him*.

The fear of the Lord is not an emotion that we acquire as a result of believing some key concepts or because we prayed and had a special experience.

We, in fact, receive the Lord Himself as 'the Fear of the Lord' when we humble ourselves to Him and tremble at His word.

This is a very real thing. It is not notional, and it is not conceptual.

It is the experience of *meeting the Lord Himself*.

### **‘The Fear of Isaac’; the Lord is our Fear**

This is illustrated in the Scriptures through the account of the resolution of Jacob’s dispute with Laban. There were a number of issues that Jacob and Laban had differences over. Finally, there was ‘a showdown’ and, during the course of that showdown, on two occasions, Jacob referred to the Lord in the very personal terms of ‘the Fear of Isaac’. He referred to the Lord by name, calling Him ‘the Fear of Isaac’. This is one of the names of the Lord.

Jacob said, ‘Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely would have sent me away empty-handed.’ Gen 31:42.

Further on in Genesis we read, ‘Then Laban said to Jacob, “Here is this heap, and here is this pillar which I have placed between you and me. This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.”

‘And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.’ Gen 31:51-53.

He swore by *the name of the Lord* which, in this instance, is ‘the Fear of Isaac’.

The commentators agree that this is very explicitly so. The Lord Himself is referred to personally as ‘the Fear of Isaac’. That is part of the issue that is highlighted to us.

### **Delivered from the fear of death; receiving the fear of the Lord**

The other side of it is that Isaac himself had *received the fear of Lord*, personally.

We know that the Lord became Isaac’s fear when he chose to join, in type, the fellowship of Christ’s offering, submitting himself to his father, Abraham, in faith obedience, to be the Father’s offering.

Isaac was delivered from *the fear of death*, and he received the fear of the Lord as a precious gift, which became the hallmark of his life.

This is for all of us to *receive*, so that we may be *delivered from* the fear of death, to the fear of the Lord.

### **The fear of the Lord is the hallmark of our life**

It is not that we are more ‘afraid’ of Him or of His punishment. It is, rather, that we are actually gripped by the heart, by the Fear of Isaac, in a personal way that becomes ours.

And we know that we know that He is our Lord; and that He is our wisdom; and that He is our fear. This becomes the hallmark of our life.

The fear of death recedes somewhat - completely, you would say - when we *choose to join the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings*.

We, too, are delivered from the fear of death. We can join the faith that is ministered in the Scriptures, that we should ‘fear none of those things’. It is very clearly coming to us in this season that we fear none of those things which are coming upon us in this time of trial and of ‘birth pangs’.

We receive the Fear of Isaac, and are enabled to submit to the Father’s will as being the complete *provision* for our lives. It is the *complete* provision for our lives. It is not partial provision; not provision only when ‘the chips are down’. It is the complete provision from beginning to end, in all facets and in all respects, every day.

### **THE FEAR OF THE LORD, IN REPENTANCE**

Let us consider this subject of ‘The fear of the Lord, in repentance’. I will cover a number of points which will be helpful in illuminating how the fear of the Lord is instrumental in our repentance, and what it should produce.

#### **Point 1. The fear of the Lord confronts us ‘before our eyes’**

‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’ Rom 3:18. This refers to the eyes of the wicked.

‘Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable [or guilty] to God.’ Rom 3:19.

Paul quoted, in verse 18, from Psalm 36 verse 1. We must meet the Lord eye to eye and heart to heart, not drawing back.

This initial engagement is one of *illumination*. We see that we deserve judgement, and that the righteous outcome of that judgement is our *death*. We have to see that.

It is not that we are under judgement and that we merely deserve 'a slap over the wrists.' You and I are *sinner*s who deserve death.

However, that death has been commuted by *the mercies of God*, as we receive *the word of life* that is ministered to us through a messenger, and that joins us to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. That is what mercy delivers to us.

We will establish the reality that mercy has no meaning if there is no judgement. And judgement, meaning condemnation, leads to death.

If there is no judgement, then mercy itself is a rather thin term that really means very little at all.

The righteous outcome of His judgement is our death. Christ Himself comes to us with eyes of judgement upon our sin and iniquity, just as Isaiah experienced. Isaiah, having seen the Lord high and lifted up, and seeing his own sin and iniquity, was 'undone'.

We, too, are overwhelmed. We should be overwhelmed and undone by the contrast between His righteousness and our sin and iniquity. We recognise that we cannot bridge the gulf between these two points of reality. We dread and fear what we deserve, which is death.

We cry out, by the mercies of God, to be saved.

You would agree that a person who has not experienced that in the first instance of their salvation, and who has, at some point, become aware of that reality, has been literally *rescued* - not saved in some metaphorical sense, but literally saved from death.

They have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. They have passed from death to life.

If that is not a potent imprint upon their heart and mind as a Christian, then what does salvation mean to them? What is the meaning of it for us?

### **Point 2. We cry out, by the mercies of God, to be saved**

This cry signals that we are not drawing back. As a result of not drawing back, the *grace* of God enables us to *choose the fear of the Lord*.

As an aside, I encourage everyone to go and read again the Scriptures in the book of Proverbs, which have so much to say about the fear of the Lord and the wisdom of the Lord. In fact, in the book of Job, Job actually declared that the fear of the Lord is *wisdom*.

In Proverbs Chapter 1, we are told to choose the fear of the Lord. Pro 1:29. We are given *grace* to *choose our sanctification*. We are also given grace to choose the fear of the Lord, and to not draw back.

We are not asking, at this point, as this cry comes, to be saved. We are not asking to be delivered from the fear that grips us.

On the contrary, we understand that this fear is *the context and means of our salvation*. Can you hear that? This fear that grips our hearts is the context and the means of our salvation. This does not mean that it does what the blood does not do. The blood, of course, is saving our lives but, without the fear of the Lord, the word of the blood is meaningless.

To receive *mercy* is meaningless if there is no *judgement*, and if there is, therefore, no fear of the Lord.

At this point, our mouths are stopped and we are, as we read in Romans, without excuse. We are guilty before the Lord. We are accountable. We are no longer trying to process our own responses. Stop doing it. The fear of the Lord bypasses our intellect and ministers straight to our hearts.

### **Point 3. We understand the fear of the Lord**

We incline our ears to wisdom and cry out for understanding. Then we understand the fear of the Lord. Pro 2:5. And we begin to receive a proper perspective of the fear of the Lord.

This understanding is, on the one hand, a wonderful and rich and beautiful balm to our hearts, because it brings the illumination of Christ's finished work to us as a personal reality. It comes to us. That is a wonderful thing.

However, it is also a heavy *travail*.

Those two things co-exist. The fear of the Lord is shattering our theology and our conceptual understanding of the word of God.

And it makes the work of Christ entirely *personal* to us. What do we mean by that?

We know that He died for us, personally. We know that our sin put Him on the cross. We look upon Him whom we, personally, have pierced. We are in no doubt about that; no-one is 'twisting our arm'; we do not need persuading on that. We know that that is why we are in the predicament we are in.

#### **Point 4. Wisdom enters our heart**

'For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.' Pro 2:10.

The seven pillars of the fullness of the Spirit of the Lord begin to be built within us as the foundation of our faith. That faith, of course, is the substance of our hope.

#### **Point 5. We demonstrate the fear of the Lord**

We demonstrate the fear of the Lord by not being wise in our own eyes. We begin to be able to demonstrate that we fear the Lord. 'Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil.' Pro 3:7.

We are being *delivered* from being wise in our own eyes which, of course, can be a difficult thing to see when we have been Christians, and have come to church, for a long, long time.

It is very hard to see where we are wise in our own eyes. We do not perceive the difference between being wise, and having knowledge.

But the Lord begins to sweep this away as He speaks directly to our heart in the fear of the Lord. Hallelujah! We are no longer puffed up. We are being delivered from the leaven of malice and wickedness, which comes from the desire to be the source of our own wisdom.

The leaven of malice and wickedness comes from our desire to be a source. If I am a source, I am being so at the expense of someone else, and it thus displaces *them*; displaces *their* perspective.

Of course, ultimately, it displaces *God's* perspective. The fear of the Lord has become *our* wisdom, instead. As I said, Job called the fear of the Lord, 'wisdom'.

#### **Point 6. Hating evil and loving good**

We then begin to hate evil and to love what is good. Pro 8:13. Understanding comes to us and we learn to discern between good and evil. As Paul said, we become wise in what is good and innocent concerning evil. Rom 6:18.

This is not the knowledge from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We are no longer eating from God's tree, trying to prove that we are like God. We have abandoned that. We have been delivered from being wise in our own eyes, and we are now receiving the fear of the Lord as our wisdom.

Therefore, in relation to our own life, our own walk, and our own sanctification, we are becoming wise in what is good and innocent.

This means that we are becoming ignorant, in a way, of what is evil - things that we don't need to expose ourselves to. It is not part of our perspective anymore.

We are no longer sophisticated nor trying to intermesh things so that we can 'stand above everything'. We are quite content to walk things out by the word that proceeds.

#### **Point 7. Coming to contentment**

As a result, the fear of the Lord gives us strong confidence, and we are satisfied with our life. We come to *contentment*. Pro 14:26. Pro 19:23.

We possess a good name, and that knowledge resounds within us as the witness of the Spirit gives us the confidence that comes through *obedience*. We cannot be confident of the ground upon which we are treading in life, if we are a disobedient person.

People who are 'all at sea' and find it hard to work out, 'Should I go this way, or should I go that way', seeming to be confused, or having a veil or a fog over their eyes, do so because they have not found the *simplicity* that is in Christ. They have been beguiled from that.

Not fearing the Lord, they have been beguiled by Satan to eat in order to be a *source* and to be like God, and they are, therefore, *confused*. The source of that confusion is disobedience.

#### **Point 8. Zealous for the fear of the Lord**

So we return to the simple faith obedience of our sonship.

We cease to envy sinners and are, instead, zealous for the fear of the Lord. Pro 23:17. There is much in Scripture about these things.

This zeal is the fruit of our repentance, and is the source of our boldness in testimony. 2Co 7:11.

### **Point 9. Working out our salvation**

As such, we become identified as one who *fears the name of the Lord*. Psa 61:5. Psa 86:11.

We work out our salvation in fear and trembling by knowing how God works within us both 'to do and to will His good pleasure'.

The 'doing' and the 'willing' of the pleasure of God come only through the fear of the Lord.

We cannot source these obedient responses from within ourselves.

The Fear of Isaac Himself – Christ - ministers Himself to us and becomes our fear. This fear is the wisdom of God.

### **OBTAINING MERCY THROUGH REPENTANCE**

So we have examined, in a very brief way, the role of the fear of the Lord in relation to our repentance. And, through repentance, of course, we *obtain mercy*.

We will now look at 'Obtaining mercy'. The testimony of a God-fearer is that they have obtained mercy. This is because they have personally encountered the polarising effect of the word, and have been delivered by the Lord from *the fearful expectation of judgement*.

### **The polarising effect of the word of God**

In the first instance, the polarising effect of God's word to us has two effects.

If we do not receive and believe His word and go His way to *salvation*, we are going the other way, coming under the weight and *judgement* of that word. It is the same word, with two outcomes.

Our first recognition to do with the polarising effect of the word is in relation to *ourselves*.

It is not in observing it in other people. Of course, we may do that; but, hopefully, when we do observe that in other people, it causes us to *fear the Lord*, not to look down on such a person or to become annoyed, or any other thing.

We are to *take heed to ourselves*.

So we have been delivered from the fearful expectation of judgement. In other words, when we have experienced that, we have seen *mercy triumphing over judgement*.

### **Enmity towards God is a worm within us**

To understand how mercy triumphs over judgement is a vital aspect of 'the knowledge of the holy One'.

A person who has obtained mercy understands their utter unworthiness in the face of God's holiness. They know that the enmity within them towards God is great wickedness, like a devouring 'worm' that they cannot kill.

It is only by being *joined to the death of Christ*, in whose body the enmity of mankind against God was put to death, that a person finds reconciliation with God and, therefore, *obtains mercy*.

That worm, that enmity, that devouring element within us that is competing with God and with our fellow man, cannot be put to death by religious means.

We need *the word* to come to us to identify the nature of our repentance, understanding that the judgement of God is upon us if we reject that word.

### **We justly deserve the wrath of God upon us**

However, equally - more than equally - we can be delivered to 'so great a salvation' if we will *believe*.

But we must be very clear that these are the stakes.

'But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him [we shall be saved from the wrath of God *through Him*].

'For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.' Rom 5:8-11.

As God-fearers, we recognise that we justly deserve the wrath of God upon us. I hope that we can understand that, and receive it as absolute knowledge today.

### **We must renounce the hidden things of shame**

You and I do not step out of whatever 'room' we are in right now, to go out into the great

'unwashed community' around us, in some way being inherently superior to other people, except for the *salvation* that has come to us through the mercy of God.

This is not because we have attended church. It is not because we have joined teams and served and done all kinds of other things.

We do know that, at the end, when Christ returns, there will be people who present their resume in a similar way. And He will reject them out-of-hand, because they have *not obtained mercy*. They have not renounced the hidden things of shame. They have held on to their iniquity as their *justification*. And He will cast them into outer darkness by His wrath - the wrath of God.

### **Reconciled to God through the body of Christ**

We *justly* deserve the wrath of God upon us. We have no way of reconciling our sinful self with Yahweh, who is holy.

Our only means to do so is by being *joined to the body of Christ* in whom is our reconciliation with God, and in whom is the salvation of our soul.

'For if we go on sinning wilfully after receiving *the knowledge of the truth*, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgement and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.' Heb 10:26-27.

The 'adversaries' are those who have not received 'the antidote' to the enmity.

This antidote is *receiving the fear of the Lord*, and *being joined to the work of His blood in His body*.

They have not joined that as the operative mode of their lives. They have remained adversaries.

### **How much severer punishment?**

'Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?' Heb 10:28-29.

Will we ask ourselves that question? Can I ask myself that question? How much severer punishment do you think we will deserve?

These ones 'insulted the Spirit of grace' when they rejected the grace coming to them in that moment of the word coming to them. We see examples of this in the polarising of the word, which we will look at in due course.

'For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'

This passage in the book of Hebrews highlights the terror of falling under judgement, without remedy.

### **The terror of judgement ,without remedy**

Now, there is a remedy. There is *always* a remedy.

However, when we reject the Spirit of grace, and we regard as 'unclean' the blood that has been shed for us - because we will not repent in that moment or we will not repent of that which the Spirit is identifying; we regard it as a common thing and we trample it - how much severer punishment do you think that will deserve?

The Lord is speaking to us seriously about these matters. This is not so that we all feel as though we are not saved, but so that we *fear the Lord*.

His *love* for us is too great to allow us to walk, in any way, in a complacent or a presumptuous manner.

Now, we are all aware that, in this season, He has visited us very clearly as judgement has begun to roll across the earth. This passage in Hebrews highlights the terror of falling under judgement, without remedy. This will happen to those who refuse to renounce their iniquity, while still claiming access to the offering of Christ.

### **The corruption of offering; not renouncing iniquity**

That is a very dangerous position to say, 'I will not renounce my iniquity, but I claim that I am a Christian. Christ's death is entirely substitutional. He died for me. I do not have to deal with my sin. He has taken it all.'

We may have theological justification for this position, and may become reactive under the pressure of our integrity being questioned.

However, God is coming to us in this season and saying, 'No more of this. It is not true. This is a false gospel.'



This is *corruption of offering* - not renouncing our iniquity while claiming access to the offering of Christ.

This corruption shuts a person off from access to the mercy of God. They have no personal access to the Mercy Seat, because they have *not obtained mercy*. There is no place of repentance, even though they 'seek it with tears'.

Of course, I am referring here to Esau, who was an iniquitous man, having no regard for his sonship. He threw it away and, then, without accountability, wanted restoration and restitution. He wanted others to minister to his victim mindset. And, of course, that does not work. He had no fear of God, similar to the thief on the cross.

Though a person seeks it with tears, there is no place of repentance. Their tears of self-pity are the result of presumption; they are not the result of the fear of the Lord.

We see that this presumption manifests in the demand for salvation, the demand for rescue, the demand for deliverance.

### **A false gospel – comfort without repentance**

And we see this very clearly in the example of the criminal on the cross. His idea of mercy was to escape his present suffering, *without repentance*. That was his version of what should happen.

And we note that, in the world today, this is very much the prevalent gospel. It is the belief that people should be offered comfort, without repentance.

### **The comfort of God to God-fearers**

But the consolation, or the comfort, of God is ministered only to those who have *joined the fellowship of Christ's sufferings*. That is where our consolation is found.

Otherwise, what consolation are you seeking? You are seeking only what everyone in the world is seeking. So, it is not Christian.

We must come through the narrow way. The other criminal rebuked this man with an important question, asking him, 'Do you not even fear God?' The difference between the two men was that the one who found salvation was a God-fearer.

### **The word polarises**

The two criminals who were crucified with Jesus depict the two responses which represent the polarising effect of the word. And we see that there are two poles, two opposing points; one to salvation and one to judgement.

Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah with respect to this polarising effect. Some people would hear. Other people would never hear. Some people would see. Other people would be blinded. This is the effect and the impact of the word.

Under the pressure of extreme suffering, no person, within themselves, is able to find a remedy or to find reconciliation in what is happening.

When the pressure is too great, no-one can show virtue under that kind of pressure. Either they will confess that they are suffering justly and deserve the judgement of God; or they will demand and feel entitled to God's rescuing them from their trial.

### **Closure is found only in the offering of Christ**

But they will not find, in themselves, any resolution.

And there is an issue that we are all finding and recognising. It is that the desire for closure in all matters of life is quite a wicked thing. It is a wicked *demand*.

We have complete closure, finally, in the once, for all, *offering of Christ*.

### **Being delivered from the fear of death**

Until then, we are to exercise *patience* in respect to every matter of life; and are to *persevere* under trial.

And, as we let patience have its *perfect* work, or its perfecting work, we will find, over time, that we do not lack. We will find that we are overcoming, and that we are knowing victory over difficulties, precisely because, through exercising the patience of the Lord, we are being *delivered from the fear of death*.

### **We are all criminals**

We will either confess that we are suffering justly and deserve the judgement of God; or we will demand that we be rescued.

With respect to the two criminals dying with Christ, we need to see this in the way which the

Lord sees it. As far as He is concerned, we are *all* criminals.

We are *all* transgressors of the Law, and we *all* deserve judgement and death. We are not entitled to eternal life.

### **Salvation is not an entitlement**

It is true that, when we are saved, we have an expectation of eternal life - and we do look forward to that reward. And that is a good thing. It is a right and proper expectation for a son of God to look forward to heaven; to look forward to that day when He wipes away every tear from every eye, and there is no more pain, neither any crying nor any sorrow.

All of those things - all of the former things - are passed away, and He is *making all things new*.

However, our expectation of that should never become a presumption or produce a sense of entitlement.

And this, of course, is one of the stumbling blocks that we encounter if we have been around for a long time; or if we grew up in the church, with the divine nature. We may feel 'entitled' to salvation.

But the Lord is coming to all of us and saying, 'You have no entitlement.'

You *do* have the right to become a son of God by faith, but now you must work out your salvation every day, in fear and trembling. And then you can look forward, with great joy, with great expectation, to being fully united with the Lord. But this not as an entitlement; rather, it is as a reward which, indeed, it is.

So, we are not entitled. Any sense of entitlement within us reveals only that we do not fear the Lord, and that we are presuming upon His offering.

### **Regarding the blood of the covenant as being unclean**

This presumption is an attitude that regards the blood of the covenant as being *unclean*. In other words, from this wicked perspective, the blood *cannot* be 'a fountain for sin and uncleanness', because it is coming to address my sin and uncleanness only insofar as I permit it.

Indeed, if our theology gives us the space and 'the wriggle-room' not to respond to that word, and to

'cherry-pick' that and to say, 'I don't like that word; I don't like the one who has brought that', then we just put it to one side like 'a common thing'; like another device or object which a man might use to satisfy the lusts of his flesh.

### **Having an evil conscience washed**

Now, of course, we can use the word to satisfy the lusts of our flesh.

In this instance, the lust of the flesh can often be the desire to escape from the torment of an evil conscience, without accepting guilt or accountability. No-one wants the torment of an evil conscience.

And we have all, no doubt, heard people talking, sometimes with great anxiety, about their tormented state, because their conscience is evil. It is not bearing witness in the Holy Spirit. They are not finding rest.

And this, again, is a picture of Esau - the tormented - because the conscience is still evil.

The conscience will not be washed, because the person, like Esau, will not accept guilt and accountability, and come to silence.

This means coming to a point where they *cease to defend themselves* anymore. Any defence that we come up with is evidence that our conscience is ill at ease.

### **The wrath of God on self-righteousness**

We must cease to defend our own integrity and our own sense of righteousness. This is only self-righteousness.

When the fear of the Lord is 'before our eyes', our mouths are stopped, and we stand guilty before the Lord.

On the other hand, when we avert our eyes from His gaze, despising our condition, but not our sin and iniquity, we are left with only 'a fearful expectation of judgement'. That is all that we have left.

This expectation will provoke a person to *wrath* and to lash out at the messenger.

In a later session, I will speak about how we become 'a vessel of wrath'.

### **Becoming a vessel of wrath**

We see this occurring in the example of the Sanhedrin, when Stephen addressed them. The

amazing thing is that they did exactly what he described to them.

He said, 'You always resist the Holy Spirit.'

So they resisted the Holy Spirit. But the point that I want to make here and now is that they were, at that point, experiencing *the judgement of God*.

He came to them *in mercy*, potentially, if they would receive the word of the messenger speaking to them.

But, equally, He came to them *in judgement* against their flesh, if they would not receive His word. They refused to receive it. So the wrath of God came more and more heavily upon them; and wrath filled their hearts.

They became *vessels of wrath* who, literally, overflowed with wrath and anger. They would murder an innocent man in the streets, without a second thought.

And we know, equally, that this is what the criminal on the cross did to Jesus. He lashed out at Him with wrath, having no regard for his own predicament, his own plight, which should have been evident to him.

The Pharisees had opportunity to recognise their condition and their plight, but they became, instead, vessels of wrath. Having rejected the ministry of the word through the Holy Spirit, the weight of judgement upon these ones became intolerable. And the enmity within them against God fully manifested itself.

### **Being filled with the wrath of God**

That is the 'devouring worm' that we referred to earlier. If it is not resolved; if it is not answered, as we turn to the Lord in fear toward His word so that we can receive mercy, we are left with our condition, and we are slowly filling with wrath. Sometimes, this occurs not so slowly.

So the wrath within them manifested fully. The fury of their own uncleanness *overflowed in wrath* because this was what they were feeling and what their own hearts had become full of.

The alternative to this outcome is for us to recognise, in the moment of trial, that *we deserve judgement*.

### **Finding a way of escape; finding the mercy of God**

The alternative to responding as a vessel of wrath, of course, is to become *a vessel of mercy* in the moment of trial, under that pressure.

And that will show up things. Bad things will manifest themselves. Peter did not cover himself in glory on the night that Jesus was beaten.

However, it was not for him to go back over that, and to 'trawl over' the inadequacy of his flesh and the ways in which he had failed.

It was for him only to *meet the eyes of the Lord* in that moment, and to begin to *find mercy*.

He did not have to analyse his emotions, and he did not have to try to work out how good or bad his response should be.

He *responded to the messenger*, and *found mercy*.

So, we have to recognise, in the moment of trial, that we deserve judgement. We must find mercy.

And we need a saviour; we need *the Saviour*. If He does not rescue us, we will go out to Gehenna, and will be finished. We are undone. And judgement is our only expectation, unless a way of escape is found.

### **The way of escape is in joining Christ's offering and suffering**

The way of escape is *in the offering and sufferings of Christ*.

As a son of God, we can present our body as a living sacrifice by the mercies of God, today.

That is our privilege, *by the mercies of God*.

If we know that we have obtained mercy, it is the most wonderful joy to present our body to Him, to do the will of God.

These mercies are only substantial to a person, and in a person, who knows that they deserve judgement. This knowledge is given to those who fear the Lord, who have obtained mercy and the witness of a good conscience before God and men.

Next week we will return to the subject of 'The fear of the Lord'. We will go on with some fresh areas on 'the Spirit of counsel' and on 'becoming vessels of mercy and wrath', and one or two other matters.