

✠ Fearing God

- **Anything in scripture that bothers you? When you read, hard to accept, really wrestle with? YES!**
- **Many Concepts we may struggle with, but in my experience we really struggle with scripture that calls us to SURRENDER- to face reality that we are not God, we are not in charge. This gets REAL when scripture confronts US- our behavior, our beliefs... especially the idea that we are ACCOUNTABLE...**
- **Over the years one Biblical truth I've seen people wrestle with is the idea that we should FEAR GOD.**
- **WHY FEAR GOD? If he is GOOD, if he is LOVE, why should we fear him? Does that imply God is mean?**
- **We see fear of God described several ways. Scripture describes LACK of fear of God as core attribute of the human condition, of sin.**

Ps 36:1 *I have a message from God in my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

- **In Romans 3, Paul issues a stinging indictment of the human condition, concluding his case that apart from God's grace, all of humanity is under corrupt and under the power of sin. Paul concludes his argument by saying..**

Romans 3:17-18 *the way of peace they do not know.* "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

- **FEAR OF GOD is also described positively, as an identifying characteristic of those who KNOW GOD...**

Psalms 66:16 *Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.*

- **Finally, FEAR OF GOD is described as the appropriate and wise response to God when we even begin to understand who he is!**

Psalms 96:4-6 *For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.*

- **But what does this MEAN?... To fear god?**
- **C.S. Lewis captures this in the Chronicles of Narnia... his description of ASLAN- Christ character**
 - **He is kind, loving, gentle, sacrificial**
 - **But he is WILD. Not tame. Fierce, powerful beyond comprehension, absolutely just... bound by nothing but his own nature.**
 - **To be in Aslan's presence was to be in the presence of unfettered love, but it was also to TREMBLE. Exchange between the children and Mr. and Mrs. Beaver (Lion, Witch, Wardrobe)**

Susan: “Is he—quite safe?” I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion”... Mrs. Beaver: “If there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.” ... Lucy “Then he isn’t safe?” Mr. Beaver.... “Safe? . . . Who said anything about safe? Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King I tell you.”

† Two Extremes

- **When we think of who God is, a big temptation is to go to one of two extremes**
- **On one hand, GOD AS WRATH. Only emphasize his POWER, our sin, and inevitable judgment. Make no mistake, God’s wrath is real! But if we only see God’s anger against sin without good news of God’s redemption and grace, we are distorting who He is.**
- **OPPOSITE EXTREME, much more popular now, is to try and make God tame. Define God in OUR image, conform Him to our desires, what we want to be true.**
- **We want him to provide for us, and satisfy our need for there to be something greater than us, but without any need for us to surrender**
- **Third option, of course, is to deny God’s existence. Scripture’s reply to this is short and to the point...**

Psalm 14:1 *The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”*

† **A Biblical view of God: He is 100% TRUTH, and 100% GRACE**

John 1:14 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

- **God is TRUTH- truth of His wrath against sin. Truth of justice. Our absolute need for his mercy... As Romans 3:19 says... “so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.”**
- **But God is also 100% GRACE. Without diminishing His truth in any way, God is the God of infinite MERCY. LOVE. Compassion. Forgiveness, and redemption.**
- **God is to be loved, with all our heart, soul, and mind.**
- **But God is infinitely beyond us in his Glory, Majesty, Justice, and Power. Consider image from NAHUM...**

Nahum 1:2-3 The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and vents his wrath against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet.

- **To quote Mr. Beaver... “.... “Safe? . . . Who said anything about safe? Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King I tell you.”**
- **GOD IS GOOD... but he isn’t to be trifled with.**
- **THIS LEADS US TO OUR STORY IN ACTS...**

† **The death of Herod**

- **Left off last week with Peter's miraculous escape from Prison. Herod was at a loss to explain what happened... picking up in verse 19**

Acts 12:19-23 After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed. Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. ²⁰ He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply. ²¹ On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²² They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." ²³ Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

- **Okay, let's walk through this.**
- **Herod heads to Caesarea, port city on Mediterranean coast, north of Modern Day Tel Aviv. This was home of CORNELIUS, and was the seat of Roman Authority in the this part of the Roman Empire.**
- **Herod goes to settle a political crisis. Tyre and Sidon were port Cities in the region of Phoenicia, in what today is Lebanon, near modern day Beirut.**
- **The basic issue is that Herod controlled the commerce and trade arriving across the Mediterranean, and Tyre and Sidon relied on this shipping activity for their economy. Because of some dispute, Herod seemed to be redirecting this trade activity from Phoenicia to other ports, and may have put Tyre and Sidon under an embargo. CRISIS.**
- **SO, reps from these cities head to Caesarea, they manage to curry favor with Herod's advisor, BLASTUS, and a new arrangement is reached.**
- **Our scene opens as Herod- dressed in his royal best (clothing indicating his power and authority)- comes out to proclaim what he has accomplished. Herod is a rock star here- he is the guy who has solved the problem, and he is ready to receive all the credit.**
- **INTERESTINGLY, this conflict, and this scene is recorded in other ancient sources, including what happened next....**

Herod... delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

- **The phrase 'eaten by worms' likely refers to a sudden and severe intestinal disease, by bacteria or literally by worms. The ancient historian Josephus records Herod suffering in great pain for five days before his death- and even Josephus links Herod's demise to his pride and receiving the people's praise.**
- **But LUKE makes it clear. This wasn't just a bad disease, this was an ACT OF GOD. Herod was SMOTE. ALSO, Luke's inclusion of this story here indicates that God's judgment on Herod was also linked to his persecution of the church.**
- **SO! WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS? THREE thoughts**

- † Reality! God will not be mocked. His enemies will be held accountable... by HIM. Meaning, *not* by US!
- **Many Christians- and parts of Christian culture (especially today)... spend a lot of time and emotional energy being angry, bitter, at the world – situation- around us. Maybe at our political leadership, actions of government.... Maybe at moral condition in our country, maybe at the church and Christian culture itself. This goes lots of directions.**

- **Another step... We think... MAN I would like to see them PAY. I would like to see God's wrath on THEM.**
- **In extreme, some people have decided to take God's wrath into their own hands, deciding it's their job to execute justice on God's behalf through violence and intimidation.**
- **CHURCH! It is not given to us to carry out God's justice! God will do this, in his timing! AND, if we find ourselves emotionally compromised- overcome with unhealthy and unproductive anger because of the actions of other people... THIS IS NOT GOD'S LEADERSHIP IN OUR HEARTS! It is our flesh.**
- **RATHER, when we trust God with His justice, we trust GOD with how he is working in other people's lives.. this FREES US for what God HAS CALLED US TO live in the power and influence of Romans 12...**

Romans 12:17-21 ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Our role in overcoming evil? Let God avenge, while we work for what is GOOD.

- **Don't repay evil for evil, or insult for insult. That is status quo these days... if a person harms me, is rude to me, then I'll give the same back. NOT US.**
- **As far as it depends on us, seek and cultivate peace**
- **SURRENDER VENGEANCE TO GOD! For us,**
- **Care for our enemies! Love those we disagree with. Seek to be a builder of relationships, giver of GOOD.**
- **BY DOING SO, we heap burning coals... NOT a picture of punishment... but of repentance.**
- **How do we respond to evil, to what is unfair, to what offends us? WITH GOOD.**
- **THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE apart from the work of God in our life... and when GOD IS AT WORK, when we are led by the spirit, as FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST... next:**

✠ As followers of Christ, we express a healthy fear of God by being people who are HUMBLE.

- **When we are irritated, angry.. when we are want to be the dispensers of God's wrath, THE GREAT TEMPTATION of our flesh is PRIDE - to think we are better than others. The NT speaks in multiple places about the sin of pride, and the virtue of humility... and one of the most convicting examples of this is a parable Jesus told... LUKE 18...**

Luke 18:9-14 *To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'* **JESUS:** "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

- **Friends, when faced with a world that is VERY EASY TO JUDGE, to think we are better... God says... leave that to me.**
- **And Humility isn't just a character trait.. scripture says it is a BLESSING.**

1 Peter 3:8-12 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

- ***We hear it again! God will bring justice on evil. This is not given to us. Do we work to make the world a better place? Absolutely. Do we seek to influence society toward justice and what is right? Yes. BUT IT IS NOT OUR PLACE TO EXECUTE JUDGMENT- either through our actions or attitudes.***
- ***RATHER, as people with humble hearts... We won't return insult with insult, but with blessing. With patience, compassion, and a heart that desires – that seeks and pursues- healing and peace.***
- ***TO LIVE THIS WAY IS TO BE A BLESSING TO THOSE AROUND US! But not only that, when by the grace of God we live with humble hearts, that is a blessed life.***
- ***We have the ultimate blessing of eternity with Christ, but we also will know the BLESSING of living in fruit of the spirit... in the peace, patience, hope, and goodness of Christ, right now.***
- ***One last thought... Luke ends this section with a statement that should bring us great hope.***

Acts 12:24 *But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.*

✠ Hope! The book of Acts and all Christian history demonstrates that even in the face of hardship and what may seem to be insurmountable odds, God's work will prevail!

- ***Is there increasing resistance to the Gospel, Biblical worldview in our culture today? Yes, there is.***
- ***How do we live in response? NOT in judgment, anger, bitterness. RATHER, in love, kindness, seeking peace, being a blessing... and trusting God with how he is at work in this world... because HE IS, and He will do so, THROUGH US.***