

What are you afraid of? That's a question that could generate any number of answers these days. Just a quick glance at the news shows us many options. We've had a summer of devastating hurricanes to our south and raging wild fires to our north. Venues like schools, movie theatres, and, most recently, outdoor concerts have become targets for wicked men. The growing division in our nation at times feels like a powder keg ready to explode. We have bad actors internationally whom mean us harm, and a growing resistance to our faith here at home.

Fear is a powerful force that can have a significant impact on how we live our lives and, left unaddressed, can lead to difficulty and damage. Fear tempts us to act unwisely out of desperation. Fear can cause us to live with a façade instead of as who we truly are. Fear can paralyze us to such an extent that we check out, or make us focus more of our time and energy building a hedge of protection around our lives than actually living the life we've been given.

But not all fear is bad. Fear can also be good thing. Fear of getting in a car accident can cause me to drive carefully and according to the rules of the road. This morning, we're going to look at a fear that followers of Jesus are called to. We continue in our series called *Thriving in Babylon* where we are studying the book of 1 Peter and looking at how we are to live as exiles in a world that is no longer our own. Peter began his letter with a description of the salvation we have in Jesus, and he continues with a prescription of how to live in light of that salvation. And this week we focus on his instruction found in 1:17, where he says **[1 Peter 1:17b] conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.**

The fear Peter is calling us to is fear of the Lord. That's a phrase we often read in Scripture and it's important we know what it means. I polled some of our staff to tell me what it meant to them, and they came up with words like reverence, awe, power, trembling. Fear of Lord is different than the other fears we have already discussed. In fact, a fear of God can be the antidote to the other fears we have. While worldly fears can lead to panic and strife, God's Word tells us a fear of the Lord is wonderfully beneficial. **Psalm 33:8:** Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! **Psalm 111:10:** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. **Proverbs 14:27:** The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

The fear of the Lord is a catalyst to change and an essential practice of an exile. It gives us a proper, humble view of who God is and who we are in light of that; it helps us in times of temptation, allowing us to recognize the consequences of disobedience; and it motivates us to become more like Jesus. Fear is a wholly appropriate response to our awesome Creator and Redeemer. Peter gives three reasons why we should conduct our lives with fear.

Conduct your life with fear, because you have been saved into a relationship.

The wages of sin is death and separation from God. But, as Peter says, God has caused us to be born again as a member of a new family and into a new relationship with God.

[1 Peter 1:17] And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

The great salvation Peter outlines in the beginning of this chapter gives us the privilege of calling God our Heavenly Father and being a member of the family of God. We are unconditionally loved and accepted by our Father and can have an intimate and growing relationship with him

throughout our lives. But with any relationship, there are standards with which we are to conduct ourselves. With the privilege of membership comes the responsibility of obedience.

Peter tells us to fear God not only as Father, but as Judge. We read in v16 that God is holy so we are to be holy. God's perfect standard is holiness. He will not compromise, nor will he let any violation of his standards go unaddressed. God's judgment is impartial. Our position as his children offers us no license or permission to deviate from his perfect ways.

As we fear God as Father and Judge, our life as an exile should look radically different from the world around us. When we trust God, the sanctifying work of the Spirit Peter mentions in V2 changes our affections, priorities, and actions, and conforms our lives to God's standards.

If we violate God's perfect standard, we can expect the discipline of a loving father. Hebrews 12 tells us **"⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."** -Hebrews 12:7-11

God loves us so much, and is so serious about ridding our lives of sin, that he will use discipline. He does so to humble us, to redirect our hearts to his, and to reshape our character to his, because he wants us to share in his holiness.

There will also come a time when God judges each person's work. All our deeds are judged according to God's holy standard, and we will stand before Jesus and give an accounting of what we did with our lives. That thought should induce awe in you. Understand, there is no fear of losing our salvation. If you are God's child, you are his forever. There should be fear, though, of losing heavenly rewards.

Now, some of us might struggle with the idea of God being both Father and Judge. I have a wonderful relationship with my three sons. We have a deep love for one another I thank God for often. We have a blast together, and our house is full of laughter and fun. It's also full of testosterone which means, very often, there's a wrestling match going on. For the record, I still win, though I'm afraid those days are about to come to an end. I believe my boys love me and respect me. They listen to my counsel, engage me in deep conversations, and they are thoughtful about God. They know they are unconditionally loved and accepted and there is nothing in the world that can change the fact that they belong to me. But they also know I have high standards and the expectation they meet those standards. And if those standards are violated, there are going to be consequences. That means the worst thing they could possibly ever hear are the fear-inducing words of Martha when she says, "We're going to talk to your dad about this when he gets home." Now, I'm not a perfect father, so I don't always do it right, but when I do, the consequences I give out are as loving discipline. And even when I get the typical response of

“WHY?!?!”, the answer I most often give them is “Because that’s the standard (holiness), and because I love you (relationship).”

God’s standard is holiness, and he will not let disobedience go unjudged. But God is also a loving Father whose desire is to have an intimate relationship with us and remove anything that would keep that relationship from flourishing.

If your Heavenly Father “came home” right now and looked your life, what would he see? Fear God, as your Father and Judge, and seek to live a life pleasing to him that honors the relationship you have with him and expresses the love you have for him.

Conduct your life with fear, because you have been saved out of futility.

Before we all came to Christ, we were doing things our own way and, for many of us, we thought it was working. The priority of our lives might have been indulging ourselves in all the world had to offer, the tireless pursuit of the idols of success, wealth, fame and the praise of man (or at least a lot of followers on social media). We were both IN the world, and OF the world. And then we had an encounter with Jesus, and God opened our eyes to the realization that those ways we weren’t his ways. Thankfully he doesn’t leave us there. Peter says it this way: Conduct yourselves with fear...

[1 Peter 1:18a] knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers.

Any way of life that you’ve established apart from God is worthless and sinful. Peter points directly at the cultural influence of the day by referencing the “ways inherited from your forefathers”, sinful practices of a pagan lifestyle that were far from the standards of God. We were slaves to that way of life but, through Jesus, we have been set free.

Verse 18 says that we have been “ransomed”. A ransom is the price of redemption, the cost of buying back something that was lost. It is the price paid to set a slave free. In Peter’s day, a slave’s freedom was able to be purchased by depositing money in a god or goddess’s temple. The temple treasury would then pay the slave owner a ransom for that slave. But here’s the interesting thing. While the slave was free from the slave owner, the slave now belonged to the god or goddess of that temple. We have been ransomed from our former way of life.

There is an incredible organization that a few of our Life Groups serve in called Exodus Ministries. This is a ministry to women have recently been released from prison, and it exists for two purposes that illustrate what God has done for us. The first purpose is to help them move on from a sinful, useless and destructive way of life that led to them being incarcerated. They are taught life and faith skills and sent down a new path to live productive and fulfilling life through Jesus Christ. The second purpose is to reunite them with their children, to reestablish the relationship of parent and child. What an incredible picture of our salvation. God saves us from a broken and useless way of life to reunite us with him, to bring back into relationship the parent, who is our Heavenly Father, and us, his children.

How different does your life look now as compared to what it looked like before you knew Jesus? There should be a difference, and that difference should be growing. **2 Corinthians 7:1** says “**Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement**

of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.” We are not expected to live perfectly the moment we trust in Christ but, as exiles, we should be progressing in holiness, set free from the useless and empty ways of our past. Our salvation is more than just forgiveness. It is a new way of life, lived in obedience to God, made possible by the work of God. When we fear the Lord, we are refocused and recommitted to living in that way.

Conduct your life with fear, because you have been saved at a great price.

While I love the picture of Exodus Ministries, there are a couple big differences. In our story, it's the child who is wayward and in need of rescuing. Secondly, these women had to pay the price of their freedom themselves. They had to serve time as a penalty for their mistakes. And their time in prison satisfied the debt they owed for their crimes. That option is not available to those who fall short of the glorious standard of a holy and just God.

**[1 Peter 1:18b-19] You were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold,
¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.**

The price tag affixed to our eternal souls should constantly send us into sticker shock. While the slaves in Peter's day could be set free by what the world considered precious at the time, with payments of gold and silver, those things are considered worthless in the Kingdom of Heaven. Our ransom was nothing less than the life of God's only begotten Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. God paid that ransom to set us free from the bondage of sin and death, and in so doing, took ownership of us. We now belong to him.

Stories of great sacrifice have always been moving. It's why we esteem those who endure hardship while committing their life to a noble cause, why we honor our military and first responders, why we are inspired when we see someone give a generous and sacrificial gift. But all of that pales in comparison to what God has given for us. If we truly take the time to consider that, we won't be able to help but be in reverent fear; fear that God's justice would require such a payment, and fear that God's grace and mercy would willingly make such a payment.

I had a conversation this week with a lady who is mature in her faith. We were discussing this passage and she paused, and with tears in her eyes, she told me her greatest regrets in life were when she willfully and knowingly disobeyed God. The regret wasn't because of the discipline or difficulty that followed. Her greatest regret came when she realized how lightly she took that which came at such a great cost. Rather than being inspired to live like her Savior, she took the certainty of her salvation as a license to sin. And in the process, she cheapened that which God considers precious. But now she lives with a reverent fear of God that generates a deep desire to please God and honor the price he paid for her salvation.

To live according to our former, futile ways is to live contrary to God's will and to diminish the value of Christ's death. But fear that marvels at, and is eternally grateful for, Christ's sacrifice on our behalf is the fear God uses to transform us. We can't help but become different when we take to heart the incredible sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf. Sitting in awe of what God has done changes our affections and moves us to live a life pleasing to him and worthy of the sacrifice he made for us. And if that still doesn't convince you, Peter has one more thing to say.

[1 Peter 1:20-21] ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

When sin and death entered the world through Adam and Eve, God was not caught flat-footed. God did not have to scramble or call a Messianic audible. Jesus was not Plan B. God knew the complete program of redemption before the foundation of the world was laid. That foreknowledge not only included Jesus but, according to v2, included you. The death and resurrection of Jesus was not just some distant, isolated event from history long past. We can almost lose the magnitude of Christ's work on the cross when we say it was for all the world for all time. Because, while Christ died for all of us, he died for each of us. Christ died for you!

To live faithfully as exiles, that is the truth that must be in our minds and on our hearts constantly. Fear of God keeps our eyes on Jesus, keeps us focused on his call in our lives, and sets us free from the temptations and threats of this world. A fear of God isn't characterized by terror and panic but, instead, faith and hope. If you fear God, you have nothing to be afraid of.

So I can't think of a better way to end the service than to sit in reverent fear of our Lord together. Let's bow our heads and take some time to consider how awesome he is, how awesome his salvation is, and how awesome of a price he paid to redeem us back to himself.