



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH
FAIR OAKS RANCH

Day 2: A Fear That Frees from Fear

Exodus 20:20 *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.” (ESV)*

DEVOTIONAL

There is a bit of a riddle sitting in the middle of this verse. Israel stands at the foot of Mount Sinai that is wrapped in smoke and fire, the ground shaking, and as one might imagine the people are terrified. Into that terror, Moses says something that sounds somewhat contradictory: “Do not fear... that the fear of Him may be before you.” In one breath he tells them to stop being afraid and immediately to start ‘fearing.’ So which is it?

The answer is that the Bible speaks of two very different kinds of fear, and this setting puts them side by side. The first is the raw dread of a guilty creature bracing for judgment. Coming face to face with the ‘all-consuming fire’ that is The Lord. (Deuteronomy 4:24). This is same panic that made Adam and Eve hide themselves among the trees. This fear is what drives us away from God as well. The second word for fear, yir’ah (examined yesterday), is reverent awe, the holy honor that draws us near and keeps us from sin. One is the fear of the guilty before a righteous judge; the other is a trembling awe when standing before something so large, beautiful and all-consuming that you will never be the same because of the experience. As Israel stood before the power and beauty of the smoke and fire of the Lord, they had to choose which fear would consume them.

Oswald Chambers captured the strange freedom of this second fear: “The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear Him there is no need to fear anything else; whereas if you do not fear God at some point you will come to fear everything else.” When reverence for God takes its rightful place, every earthly fear loses its grip — the fear of man, of the future, or of what people think. A soul that trembles before God stands unshaken before everything else.

Notice the purpose of this fear: it is to be “before you, that you may not sin.” The fear of the Lord is not a Sunday feeling; it is meant to stand guard in front of your thoughts and actions all week as a holy awareness of God’s presence that steadies you in moments of temptation or doubt. Purity is protected not through gritted teeth but in a heart filled with reverence that sin simply loses its appeal, crowded out by awe.

TAKE AWAY

Do not be afraid of God, be inspired by Him. Keep His holy presence before your eyes, and you'll find earthly fears, and old temptations, losing their power.

PRAYER PROMPT

Ask God to let a reverent awe of Him stand before your heart and mind today, so every lesser fear grows quiet.