

“God is Awesome”

Luke 21:5-28

Prov. 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Fear has multiple meanings. Jesus tells all who will listen that terrible and fear-filled days are coming. "Nation will rise against nation . . . There will be great earthquakes . . . There will be terrors and great signs from heaven."

Anyone who says that God has promised long life, liberty, and the guarantee of happiness if you act a certain way or pray a certain way or live a certain way is promising more than even a politician would dare speak. There is no place in Scripture where God has made promises of emotional fulfillment, long life, happiness, or abundance for you in this life. Anyone who is saying otherwise is calling Jesus a liar.

Jesus says that before the end comes, "they will lay their hands on you and persecute you . . . some of you they will put to death . . . You will be hated by all for My name's sake." But here is the key, "not a hair of your head will perish." "Some of you will be put to death . . . But not a hair of your head will perish." How can that be? That doesn't seem to go together.

We pray for the last days to come. We pray for Christ to return. And, hearing His words, we do this with great fear. There is no victorious, abundant life promised here on earth. God's promises always

have to do with eternity. Our victory comes in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting where not a hair of your head will perish. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

It has been asked, why would a Christian fear a forgiving and loving God? Think about what we stated earlier in our liturgy, from Ps. 130, "If You, O Lord, kept a record of sin, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared."

Forgiveness creates the fear of the Lord. How can that be? That doesn't seem to go together. One of the chief attributes of original sin is that, having been born spiritually blind, dead, enemies of God (as we discussed at length last week), we humans are not born with a fear of the Lord. This is why, by nature, we are inclined to and willing to do evil (even when we know that it is wrong). Because, ultimately, our Old Adam does not want to believe that God has the authority to bring consequences.

However, as I said, fear has multiple meanings. It is not simply to be "shaking in your boots" afraid. Ultimately, fear can be understood to be synonymous with faith. Fear means to have a reverent awe of the majesty and authority of God. We are to "fear, love, and trust in God above all things" (as we learn in Luther's Small Catechism). "We fear God above all things when we revere Him alone as the highest being, honor Him with our lives, and avoid what displeases Him" (also from SC).

Why do we fear Him? We fear Him because He is present and has authority that we, as the people of God, recognize. The fear of the Lord does not come until there is faith. The fear of the Lord comes with faith. You can't really separate the two. The Law convicts us and shows us

there are consequences for being a child of Adam. Yet, the promise is sure: “Not a hair of your head will perish . . . Your redemption is drawing near.”

He comes with a gracious gift. When you are feeling like a poor, miserable sinner, when you are feeling worthless or terrified, do not settle for pop culture emotional medicine. The world tells you, “Don’t worry. You are fine. You are awesome.” When I am feeling worthless or miserable, do not tell me that I am fine. And do not tell me that I am awesome. I need to hear that I am loved and forgiven.

Yet, this loving and forgiving God comes as being terrifying and truly awesome. When you here that God is described as awesome, you have to think “Old School.” Do not think of it the way the word gets used today. God being awesome does not mean that He is really “cool” or “exciting.” Any dictionary 100 years ago would tell you that to be awesome means to be totally terrifying and awe creating – to the point of overwhelming you.

Think about visiting the Grand Canyon. You look out over the amazing and wondrous nature of creation. You are not really in awe of it (in the Old School sense). Standing on the safety of the trail or designated lookout spot, the canyon is not awesome in the classic sense. You can be amazed and impressed by the vast power that must have been needed to carve this out – like the power of a worldwide flood. But technically, you are not in awe of the Grand Canyon – until you walk out, past the security fence, to the very edge and look down.

When you look at the reality that there would be consequences for taking one more step, what you are feeling at that moment is what makes

that place Old School awesome. That is fear. And when someone grabs you and pulls you back from the edge, that is the simultaneous fear and love of God of which Luther speaks repeatedly throughout his catechism.

The Law of God causes us to look with awe at the consequences of being a child of Adam. Jesus is the one who has pulled you back from the edge. He says, “No harm will come to you. I already took that step for you. I already suffered the consequences of the guilt of your sin. I have already endured the fullness of the wrath of a terrifying and awesome God. I have the scars. ‘Not a hair of your head will perish.’”

This is why, on Reformation Sunday, I said that Satan is happy when God is thought of as “The Big Guy in the Sky” and Jesus is the guy in flowing robes and sandals who teaches you to be the best you that you can be. Satan is happy when people do not “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Satan is happy when God’s Law is said to be a bunch a rules for Christian living or rules that you must obey in order to be a “good Christian.” Satan is happy when the real Gospel is hidden, the good news that Jesus Christ suffered, died, and took the consequences of confronting the awesome God for you.

Every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Everyone must confront this terrifying and awesome God who has demanded that His Law be kept perfectly. Jesus says, “I took that step for you. His punishment for you that you deserved, I took upon Me. I chose to stand between you and the righteous judgment of an awesome God. Not a hair of your head will perish. Amen.