

THE FEAR OF GOD AND THE LOVE OF GOD



Two men were hanging on crosses on either side of Jesus as he was dying on his cross. You could say that these two men represent the entire human race.

- They were dying as we all are.
- They were moving toward a destiny beyond this life ..

... as we all are.

One of these two men remained hard to the last. The other came to his senses and responded to a voice within his soul which had been speaking to him for a long time....

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying,

"Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said,

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Luke 23:39-43

One man hanging in the presence of the Lamb of God who at that moment is taking away the sin of the world, looks at Jesus and sees nothing but a dying fool. *"Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us! Ha!"*

This man is in the very presence of holy love, yet utterly blind to it.... blinded by the fact that he has destroyed his own sense of the holy. For him there is no god, no justice that will ever call him to account. *"You take your chances ... you make your way through an absurd world, and that's it!"*

The other man hanging in the presence of the Lamb of God begins to see something which gives him hope. He sees because there is still alive down in his soul a sense of the holy.

**He knows that there is justice in this universe
...that sooner or later you do reap what you sow.**

"Do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation. And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Suddenly heaven opens on this dying criminal as Jesus fixes his suffering eyes on him and says, with the same authority which healed the sick and raised the dead,

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."



Jesus was promising this man a life beyond the grave ... a life on the other side of death which will bring this man back to where Adam was before the fall ... Paradise.

But the Paradise Jesus promised this man actually began the minute Jesus spoke to him.

- Paradise begins on *this* side of the grave.
- Paradise begins here *in this world* while we still walk around in these bodies of flesh and blood.

You are in Paradise when you know, absolutely know, that God loves you ... know this, not as a theory, but personally that God knows you by name...

- walks with you,
- suffers with you,
- guides you,
- protects you,
- provides for you.

When you know God like that, you are with Jesus in Paradise.

- You're walking and talking with God.
- You see God's hand at work.
- You behold God's glory even in the midst of this sordid world....

... even in the midst of your suffering, you hear his voice ... you are continually refreshed with God's peace.



And when you are in such communion with God, when you have such certainty of his love, then it becomes possible to live the Sermon on the Mount, to walk in Jesus' steps. You are so filled with thanksgiving to God for his goodness to you....

- your heart overflows with holy generosity,
- you see with a generous eye,
- you listen with a generous ear,
- you begin to open your hands as God opens his to satisfy the desire of the hungry, thirsty souls around you...



... that's Paradise.

Paradise is to know that God loves you ... so clearly that your heart is enflamed by that love, and your actions toward other people are driven by that love.

"Ah, but how do I get there?" you say. "If such a Paradise is achievable in this life... if I can actually come into such a place where the love of God is that real and has that kind of power over my thinking and living, show me the way!"

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

But the other rebuked him, saying,

"Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

... "Do you not fear God?

Don't you see that we're getting what we deserve?

We're reaping what we've sown!"

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

The man did two things:

He feared God.

He threw himself on the mercy of Jesus.

Then Paradise opened its door and he was surrounded by the love of God.

To this day, the way into Paradise remains exactly what it was for the thief on the cross.

Step 1 We learn the fear of God.

Step 2 We throw ourselves on the mercy of Jesus.

1. We Fear God.

Nobody enters into the love of God ... knows that love ... is healed and changed by that love until he or she learns to fear God.

Before Moses could draw near to God at the burning bush, he first had to take off his shoes. He had to learn how you behave when you stand on holy ground.

Before Joshua could walk under the mighty protection of the God, he had to take off his shoes. He had to learn respect for the holy.

Before Isaiah could be a prophet, his tongue had to be cleansed by the burning coal from heaven's altar.

Before Peter could be a fisher of men, he had to fall on his knees in the boat and confess his sin before a holy Lord.

The first petition of the Lord's Prayer is,

***"Hallowed be thy name"
... may your name be kept holy by me!***

And this is the missing element not only in Babylon out there, but in large segments of the professing church...

....no fear of God,

....no sense of the holy...

An arrogant blindness even among professing Christians to the fact that...

God is not mocked.

We will reap what we sow.

God will have the last word.

Our Lord always connected his message of love with...

a call of repentance,

a call to fear God,

- because the other side of salvation is condemnation,

- because the other side of God's mercy is his judgment.

***And I only come into his mercy...
... when I stand in awe of his judgment.***



In the meantime, when so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear him!"

Luke 12:1-5

There is only one being in the universe who has the power to cast into hell ... and that's God.

And Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world warns us, warns us to fear him. He's saying, *"The Pharisees practice hypocrisy because they have no fear of God. One day God will uncover them ... there is nothing covered that will not be revealed."*

"But you," he says, "fear God and you will never be a hypocrite. Moreover, the minute you fear God, you will also begin to taste God's love."

***"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?
And not one of them is forgotten before God.
Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered.
Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows."***

Luke 12:6-7



Fear God and you won't be afraid of anything else.

Fear God and immediately you will taste God's love.

- The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
- The fear of the Lord is the first step into Paradise.

2. We Throw ourselves on the mercy of Jesus.

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Having seen that God is calling me to account and that there is a debt of sin on me that's enough to drive me into the outer darkness,

- that I'm already beginning to reap what I've sown,
- that my judgment of others is coming back on me,
- that my selfishness is coming back on me,
- that every layer of hypocrisy in my life is beginning to show through

There are only two options left ... either I pay, or the Lamb pays for me. Either I reap the consequences of all my greed, my deceit, my attitudes, my bitter words, my petty ways, or the Lamb takes all this on himself and washes it away in his blood.

***"Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise....
"Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven."***

And this throwing ourselves on Jesus' mercy is not a once-and-done act at the beginning of our walk with him ... it's our life ... it's a step we take again-and-again as his light keeps searching our hearts and showing us what's there and what needs to change and what needs to be cast out.

- Every time our repentance is real,
- Every time the break is clean,
- Every time we truly abandon ourselves to him...



**...Jesus brings us into Paradise ...
... into a place where we know the love of God.**

Where that love rules our lives and overflows with healing grace to the lives we touch.

Whenever we seek the Lord's presence, alone in our room with the door shut....and whenever we come together with other believers in his name...

...We need to see that Jesus is still the door for us into Paradise...

... The door into a life of endless and wonderful communion with God ...

If we will take two simple steps:

1. Fear God enough to repent before him in some specific way, some specific thing which we know needs to change.
2. Throw ourselves on Jesus' mercy, "Lord, remember me, restore me, help me!"

Take these two steps, and the door will open.

We will find ourselves surrounded and filled and moved and changed...



....by the love of God.

Prayer: Holy beloved Lord, We want to know your love to the depths of our souls. We want to experience your Paradise now. We want to know you, walk with you, talk with you. We want to behold your glory and to be refreshed by your peace. We want to be so full of you, that our hearts overflow with thanksgiving and holy generosity. To do this, may we fear you in the way you should be feared. May we stand in awe of your Holy judgment. May we take off our shoes, fall on our knees and hallow your name. We throw ourselves upon your mercy. Oh Christ. Search our hearts, expose and cast out whatever separates us from your Holiness. We abandon ourselves to your cleansing. May repentance be our life so we can commune with you. Oh Holy, Omnipotent, Loving Savior, surround us, fill us, move us, change us with your love. Amen.

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THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN