

## Famous Last Words #4 - "Don't you fear God."

We have been looking at the last words of Jesus as He hung on the cross when He died for our sins. Today as we finish this series we are going to also look at the last words of the two thieves that were crucified with Him.

Luke 23:39-43, *"One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'we are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'"*

These two men had very different things to say. One was hurling insults at Jesus and the other evidently believed in Jesus as he asked Jesus to remember him when He came in His kingdom. Which is quite remarkable when you think about it.

Even though the thief sees Jesus nailed to a cross the same as him he still accepted Him as the Christ, the anointed One of God. **Remarkable**, would I have had that kind of faith?

There are a number of things in this passage that I want to look at today. The one fellow said to the other, *"Don't you fear God?"* We are told many times in the Bible to *"fear God"* or *"fear the Lord."*

Deut 10:12 says, *"What does the Lord require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord."* So we see that to "fear the Lord" is actually **required** along with instructions to love and serve Him.

And Eccl 12:13 tells us our obligation is to, *"Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."* If to "fear God and keep His commandments" is our whole duty, it is important for us to know what it means.

**Definition:** The fear of God is an awesome respect or reverence growing out of the greatness and power of God. To revere God as we ought, it is critical that we understand His nature.

In Job 37 we learn a basic reason why God is held in reverence--because of Who He is: *"God is clothed with awesome splendor and majesty. The Almighty--we cannot imagine His power. He is great in justice and abundant righteousness in His dealings with men. No wonder men everywhere fear Him!"*

In reality we would like a God who is comfortable and pleasant - like a friend we can introduce to our friends and neighbors. We like the side of God that is loving, gracious, merciful, and forgiving.

But there is a bigger picture - God is awesome, a consuming fire, Holy, a judge, just, and to be feared. It is not a comfortable picture of God but it is God all the same.

There are **things we don't need to fear God about**, we don't need to fear that God will let us down, or that He will not be faithful, or not fair, or not forgiving. But we do need to have a true view of Him.

Hebrews 12:28-29, *"Worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire."*

When God is working in us we should know it, we should be uncomfortable with our sin. If you have no fear of the Lord then sin doesn't make you uncomfortable in the least. It is high time we became uncomfortable with our sin.

We need to allow Him to show us things we need to deal with otherwise we may have to deal with the **reason** the Bible says to "Fear God."

In the Chronicles of Narnia, **C.S. Lewis** in trying to symbolize what it means to fear God so he portrays the Lord Jesus as a lion as does John in Revelation the 5th chapter.

The lion in his novel is a figure that is fierce and powerful, yet tender. His splendor is dazzling. His wrath is terrible, yet His love and tenderness are infinite. To be in His presence was awesome.

Quoting from his novel: *"As the Lion passed by they were terribly afraid He would turn and look at them, yet in some queer way they wished He would." Then the question was asked of someone who know the Lion well, "Is He safe?" And he answered, "Safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course He isn't safe. But He's good. He's the King, I tell you."*

This is a message we need to hear today. How irreverently we treat God! The third commandment tells us not to take God's name in vain. Among other things this means don't use it lightly, loosely, or irreverently.

There's a difference between saying God is our friend and saying He is our "**Good Buddy**". Think of it this way: You might be comfortable meeting with the head of a nation, say like, Russia's **Putin**, but you wouldn't put your feet up on his coffee table and call him by his first name. "*Hey **Vladimir** how's it going babe?*"

Why wouldn't you do that? Because it shows a lack of respect and we certainly should respect our Lord more than any head of state.

Our **motivation** for fear grows out of an understanding of **Who** God is, because an understanding of the character and attributes of God motivates respect and reverence. This Godly fear also shows itself in several areas:

Some people embraced Christianity originally because they are afraid of going to **hell**. Hopefully they grow from that point and that isn't the only reason they seek salvation but it is this fear that has driven a lot of people through the church doors.

We tend to picture God as a kindly old **grandfather** who'd never send anyone to hell. This is the modern day politically correct sentimental God and not God as He really is.

Have you ever thought about this? Wild animals rarely get jealous. One **chipmunk** doesn't get jealous of another chipmunk. The number one emotion among wild animals isn't vanity or happiness: it's fear. Fear is everywhere in the animal kingdom, because fear is a great way to stay alive.

So wild animals are always vigilant that a bigger and more aggressive animal doesn't catch it off guard and kill and eat it. Some are really fast at getting away and others are good at camouflage.

Just think, what if a chipmunk had the ability, somehow, that every time a predator looked at him he would see a huge **grizzly** instead of what he really was – a little defenseless chipmunk?

In a way that is what happens to us when we become a Christian. Revelation 12:10 says, "*For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.*"

So when **Satan accuses** me before God, day in and day out, of being a sinner, when he says, "*Look, look, what he's doing, he is a sinner!*"

And Satan is right, I am a sinner and what defense do I have, what can I say, what can I do? How can I overcome what Satan is saying when what he is saying is true! “O, *woe is me!*”

But wait a minute; the passage in Revelation goes on to say in verse 11, “*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.*” So, I imagine God’s head slowly turning to look in my direction but instead of seeing me, He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ who has stepped between me and Satan to protect me from Satan’s accusations.

And God turns back to Satan and says “*I see nothing wrong.*”

**When we are in Christ,** Hidden in Christ, and when the Father looks upon us He sees the righteousness of the Son because it has been attributed to us. We are clean, we are pure, and we are a holy people who can now gain access to the Father through Christ.

I would like to suggest that the Church become a place of terror again; a place where God continually has to tell us, “**Fear not**”; a place where our relationship with God is not a simple belief or a doctrine or theology, it is God’s burning presence in our lives.

The **tame politically correct God** that many of us serve needs to be replaced by the real God whose very presence shatters our egos into dust, burns our sin into ashes, and strips us naked to reveal the real person within.

The Church needs to become a gloriously dangerous place where nothing is safe in God’s presence except us.

**Nothing**--including our plans, our agendas, our priorities, our politics, our money, our security, our comfort, our possessions, or our needs.”

If our whole duty is to fear God and keep His commandments like Deut 10:12 says then it is important that we know what He wants us to do.

It is especially important when it comes to salvation. What exactly does God want us to do when we accept Him as our Savior?

And yes, there are certain things you need to do. The bible tells us that we are saved by faith but how does that play out in our lives?

Now, I think everyone here believes in the **Permanent Fund** – it’s great – it’s for our benefit. But just because you believe in it do you automatically get it? No. You have to fill out the form, answer a few questions – you have to follow the process that has been set up by the state.

Do you “earn” over a \$1,000 by filling out that one page? No, you don’t earn it – the few minutes it takes you to fill it out isn’t worth \$1,000 to \$2,000, but you **won’t get anything** if you skip filling it out. Do, you see where I’m going with this?

There are certain things God expects of us as part of having faith – by doing these things we don’t “earn” salvation but that doesn’t mean it is okay to skip them.

Would we still be saved if we don’t do these things? Maybe, thank goodness it’s not up to me, but **why would anyone want to take a chance?**

Let me ask you *“Do want to face God, who is a consuming fire, some day, and try to explain to Him that you just thought you would skip what He asked you to do.”* Like the thief on the cross said, *“Don’t you fear God?”*

Do you think that these things He went to the trouble of putting in the Bible were **optional**? And what if they were - but you knew that He wanted you to do them would you be willing to tell a mighty and all-powerful God *“I knew You wanted me to do those things but I didn’t love and respect You enough to do them.”*

Okay, I think we see the importance of doing what He asks of us, **so what does He ask of us?**

Let’s look at this question from the point of view of a person who wants to become a Christian and what they should do.

**1.** The first thing he or she discovers that they have to do is they absolutely have to **have faith**, faith is another word for believe. They had to believe.

Hebrews 11:6, *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him **must believe** that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”*

In Acts 26:17-18, the apostle Paul was on trial and was explaining to King Agrippa what had happened on the road to Damascus and what Jesus told Paul at that time.

Jesus told Paul, *“I am sending you to open people’s eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are **sanctified by faith (belief) in me.**”*

And Romans 5:1 says, *“...we have been justified through faith (believing).”* **What does “justified” mean?** It means you have been **“made right”** with God. You believe and have been made right with God which is another way of saying, **“you are now saved.”**

Praise God and give Him the glory, but wait a minute, I want you look at another passage from Romans. Romans 1:5 where the apostle Paul also said, *“Through Jesus and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people... to the **obedience** that comes from faith.”*

To the obedience? What obedience? **What is it Jesus wants us to obey, to do?** Real faith, faith that justifies you, that saves you, leads you to obey whatever Jesus would like you to do.

What should our attitude be? It should be, *“Jesus, Son of God, You who suffered and died for us so we could be made right with God, what is it you want me to do.”*

So we are to believe what else would the Lord like us to do?

**2. Confess.** The bible uses the word “confess” two different ways when it says we should confess.

Romans 10: 9-10, *“If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”*

Here the word “confess” is used in the sense that **you tell everyone**, you “say it out loud”, and you let everyone know what it is you believe. That Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for your sins and that you accept Him as your personal Savior.

Mark 8:37-38, *“What can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.”*

The second way it is used is you **tell the Lord** your sins, you confess your sins to Him.

1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

**3. Repent.** The Bible doesn't just say we should, **it says we must,** it commands us to repent. Acts 17:30-31, *“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now **He commands all people everywhere to repent.** For He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead.”*

In Acts 26:20 is what Paul said he told the people, *“I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”*

**What does it mean to “repent”?** Repentance is literally a change of mind, a change of the whole personality from a sinful life to the desire to live a godly life. You now want to live your life the way God wants you to live it.

You have a deep sorrow about the things you did that you know are wrong, that were a rebellion against the way God wants you to live. When you get right down to it that is what **sin is, rebelling against God**, doing what you know He doesn't want you to do.

**4.** Is there anything else that Jesus would like us to do? From what we find in the New Testament it appears that He wants us to join Him symbolically in the death, burial and resurrection by being **baptized.**

After Jesus ascended into heaven the very first time someone asked what they needed to do to be saved, to be forgiven for crucifying Jesus upon the cross, what were they told?

Okay, let me set the stage for you, the Holy Spirit had descended upon the apostles in Acts the second chapter and they begin to tell everyone about Jesus Christ and how they had crucified the very Son of God.

And the people were listening to Peter and were convicted by what they heard and the bible said they were *“cut to the heart”* and asked Peter what *“can we do?”*

And Peter told them in Acts 2:38, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

They obviously already believed because they wouldn't have cared about what to do if they had not believed.

Now, that is what Peter told them to do, what happened after that? Acts 2:41, *“Those who **accepted** his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”*

Wow, what a spectacle that must have been, 3,000 people being baptized in one day. **3,000 people showed that they believed** and had **accepted** Jesus as their Savior by being baptized.

In Bible College we were required to take two years of **Greek** because the New Testament was written in Greek and we needed to be able to study the words of the Bible in the language it was written in.

After going through the Greek classes I was very curious about what people were told to do in the New Testament when asked the apostles what they needed to do to be saved and what they actually did.

So I went through the book of Acts in the original Greek to make sure I didn't miss anything and I looked at every time someone got saved and what exactly did they do. I found in every case, without exception, they were baptized.

For instance in Acts 8:12, *“**When they believed** Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, **they were baptized**, both men and women.”*

Now, I want to wrap this all up. **You are one of the two thieves.** You either reject Him or you believe in Him. And unlike the thief that believed in Him you are able to do what else the Lord would like you do.

**So, the question is:** Have you done everything that the Lord would wants you do? Which thief are you? You can tell which one you are by if you fear God or not and if you fear God you will do what He wants you to do.

My **challenge** to you is to fear God and obey what you know what He wants you to do.