

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse - Sunday September 2nd 2007 Proverbs 1:7 The Fear of the Lord

One of the commonest complaints about the Church is that it is irrelevant to the real world. What do all those miracles and sacrifices have to do with Monday morning, bringing up kids, holding down a job, paying bills etc.? But what could be more relevant than salvation? However this Autumn we are going to address the everyday concerns of the congregation by entering the world of Biblical wisdom to be found in Proverbs.

The priest is called to minister the sacrificial system; the prophet calls people back to loyalty to the covenant; and the wise man guides in how to live in the everyday. The priest and the prophet are not irrelevant to the everyday, nor are these sermons going to be 'how to' messages but Proverbs describes our world as it is, rather than telling us what to do. So at the end of this series you will not be able to say that the Bible is irrelevant.

But this first week we are going to look at chapter 1:7 which is absolutely crucial if this Book is going to make sense, and if our church is to be something more than a community of nice people. And that is the Fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. This is actually one word and is difficult to translate. Rudolf Otto the great German scholar resorted to a Latin phrase: *mysterium tremendum*.

Picture yourself standing under the flight path at the end of a Heathrow runway as a 747 takes off and you have some idea of the terror, dread, wonder, attraction, awe all wrapped up in one. Only this time it is Mount Sinai, Mount Tabor, Golgotha, Jesus hanging on a cross – that place where 'wrath and mercy meet' according to Kendrick. We are in terror of the God of Judgement but also drawn with wonder at the mercy and forgiveness contained within the cross. Unless we recover the fear of the Lord, we are done for; we shall just be people who worship with our lips with no sense of wonder, no sense of dread, no sense of amazement that I am here when I know what I am like.

Put the strong sense of the living God right at the centre of your life. Stop chattering and listen. The fear of the Lord includes morality and decency and doing good, but it is more than that. It is respect, reverence, awe – affectionate reverence. A recognition that God is merciful and gracious, that without his love we would be utterly lost, and without hope! So we live our lives in the fear of the Lord, not going round thinking we mustn't offend him otherwise he will scold us, but not wanting to offend to grieve him because we revere him so much.

For example how are some going to stay away from pornography on the internet? You can try various tactics, but that doesn't get to the heart of it. The same with the temper, or speaking your mind. Actually the only way out is the fear of the Lord, knowing who it is who has come to live in your life, knowing the explosive power of a higher affection.

How do you get it – it's not a commodity, it's a gift! In the person of Jesus. You can stifle it, thwart it in a sea of chattering, trivialities, noise and busyness. STOP and LISTEN

Ian then went on to quote an episode in 'The Wind in the Willows' by Kenneth Grahame when Mole and Rat encounter this august presence in the wood. They were afraid, and yet not afraid, and bowed their head and worshipped.

'I stand in awe of you
So let my words be few'