

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Lindale, Texas
4th Sunday After the Epiphany
January 28, 2018
Mark 1:21-28
The Reverend John P. Carr

Wisdom

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Ps. 111 Verse 10

This is one of the most important verses and concepts in the Bible. It reveals our relationship to God and where it will lead us.

First let's understand *what it says*. The word here "fear" can mean terror but in this instance it means "reverence or awe." This reverence or awe will be revealed as an attitude in daily life of reverence in one who truly recognizes God as all powerful.¹ The word "beginning" means "first part or foundation."² The word "wisdom" means "wisdom, knowledge, experience, insight and judgement." It is always used in a positive sense. This true wisdom leads to reverence for the Lord which ties it back to the sense of fear of the Lord as reverence.³

So another way to express verse 10 is, *"Being in awe of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom, knowledge, insight and judgement."*

This sounds like something that is worthy of pursuit so let's go a little deeper. This wisdom of the Hebrews was an intelligent and heartfelt attitude toward life and God. The Hebrews believed in a personal God who is holy and just and expects His people to live according to His principles. God said, *"be holy for I am holy."*
Lev. 11:44

This was not merely an intellectual obedience in following God's principles and commandments but it began in the heart based on a relationship with God based on love and obedience. God's instruction as seen in Psalm 111 is not that of a tyrant but instruction given to one *whom He loves*.

Why does God instruct the way he does? Because he loves us as His children and wants us to have a right relationship with him. For us, that relationship begins with recognizing with reverence and awe that God is God the Father, the Almighty, the

Lord of all. This attitude of reverence and awe leads us to the praise and worship of God. That is why we are here today!

I have seen this sense of awe. When my daughter was about three or four she was at the back of the church as the procession came down the aisle following the service. The organ was booming, the choir was singing, as they processed out and then finally the priest was the last one. He approached Megan as she stood frozen at the back of the church. He said “hi Megan” and she fell at his feet with her arms outstretched and her face to the floor. This was pure awe as she associated our priest with God and she was awestruck. She fell at his feet. This was reverent awe.

This sense of awe does not fall only to the wise but also to people of all ages and occupations. There are those who may seem very wise in their education, their speech, their activities and actions but the best proof of their relationship to God is their actually doing the will of God. Those who worship and obey God reveal their true wisdom.

This is the essence of the great challenge of life.

- Who will we follow?
- Will we will live our way or God’s way?
- What reveals God’s way?
- Why should we obey or why should we not obey God?

To live our way is to make up the rules as we go along. This is situational ethics and it leads to pain.

Job asks the question, “*Where shall wisdom be found and where is the place of understanding?*” He finally concluded that, “*the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*” Job 28:28

Solomon reached the same conclusion. In Proverbs he wrote, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.*” Proverbs 1:7, and also “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy,*” Proverbs 9:10.

Don’t we all at some point, at some level seek to get our lives right?

Don’t we want to stop the struggle about how we will live at some point in our lives? Getting this right is to seek this kind of wisdom and it begins with God.

It begins with acknowledging who is in the leadership role. It becomes no longer our way that we will follow but God's way. God's way is His commandments as revealed in the Old Testament and in the life and words of Jesus.

Great wisdom then is to first follow God by acknowledging that you want to follow! This is the beginning of that loving relationship by inviting God into your heart. God has always loved us and wanted us to follow Him and has given us the way to find His love. We need only, as Jesus said, to love God and love our neighbor. This is the summary of the Law and the Prophets as well as the life that Christ exemplified. Jesus came as the very human expression of the love of God. As it says in John 3:16, "*God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that all who believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*" That sounds like the basis for a good and loving relationship.

This fear of the Lord then, this awesome wonder of the Almighty, is the very beginning, the foundation of this relationship.

The wisdom that is the fruit of this budding relationship is expressed as worship and the practices of religion.

- God has promised that this is our way back to God,
- this is the way to a peace that passes all understanding,
- this is the way to true wisdom on this earth and life everlasting.

Where then does this leave us today? Can we accept and believe that there is a great and awesome God and that acknowledging Him is the foundation of our lives and all wisdom?

To do so is the path to everlasting life, joy and freedom.

Amen

1. Key Word Study Bible, Lexical Aids to the Old Testament p. 1620, item 3374 *Yirah*
2. Key Word Study Bible, Lexical Aids to the Old Testament p. 1658, item 7725 *Reshith*
3. Key Word Study Bible, Lexical Aids to the Old Testament. P. 1612, item 2451 *Chokhmah*

4.