

Roberto Monsivais has an obsessing fear. He is terrified of being buried while he is still alive. Now while it might be admitted that there are many others who share this fear - there is a Society for the Prevention of People Being Buried Alive in England - it also must be admitted that Roberto has allowed this fear of his to be taken to quite an extreme. Roberto has invented a Life Detector System. He has registered a patent for this device. Attachable to any casket, the Life Detector System incorporates the most modern hospital equipment used to monitor vital signs. If any heartbeat or breathing is detected, an emergency oxygen supply is immediately activated and an alarm goes off alerting rescuers to come and open the coffin. Roberto's Life Detection System caused quite a stir and much discussion when it was introduced to the International Inventors Exposition in New York City several years ago.

It is natural for us human beings to fear that which is greater and stronger than us, isn't it? Death has been described as our final and greatest enemy. So it is natural for people to have a fear of death. And people respond to their fears in many ways. Some are filled with anxiety and worry, others deny and avoid fears, still others rationalize and try to reason them out, and some who are more activist like Roberto, try to invent something that will help give them peace of mind. The healthiest way to deal with our fears is to accept them and prepare ourselves to deal with them.

It is most interesting to see how people deal with the existence of God in their lives. Webster defines God as the supernatural and immortal being who has special powers over the lives and affairs of people and the course of nature. Every culture that has been discovered naturally believes in some kind of God. I believe that an innate knowledge of some kind of deity is naturally inherent within every person for we have all been created in the image and likeness of God.

There is a very interesting anecdote in the life of Helen Keller. Most of us have heard of Helen Keller at one time or another. This poor woman who was born without the ability to hear or speak or see was taken as a project by a fine Christian woman named Anne Sullivan. Helen could smell and feel, but she had no use of the senses that are so critically important in communication with other people. She couldn't hear anyone speak, couldn't speak herself and couldn't see anything around her. As Sullivan brought Helen to the point where she was beginning to be able to communicate which was a miracle in itself, she was concerned that Helen hear the good news of the gospel as some of her first communication. So Anne sought out Philip Brooks who was a well-respected pastor to share the gospel with Helen Keller and Brooks decided that he

should begin to speaking of God's existence – the fact that Helen had a creator who had made her. Now remember, Helen Keller had had no communication with any person or any outside influence in her life outside of her dealings with Anne Sullivan. As Pastor Brooks communicated with Helen through Anne Sullivan that there was a divine being whom we can God suddenly Helen Keller's face became radiant. She answered back to Pastor Brooks through her mentor, Anne, "I see exactly what you are saying to me, but I have known that all the time."

It appears that God has created us with an innate knowledge of a greater being than ourselves. A person must be taught to be an atheist. But as we think of the implications of a greater being than ourselves, this can bring a great concern to us. This is undoubtedly the reason why so many convince themselves that there is no god. In some ways, it is a fearful thing to realize that there is a supernatural being who has power over our lives.

People respond to this natural fear of God in many ways, don't they? Some become obsessed with anxiety and worry, filled with guilt because of their failure to meet God's perfect standards. Others try to deny and avoid God. They think that if they live as if He doesn't exist that maybe He will just go away. Still others try to rationalize and reason God out. They define and describe God until they feel that they have Him all wrapped up in a little box where they can handle Him.

The general way that our culture has dealt with the existence of God during this past generation is to try to explain away his existence or try to at least limit his power under a false guise of science. The paradox is that a science that breaks known laws of science is used in an attempt to explain away God. The proven laws of physics state that matter, energy cannot be created or destroyed and that matter in any closed system will tend toward disintegration and disorder. These are known as some of the laws of Thermodynamics. The theory of evolution breaks both of these proven laws of physics which are accepted by all scientists. Yet, atheistic evolution continues in its claim to be a scientific solution to the existing universe. The obvious underlying reason is that evolution is the best way that we have today to explain the existence of the universe without God, as irrational and unreasonable as it is. Evolution is an example of denial to the natural fear that people have of God.

Now during this past generation, I believe Christians have often responded in the wrong way to these attempts to deal with the natural fear of God. In an often sincere effort to motivate people to believe in God, many Christian have presented a false view of who God is. The reasoning seems to be something like this - if we can present a God who people will not fear at all, then they will certainly accept him and believe in his existence. So believers in God have often presented their God as a God who should never be feared at

all. He is a God of infinite love, which today means a God who has absolute tolerance for everything and everybody. This God would never hurt anybody. This God would always accept everybody. So this God is not someone who should be feared at all.

Now instead of correcting the problem of unbelief in our culture, this foolish solution that has been proposed has made the problem worse. It hasn't made everybody believe in God. And many who believed in this God actually lost respect for him. So instead of merely being ignored by many in our society today, God is actually ridiculed and scoffed at. They regard Him as a weak, anemic being, if He exists at all. They use his name in vain. Some even make jokes about him.

Now as I mentioned earlier, the healthiest way to deal with any fear is life is to accept it and deal with it. This is true with the natural fear of God that we have as well. If we are to deal effectively with this natural fear that we have of a supernatural being who has influence over our lives, we must accept who God is and respond to his revelation to us.

We have been looking at 8 pictures of God that Moses gave in a great song of celebration following God's miraculous deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea during these past Sunday Mornings. This morning we come to the 6th picture that is found in Exodus 15:14-16. In these 3 short verses, there are 8 different words or phrases that speak of the terrifying nature of Almighty God. I have highlighted them so that you will notice them. I'm going to start reading from verse 11 to include the immediate context.

READ Exodus 15:11-16

*11 "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? 12 You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them. 13 "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling. 14 The nations will hear and **tremble; anguish will grip** the people of Philistia. 15 The chiefs of Edom will be **terrified**, the leaders of Moab will be **seized with trembling**, the people of Canaan **will melt away**; 16 **terror and dread** will fall upon them. By the power of your arm they will be as **still as a stone** until your people pass by, O LORD, until the people you bought pass by.* Having spoken of the Pre-eminence of the Lord and his desire to lead his people in paths of righteousness which we have already seen in previous weeks, Moses now speaks of the fear that these nations surrounding the land of Canaan will feel towards the God of Israel.

The people of Philistia will tremble and be filled with anguish. That Hebrew word *Tremble* literally means to shake or quiver. It has the idea of being so frightened that the body just begins to shake all over. Anguish means to writhe in pain and agony. It is used of one whirling around - like when a person stubs his

or her toe and hops all over the place seized with acute pain.

The chiefs of Edom will be terrified. This word is normally used of something totally unexpected. Like when the police knock at the door to inform that a loved one has been taken in an accident or the doctor says that the tumor was malignant, and the knees become weak and there is a strong knot in the pit of the stomach.

The leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling. A different word than found in verse 14, this has the idea of being overwhelmed by fear to the point where the mind shuts down, rational thinking becomes impossible.

The people of Canaan will melt away - they will faint, they will fall apart, they will just dissolve like snow in the bright sunshine on a warm day. Terror and dread will fall upon them. Horror, excruciating apprehension will consume them. They will be as still as a stone. They will paralyze with fear, unable to move, apparently as lifeless as a rock lying on the ground.

Tremble, anguish, terrified, trembling, melt away, terror, dread, still as a stone - what descriptive words to describe how these unbelieving people felt about God.

Now it is interesting to note that Moses doesn't try to present a watered down version of God to them to allay their fears. He doesn't try to convince them that God really will accept them just as they are and will tolerate their evil practices. The implication is that the feelings that they have are not only natural but they are right and proper as they see the true and living God. As these nations heard about God's great deliverance of his people from the nation of Egypt, it would be only natural for them to be filled with anxiety. And so it should be with any rational person. As we contemplate a supernatural being who holds our very existence now as well as our eternal future well being in the palm of His hand, it is only natural that we should be filled with a sense of awe and a healthy sense of apprehension, of fear, of respect. This God has ultimate and absolute power over our lives. We would be fools not to fear a being who has that much power.

How do we deal with this fear of God in our lives? As is usually the case, the answer is found right here in our text. We must be sure that we are in a right relationship with God. We must be sure that we are on God's side.

It was during the Civil War that a lady came up to President Abraham Lincoln with a question. She was concerned for the outcome of the war. She was fearful for her sons who were fighting in the conflict. And as she had prayed, she had come to an intellectual and moral dilemma. She recognized that there were born again Christians fighting on both sides. There were believers in the South praying to God that their side

would win, and there were Christians in the North praying to the same God that their side would win. So the lady asked the President in an attempt to bolster her confidence, *President Lincoln, whose side is God on. Is He on the side of the North or the South?* The wise President looked with compassion on this distraught woman and answered, *I trust that God is on our side. But there is a more important question than whether or not God is on our side - it is whether or not we are on God's side. I hope that God is on my side; but I want to be sure that I am on God's side.*

President Lincoln recognized a very important truth. He knew that as important as the Civil War was and as important as the unity of our country was, there was something that was even more important. That was his eternal destiny. For the most important matters of this life are still temporal by nature, but our relationship with God determines our eternal destiny.

Moses was following the leading of God in his life. As he had experienced God's gracious guidance, he knew a God who also was loving and faithful. We looked at that last week. *In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.* And Moses ends this paragraph which speaks of the awesome fear of God with another statement of God's redemption - *until the people you bought pass by (15:16b.).*

It is not happenstance that Moses sandwiches these 8 statements of the fear that these unbelieving peoples had of God with 2 statements of God redemption - God's love and concern for his people buying them out of slavery.

You see, our relationship with God will ultimately determine our view of him. If we have no personal relationship with God, we will have a natural fear and terror of this supernatural being who controls our lives and destiny. This fear will be so great that we will have to deal with it in some way. So we will deny it or try to rationalize it away or worry about it - but we will never have a satisfactory way to deal with it.

But if we have a personal relationship with God, we will have an entirely different view of him. Oh, we will continue to respect him and stand in awe of his majesty and power. In fact, we will grow in our reverence for him as we learn more and more about him. But we will also have experienced his love for us. We will know of the God who loved us so much that he was willing to suffer the pain and penalty of our sins so that we wouldn't have to. As we have a personal relationship with God, we will have confidence in his mercy and grace and direction as well as in his power and strength and might. And that is the difference between true belief and unbelief in God.

When we were living over on the east side of the state, Sandy and I decided to vinyl side our house. The cement blocks were so porous that the rooms were very drafty especially in the winter time, so we

decided to put a couple of inches of insulation around the house and then put vinyl siding on it. I did most of the work myself, enjoying the diversion of doing physical work with my hands on my days off. But when I came around to the electrical meter that had to be taken down, I called the power company to come out and help me. I was fearful of getting anywhere near those heavy duty power lines coming into our house - and with good reason. But the man from Detroit Edison wasn't afraid to go near the box. Now, he had a healthy respect for that meter. He put on heavy rubber gloves and stood on a rubber mat. But he had enough knowledge to know which wires to touch and when to touch them, and he quickly disconnected the wires from the box, removed the box, allowing me to vinyl side under the meter, and then he reconnected everything just like it was before.

My fear of that electrical power caused me to not go near that box. I avoided it at all costs. But the electrician knew what needed to be done. He respected the power and he was able to connect the power to the house. Without him, we wouldn't have had power in our house.

As human beings, we have a natural fear of Almighty God - and with good reason. For He is the all powerful One - He has greater power than all the power in the universe that He has created. That Icelandic volcano that is exploding and throwing ash into the atmosphere that grounds all of Great Britain's planes is nothing compared to God. That broken oil pipe in the Gulf of Mexico that threatens the fishing industry that produces 30% of our national consumption is nothing compared to God. God alone is the all powerful One - He has greater power than all the power in the universe that he has created put together. But he desires for us to know him and experience His power in our lives. If we have no relationship with Him, we will avoid him in one way or another and never experience his power in our lives. But if we learn more about him and realize that he desires a personal relationship with us, we will never come to place where we approach him casually without respect for his awesome power, nor should we, but we will have a relationship with him that allows us to experience His power in our lives.

We have a beautiful illustration of this concept in a scene from the 4th chapter of Mark's gospel. After a busy day of ministry, Jesus and his disciples were crossing over the Sea of Galilee in the darkness of the night. As can happen suddenly in this area, a storm came up. Jesus, physically exhausted from his day of teaching, was sleeping in the back of the boat on a cushion. The "Jesus Boat" that was found a couple of decades ago during a drought shows how this scene could have easily taken place. There was a small wooden platform in the rear of this fishing boat that dates back to Jesus' day that was probably used by the person who was steering with the rudder to sit on. Slipping under that plank on the cushion would have been a comfortable place to sleep, even in rain. Anyway, the disciples decided not to stir Jesus at first

thinking they could manage the navigation in the storm. After all, several of them were experienced fishermen. They had practically grown up on the lake. They could handle a Galilean storm. But as the storm progressively intensified, they eventually became fearful for their lives. So they shook Jesus awake and asked him accusingly, *don't you care that we're all going to drown here in this storm?* Now imagine waking up from a sound sleep after a hard day's work to this scene of panic. What did Jesus do? He calmly rebuked the wind and the waves and they instantaneously became still. Then he turned to his disciples and asked them, *why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*

Now what I want you to especially note in this scene is the response of the disciples. Mark records that they were then terrified and asked each other, *who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him?*

They had been fearful of the storm that threatened their lives. But that fear was nothing compared to the fear that they felt after Jesus rebuked the wind and waves. Now they were terrified having seen first-hand the power of the Son of God. And that was God's point all along as he allowed them this experience. God's design was for their faith to be increased. He knew this would happen as they were exposed to another measure of Christ's awesome power. They had been afraid of the storm – but they were terrified of Christ. But that natural and proper terror led to increased faith, a closer personal relationship with him and a greater confidence to face the future.

Moses had experienced God's awesome power in his life. He had lifted his arm over the Red Sea and watched it split apart. Imagine that! Imagine the terror that must have filled Moses as these waters exploded apart for a width of a mile or two. Imagine the timidity of the people as they walked through between these great walls of water that they knew could crush them in a moment if God released his grip on them. But God got Moses and the Israelites across that Red Sea safe to the other side and their faith and confidence were increased.

But then came the brash Egyptian soldiers. Imagine their terror as the wheels began to fall off their chariots in the middle of the sea bed. Imagine their horror as they looked at those great walls of water crashing down upon them, dooming them to a watery grave.

Moses and the Israelites knew a God who was to be feared. But Moses and the Israelites also knew a God of great love and compassion - a God who was eager and willing to lead and deliver his people. So they didn't have the same type of fear and terror that the Egyptians had.

Do you have a proper fear of God this morning? The answer to that question might be found in yet another question - what kind of relationship do you have with God this morning?