

Sermon for Sunday, December 12, 1982 by Dr. Andrew A. Jumper, Senior Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, 7700 Davis Drive, St. Louis, MO 63105

"THE DANGER OF REVOKING THE THIRD COMMANDMENT"

Malachi 4:1-3; St. Matt. 1:18-21; Phil. 2:5-11

Text: "But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall
rise, with healing in its wings." Malachi 4:2

Today is the third Sunday in Advent. Advent is the season before the
birth of Jesus when we anticipate his coming. And while it is true we
have a lot of customs and traditions clustered around Christmas that
have little or no relationship to Jesus and his birth, still for most of
us here this morning the primary focus of our interest and concern is
the anticipation of the coming of the Savior into the world.

But the question I would like to ask you this morning concerning
Christmas is this: should you be afraid of Jesus? Should you be afraid
of the coming of the Son of God?

Let me suggest to you that the right answer is "yes." Now, I don't mean
afraid in the sense of scared, but I do mean that you should fear God
and his coming in the Biblical sense. In the Bible we are taught to
have a sense of fear of God that really means a deep sense of awe, a
profound feeling of reverence.

May I suggest that you go home and read chapters 19 and 20 of the Book
of Exodus. There we are told of the awesomeness of the God who met
Moses and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. There God said to Moses,
"warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to gaze and many of
them perish." And then, later on, the Bible records, "Now when all the
people perceived the thunderings and the lightings and the sound of the
trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled;
and they stood afar off and said to Moses, '...let not God speak to us,
lest we die.'" (Exodus 20:18,19)

Well, we do not have that awesome fear--that deep and reverent fear of a
holy God today. Back then, God gave the ten commandments to his people
and one of them said, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God
in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in
vain." (Ex. 20:7) And do you know, the Jews believed that! As a matter
of fact, the name of God was so holy, so awesome, so reverent, that they
would not even pronounce God's primary name. Instead, they would use
other names and never use his first name. Just as an aside, let me tell
you something of interest. When Hebrew is written, the vowels are not
included. They are understood. But in the case of God's name, since it
was so holy and they never pronounced it, over the centuries, they
didn't know any more what the vowels were. So a Bible translator,
around 1520 A.D., took the Hebrew word, "adonai" which was one of the
leading substitute names for God, and put those vowels with the Hebrew
name of God. When he did that he got the word "Jehovah". But actually
there is no such word in Hebrew as "Jehovah." It is a made up name--an
artificial word. Probably the real word was Yahweh.

Anyway, the point is this: for the Hebrew, the name of God was of
primary importance. He had a sense of awe and reverence about it. He
had a fear of God.

We don't have that sense of fear about God today. Recently someone wrote Billy Graham complaining about the loose use of God's name in books and television and all the media. Dr. Graham replied, "I am concerned about this because I believe it is a sign of a deep spiritual problem in our nation. Take, for example, the casual way that the name of God is used in conversation by many people in a profane way, and is used freely in television and in print." He adds, "The Bible tells us very clearly that this is wrong." And then Dr. Graham asks, "What does it mean, therefore, when profanity becomes so common? It means that people no longer have a high regard for God, and instead treat him casually, as if he were of little importance." And then Dr. Graham concludes, "That is why I say that these things are symptoms of the spiritual deadness of our time. Many of the people in our nation live their lives as if God did not exist..."

Yes, are you afraid of God? Do you have a sense of fear and awe before God? Some of you may have seen in the paper recently an article by the Associated Press religion writer, George W. Cornell. Mr. Cornell reported on a recent study which showed that we Americans overwhelmingly believe in eight of the ten commandments. And which two did not receive such an overwhelming endorsement? The first four commandments deal with man's relationship to God. And the ones rejected by many Americans are two of those dealing with man's relationship to God. Many Americans do not regard the command to keep the Sabbath holy pertinent and an almost equally large number reject the commandment against taking the Lord's name in vain.

Let me share something with you. Throughout the history of Israel, whenever the Jews treated God in common ways, whenever they lost their sense of awe and reverence before the creator of the universe, whenever they turned their backs on God as insignificant and unimportant, God dealt with them in the most severe ways.

If America treats God in cheap and common ways, God will vindicate himself and send his wrath upon a sinful nation. If the church of our Lord Jesus treats his name as common if it tramples on the gospel, it makes of naught the cross of his suffering, if it denies the need for his lordship in human lives, God will pour out his vengeance and his wrath upon the church in its unfaithfulness.

And--we must go on to add--if you and I treat him shabbily, if we do not have a sense of awe and reverence before the King of kings and the Lord of lords, surely his just wrath shall fall upon our lives too. Over in the 11th chapter of I Corinthians St. Paul calls the Corinthians to task for irreverence. It seems they have been abusing the Lord's Supper and Paul warns them, "For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself." And then he adds, "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." (I Cor. 11:29,30)

One of my prayers these days is for our nation. In the Bible this morning we read God's promise, "But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings." And if ever a country needed spiritual healing, it is this land of ours.

But I suspect that above all you and I need spiritual healing. Is that true in your life? It is in mine. And after all, the healing of the nation begins with the spiritual healing of individuals such as you and I.

In our scripture this morning we read how the names of Jesus were given. The angels tell Joseph to call the expected baby by the name of "Jesus" because that name means "to save." And then the angel goes on to quote Isaiah where it says that his name shall be called Emmanuel, which means God with us. And then in Philippians we read how "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." How that thrills my soul! O, that wonderful name of Jesus! But are we ready for that Jesus to come into our lives and be Lord?

Yes, are you ready for Jesus this morning? For example, if Jesus sat beside you day by day as you worked, is there anything in your business life that would need to be changed in order to honor his name? You see, that was the problem Zacchaeus ran into. When Jesus came into his life, some changes had to be made. He had to restore what he had taken falsely and with interest. In addition, he had to share what he had with the poor. And there was Levi or Matthew as we know him--who was a tax collector and who had to make some radical changes in his lifestyle when Jesus came into his life. You young people--you wives and mothers--if Jesus walked at your elbow day by day, what changes would you need to make?

Here is another question: are we ready for Jesus to come into our homes? How does your family spend its time--what things does it share together of a spiritual nature? Are there any changes we would have to make in terms of how we speak to one another--of how we relate, of how we treat each other? Are there some family activities we would need to stop--and would there be some we would need to start?

And how about our friendships? What kind of friends do you have? What sorts of things do you do together? Are they the kinds of friends, and are the things you do the things you would be pleased to share with Jesus. And how about this: has your life with your friends so reflected Jesus and have you so represented him to them, that if you introduce Jesus to your friends would they say something like this, "We have heard so much about you that we feel we know you already"--would they say that?

Or what about our financial lives? Listen, would you be pleased to have Jesus come and sit down with you and go over your check stubs? Would you be pleased for him to see how much you gave to help others, how much you gave to work of his church, as compared to what you spent on your vacation, or compared to what your monthly bill is at the club? Isn't that what happened to the rich young ruler? He wanted all of the benefits of religion--he wanted the sort of spiritual security he felt Jesus could give him. Yet, he was not really ready for Jesus to come into his financial life.

Again, what about our spiritual lives? Would we be willing to sit down with Jesus and give him an accounting of what we have done spiritually? For example, would he be pleased with your prayer record--your Bible reading--your service record to others--yes, how good would your spiritual record be?

Well, it's the third Sunday in Advent--one more to go and then we celebrate the birth of a child who is to be called Jesus--a name that is highly exalted--a name that is above every name that at his name every knee should bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. But let me ask us all: are we really ready for Jesus to be born--are we really ready for him to break into--to invade--our lives? Are we really ready to honor him and give him an accounting?

There are two things about God we ought not to forget. First, as Paul told the Corinthians, to treat God in a common way brings spiritual disaster and even sickness and death. You see, God cannot honor a life that does not honor him. He cannot bless a soul that does not bless him in return, that has no sense of awe and reverence before the Creator of the universe. But the other thing is this: God makes a promise--an unequivocal promise--that to those of us who fear his name--to those who bow the knee to whose name is above every name--yes, to those who fear his name there comes healing--wholeness, for to those who fear his name, the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.