

**The Fear of the Lord**  
**Second Series – Sermon Twenty-One**  
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As usual, MacDonald takes on challenging subjects with the insights that only one who sees the big picture can offer. Fear is a subject I think we are all uncomfortable with and avoid in some way. We tend to redefine it to not deal with it. We take a verse like, "*The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" and change fear to "awe" instead. I am not suggesting that this is "wrong," but it can be a way around this uncomfortable subject. This verse is not implying that this fear is "eternal conscious torment!" or something like that, but the awakening of our consciousness to the One ". . . *who sees the end from the beginning.*"

This sermon is a message of hope in that we can trust Jesus in His strength to finish what They have started. For in Him is Divine Power perfected in our human weakness. Jesus is the One in whom these extremes find a compassionate balance and a grace for freedom and Life!

## Outline

**The Use of Fear** - Fear has a place in the early stages of our development. It sets boundaries while maturity takes place.

**Fear of the Fire** - That which is good has nothing to fear from God's consuming fire of love.

**John's Fear** - No encounter with the Divine glory should breed terror. When a child of God is afraid of Him, it is a sign that His Fatherhood has not yet been fashioned in his heart.

**God as Being** - For in Jesus is Divine Power perfected in our human weakness.

**No Place for Fear** - We can live with nothing less than our love-perfect Father.

### **Revelation 1:17-18**

*"When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One.'"*

Often our first encounters with the Divine are filled with fear. So long as our confidence in God's love is imperfect, there is room for fear. When love fills our hearts, and nothing but love can fill it, this love will cast out fear leaving no room for it. Until then, fear can hold us until love entirely takes its place.

Those with the greatest fear of God initially tend to project their evil selves on Him, but with more power, allowing Him room to work with them. Although this room is created by seeing God as a little higher than themselves, it is unhelpful in advancing a deeper relationship with Him. Power without love, and dependence without relationship, only awakens a worship without love's devotion, simply the disharmony of a slave's flattery.

Even those whose idea of God is better, but their consciousness is still conflicted. Can the Divine goodness be able to do much more to quiet their apprehension when this consciousness still imagines a sacrifice is needed due to offenses and evil? Yet this concept of God still remains dominant in most of Christianity. **Naturally, the first feeling towards a being we call God, whom we know little about, is fear.**

### **The Use of Fear**

Where fear has an opening it will exist, as so it should until love can cast it out. For those who don't know God and are unhappy with themselves, fear towards Him is reasonable and natural and is a powerful ally in developing their true self. Neither the wild one nor the self-sufficient sage is rightly human. It doesn't matter whether we think one or the other is wise or a degenerate - neither is God's vision of humanity. The true self is there, but everything needs to work together for our transformation.

**Fear is natural and has a part to play in the development of His child. Until love grows, which sees God truly, and can cast out fear, it is a good thing fear is there. Although a poor one, it is a bond between the creature and their Creator - a bond that must and will be broken and replaced by an infinitely better bond of love.**

**So, God must appear terrible to those who are far from Him who would prefer a devil because of their similar selfishness in contrast to a self-giving God who dies for His enemies. The choice of change or**

die makes them afraid of Him. They love their flawed and selfish life as it is, while God loves it as it must become. God takes us where and as we are, accepts what we offer, and takes us where we need to go.

To remove the fear from our hearts without us knowing the consuming fire of His love, would take ages to know, and would damn us to the power of evil. Persuading men that fear is an evil thing and an insult to God while they are in love with their selfish selves and slaves to the evil impulses of passion, so what would the consequences of this removal be? They would insult God as a religious relic, a superstition, a lie, a bad influence under which they have been subjected for far too long or a myth to be cast aside and spit upon in rejection. In this condition, how much could they learn of Him?

With this temporary fear removed, it would not take long before the old fears would return. Perhaps with the difference now of not trembling before the living God but trembling before their evil imaginations. Imaginations that they have now given new power through their fears. Then spiritual chaos with all their influences would rise again.

**God is true to Himself, a relational Being, One who would rather than be unfair, lay down His Divine rights and give Himself for His creation. This Creator who would rather die for them, as much as the Divine can die, for their transformation into Life, rather than see His children die in ignorance. This God may well look fearful from a distance to one who sees in himself no essential good. One who fears only suffering the loss of his ambitions and has no aspirations to be good!**

This one's growth would be in direct proportion to their awareness of the need to grow into Him whose likeness they were created, as well as their awareness that their neighbor belongs to them as much as they belong to themselves. We must come to understand that we can only find ourselves in oneness with others and our Creator, the source from which we came.

**The amount of growth as an individual that we can experience is in proportion to our capacity to see and understand this oneness with God and neighbor. I do not say we see them yet, but as we approach them, our fear of God for our life will subside. It is still far from the Joy and Life that awaits us, but we are drawing near to Life in our true nature and the central Joy of our sonship to our God and Father that loves relationships and hates selfishness and division. The One who does nothing Himself that is not Life in His children, nor demands anything of us He would not do Himself!**

## **Fear of the Fire**

The consuming fire of God, which is love, is His essential Being and creative power. This fire is decidedly different from its earthly counterpart burning more at a distance than up close. The farther away from Him, the worse it burns. When we turn and draw nearer, the burning changes to comfort which turns to joy. A joy so great that our hearts can hardly contain it, and we say, *"Whom have I in heaven but you? You're all I want! No one on earth means as much to me as you!"* (Psalms 73:25 Passion)

When this glory of being and its essence as Life and Joy shine upon corruption and death, it will, like the sun, consume the darkness and death and turn corruption to dust. What the fire consumes in our souls is not our souls but what is in opposition to them. Yet so close to it and living upon it that the fire is felt in every spiritual nerve. When the evil parasites are consumed, that is when we yield ourselves and our selfishness and return to the Lord. Then what was only burning before, now feels like love, comfort, and

strength, an eternal ever-growing Life in Him. Now, he is alive, and this fire cannot harm his Life. It can only consume darkness and death, which needs and should be destroyed!

Our Father is essential and eternal life, and darkness and death cannot survive in His presence! Death is but the corruption of the good and has no life of its own. Existing only within the decay of the things of this life. If any of the Father's children find they have fear in His presence, that their relationship with Him is fearful or uncomfortable, let them not worry about dressing but rush in their nakedness as a true child for shelter from their terrors into the loving arms of their Father. Run to the home from which they came so they can know that it was and is their true home. Even an evil father's heart would be won by such repentance and embrace. How much more would our good heavenly Father who desires nothing but a relationship with His children receive us with open arms!

**Self, accepted as Life, is the one demon-foe of Life itself, and God is its only Savior. Saved from all that is not of His Spirit, not of His Heart, for God is Life. For all that is not God is darkness and death. But Life is the destroyer of death, of all that kills, of all that is of death's kind.**

## John's Fear

When John saw the glory of the Son of Man, he fell at His feet as dead. It doesn't matter whether it was a vision or a body as He was in life. Jesus would take any form available to reveal Himself, and He knew what way to show Himself to John. It seems to me that this revelation would need to come from Jesus Himself so that John would have the confidence to share it again.

As strange as they affect us, various images of the Lord's appearance lend themselves even through their tone and greatness to us in our ignorance. So why was John so overcome with terror? Similar terror had happened to John and the others on the mount of transfiguration. But John had afterward leaned on Jesus' breast at the last supper, followed Him through His judgment without denying Him, and seen Him die and resurrect and had personally suffered at the hands of the Jews after His ascension. So why I ask was he afraid now? ". . . *on the isle called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*"

**No encounter with the Divine glory should breed terror. When a child of God is afraid of Him, it is a sign that His Fatherhood has not yet been fashioned in his heart. Glory can only breed terror in those who are capable of being terrified by it. While we are such, it is good for us to be aware of it until we find refuge from it in the only place where it is not, in the heart of His glory.**

The translation I prefer of this encounter is ". . . *one like unto a son of man,*" I think John saw Him as the man he knew so well, and it was the radiance of His glory that made him unsure, not any difference in His likeness. Nothing blinds so much as light, making Jesus' familiar features difficult to distinguish as the Son of Man.

However, the appearance of the Son of Man was not intended to foster fear in John. So, why was John afraid? Why did this servant of the Lord fall at His feet as one dead? What joy for us that he did, for the revelations that he received. His words are the best confirmation of their source, for they are from the heart of our great Brother, the one Man, Jesus Christ, the divinely human One!

The immaturity of the disciple, his unfinished faith caused his terror. This immaturity is undoubtedly implied in Jesus' response to him when he fell! The terror that made him afraid was the image that should have taken away his fear.

For the glory he saw, His head and hair brilliant with such a radiant light that they were white as wool, snow-white as his garments were on mount Hermon. In the presence of this light, His eyes flashed like flames of fire, His presence as the sun at full strength, and the darker glow of His feet, like fine brass burning in a furnace, this was as a memory of the twilight of his humiliation. That is of the humbler glory of touching the earth, in contrast to his head high in the heavens of radiant perfection. And His girdle under His breast golden between the snow and the brass. **What were they all but the shining glory of Him that is the brilliance of His Father's glory, an expression of the irrefutable truth which was itself the reason why John should not have been afraid? "He laid His right hand upon me, saying to me, Fear not; I am the first, and the last, and the living one."** Endless must our terror be until we meet heart-to-heart with the heart-fire of the Universe, the first and the last and the living One!

**But oh, the joy to be revealed by Power Himself. The One who is the first and the last, and the living One. Revealed by what we can see is Truth, but what we are slow to believe. That the cure for trembling is the presence of power, that fear cannot stand before Strength, that this visible God is the destroyer of death, that the only safety in the Universe is the perfect oneness in the Living One!**

## **God as Being**

**God is Being; death is nothing!** What a truth revealed from the mouth of Him who knows! Jesus told Paul that strength is made perfect in weakness and instructed John similarly that weakness is to be feared, not strength. All false appearances of strength, such as human might, rightly create terror, but are deceptions. True Strength and Goodness are in the One. This living One has the power of Life! The evil one has but the illusion of death and within its very nature the necessity of its destruction.

However, the mildest display of the glory of the Living One is too much for His dearest apostles. These the best of the children of men are cowed at the sight. John himself had not yet learned that glory was a part of his inheritance. Yes, the natural condition of his being. That there is nothing in his being, made in the image of God, that is alien from the most glorious of heavenly glory. John had not yet learned this and therefore fell before Him. When, in reality, it is the voice of Him that is forever telling him not to be afraid. For this very reason, the only reason that He is the first and the last, and the living One!

So what does this life look like for him? What joy, peace, and fulfillment, but closer contact with his source of Life? **The connection is as close as the one he had before his birth, only infinitely higher. For now, it is a union willed by both. He who comes from his source needs that source to make his being complete, not merely complete in his awareness, but complete in himself, coming full circle ending where he began.** Then this being is whole even as God is whole, for it is one with the self-existent God, blossoming in the air of the Universe in which it is rooted, the world in which it lives and grows.

**John should have been far from trembling when Jesus, on whose breast he had leaned, and whose love and glory was more hidden now than standing before Him with His love streaming forth in radiant glory! John should have been more joyful and secure when the Living One's strength was more visible. It was never because Jesus was clothed in the weakness of human flesh that He could be trusted. But because He was strong with a strength able to take on our weakness as human flesh with**

**which He could best do His redemptive work. The strength that was now shining out with its own light, so recently hidden within His revealing flesh.**

Had John been as close in spirit to the son of Man as he had been before in bodily presence, he would have indeed fallen at His feet, but not as dead, but as one full of joy unable to stand before this Life-giving flow. He would have fallen in awe of the Holy One, not senseless, but to embrace and kiss the feet of Him who had again, as at first, in the resurrection from above and now in heaven's glory.

## **No Place for Fear**

**So for those who believe that good is the only true power and that evil only exists to reveal what is good, what place can there be for fear? Since the strong and the good are one, and our hope is in oneness with God. Since this is rooted in His will, what is left for us to do but rejoice? Rejoice in the radiant glory of the First and the Last!**

The One who is the First and the Last is the surrounding protection of our being. **Our Master is behind and before us, finishing what He has begun. He provides for us, for He is the living and life-making One. The reason for not fearing in the presence of God is that He is the all-glorious and all-perfect One. We need this perfect and glorious God. His children can live with nothing less than their Father, the infinite One. Our Father is beyond all our poor consciousness can catch sight of, beyond what our richest imaginations can conceive, beyond all that our hungry hearts could want, and of what the fullest heart could be thankful.** And beyond all these, as the heavens are higher than the earth. So rise the thoughts, the creation, and the love of God who is in Christ Jesus. Who is His God and our God, His Father and ours? Before Moses and the law were known and before the birth of Jesus, the suffering heart of humanity saw and was persuaded that nowhere else lay its peace than with the First, the Last, and the Living One! Then Job said, *"I wish you would hide me in the world of the dead; . . . and then set a time to remember me. . . Then you will call, and I will answer, and you will be pleased with me, your creature."*

## **CLIFFNOTES WITH ORIGINAL MACDONALD QUOTES**

Naturally the first emotion of man towards the being he calls God, but of whom he knows so little, is fear.

### **The Use of Fear**

Fear is natural, and has a part to perform nothing but itself could perform in the birth of the true humanity. Until love, which is the truth towards God, is able to cast out fear, it is well that fear should hold; it is a bond, however poor, between that which is and that which creates—a bond that must be broken, but a bond that can be broken only by the tightening of an infinitely closer bond.

To remove that fear from their hearts, save by letting them know his love with its purifying fire, a love which for ages, it may be, they cannot know, would be to give them up utterly to the power of evil.

Persuade men that fear is a vile thing, that it is an insult to God, that he will none of it—while yet they are in love with their own will, and slaves to every movement of passionate impulse, and what will the consequence be? That they will insult God as a discarded idol, a superstition, a falsehood, as a thing under whose evil influence they have too long groaned, a thing to be cast out and spit upon. After that how much will they learn of him?

Verily, God must be terrible to those that are far from him; for they fear he will do, yea, he is doing with them what they do not, cannot desire, and can ill endure. Such as many men are, such as all without God would become, they must prefer a devil, because of his supreme selfishness, to a God who will die for his creatures, and insists upon giving himself to them, insists upon their being unselfish and blessed like himself. That which is the power and worth of life they must be, or die; and the vague consciousness of this makes them afraid. They love their poor existence as it is; God loves it as it must be—and they fear him. The false notions of men of low, undeveloped nature both with regard to what is good and what the Power requires of them, are such that they cannot but fear, and devotion is lost in the sacrifices of ingratiating: God takes them where they are, accepts whatever they honestly offer, and so helps them to outgrow themselves, preparing them to offer the true offering, and to know him whom they ignorantly worship.

To remove that fear from their hearts, save by letting them know his love with its purifying fire, a love which for ages, it may be, they cannot know, would be to give them up utterly to the power of evil. Persuade men that fear is a vile thing, that it is an insult to God, that he will none of it—while yet they are in love with their own will, and slaves to every movement of passionate impulse, and what will the consequence be? That they will insult God as a discarded idol, a superstition, a falsehood, as a thing under whose evil influence they have too long groaned, a thing to be cast out and spit upon. After that how much will they learn of him?

God being what he is, a God who loves righteousness; a God who, rather than do an unfair thing, would lay down his Godhead, and assert himself in ceasing to be; a God who, that his creature might not die of ignorance, died as much as a God could die, and that is divinely more than man can die, to give him himself; such a God, I say, may well look fearful from afar to the creature who recognizes in himself no imperative good; who fears only suffering, and has no aspiration—only wretched ambition!

In proportion as he becomes capable of the idea that his kind belongs to him as he could never belong to himself; neighbour, and that his being can find its end only in oneness with the source from which it came; in approaches the capacity of seeing and understanding that his individuality can be perfected only in the love of his neighbor, and that his being can find its end only in oneness with the source from which it came; in proportion, I do not say as he sees these things, but as he nears the possibility of seeing them, will his terror at the God of his life abate; though far indeed from surmising the bliss that awaits him, he is drawing more nigh to the goal of his nature, the central secret joy of sonship to a God who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, does nothing he would not permit in his creature, demands nothing of his creature he would not do himself.

## **Fear of the Fire**

Self, accepted as the law of self, is the one demon-enemy of life; God is the only Saviour from it, and from all that is not God, for God is life, and all that is not God is death. Life is the destruction of death, of all that kills, of all that is of death's kind.

## **John's Fear**

No glory even of God should breed terror; when a child of God is afraid, it is a sign that the word Father is not yet freely fashioned by the child's spiritual mouth. The glory can breed terror only in him who is capable of being terrified by it; while he is such it is well the terror should be bred and maintained, until the man seek refuge from it in the only place where it is not—in the bosom of the glory.

What were they all but the effulgence of his glory who was himself the effulgence of the Father's, the poor expression of the unutterable verity which was itself the reason why John ought not to be afraid?—'He laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one.'

Endless must be our terror, until we come heart to heart with the fire-core of the universe, the first and the last and the living one!

But oh, the joy to be told, by Power himself, the first and the last, the living one—told what we can indeed then see must be true, but which we are so slow to believe—that the cure for trembling is the presence of Power; that fear cannot stand before Strength; that the visible God is the destruction of death; that the one and only safety in the universe, is the perfect nearness of the Living One!

## **God as Being**

God is being; death is nowhere!

A contact close as ere he issued from that Life, only in infinitely higher kind, inasmuch as it is now willed on both sides. He who has had a beginning, needs the indwelling power of that beginning to make his being complete—not merely complete to his consciousness, but complete in itself—justified, rounded, ended where it began.

Far indeed from trembling because he on whose bosom he had leaned when the light of his love was all but shut in now stands with the glory of that love streaming forth, John Boanerges ought to have felt the more joyful and safe as the strength of the living one was more manifested. It was never because Jesus was clothed in the weakness of the flesh that he was fit to be trusted, but because he was strong with a strength able to take the weakness of the flesh for the garment wherein it could best work its work: that strength was now shining out with its own light, so lately pent within the revealing veil.

## **No Place for Fear**

In those then who believe that good is the one power, and that evil exists only because for a time it subserves, cannot help subserving the good, what place can there be for fear? The strong and the good are one; and if our hope coincides with that of God, if it is rooted in his will, what should we do but rejoice in the effulgent glory of the First and the Last?

The Master is before and behind; he began, he will see that it be endless. He garrisons the place; he is the living, the live-making one. The reason then for not fearing before God is, that he is all-glorious, all-perfect. Our being needs the all-glorious, all-perfect God. The children can do with nothing less than the



Father; they need the infinite one. Beyond all wherein the poor intellect can descry order; beyond all that the rich imagination can devise; beyond all that hungriest heart could long, fullest heart thank for.