

[Slide 2]

<sup>10</sup> **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.**

[Slide 3 – boy hiding]

### **Fear**

Eyes wide open, hiding behind a piece of furniture, a chair, perhaps, that has the look of an old church pew. Hiding, but needing to see what's going on and with what appears to be a firm grip on his little wall of protection. It's a picture of fear. What's making this child afraid? Who is making this child afraid?

What makes our children afraid? Or better, Who?

What if it's us? We teach our children, "Fear God above all things!" To many in our time, that's something monstrous. Fear has to do with anger and threats and judgment. They don't want to hear any hint of that.

The Presbyterian Church USA rejected our closing hymn, "In Christ Alone," from their hymnal over this phrase in verse two, "Till on that cross, as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied."

So, is there something monstrous about teaching that **the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom?**

[Slide 4]

### **The fear of the LORD**

Realize how specific and exclusive this proverb is. It's not generic, but specific. ...**of the LORD**. This is God's forever name, his covenant name. This exclusive claim is very specific. We're told that exclusive claims are offensive, intolerant. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America officially resolved this summer not to make judgments about other religions or their followers.

They are completely in line with the spirit of our age as shaped by postmodernism. Postmodernism rejects all the stories that help people make sense out of the world. They would tell us there is no one story that explains everything. They reject them all because they're all about power, exercising power over people.

They need to know that one story is different, completely different. And that this fear is very different.

[Slide 5]

### **The fear of the Lord is the VERY beginning of wisdom.**

This claim is clearly very exclusive. The fear of the LORD is the first in order, the very beginning of wisdom. That is to say, where the fear of the LORD is absent, there is no wisdom to be found.

[Slide 6 The Thinker]

### **The fear of the Lord is the VERY beginning of WISDOM.**

What is wisdom? It is more than information. It is more than knowledge. It is more than just knowing things by pondering, observing, reasoning, by considering the world around us. And it is also more than just knowing the information found in the Bible. Wisdom has been described as the right knowledge, rightly applied. Wisdom is active.

When the LORD speaks to us through Word and Sacrament, he gives us things to ponder. But his goal is not just to impart information. His goal is to communicate capability. I'll explain that more after we consider where it comes from.

[Slide 7]

### **The SURPRISING Source of CHRISTIAN CAPABILITY**

To say that the fear of the LORD is the very beginning of wisdom, doesn't mean that there is nothing else in the picture or that nothing comes before it. With the LORD, foolishness comes first. That foolishness gives us a brand new perspective on fear.

[Slide 8]

**But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.**

These words from Psalm 130 give us a new perspective on how the Bible uses the word, fear. It's common sense to say that anger is what leads to fear. But the LORD turns that upside down.

Where does his wisdom come in? Through the foolishness of the cross. Through the weakness of the cross.

Postmodernism rejects all the stories that help people make sense out of the world, because they're all about power. Yet we hold to the one story that is about setting aside power. Christ Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used for his own advantage, but made himself nothing. He humbled himself to die on the cross and by that, to satisfy God's wrath.

One picture I sometimes use to describe fear is a negative one, so I try to use it with care. How is fear of an abuser evident in the one fearing more abuse? It shows itself in a constant concern for what that other person wants. But here we are considering a fear of letting our LORD down, a constant concern for his good will.

What leads you to fear the LORD and embrace his entire will? What leads you to want what he wants from the bottom of your heart? His grace, revealed at the cross of Jesus Christ.

[Slide 9]

**Grace leads to capability.**

That's where the fear of the LORD begins. But that's not the end of the story. Where there was inability, there is now capability.

Grace produces something new in God's people, Christian capabilities!

The Capability of courage, of resorting to grace, that comes with our new identity.

- **Courage:** The three men in the fiery furnace. As they told King Nebuchadnezzar, they knew: the God we serve is able to deliver us, and even if he does not, we will still not worship your idol. God is with me. He will never leave me or forsake me. Where does he want to see that courage in my life? What act of love have I fearfully held myself back from?
- **Resorting to Grace:** Jacob, returning home, afraid of what his brother Esau might be planning, wrestled with God in prayer. Confessing, I am unworthy; but clinging to grace. God, you promised. God is gracious. His love is absolutely reliable, coming to me as the opposite of what I have deserved. So when I stumble and fall, he wants to see me get up and follow in the strength of forgiveness.
- **Identity:** the capability that comes from knowing who you are, and what God said to you in your Baptism. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God. And that is what we are. How much of my energy do I waste on trying to become somebody? He wants me to live in the wisdom of knowing I am his child.

The God who cares about his people, cares about how they live. He cares about how you live. And so he forgives, and gives, and gives.

To care about his will and pursue it is the very beginning of wisdom.