

Fear God and give Him glory. (Revelation 14,7)

This Bible verse is the motto of the Sárospatak Reformed College, one of the oldest Calvinist Colleges of Hungary. Our ancestors chose it as a guide for our institution at the time of the Reformation. A few years ago a pastor visited us from America and he saw the 300-year-old angel engraved in stone with this Bible verse written beneath. He remarked that it was usually typical of sectarian groups to turn toward the apocalypse. He asked why a Calvinist institution had chosen a motto from there. The answer can be understood from our history. At the time of the Reformation our nation lived in a very difficult situation. First the country was torn in two politically, the nobility having elected two kings who were fighting against each other. Later on the Turks occupied almost one third of the country. Fearful times set in the lives of our ancestors. Nobody knew what the following day would bring; if one's house would be set on fire; if one's child would be kidnapped; if everything one had worked for for a lifetime would be gone in a moment. Our ancestors accepted this situation as the will of God. They saw it as God's judgement on them. However, this judgement was not to destroy them, but to cleanse them. Throughout our history filled with many shocks the people believing in God recognised this divine intention again and again. Today we see it the same way; our nation was cleansed and renewed under the judging hands of God.

Some one hundred years ago our famous poet, Endre Ady actually prayed to God calling upon God's cleansing and renewing judgement. In one of his poems he asked God to punish this nation frequently otherwise it would perish. The poet also saw that in God's judgement God's saving grace was revealed.

This Bible verse calls us to do the same now: fear God. However, the question is immediately raised: is it right to generate fear? Is it right to speak of God as a fearful Lord? For we know fear may bring much trouble in our lives. There are illnesses that may have their roots in anxiety. Are we allowed to burden the people living among much fear with preaching the judgement of a fearful God? There are theologians who say that the God of the New Testament is the God of Grace and the God of Love contrary to the revenging God of the Old Testament. We turn away modern people from God, if we speak of God as a Lord of judgement. We don't need to list those sentences from Christ's sermons that speak of God's judgement in contrast to this. The Book of Revelation is also a part of the New Testament. We cannot tear the Scriptures in two and set the parts against each other. Also we cannot speak of God as a loving Lord without speaking of God as a judging Lord.

The best example for this is the Cross of Jesus Christ, which shows God as a judging Lord and as a loving and saving Lord at the same time.

It is also a question whether we can hide from the judging reality and contemplate on our present without seeing God's warning signs in it. It is important for us to recognise what we read in this Bible verse that the same angel who cries out 'Fear God' proclaims the gospel as well. As we have read, "he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on earth: 'Fear God and give Him glory.'" This is the Gospel, this is the good news. God is not silent even among the judging signs; he proclaims the time and possibility of conversion. In Psalm 28 we read how the psalmist prays, 'To you I call, O Lord, do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I shall be like those who have gone down to the pit.' The prophet Amos testifies of a time that will come when people will hunger the words of God, but God will be silent. So when God speaks, even if it is through His judgement, it is good news. God wants to shake us out of our deadly sleep so that we would turn to God.

Fear God and give Him glory. This is the summary of the mission message. To fear God and to give glory to God means that we abandon ourselves to God. We owe God ourselves, we belong to God. For God created us and saved us. God is not satisfied with anything less. God claims our whole personality and our whole being.

If we do not fear God, that is, if we do not abandon ourselves to God, something else will take God's place. If we do not give glory to God, there will be idols in our lives and several other gods will be born for us that we will fear and glorify, that is, we will abandon our lives to them. Such idols can be for example money we speak of so often, or power. Without God everything becomes an idol in our lives. These gods lay hold of our lives and rob us. This kind of god-fear is indeed harmful. That person or that community that worships idols is lost.

A temptation typical of modern people is to think they are real humans when they are their own masters. This is an illusion, this is self-deception. We are free, we own our lives truly, we live a full life only when we abandon it to God. Our idols bind us and keep us in captivity; God makes us free.

How can we abandon our lives to God? We can do it by accepting Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour and follow Him. It is in Him that we experience that fearing God does not mean dread or despair or anxiety. Fearing God is what the psalmist puts this way: "It is good to be near God." (Psalm 73,28) "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." (Psalm 73, 25-26)