

THE ROCK COMMUNITY CHURCH

1 Samuel 6

"Return to Sender: The Ark Goes Home"

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Anaheim Hills, CA | RockCC.com

21:46

So I want to invite you to grab your Bible and make your way to 1 Samuel chapter 6. 1 Samuel chapter 6 this morning. If you didn't bring a Bible, there should be one hiding underneath of your chair.

21:56

You can follow along with that one as well. But last week, if you were with us, we looked at this passage that essentially turned out to be this comedy of errors in 1 Samuel chapter 5. As Pastor Dave told us this narrative, this story about how the Philistines had captured the Ark of the Covenant, and they had brought it into their pagan temple, and they had set it before their their false god, Dagon.

22:22

God had allowed the Ark, we know, in 1 Samuel chapter 4 had allowed the Ark of God to be captured and to be taken into Philistine possession as he was punishing the Israelites for their disobedience.

22:34

But God, be sure of this, God was not going to be mocked by the Philistines because God is God, and there are no other gods before him as the Ten Commandments remind

us. So we can imagine this scene, and we did last week at Dagon's temple where we would have seen something that honestly made for quite the silent movie, right?

22:55

If you imagine the piano music, the Benny Hinn style, or the Charlie Chaplin style, just running around and propping the Dagon up that had fallen down, and the hands cut off, and you know, oh no, there's just this comedy scene of this terrible, terrible story as the Philistines failed to acknowledge that the God was greater than their false god, Dagon, for far too long.

23:20

What we have in this week's passage, though, is that the Philistines finally determined to send the Ark of the Covenant back to Israel. After seven long months of God's judgment upon this idolatrous people in the form of tumors, in the form of famine, what we're going to see is the Philistines come up with a plan to return the Ark of the Covenant to Israel.

23:43

They were determined as they were sending the Ark back that they were going to send an offering with it, and their offering that they were going to send with it was their effort to appease the wrath of God that had been directed against them.

23:55

Now before we jump into our passage, I want to teach you a new ten dollar word this morning, right? So everybody, you're going to repeat it along with me. So our word of the day is the word propitiation.

24:05

Go ahead and say that with me. Propitiation. You guys aren't nearly as loud as the first service. You guys had more time to wake up. You should be able to get this one, right? Let's do it one more time.

24:15

Propitiation. There it is. All right, so propitiation, if you're unaware, maybe somebody's got a great definition that they could offer this morning, but somebody in the first service, they got the cheat because we're going to stick it on the screen as well.

24:30

So propitiation defined by Merriam Webster's dictionary is the act of gaining or regaining the favor or goodwill of someone or something. It's this idea of appeasement, right? So people in days gone by would make offerings as they believed in several different gods, they would make these offerings to propitiate the gods, to appease the gods as they believed that bad things happening in their life was the result of an angry god.

24:58

They had a bad harvest, a bad crop season, and they would believe that it was because they had angered the grain gods or the gods of the harvest. If they were unable to have a child, they would believe that it was because they had angered the god of love or the fertility gods.

25:15

So the Philistines had determined that they had somehow wronged the god of Israel, and that as they had been experiencing this judgment for the last seven months, they were determined that they wanted to appease the wrath of God, and so they wanted to offer some sort of a sacrifice to propitiate his judgment, his wrath against them.

25:33

So with that kind of in the back of our mind, let's read our passage together this morning. It's a, it's a big old chunk. We're going to read 1 Samuel chapter 6. We're going to read the whole chapter together, so I'd invite you to follow along in your copy or you can follow along on the screens behind me as well.

25:48

1 Samuel chapter 6 starting in verse 1. It tells us that the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines for seven months, and the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, what shall we do with the ark of the Lord?

26:01

Tell us what we shall send, with what we shall send it to its place. And they said, if you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty, but by all means return him a guilt offering, and then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why his hand does not turn away from you.

26:18

And they said, what is the guilt offering that we shall return to him? So the priests answered and said, five golden tumors and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for the same plague was on all of you and on your lords.

26:33

So you must make images of your tumors and images of your mice that ravage the land and give glory to the God of Israel. Then perhaps he will lighten his hand from off of you and your gods and your land.

26:45

Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After he had dealt severely with them, did they not send the people away and they departed? Now then, take and prepare a new cart, two milk cows on which there has never come a yoke, and yoke the cows to the cart, and take their calves home away from them.

27:05

And take the Ark of the Lord and place it on the cart, and put in a box at its side the figures of gold, which you are returning to him as a guilt offering. Then send it off and let it go its way, and watch.

27:16

And if it goes up on the way to its own land, to Beth-shemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm. But if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that has struck us. It happened to us by coincidence.

27:30

So the men did so. They took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home. They put the Ark of the Lord on the cart, in the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors.

27:41

And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went. They turned neither to the right nor to the left and the lords of the Philistines went after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

27:53

Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. When they lifted up their eyes and they saw the Ark, they rejoiced to see it. And the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there.

28:06

A great stone was there, so they split up the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. And the Levites took down the Ark of the Lord and the box that was beside it, in which were the golden figures, and set them upon the great stone.

28:21

And the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrifices on that day to the Lord. When the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron. These are the golden tumors that the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the Lord.

28:37

One for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, and one for Ekron. And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and unwalled villages.

28:50

The great stone beside which they set down the Ark of the Lord is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh. And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they looked upon the Ark of the Lord.

29:03

He struck 70 men of them, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great blow. Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up away from us?

29:17

So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord, come down and take it up to you. These are the words of the Lord. Would you pray with me, church?

29:29

God, we thank you for your word. And we thank you that we can consider together this morning this passage, this simple historical account of the Philistines returning the Ark of the Covenant to Israel.

29:40

God, we pray that as we look at this historical narrative, this story of what happened and how you are at work among your people and among the Philistines, God, we pray that we would hear from you this morning.

29:52

God, that this wouldn't just be a history lesson, but that this would be something that speaks to our hearts. God, that you would give us ears to hear and to receive what you have to say to us this morning.

30:02

That we would not just be hearers of the Word, but that we would be doers of the Word. So, God, we give this time to you. We pray that you would speak for your servants who are listening. It's in Jesus' name we pray.

30:12

Amen. All right, well, as we jump in, we're going to just work our way through this story, and there's going to be several things that we kind of just pause and focus on as we work our way through. So, the first thing that we see in these first 12 verses, this story of the Ark of the Covenant is coming to its conclusion as it's making its way back to Israel now, but the first thing that we see is that the Ark is reinstated, that it's reinstated, that it comes back to Israel.

30:38

And so, after seven months of the Ark of the Covenant being possessed by the Philistines, the Philistines have determined that the payoff is no longer worth the pain, that having this victory trophy from their conquest over the Israelites, it was no longer worth it.

30:55

So, they've decided that they want to get rid of this Ark, that they want to send it back to Israel where it came from. And so, returning the Ark is an admission of the fact that they have offended the God of the Ark.

31:07

As they've decided to send this Ark back, they call for their priests, they call for their diviners, their religious leaders, they call them all together and they have this little powwow where they get together and they seek advice of how should we do this?

31:22

How should we send this sacred artifact back to the Israelites and how should we do this in a way that will hopefully appease their God in a way that He will stop punishing us with these tumors and with these mice that are described here in this passage?

31:38

They seek advice for how to deal with this and how to have a suitable procedure for dealing with the Ark. And so, they gather together and then it tells us as we continue down through our passage that they come up with a plan in verses 3 and 4.

31:52

Verses 3 and 4 of our passage, it says that the priests said, if you send away the Ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty, but by all means return Him a guilt offering, then you will be healed and it will be known to you why His hand does not turn away from you.

32:09

And they said, what is the guilt offering that we should return to Him? And so, they answered and said, five golden tumors and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for the same plague was on all of you and on your lords.

32:23

The priests offer this recommendation that the restoration of the ark should be sent. It should be accompanied by this guilt offering to essentially make reparations for the pain, for the suffering, for what they had done against the God of Israel, for their wrongdoing.

32:42

So this offering is being sent with the ark being sent back to Israel, hopefully with the goal of appeasing the anger of the God of Israel, that He would withdraw His plague from them, that these tumors and that these mice that had haunted them for the last seven months would hopefully be withdrawn from them, that they could go back to normal, essentially.

33:04

The priests advised offering these five golden tumors, these five golden mice. So we hear first this word tumors. Now this word tumor simply means growth in the original languages. So it may have been boils or skin lesions of some kind that some disease, some communicable disease had broken out among the Philistines.

33:25

Other translators believe that these tumors, that the word literally can be translated as hemorrhoids, that some sickness had broken out among the Philistines that was causing this pain. And so if you're taking notes this morning, you can write down, disobeying God can be a real pain in the butt sometimes.

33:43

But the tumors are mentioned specifically in the scriptures here, but there's something else that's going on here as well. All right, as they send these golden mice back with the ark of the covenant to Israel.

33:56

It seems likely that there was this second disaster, this second plague in which mice have swarmed in substantial numbers all around the Philistine territory. Verse five tells us that the mice devour the land, which would seem to indicate that a famine has been caused by their attack on the crops, on the plants, on the trees, on whatever it may be that they could get their little mouths on in the Philistine territory.

34:20

These golden images therefore model both of the symptoms of this plague that had come upon the Philistines, the tumors and the pests. There was this acknowledgement of what God had done among them over the past seven months.

34:36

But still in the midst of all of this, the actions of the Philistines seem to indicate that they're not concerned with humbling themselves before God or seeking to follow the God of the Israelites. They're not asking questions of how can we live in God's ways?

34:50

How can we do what God wants us to do? They simply wanted to get rid of his punishments that he was sending to them. They wanted to get rid of his wrath to appease him in some way. That word that we learned at the beginning, talking about appeasement, what's that word again?

35:05

Propitiation, that's right. They wanted to propitiate God's wrath. They wanted to just make the bad stuff go away. The idea was, you know, they're going to send this box with all the golden figurines.

35:16

They're going to send the Ark of the Covenant back to Israel. And fingers crossed, hopefully Yahweh who has been affecting us with these plagues, if it is him that he will be appeased and that his wrath will be assaged.

35:31

It'll be taken away from them. So unfortunately, over the past seven months, the Philistines have proven to be a bit slow. And they're realizing what's going on. And the fact that they should have, seven months ago, realized the error of their ways and turned from what they had decided they were going to prop Dagon up in front of this Ark of the Covenant and pretend that their God was greater than the God of Israel.

35:59

It took them seven months to realize that these, this disease, this famine that had broken out in their land, maybe that's because seven months ago something changed, right? Maybe, just maybe seven months ago when we took this symbol of the God of Israel back and possessed it, well maybe, just maybe, these two things go hand in hand.

36:22

but they didn't want to be absolutely just assume that that was the case. They wanted to make sure of it. They didn't want to just send the Ark of the Covenant and these gold figurines back to Israel if it wasn't actually the God of Israel that was mad at them.

36:35

So they came up with a little experiment, right? To determine if the God of the Hebrews is truly the cause of all of their pain and suffering. So it tells us in verse seven, they come up with this little experiment that they run.

36:49

Verse seven, it tells us, now then the priests tell the leaders of the Philistines, now then take and prepare a new carts, two milk cows on which there has never come a yoke and yoke the cows to the carts, but take their calves home away from them.

37:04

These milk cows that are described here in verse seven have recently given birth. They have new babies that are being taken away from them here in this little experiment. And by the way, they're untrained at the task that they're being given to do.

37:17

They're being told to pull this cart as this yoke is being placed on them, but they've never pulled a cart before. They don't know what they're doing. And so every natural instinct of these animals says that these mama cows should turn around and immediately head towards home as they return to their calves.

37:36

At the very least, they should wander around in circles or perhaps wander off to the right or to the left as they don't know what they're doing and pulling this cart. You know, it kind of feels like the Philistines have said, we're gonna do this little experiment to see if it was the God of Israel who had caused these plagues to break out among us.

37:53

But it feels like they were trying to stack the deck against this experiment, do everything that they could. By the way, the town that they were sending the cows in the ark up to was actually uphill from where they were going.

38:04

And so all we need is for these untrained cows to march in a straight line up the hill away from their babies. And we'll know that this was God that had done these things. There's no way that these cows are going to pull this cart towards Israel by accident.

38:17

So let's look at verses 10 through 12 and see what happens in our little experiment. Tells us that the leaders, the men of the Philistines, they did so. They took two milk cows and they yoked them to the cart.

38:28

They shut up their calves at home. They put the ark of the Lord on the cart in the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors. And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went.

38:40

They turned neither to the right nor to the left and the lords of the Philistines went after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh. You know what happens here makes no earthly sense whatsoever. These untrained cows turn away from their young.

38:56

They pull the cart uphill in the opposite direction of home. By the way, while they're unguided by any human hand, they not only pull in the opposite direction of home, they do so without even veering off the path in any way.

39:09

God clearly, even though a human hand is not guiding these animals, clearly the hand of God is guiding these animals as they're being led with the ark of the covenant back to Israel and back to God's people.

39:21

We see in verses one through 12 that the ark was reinstated, but now we see in verses 13 through 18 that the ark is now celebrated as it returns home. The ark is celebrated. When the ark of the covenant arrives in Israel, as these cows march up the hill, up the hill, and they come over the crest of the hill and the Israelites see this cart coming down with the ark of the covenant, it is met with joy and with celebration.

39:48

There are some confusing details that we see here in this passage as well though, because when we look at this, there's a few details that don't line up to the way that they should kind of all fit together.

39:59

If we look at this passage, just verses 13 through 16, let's look and consider how the story continues on. It tells us in verse 13, now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, and when they lifted up their eyes and they saw the ark, they rejoiced to see it.

40:16

And the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and it stopped there. And a great stone was there and they split up the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord.

40:27

And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the box that was beside it in which were the golden figures and set them upon a great stone. And the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrifices on that day to the Lord.

40:41

When the five Lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron. You know, the Israelites' immediate reaction to seeing the ark come is joy. But of itself, that doesn't tell us a whole lot, does it?

40:56

What is their joy? Why are they so excited? Are they right in their heart before God as they see God's Ark of the Covenant coming back into Israel? Are they excited because they know that God is coming back?

41:09

That somehow God has decided to come back and to restore his relationship with his people? Have they learned their lesson from the defeat that they suffered seven months earlier as they had tried to use God as some magical trinket to serve their needs and their desires?

41:25

Had they learned their lesson and were they thankful for that period of divine punishment? Had they learned their lesson or were they just thankful that the punishment was over? Were they thankful to have the presence of God back among them or were they just thankful to have this national monument, this national treasure being returned to them?

41:45

In the same way that many of us would be happy if someone stole the Declaration of Independence and we panicked about it and it was gone for seven months and all of a sudden it shows back up. Many of us would be excited because we got our national treasure back.

41:59

Our national symbol had been returned. Are they just excited because they got the box back or are they excited because it means more that they're being restored with their relationship to God? We see that there's joy is simply all it describes to us in these few verses.

42:16

We also see that there are Levites that are there, that they call for the Levites, the religious leaders. They call for them as there are some there living there in the town in Beth-shemesh. They're promptly summoned and called to come and to help take care of the ark that has shown up here in this field.

42:35

We see here described that the cart and the animals that were carrying the ark back into Israel, they were used to offer a sacrifice before the Lord. But if you're careful, if we know a little bit of Israeli history, we know that they don't follow the regulations for the sacrifice in the way that they should have.

42:54

In the old Levitical law, male bulls were supposed to be the animals that were sacrificed, not these female milk cows that were being sacrificed here today. These offerings were also supposed to be offered at the tabernacle, at the place of worship, not in some field, in some outlying village.

43:11

And I'm not sure about the laws here, but it seems to me that dropping the ark of the covenant on a big rock while they offer the sacrifices that they wanted to offer, may not be giving it the respect that it's due.

43:26

We see all these things take place and as the Philistine lords were watching from a distance, it tells us that they followed to the border and they look on from a distance, seems to me that they probably saw all of this happen, all of these things take place.

43:40

And it seems to me that they probably went home encouraged that day, that they had considered, they had asked these questions, they had sought their priests and their religious leaders, what should we do to get rid of this ark, to get rid of these punishments that God seems to just keep putting on us and putting on us and putting on us.

43:58

And it seems to me that they probably went home encouraged that day because the ark of the covenant was back in Hebrew hands and it was no longer in Philistine territory. It worked, all's good, right?

44:13

We saw the ark reinstated at the beginning of our passage. We saw the ark celebrated as it arrives back in Israeli possession. But now in verses 19 through 21, we see the ark is violated. The ark is violated because there's this abrupt turn that happens in the story in verses 19, 20 and 21.

44:35

Because the Israelites in some way, shape or form, it's not really described to us here, not in detail anyways, but we see that the Israelites had somehow erred in their handling of the ark of the covenant in some way.

44:49

Perhaps it was the improper sacrifice that they had offered, that they hadn't offered the appropriate animal, that they hadn't done it at the appropriate location, that they had somehow ignored God's instructions for their sacrifices and so perhaps it was their improper sacrifice that had caused God to become upset with them.

45:08

Some have suggested that the ark of the covenant in a small rural town like this may have been turned into some sort of a carnival -like sideshow. People just wanted to come and to see this ark of the covenant that perhaps they would never have an opportunity to see.

45:23

Certainly they would never have an opportunity to see as the ark of the covenant was supposed to be housed in the very inner chambers of the tabernacle. Or even the high priest only goes into the presence of the ark of the covenant once a year.

45:37

It was supposed to be separated away from the people, but perhaps it had been turned into some sideshow. Come on down, pay your one shekel, and you can see the ark of the covenant together this morning.

45:49

Maybe something like that had happened. May have been that some had made some decision to ignore the regulations that God had given the restrictions for the ark, and perhaps they chose to touch the ark, which would certainly have been caused for their demise.

46:06

Perhaps to look inside the ark, I wonder what's actually in there, and they just wanted to sneak a little peek. Well, that would have strictly been prohibited by God's laws as well. Maybe they simply looked at it.

46:17

The simple explanation of the fact that the ark of the covenant was supposed to be stored away in those inner chambers in the tabernacle, that even the high priest wasn't supposed to go into the presence of this ark, but once a year after he had cleansed himself, after he had offered all of the sacrifices, after he was absolutely certain that he was in right standing before God, that then and only then was he supposed to go into its presence.

46:42

So perhaps it was simply the fact that they hadn't taken the proper precautions. They hadn't dealt with this ark in the appropriate way. They hadn't shown it the respect that it deserved and perhaps covered it or done something that they should have done.

46:58

But regardless of what it was that they did or didn't do, what we see here in this passage is that God responded in immediate force. You look at verse 19 again, it says that God struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they looked upon the ark of the Lord.

47:14

He struck 70 men of them and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great blow. Regardless of what the exact offense was, the problem seems pretty clear to me. The proceedings seven months hadn't changed anything in the people of Israel because seven months earlier they had gone into battle with the Philistines and they had gotten themselves defeated.

47:37

They had lost 4,000 men and so as they had lost 4,000 men, they decided, well, you know what, let's go get the ark and we'll bring the ark to the front lines, that the presence of God will help us to win our battles.

47:47

And they tried to use God in some way as a magical trinket, their irreverent and disrespectful attitude towards the ark that they reflected as they carried the ark of the Lord to the front lines that resulted in 30 ,000 men being killed and the ark being captured.

48:07

That irreverent and disrespectful attitude that they had reflected as they watched the ark be taken, they watched thousands of their brothers killed, seems to me that that same irreverent and disrespectful attitude towards the ark continued.

48:22

Seems that they had violated the holiness of the ark somehow, that something that they did or didn't do resulted in the fact that they got themselves in trouble again. The lesson that they should have learned seven months earlier, the Israelites now have another opportunity to learn their lesson.

48:38

God is not a trinket to be abused or misused. God is not a trinket for us to just magically rub our little rabbit's foot and think that we're going to get what we want when we want. God's presence should be treasured and it must be entered in reverence.

48:54

When Israel's behavior mimics the behavior of the Philistines though, they become recipients of punishment in the same way that the Philistines had. Israel's behavior mirrored the Philistines as they irreverently approached God's presence in the same way that the Philistines had made the mistake of marching the ark of the covenant into Dagon's temple, thinking that they had somehow conquered and defeated this God and carried him into their temple.

49:22

And God said, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, I will not be one of your gods, I am THE God. But now Israel's behavior is mirroring that same behavior that we saw in the Philistines.

That as they irreverently approached God's presence and they received their due punishment. Some people say, you play stupid games, win stupid prizes, right?

49:49

They hadn't learned their lesson. Not only did Israel's irreverent behavior mirror the Philistines, but Israel's response to their punishment also mirrored the Philistine response. There's no indication as 2 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 10 tells us, that tells us of a godly sorrow that leads to repentance.

50:13

There was no godly sorrow here among Israelite people. Israelites didn't respond in repentance, they didn't respond in godly sorrow that led them to come closer to God. It simply shows that they were scared of the power of God.

50:31

Then in the same way that the Philistines were looked around and said, this thing is causing us pain, get rid of it. You know what the Israelites did here as God punished them for not handling the Ark of the Covenant correctly?

50:44

They said, this thing's trouble, get rid of it. They pawned it off to Kiriath-jearim. as we see in the first couple of verses of 1st Samuel chapter 7, it tells us they sent messengers to the next town over.

50:59

They said, hey guys, good news, the ark's back, come get it. They just wanted this thing to go away. So they pawned it off to the next town over, to Kiriath-jearim, and we're gonna see it taken there, and we're gonna see in the next chapter, in just the next few verses, that this is where the Ark of the Covenant is going to call home for the next several years.

51:19

But what do we do with all this, right? Kind of a historical passage that we're looking at so far together this morning. So we see this story of the ark and the Philistines and Israelites and these sacrifices, all these different things.

51:33

What do we do with all this? What does this mean to us today, right? 2024, how is my life supposed to be different based on a story with some golden hemorrhoids and some golden mice and some people that are dead?

51:50

Well this week's passage is ultimately about two different groups of people who sought to appease God's wrath, to propitiate the wrath of God in some way, ultimately running from His presence as they shipped Him off to the next town.

52:02

The Philistines shipped Him off to the border territory of Beth-shemesh. People of Beth-shemesh shipped Him off to Kiriath-jearim to the next town over. The Philistines were seeking to propitiate the wrath of God, to appease the wrath of God by sending these golden tumors, these golden mice, along to Israel with the Ark of the Covenant.

52:23

The Israelites quickly passed off the ark as they had mishandled it while it was in their care. So I think we should ask the question here together this morning that's that's asked in 1 Samuel chapter 6 verse 20.

52:36

But right at the end of our passage it simply asks the question that the men of Beth-shemesh said, who is able to stand before the Lord this holy God? Who can abide in the presence of this holy God? That's the question that we should ask because the Philistines tried to stand in the presence of God and they were judged and they were punished for their idolatry.

52:56

That they had marched God as a trinket into their false God's temple and they were judged accordingly. The Israelites and Beth-shemesh were judged for their disregard of God's holiness. That they had inappropriately handled the Ark of the Covenant in some way.

53:12

So who can abide in the presence of this holy God? That's the question that they're seeking to answer. Who can stand in God's presence? Well interestingly the answer to this question is provided in the very construction of the Ark of the Covenant that has been passed around back and forth between these groups and these stories.

53:31

Because if the Philistines had reflected on its unique design, this isn't just a box. This isn't just a square-sided little rectangle that had stored a few treasured things in it. It looks a little different than most other boxes did.

53:45

They might have understood that God's will and God's salvation, they may have understood how that all works a little bit better if they had slowed down and taken a look at the box. Because the Ark was a golden box containing the law of God.

53:58

It contained the Ten Commandments among a few other things. The Ten Commandments, the tablets that God had written with his own hand and had given to Moses all those years before. The Ten Commandments were indicative of God's law.

54:13

They were God's standard that he had for humanity. And a judge by these ten simple rules, unfortunately the reality is that every man and every woman that has ever walked the face of the earth fails miserably.

54:29

Right? Ten rules. It's all you had to do. Follow ten rules. Like, okay, I could do ten, right? Perhaps you're sitting here thinking, I'm a pretty good person. We're not going to go all the way through all ten of them.

54:42

But if you disagree, let me just ask a couple simple questions for you. You can answer in your own mind. Have you ever told a lie before? Uh -oh. Have you ever stolen something before? Uh -oh. Have you ever given greater priority to something other than God in your life?

55:00

That you made something else a God in your life? Uh -oh. We only made it through three and we're already in trouble, right? By these ten simple laws we are all judged and we're all determined to be worthy of punishment.

55:15

The Ark of the Covenant was more than just the Ten Commandments, because on top of the Ark of the Covenant there were these two angels that were seated there. There was a golden area on top that the lid that was on top of it that was known as what's referred to as the mercy seat.

55:30

The mercy seat on the top of the box was where the priests, as they would offer sacrifices, would come in, would enter into the Holy of Holies, into the inner chamber in the tabernacle, and they would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifices upon the top of this Ark of the Covenant, upon the mercy seat on the top of the box.

55:49

That's where the priests made atonement to pay the sin debt that the people of God had accumulated over the year prior. But you know what? The New Testament speaks of Jesus. New Testament speaks of Jesus, who came to appease the wrath of God, to propitiate the wrath of God, paying the debt that we all owe, making payment on our behalf.

56:11

Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice made for the sins of God's people, not like a lamb, or a goat, or a bull, or a cow, or anything else that may have been offered in the Old Testament. Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice made for the sins of God's people.

56:24

Let me just read two brief verses that kind of lay this out for us really clearly. Hebrews chapter 2 verse 17 tells us, therefore he, Jesus, had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

56:46

It tells us that Jesus was the the mediator. He was the one, the priest, that stood in between God and humanity and said, I'm going to appease the wrath of God by offering a sacrifice on their account.

56:58

In fact, Romans chapter 3 verse 25 tells us pretty clearly, talking about Jesus, who God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. Jesus is, he doesn't just make payment for us, he is the payment for us.

57:18

That the way that we are saved, that we are forgiven of our sins, that we are let off the hook in some simple words. The way that we can be forgiven is that Jesus not only stood in between God and man, he was the sacrifice between God and man, that he

was the propitiation, he was the appeasement of God's wrath, that by his blood an innocent man was killed so that guilty men and women could be forgiven.

57:51

Sounds like a pretty good deal to me. Sounds like a message that the the Philistines probably should have slowed down and paid attention to. That the Israelites probably should have slowed down and paid attention to.

58:04

But Romans 3 tells us that God put Jesus forward as the propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. The Bible invites us to repent and to place our faith in Jesus for our salvation. And that's more than what some people make it out to be.

58:22

Because some people will tell you, you just have to believe in Jesus. You just have to believe that Jesus was who he said he was. Okay, lots of people that will intellectually agree with the fact that Jesus existed.

58:33

That doesn't mean that they place their faith in Jesus for salvation. Placing our faith in Jesus, as Romans 3 talks about, is far more significant than just intellectual agreement. So I could stand here this morning and I could tell you I believe that that chair would hold me if I walked over there and sat in it.

58:52

That's just a statement of intellectual belief. I believe that that will hold me. But it doesn't require any action, does it? I can just say that I believe. But for me to place my faith in that chair to hold me, there's something required, isn't there?

59:09

I gotta go sit down. I gotta go sit down in that chair. For me to place my faith in that chair means that some action is required. So as we come to the end of this passage, as we come to the end of this comedy of errors, as the people of Israel, as the Philistines have stumbled back and forth and made error after error after error because they didn't slow down and acknowledge God as the one that was worthy of their respect.

59:38

That they didn't place their faith in God to to make a way for them. Brings us to the question that we have to answer this morning. Have you placed your faith in Jesus to be the one to save you? Have you placed your faith in Jesus to be your propitiation?

59:57

To be the one that would appease the wrath of God on your behalf? Because if you haven't, please don't leave here today without doing that. There is nothing more important that you could do this morning than to say, I want Jesus.

01:00:13

To have a relationship with Him, to make the step, to take the step that the Israelites missed, that the Philistines missed, but it is available to you this morning. Jesus stood in between God and us, and Jesus made a way for us to be forgiven.

01:00:29

Jesus made a way for us to be brought into God's family for the wrath that we deserve, for the punishment that we deserve. It was poured out on Jesus. All we have to do is place our faith in Him. It sounds like a pretty good deal to me.

01:00:44

So if you haven't done that, will you do that today? Our prayer team is gonna be down here after the service is over. They would love to pray with you. I'm gonna be floating around back there in the hallway and trying to make it as hard as I can for you to sneak out without saying hi to me.

01:00:58

Would you come talk to me? Would you find somebody and make that decision today? But what if you have? What if you have made that decision? What if you have placed your faith in Jesus to be your sacrifice this morning?

01:01:12

What does this all mean for you? I think we've been given the opportunity to enjoy what the Philistines and the Israelites and 1 Samuel 6, what they ran away from, because we're invited into the presence of God.

01:01:26

We don't have to shy away from the presence of God. We don't have to stand at a distance anymore, because when Jesus went to the cross, when Jesus paid that debt, when He gave His life so that we could be forgiven, you know what?

01:01:38

There's something really profound that happened in that moment where He gave up His Spirit, where He paid that sin debt. Because in the temple, in the temple, there was this giant thick, scholars say, somewhere between 12 and 18 inches thick, there was a curtain that separated the presence of God, the Ark of the Covenant, the inner presence of God was separated from the rest of the people so that the rest of them wouldn't die like the 70 people in our passage today that looked at the Ark.

01:02:09

They were separated from God, but in the moment that Jesus gave His life, you know what happened? God tore the veil. This thick, thick curtain from the top to the bottom tore in half as God shook the foundations of the earth, that God has allowed humanity, God has allowed us into His presence.

01:02:29

And so if you've already received that offer of salvation, if Jesus is your sacrifice this morning, you know what? You can leave here with a big smile on your face because we get to go into the presence that the Israelites didn't get to be in.

01:02:40

We got to go into the presence without fear that the Philistines didn't get to live in. We are invited to live in the presence of God. Jesus said, I came that they might have life and that they might have it to the fullest, that they might have it abundantly.

01:02:55

We get to leave here with a smile on our face this morning because God's invited us in. And if we place our faith in Jesus as our sacrifice, if Jesus is the one that made a way for us to come in, we have the ultimate gift that these people, it was just an idea for them.

01:03:15

It was something that they needed to run away from and fear and hide. They needed to stand at a distance from God, but God has brought us close by the blood of Jesus's cross. So you know what, this morning, if you haven't received Jesus, put your faith in him this morning.

01:03:33

And if you have, leave with a smile on your face because we've been invited in. God has adopted you as his son or his daughter. That the fear that categorizes the Philistines and the Israelites here in this passage, that's not the fear that we have to walk out of here with this morning.

01:03:52

God loves you and he calls you his son or his daughter. Our prayer team will be down here at the front. We'd love to pray with you. Our prayer wall is out the back doors to the right. If you need to write down your prayer requests, we would love to pray for you in our prayer meetings if you would write those requests down.

01:04:12

But at this point, I just wanna ask you, would you pray with me now? God, we thank you for, God for a historical narrative that can hit a square between the eyes if we let it. God, the comedy of errors as the Philistines and as the Israelites just totally misunderstood your holiness, misunderstood the fact that you are God and no one else will compete for your affections.

01:04:43

That no one else will ever stand in your presence and be your rival. But God, this morning as we look at this story, as we look at this narrative and as we see God, a beautiful, beautiful reminder of the greatness of who you are.

01:05:08

God, help us to be overcome with joy. God, help us to be overcome with the reality that we have been invited in, that you have made a way for sinners like me, sinners like us, to be brought into your presence, that Jesus would be the ultimate propitiation, that he would appease the appropriate justice and wrath that was destined for us, that you are good in judging sin and judging evil.

01:05:37

We all understand that when someone sins against us, but we don't want to accept it when we sin against someone else. God, you are good for judging evil. You are good for setting wrongs right. You are good in judging the world of sin.

01:05:57

But God, we thank you that you didn't force us to have to pay our own penalty. God, that in your love for us, that you sent Jesus to come and to absorb that wrath, to absorb that punishment, to offer to us freely the gift of salvation if we would simply place our faith in Jesus to save us.

01:06:15

God, help us to put on Christ this morning. Help us to live the life of obedience, of deliverance that you have offered to us. God, help us to leave here this morning with the biggest smile on our faces that can fit because of the greatness of who you are and the fact that you've invited us in.

01:06:40

God, we thank you for your love for us. We thank you for Jesus. It's in his name we come, in his name we pray, amen.