

INTRO: In any close relationship, there are things you need to know and respect about the other person. And these things can range from the trivial, like sports loyalties or movie preferences, to the kinds of things that will do real damage and even end the friendship—moral convictions, worldview issues, family dynamics, past hurts. Of course, when it comes to relating to God, many people assume that He is bigger than all that, so big that it's impossible for us to offend Him. After all, he's the perfect gentlemen, and surely what Abraham Lincoln so famously said must apply to God all the more, "with malice toward none and charity to all..." Actually, God is love. That's in the Bible. So that settles it right? It's easy to be close to God, because God is not demanding or judgy. He's forgiving. He's really just a big softy; a cosmic, infinite, divine, all-knowing, all present, all powerful...life coach. And He sent Jesus. And Jesus said "judge not lest ye be judged." And therefore, God must not judge, because God wouldn't want to be judged Himself, and surely he takes his own medicine. And so our reasoning goes...until we read all the way through our Bibles. This morning we come to 1Sam 6:1-7:1, Page 229 in the pew Bible. And we discover that there is one great thing we really need to know and respect about God if we want to be close to Him. Let's read it to find out.

1S 6:1-3. *"The ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, 'What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us with what we shall send it to its place.'" The lords of the Philistines sense that they owe something to the Lord of Lords. So they call their own priests for a religious cabinet meeting. This is a conversation between the five lords of the Philistine cities, and their own pagan priests and diviners, NOT Israelite priests.¹ *They [the Philistine 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."**

So, the Philistines are still in Ekron, howling to high heaven, in a world of hurt because of these sores all over their skin. They know the ark of God is too hot to handle. The question is, how to get rid of it in a way that doesn't land them in hotter water than they're in now?² How do you get rid of God safely? *"With what shall we send it to its place."* That is a question of respect and appeasement. How do we tell this god "we get it, we fold, you win"? These Philistine priests make this a personal transaction. This isn't about the ark as an inanimate but magical object. It's about the God represented by the ark. *"Return him a guilt offering."* *"You'll know why his hand does not turn away from you."* But it seems like the lords would be satisfied with just the healing part. At any rate, their pagan priests answer with their own hazy perception of Hebrew religion mixed with their own worldview.³ Whatever you do, don't send him away empty-handed. Give him a guilt offering to make up for disrespecting him. Then he will leave, he will take his plague with him, and you can go back to work in the iron mine and the weapons plant.

1S 6:4-6 *And they said, 'What is the guilt offering⁴ that we shall return to him?' They answered, '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. 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. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land. 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*

¹ "Philistia's religious authorities..." (R.D. Bergen, NAC 100); so all the other commentaries.

² "To send the ark of Yahweh back would be to acknowledge a religio-political defeat" (Tsumura, NICOT 214).

³ "This advice apparently represents a syncretistic blend of pagan imitative magic and perverted Torah ritual" (Bergen, NAC 100).

⁴ They've contracted guilt. For what? For treating God no differently than Dagon, or as Dagon's subordinate. Guilt offerings in Lev 5:14-19 are for unintentional sins against the first table, "in any of the holy things of the Lord" (5:15), and they are compensatory, "he shall bring to the Lord as his compensation... He shall make restitution for what he has done amiss in the holy thing and shall add a fifth to it and give it to the priest. And the priest shall make atonement for him... the priest shall make atonement for him..."

departed? Here's what you should do. Make 5 golden figures of the tumors that plagued your bodies, one golden figure for each of the 5 major cities in Philistia. There's a ton of disagreement on what the mice mean. Some think literal mice carried the plague and so were part of the plague. Others think mice ruined the fields during the plague.⁵ Others think the golden mice looked like the tumors and so represented the tumors, and that when the word "and" connects tumors and mice in these verses, it means "namely" or "that is" rather than "and", which is grammatically possible and might be best, since this is the first time mice are mentioned in the Hebrew text.⁶ That way, there are just five images, one for each city.

Either way, the Philistine priests think this is how they will give **glory** to the God of Israel and in response he might lighten his hand.⁷ Where was the last time we read of anyone concerned with God's glory? It was Phinehas' widow, giving birth to Ichabod, lamenting twice that the glory has departed from Israel. Well, it may have departed, but it wasn't destroyed. God is glorious no matter where He is, and He will be taken seriously. He will be treated as the weight and significance He deserves, even by people who do not trust or like Him...like these Philistines, who are now very concerned about how to give God glory, if only to escape His unwanted attention. And the way they aim to do this is to give God credit for sending the sores by sending Him back with five golden mice that symbolize the shape of their sores. You brought these sores on us, and so we give you back your ark and your plague...in gold. Take it with you. You win.

But of course, if you know anything about the Law, you know they are way off in how to give this God glory. The ark was never supposed to be pulled on a flatbed cart. It was only to be carried on the poles specially made to go through the metal rings on the four corners of the ark (Num 4:4-15). Those poles were only to be carried by Levites from the tribe of Kohath. And mice are unclean animals (Lev 11:29)—you didn't touch them, you didn't sacrifice them to God, and you especially didn't make images of them to give God in violation of the second command. The Philistines don't know any of that. This is a ritual train wreck. If you're Israelites hearing this for the first time, you're probably snickering at them. "Look at what these jokers are bringing God. He's never gonna accept that."

Yet the Philistine priests do know some historical theology, because they state their reasoning in terms of Pharaoh's attitude toward God and Israel during the Exodus. They call their swollen sores a plague in v.4, just like the exodus. In v.6 they flat out ask their city lords, "Why play the fool like Pharaoh? We know that story. He was so stubborn it took 10 plagues, and when Pharaoh finally did send Israel away, the plagues ended, Yahweh left them alone. We ain't stupid. You don't have to plague us twice. So let's just skip to the end of this exodus." They even send the ark with golden gifts, like the Egyptians sent Israel with gold jewelry in Ex 12:35. So yes, the Philistine offering of golden mice-tumors is a liturgical laughingstock. But it invites a comparison. These Philistines respect God sooner than Pharaoh did, and more than Phinehas the Israelite priest did back in chapter 2. God can stand a little ignorant reverence; what he hates is conscious contempt.

The Philistines see this situation as another exodus event. The Philistines play Pharaoh, only they intend to be a quicker study. The ark is like Israel escaping foreign captivity; but as we'll see, the ark makes its

⁵ Firth, *Apollos* 98, 100.

⁶ Tsumura, *NICOT* 216-217, 222, 223.

⁷ "The gifts of 'tumors and mice' is an intention to 'give back' the plagues caused by Yahweh and so remove their danger from Philistine cities" (Brueggemann, *Interpretation*, 40). D. Tsumura is even more compelling: "These golden objects function as (1) 'a compensatory sacrifice, carrying away the contamination from Philistia and with it the suffering' [quoting McCarter]. But at the same time, they are (2) a payment of tribute 'to the God whose property has been violated' [quoting R.P Gordon]...The MT of 1Samuel 5 does not even hint that the disease was caused by mice but only by Yahweh. Therefore, making and sending off the golden mice was 'sympathetic magic' whose purpose was to get rid of the disease itself, not to get rid of mice as the cause of the disease... So, it seems that in this account the golden objects are referred to alternatively as 'tumors' or 'swellings' or 'mice' because the mice represent the tumors" (NICOT, 216). Do the golden mice given to God point forward to the wealth of the nations being brought to God's kingdom?

own way out of Philistia—no Moses necessary. In the meantime, the Philistine priests try one last thing to make sure they're not seeing things, and to make sure the lords don't go home with their tail between their legs unless it's absolutely necessary. They set up a test to see if Yahweh really defeated Dagon, or if that was just happenstance. And as they formulate the test, they stack the deck against Yahweh.

1S 6:7-9 “Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows on which there has never come a yoke, and yoke the cows to the cart, but take their calves home, away from them. 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. 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 struck us; it happened to us by coincidence.” So let's recap. The ark arrives in Ashdod, Yahweh submits Dagon and then decapitates him,⁸ and inflicts sores on people in multiple cities so badly that they cry to high heaven for mercy. But the priests are like, “maybe that was just a really weird week.” So they set up a test. Get 2 mamma cows that have never been harnessed. Hitch them to a brand-new cart with the ark on it, send them toward Israel, and then walk their calves back home the other way. They design this to be both reverent and revealing. The cows have never pulled and the cart has never...carted. So both will be ritually undefiled and un-offensive to Yahweh, so the thinking goes.

But it will also be revealing. Cows have to adjust to being harnessed. They don't immediately submit to pulling just because you harness them, and they often need to be trained to cooperate to pull in the same direction in the same harness with another cow. Add to that the unnatural direction of mamma cows moving away from their baby cows, and if the ark still crosses state lines, then we'll know the plague was supernatural. The ark will have to do something contrary to nature—two rookie mamma cows, pulling together in the same direction, in the same harness, away from their own calves. Now, we don't know the priests attitude in suggesting this. Maybe they're like, “Yeah, when pigs fly—this is never gonna work. We can't lose...And I hope we don't, because I need this job...”⁹ I don't know. But look at how they put it in v.8-9. Let it go its way... If it goes up...to its land.” The ‘it’ is the ark. They're talking like the ark—or the God of the ark—will be holding the reins in the cart and setting the direction for the cows. Still, they want this test to confirm or deny that Yahweh is the one who defeated Dagon and plagued the people. Did all that stuff really happen in chapter 5? Watch...this....

1S 6:10-12 “The men did so, and took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home. And they put the ark of the Lord on the cart and 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. They turned neither to the right nor to the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them as afar as the border of Beth-shemesh. Straight over the border, in the middle of the road, never veering to either side, never even trying to turn around, even though the whole time they're mooing in mourning because they want to go back to nurse their calves,¹⁰ but something—someone—is driving them against their maternal instinct, to haul the ark, all the way to an Israelite border-town that belonged to Levites no less (Josh 21:16). Yeah. This is real. And the lords follow them to the border, probably amazed.

1Sam 6:13-16. Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. And when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, they rejoiced to see it. The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there. A great stone was there. And they split up the wood of the cart and

⁸ “That Dagon is face down indicates he has begun the journey into the underworld, making this threshold especially dangerous, which is why those entering the temple do not tread on it” (D. Firth, *Apollos*, 95).

⁹ E.g. Brueggemann, “The planning of the Philistines is indeed careful and cunning and sets very long odds...The Philistines are frightened, but they still hope to see Yahweh exposed as a powerless god. Their strategy is to prevent Yahweh's demonstration of sovereignty” (*Interpretation*, 41).

¹⁰ Baldwin, *TOTC* 82.

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. And the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices on that day to the Lord. And when the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron. This is the first time anyone's been happy to see the ark. But what are they happy about? Are they overjoyed to discover that Yahweh had not really been defeated at all? Is this just about saving face with the Philistines? Are they just glad to have their lucky charm back? It's hard to tell from the sequel. For now, they follow custom and burn both the cart and the cows as devoted to God now that they've done their duty for the ark. The Levites unload the ark, as only they were allowed to do by law. Meanwhile the Philistines are creeping on them in the wheat, seeing how it all shakes out, and with their question answered to their satisfaction, it's back to business as usual in Ekron. Glad that's over. Life goes on. Time to duct-tape Dagon.¹¹

As if to relish the victory, the story gets summarized in **1S 6:17-18** *These are the golden tumors that the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the Lord: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, 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. 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. "Every one of those Philistine lords ponied up to Yahweh that day,¹² and it all happened at Big Rock near the interstate outside Beth-shemesh."* Happy ending, right? Close; but God's not done just because he's back in Israel.

1S 6:19-7:1 *And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon¹³ the ark of the Lord. He struck seventy¹⁴ 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?'* Now remember, this is a city settled for Levites (Num 21:16). Of all Israelites, these Israelites in this city should have known exactly how to treat Yahweh and his ark. Nobody was supposed to so much as look at the ark, not even the Levites. Even the Kohathite Levites who were commissioned to carry the ark were not allowed to touch it directly. That's why God insisted it be carried with poles that ran through rings on the corners. **Num 4:20** *"they shall not go in to look on the holy things even for a moment lest they die."* In fact, travel protocol was to cover the ark with a layer of goatskin, and on top of that a layer of blue. The reverent impulse here, then, would have been to cover the ark, not to gawk at it, and especially not to lift the lid for a look inside.¹⁵

The key question of the whole chapter is there in v.20 *Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, 'Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? That is the question of all human history. God's own people cannot stand before His holiness. So who will stand before Him in their stead? Who can mediate a relationship between such sinful people and such a holy God? And again, who respects God more—Philistines or Israelites? Granted, the Philistines have no idea what they're doing, and maybe they stack the deck against*

¹¹ So also D.R. Davis, FOTW.

¹² "In a narrative into which a list is integrated, both list and narrative normally deal with the same items. This means that the initial *waw* in v.18a is probably to be taken as *waw* explicative as and 17:40 and elsewhere, and thus translated as namely" (Tsumura, *NICOT* 224).

¹³ "As McCarter notes, *looked into*, instead of 'saw'...these people somehow lacked the proper attitude toward God, not honoring and reverencing the holy One" (Tsumura, *NICOT*, 226). Though D.R. Davis disagrees with many EV's and sticks with "looked upon."

¹⁴ MT, LXX, BHS, KJV, ASV, NAS95, NET have "50,070". But this is widely considered to be the result of an unrealistic gloss (e.g., Firth 93; McCarter, 139), and some modern translators (NJB, CEB, NIV, RSV, NRSV, ESV) and many commentators (J. Baldwin, R.D. Bergen, D.R. Davis, D. Firth, P.K. McCarter, D. Tsumura) follow Josephus (*Antiquities* 6.1.4) in translating simply "70" due to the likely small population of Beth-shemesh. Tsumura notes that "O.T. Allis supports the MT and takes it to mean '50 out of 1,000';" but Tsumura goes on to suggest that the Hebrew grammar could yield "two possible explanations: (1) 'one fifth of the clan'...or (2) '5 out of [every] 1,000 (or clan).'" If (1) is the case, the clan has 350 men; if (2) is correct, then the total population of the city would be 14,000 (or 14 clans)" (*NICOT*, 227).

¹⁵ "Even the Kohathites...were forbidden either to touch or view the sacred box. Thus, the first duty of the Israelites—especially the Kohathites, whose charge it was to care for the holy things of Israelite worship (*cf.* Num 4:2)—would have been to hide the ark from view while avoiding any physical or visual contact with it" (Bergen, *NAC* 103).

Yahweh; but at least they're using a new deck of cards—a brand-new cart, fresh cows, and gold figurines as an offering of recognition and recompense. But here, even the Levites have forgotten how holy God is, how seriously he takes his holiness, how dangerous it is for a holy God to come near to sinners, how He alone determines the rules of our engagement with Him. Some of them pay with their lives.

Sadly, these Levites don't know what to do with God any more than the Philistines. *And to whom shall he go up away from us?' 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.'* Now it's not just the Philistines trying to get rid of the ark. It's Israel passing it from city to city. *And the men of Kirath-jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the Lord.*" Finally, someone qualified and consecrated to guard the ark, and to guard people from getting hurt by it (Gen 2:15; Num 8:26). Ok. Crisis finally averted. But the question remains: *who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?*

POINT

If we want to be close with God, we must respect His sovereign holiness.

FIVE APPLICATIONS (not to-do's, but implications, thought patterns, truths to trust and obey)

1. God is powerful and glorious, whether we think so or not.¹⁶ God is free to do whatever he wants, wherever he wants, among whomever he wants. He can cross state lines and international borders, he can deal with all people of all colors and cultures and religions, without changing either his character or his expectations. **God freely champions His holiness all over His world by His power for His glory.** And His power over people is not conditional on what they think of Him, or whether they acknowledge Him. The Philistines feared Yahweh before he arrived—"Woe to us! These are the gods who struck the Egyptians...." That fear led them to fight God. Then they ridiculed Yahweh after they thought they had "defeated" him. Then they feared him again while His hand was heavy against them, and that fear led them to reject God—send Him away, whatever it takes. We'll see in the coming weeks, though, that they will set themselves against Yahweh and His people again by drawing up in war against Saul in chapter 13 and then sending out Goliath to taunt them into a winner-take-all challenge in chapter 17. Yet God was the same God the whole time—equally powerful, equally glorious, equally holy and sovereign, regardless of the Philistines shifting opinions and policies toward him.

Friend if you're a non-Christian reading and hearing these things with us this morning, I wonder if you can see yourself in a mirror here, your own shifting opinions and policies toward this unchanging God. You fear him, so you fight him. You assume you've won, so you ridicule Him, only to realize that his hand is heavy against you. You fear him all the more and so you bribe him away, yet you have a hard time letting him win, so you re-engage the fight. You want the last laugh against God.

The Philistines were the avant-garde of the iron age—they had mastered the new technology to exploit and extort their way to prosperity and power. This is the world's way still today. The world unites against God, musters all its tech and science and strength, and says like Philistia in chapter 4, "take courage and fight." Yet it will work no better today than it did back then. The church is here to warn you with a love that tells the truth—fighting against this God will be a losing battle for you still today. He is too wise, too holy, too sovereign for you, and He will beat you at your own game. He will simulate "losing" a battle to

¹⁶ "The 'Ark Narrative'...is really about Yahweh's freedom. Yahweh can overcome the Philistines without human involvement. The story insists that Yahweh is absolutely sovereign, but that if Israel stands in proper relationship to him, they can have security. What matters is not human power, but the God who reigns over all. This theme is taken up in terms of Israel's kings in Ps 2, a theme the NT redirects to Jesus in Acts 4:25-26" (D. Firth, *Apollos* 103).

you, only to see you into invite Him right into the temple of your own favorite god. And then he will go to work on you from the inside. Yet look at the stubbornness of the human heart. No matter how clearly he decapitates your Dagon, as soon as God lifts his hand, you go back to the idols of money and sex, power and pleasure, wealth and ease and safety. But you are not safe from this God unless you repudiate your idols, repent of your sin, and trust in God's Son, Christ Jesus. You need to change your gods.

2. Sometimes misguided non-Christians put us Christians to shame.¹⁷ I know that the Philistines are not converting to the God of Israel here. But the contrast between the Philistines and Phinehas is palpable. Eli's son's Hophni and Phinehas offered all the right sacrifices, but they exploited their power, extorted God's people, and their corruption drew God's condemnation. They were totally irreverent toward God. They were Israelite priests, yet still they refused to respect God's holiness. These Philistines, on the other hand, feel God's power. They see the effects of His holiness in His judgments against them and their gods. They recognize God's reality. They don't repent toward God; but at least they respect His holiness and power. They remember God's history with Egypt and they don't want to become another Pharaoh. They take God seriously, even though they don't trust God sparingly. That's more than Eli's sons could say. Philistine priests take God more seriously than Israelite priests. The churches today should take a lesson here. Do we take God seriously? Do we treat him as the dangerously holy God, the consuming fire He still is? Familiarity with God has bred contempt in the churches. Many non-Christians put many Christians to shame in the way they live, and talk, and love, in their seriousness about life, in their integrity, in their business dealings, in the way they treat their bosses and employees, their spouses and children. This should not be. And it would not be if we ourselves knew and respected God as we should.

3. God's holiness is still humanity's greatest problem. 1Sam 6:20 "*Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, 'Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?'*" That is the question of the ages; it reverberates in our hearts still today. Our greatest problem is not racism or sexism. It's not populism or nationalism or globalism. It's not even abortion or what our culture thinks about marriage. It's not the economy or the deficit or overpopulation or a declining birth rate. It's not inner-city crime or police brutality. It's not the specter of court-packing or confirming a justice right before an election. Humanity's greatest problem is God's holiness—His unique, transcendent purity, his devotion to his own character and ways, and the moral expectation and demand that His moral authority creates for us.

Our greatest problem is not our government. It's our God. The most serious thing we need to be saved from is not the power of other people's opinions enshrined in law; it's not even the way other people sin against us. The most serious thing we need to be saved from is God's holiness breaking out against us over our own sins. "*Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?'*" That should be our question. Yet today, we ask that question in our hearts with sarcasm and contempt. "Come on! What does God expect?! How can anybody possibly please him when he demands perfection?" And because we cannot answer this question to our own satisfaction—*who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?*—we try to get rid of this God safely, which at best can only delay His judgment.

¹⁷ "...arrangements are made for the ark's return, arrangements dependent upon advice from Philistine priests and diviners, people who would not normally know Yahweh's will. Their advice is almost completely against the law; instead of properly consecrated Levites, it is returned on a cart with unacceptable reparation offerings since mice and tumors were unclean. These men do not know Yahweh's requirements, yet they recognize that the Philistines stand in the same danger as Egypt during the exodus. Like all great humour, this cuts both ways. Israel laughs at their folly in imagining that these processes would be acceptable, yet it was these religious professionals of another deity who understood what Yahweh was doing. Israel's corrupt priesthood is ridiculed in the mirror of the folly of the Philistine priests and diviners. It is the Philistines, and not Israel, who come truly to know Yahweh through this" (D. Firth, *Apollo* 102). While Firth gives the Philistines too much credit for "knowing" the Lord, the comparative point stands. They don't know Yahweh sparingly, but they do respect his holiness better than Israel at this point. Brueggemann is more measured, "They unwittingly observe and testify that Yahweh is indeed God. They interpret what is going on in the categories of Israel's faith" (*Interpretation*, 38).

4. Getting rid of God safely only delays judgment. This is what many people do. They try to appease God with their own offerings, only so that he will leave them alone for the time being. The Philistines paid God to go away. But as we'll see, God will not leave Philistia alone forever. He's coming back for them. People still try to get rid of Jesus safely. Jesus heals the Gadarene demoniac in Mark 5, sends his demons into a herd of pigs, and the demons run the pigs over a cliff to a watery demise. Word makes it into town, and in Mark 5:16 "And they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region."¹⁸ To them, Jesus is bad for business. The Jewish Pharisees also invite Jesus to take a walk in **Luke 13:31-32** "*At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, 'get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.'*" And he said to them, *'Go and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.'*" The Pharisees finally get rid of Jesus safely by manipulating the state authorities into crucifying him. But of course, they could not keep Him in the grave. Jesus rose from the dead, and His resurrection is the proof that He is the one who will one day execute God's judgments on all those who refuse to trust in Him for the forgiveness of their sins. And Jesus' resurrection is what the ark's exodus prefigures in 1Sam 6.

5. The ark's exodus foreshadows Jesus' exodus, and ours in Him. Jesus re-lived Israel's history, only He did it with sinless perfection. And that includes the exodus. At His transfiguration, Jesus has this tantalizing little interaction with Moses and Elijah, now glorified, in **Luke 9:31** "*And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure (exodus), which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*" That word translated 'departure' there is the Greek word *exodus*, and He was about to accomplish that exodus by rising from the dead in Jerusalem. Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and Luke all understood Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead as an exodus. In fact, Jesus' resurrection would be THE exodus that would enable our exodus. Jesus defeat sin's power and pollution, so that we could escape sin's slavish power and penalty over us. And just as the ark led itself out of exile, so Jesus rose bodily from the dead by the power of His own indestructible life. He said he would in John 10:10 "*I lay down my life that I may take it up again. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.*" Jesus raised Himself from the grave. It was, as John Flavel said, "by the power of his own Godhead that he quickened and raised himself."¹⁹ Jesus said in John 11:25 "***I am*** the resurrection and the life." Jesus Himself is, in His own divine personhood, the power of God for resurrection life, not only for Himself, but for every sinner who trusts in Him.

Many of us have hoped for a V-shaped recovery for the economy. I don't know much about that. But 1Sam 6 and the rest of the Bible tells us to hope in a **V-shaped Christology**. The way God recovers us from our own spiritual plight is to send His own Son to experience it and overcome it in our place. The Son of God starts high in heaven, descends low, all the way to the grave, and then rises far above all authority and power. This is Philippians 2:6, "*though he was in the form of God [high], he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men [low]. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death [lower], even death on a cross [lowest]. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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 [highest].*"

¹⁸ So also Brueggemann.

¹⁹ John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life* (Works, 1:490).

Paul Alexander ©2020

That is the V-shaped recovery we need today, no matter what happens with the economy or the election. Christian, that is the V-shaped recovery you should be talking about, more than you talk about the economy or the election or the supreme court nomination. Jesus' exodus-resurrection is the V-shaped recovery that we all agree on in this church, it's the recovery that humbles and unites our hearts and keeps us together when our social fabric is fraying at the seams. And it is the V shaped recovery that should determine our own mindset in divisive times. *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.*" He was high, but humbled himself to death for us, like the ark in the temple of Dagon. And therefore we should follow in his footsteps as we relate together here in the church. Brothers and sisters, that is how the world will know we are Jesus' disciples, when we love one another as Jesus loved us—selflessly, sacrificially. And when we live out our own V-shaped recovery in Christ, it makes others wonder what we're drawing our lives with; what pen, what pattern is this? And we should pray that by God's grace He would use our V-shaped recovery to help others experience their own V-shaped recovery in Jesus' death and resurrection.

CONCLUSION

"Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?" There is a right answer to that question. We find it in Ps 24:3-4 *Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false.*" Friend, just to be clear, that is not you. That is Jesus. And yet Jesus does one better. He not only stands before God. *When he had made purifications for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.* The Philistines were right. You don't send God away empty-handed. God's sovereign justice demands a guilt offering, a satisfaction, a price paid for the offense done to His glory. But we must be redeemed by something more precious than gold. That is what Jesus has become for us. After obeying the whole law his whole life, he became a curse for us in his death on the cross. He rose from dead by the power of his own life. He completed His exodus and ours, and He did it just as the ark completed its exodus—all by Himself, while his disciples had abandoned him. And now, Jesus does not merely stand before God the Father. He sits beside God the Father, at the right hand of power. Faith alone, in this Jesus alone—the crucified, dead, buried, risen, ascended Jesus—is the only way we truly respect God's sovereign holiness. The reason is that God's holiness demands a righteousness from us that is beyond our willingness or ability to give. And therefore God's holiness also demanded the sacrifice of Jesus as the only possible satisfaction for our idolatry and opposition against God.

Everyone in 1Sam 6 wanted to get rid of the ark, even the Levites. *"To whom shall he go up away from us?"* The presence of this holy God was too much for them. And the same thing happened when the Son of God became our Immanuel, God with Us. Peter, an Israelite, was doing what he did best when he first met Jesus; he was fishing, and he was failing. Jesus tells him his business. *"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."* Peter protests, but does it, and hauls in such a huge catch that it sinks both his boats. *"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.' ...And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.'"* Peter had no idea, but as he stood there waist-deep in the water looking at Jesus, he was looking at his own exodus.

Christian, this is how you feel sometimes, right? Jesus' sovereign power and authority, his righteousness and holiness, His goodness, his generosity, his mercy, his presence—it's too much for you to handle, and you want to say with Peter, "Depart from me. I have no business being with you. I am too sinful to be with you." But if you turn from your sin, your self-reliance, your idolatry, to trust in Him alone, Jesus says to you as he said to Peter, *"Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men."* As soon as

they got to shore, Peter left everything to follow Jesus right there on the spot, and the rest is history. I wonder, friend. Will you send Jesus away, like they did the ark, or will you leave everything else to follow Him?

