

Tashi Nicholas

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 October 2013

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 0 0] Some things just don't go together. To my friend's dismay, I'm a really big fan of matchmaking. I'm really enthusiastic about it. And my logic always goes along the lines of, well, I like this person and I like this person, and so I can't understand why they wouldn't like each other.

Solid logic, I thought, until I was on the other side of it. I had a girl from my other work at a real estate agency tell me that I would be perfect with her roommate, and she wanted to set us up.

And I don't know why. I didn't want to seem snorty or something, so I just agreed to go. And he worked, and so he said he would pick me up at 8, and I'd get hungry at like 6 o'clock, and so I ate, and then he picked me up when I was full.

But anyway. And we talked about what he did and what his job was. He was an accountant for toiletries or something, and he said, I can give you free razors and deodorant if you need.

And then I suddenly got really self-conscious. And we were walking along, and I picked like the closest restaurant to my house. I live like near five Thai restaurants.

[1 : 0 7] I picked the closest one to my house so that I could go and put deodorant on or something. And we spent like five minutes talking about what I did and what he did, and then the conversation was over for the rest of the night.

So intermittently we talked about how good the food was, but at 8.30, half an hour after he had picked me up, we walked as fast as we could back to his car, and then I ran into my dorm and waved him goodbye, and I never heard from him again.

And there are heaps of other examples of stuff that doesn't go together. Coke and milk, wine and ice cream, brushing your teeth and then eating an apple. Some things don't go together.

So if you miss the last couple of weeks, God told Israel that he was angry with them, and instead of dealing with that, the Israelites went in a war against Philistine, and Israel was losing the war, and so they brought out the ark of the Lord into the battlefield.

And if you don't know what that is, it's like a big box where God's presence was supposed to be. And then after they brought out the ark, they started losing even worse, and the Philistines took away the ark, and God started cursing and putting plagues on Philistine.

[2 : 2 1] And so we've gotten to this place where the Philistines have seen Israel's God, and they've seen that he's greater than their own God, Dagon, and they've seen him control diseases and be in control of animals and nature.

And the Philistines have kind of rightly been like, oh crap, we're on the wrong side of God's anger. We need to get this out. And they figured out that, yeah, the ark was related to the anger of God, and so they're just trying to get it out of their country now.

Look at verse 4 with me. So they asked their own priests, like, what are we supposed to do about this?

How should we get rid of it? And the priests answered by saying, make models out of gold of the plagues that God has given you. And they keep saying things out of fear in verse 5 and verse 6, and fear is a correct response for them.

I do think that this passage has something to say, though, about knowing God correctly, knowing what good is like and how to serve him. The offerings of gold, rats, and tumors make so much sense if you don't know the Lord, Israel's God.

[3 : 53] God has revealed himself to Israel, and so Israel knows how to please God and what they can sacrifice to him, but he hasn't done that for the Philistines. So the Philistines would have gotten their own common sense and sort of thought gold is valuable and good, and therefore we should just give that to God.

God, it's kind of like they have taken themselves and the stuff that they like and just put her on a bigger scale. Has anyone ever done something for you that's really well-intentioned, but you hated it?

Like if you drink long blacks and someone tries to shout you like a surprise coffee, and then you're like, oh my gosh, thank you so much, and you take a sip and it's like a mocha with five sugars.

It's like, that's really nice, and it's so nice that you tried to do something nice to me, but you didn't really, you didn't nail it, hey? In the same way, for Philistines, if they had actually known God, they would know that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, and therefore anything that they try to offer him is already God's.

But even outside of that, that God has outlined what pleases him and what is an appropriate sacrifice for guilt, and they just don't know God, and therefore they can't do it.

[5 : 07] Their feelings are appropriately in line with God, and they're fearing God correctly, but without knowing him, there was no way that they could make up for their guilt. I think it's important for us to get this, because I see this in Christians and non-Christians alike.

I see Christians, and we kind of assume that God is a bigger version of ourselves. I'm super guilty of this. Christians were like, oh, I really like youth ministry, and then therefore that's the most important ministry to God, or I like hymns, and therefore it's what glorifies God the most.

I don't even think we do it with bad intent. I heard of this book, and it's called Introverts in the Church, and the essence of the book is, Jesus was an introvert, and he was perfect, so go introverts, it's good to be an introvert.

Now, I don't want to tease a book, or tease introverts or anything, but that's like the ultimate spiritual trump card, isn't it? Jesus was an introvert. But we seriously do that in all aspects of our lives.

Like, if we're loud, and we communicate loudly, and we talk about our love for Jesus all the time, we just think that that's what God likes the most. And if we're quiet and more serious, and we obey Jesus quietly, then we assume that Jesus is more pleased by that.

[6 : 23] We make God into a bigger, more authoritative version of ourselves, when in reality, God has revealed himself, and what he's like, and whatever parts we don't really like, or the bits we think are less important, we just skip over.

But I also see this in people who aren't Christians as well. The amount of times I've heard someone say, I'm just going to try and do my best, try to be a good person, and I think that'll be enough for God.

Can I say it isn't? It isn't enough for God? That's enough for you, and I think that's projecting it on God. God has revealed the way in which he's pleased, and he's shown us how to have a relationship with him, and that is through Jesus.

And you doing your best isn't actually enough for God. These Philistines sent back these guilt offerings, and were trying to make up their guilt before God, and make it go away.

But it wasn't sufficient, because it's not what God asks for. All right, look at verse seven. Now then, get a new cart ready with two cows that have carved and have never been yoked.

[7 : 33] Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up. Take the ark of the Lord and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it, put the gold objects you are sending back with it to him as a guilt offering.

Send it on its way, but keep watching it. If it goes up to its own territory towards Beth Shemesh, then the Lord has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us, but that it happened to us by chance.

So the Philistines have attached the ark of God to the cows, and apparently I learnt while researching for this sermon that cattle subconsciously walk towards their owner.

And so the idea is that if we attach the ark to these cows, and they walk away from us and towards Israel, then we'll know that God was bringing these curses on Philistine, and if it doesn't, then it was just an accident.

And they do that, and the ark starts to walk away from them and towards Israel. If you look at verse 12, the cows went straight up the road to Beth Shemesh and stayed on that one highway.

[8 : 43] Lowing as they went, they never strayed to the right or to the left. So that's really cool anyway, and God brings himself back to his own people. But have you noticed what Israel is doing while this is happening?

I have no idea, because it doesn't matter. God isn't dependent on the Israelites to save him, and he's not sitting in Philistine waiting for Israel like, guys, I've been captured, save me.

God shows his power, and he shows how worthy he is to be feared and worshipped when the Israelites aren't even present. The Old Testament often refers to God as making his name known among the nations in and outside of his people, and Israel was supposed to be a part of that.

This part of 1 Samuel shows God doing exactly that. Philistine, only a couple of chapters ago, thought that they could win a battle against God by fighting hard and being men, and now they are shaking and frantically trying to get the ark out of their country, and God guides his own way back to Israel.

So there are two really wonderful things about this. The first one is that God didn't need Israel to save him. God isn't dependent on them to go and get him, and he's also not dependent on them to fulfill his work in the world.

[10 : 04] God wants to make his name known, and he can do that with or without the Israelites. I think that's a good lesson for us as well. In God, not being bound by what we can do for him.

We do this thing in church, and I think it's a result of making God really small in our mind, but we do this thing where we think that God is dependent on us to get stuff done.

Like God's hands are tied, and he's just sitting around waiting for us to do his work for him. A friend of mine from when I was at art school, Chelsea, was telling me that when she was in year four, she got her report card back from her religious education teacher, and her report card read something like this.

Chelsea is a zealous young woman who clearly has a lot of love for Jesus. However, Chelsea needs to learn that God does not need Chelsea to defend him. God can defend himself.

What a wise lady. And I think that attitude is kind of taken on by us as adults. Like God is lucky to have us on his team, otherwise he would have no one.

[11 : 09] And I'm super guilty of this. I find myself at college talking to people who are so weird, and just thinking to myself, don't tell anyone you're a Christian. You're making God look lame.

But I know that's awful. It sounds even worse when I say it out loud. But God doesn't need us to make him look good. He doesn't need St. Paul's Church to reach the people of Chatswood. It's out of a heart that thinks that God is small and unimpressive that makes us think we're necessary for his plan.

The second wonderful thing about God leaving Philistine to go back to Israel on his own is that although Israel treated him like a genie and considered God in their debt and didn't listen to his warning about the current wrath, coming wrath, God returned to Israel anyway.

Throughout the book of 1 Samuel and all through Israel's history, Israel ignored God and tried to get stuff from him. They presumed their position over God. And considering God made the heavens and the earth, that's really offensive.

But God returns to them anyway. The ark of God left Israel and was distant from them. And that was their judgment. But after only seven months, God returns to them.

[12 : 27] And this is a beautiful sign of their relationship with him, isn't it? God is despised by his own people, but still returns to them. So the ark of God comes back into Israel and there's like a big party and everyone's sacrificing and celebrating the ark returning.

And for some reason or another, people decide to look into the ark and God strikes down 70 of them. That seems really out of place, right? Like you think you're moving towards a happy ending by this point.

The Philistines have been given a hard time. God is showing the nations how powerful he is. And then all of a sudden, bam, God kills 70 of his own people. It's really disheartening, isn't it?

It's like if this was a movie, that would never happen. You'd just finish with the ark coming towards Israel and then everyone's starting to celebrate and the credits would open. But you read this part of the story and you're like shocked and angry because it's like we've done full loop in the story again.

Like it seems like after all this time and all that had happened, the Israelites hadn't learnt or changed anything. I'm just going to put it in the open that I don't think we really understand this.

[13 : 41] Like a bunch of guys would look into a box and get killed. I don't really think that we understand why that happened. But God's holiness requires that laws like that should be kept.

God isn't like a bad parent who continuously threatens but never punishes. That's how serious God's holiness is. It's not just that holiness means that people could die from taking a peek.

It's that because of God's holiness, people needed to die. It's not even like he's punishing them for not keeping his law. It's like those men couldn't live after having been that close to God's holiness.

The Philistines, even with their error of what offering to make God, the Philistines actually had a more correct view, a more reverent and fearful view of God. But the Israelites have gone back to being presumptuous and expectant in their relationship with God.

Treating God as anything besides God is what sin is. I want you to imagine how much bigger God is than you. Like imagine God's power. God created the world.

[14 : 47] He can do anything he wants. He can change anything he wants. He can move mountains if he wants to. He can dry up the sea. He sustains everything. He decides the temperature of the sun. He holds up the stars and he makes it rain and he makes our hearts beat.

We get tired at like three o'clock in the afternoon. And then like think about how much more God knows than you. Like God has always existed so he's known everything that has ever happened and he knows how those events caused each event to happen and he knows everyone who's ever existed and everyone who will ever exist.

And I'm like a little bit foggy on things I did over the weekend. And so if you consider how much bigger God is in all those situations than you, I want you to take a moment to think about how much bigger God's holiness is above your holiness.

God has always existed and in that time he has never done anything but perfection. Sorry. He has never been anything but perfection. In fact, God is so perfect that the word holiness is kind of arbitrary because holy just means like God and holiness is like God and then God is holy and so you've kind of done a full circle there.

And God sets things up so we can really see how holy he is. The priestly system that God sets up in Leviticus is all about God showing his people how holy he is.

[16 : 07] Even though the Israelites are God's chosen people who he loves and he's committed to them, they can't come to God on their own. That's why there were priests. Someone needed to stand between a perfect God and a sinful people and unholy people so that the Israelites could even come close to being near God.

That's why there was need for a sacrificial system. In order for unholy people or sinful people to even come close to God, someone needed to die in order for them to get there. And when we consider these things and we consider the power that God has over us and the things that God knows above us and the way that he is infinitely greater than we can even fathom and the fact that he's holy, it makes the arrogance of looking inside the ark of the Lord quite shocking actually.

And it's not like they looked in the ark of the Lord and that's not what God told them to do and God was angry and so he killed them. Although God would be totally within his rights to do that if that was true.

But it was the experience of people who were so imperfect approaching something so perfect. The two couldn't coexist. God's holiness totally obliterated these unholy people.

Look at verse 20. And the people of Beth Shemesh asked, who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God? To whom will the ark go from here?

[17 : 32] For the first time, these people were struck with fear of God. For the first time, they actually understood how unworthy they were and they had a correct perspective of themselves before God.

And they saw a God who was powerful to win his own victories and whose presence they couldn't even stand in because of his holiness and they said to themselves, who can stand in the presence of the Lord?

It's like they finally realized this cycle of their failures and God's rightful anger against that and sort of thought, when is this going to end? Where's the hope in this?

God demonstrated his love for them by coming back from Philistine, coming back to Israel and then this happening would have been such a huge blow to their confidence. Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?

The Israelites actually asked a really good question because the answer is no one. No one could stand in the presence of this holy God. It's just like when God returned, but just like when God returned himself from Philistine with the ark, God doesn't rely on his people to find a way to get to him.

[18 : 46] No one can stand in the presence of the holy God and so God himself came out of heaven and took on the appearance of man. There was no possible way that an imperfect human could come into his presence, so Jesus came out of heaven and came to earth.

There was no other way and God could have just not. God could have left the ark in Philistine. God could have not come to earth and he would have just said, you rebelled and I left you and that's all.

But again and again, God returns to his people and his final solution for that comes in the form of Jesus. Jesus being holy and perfect like God would stand between an unholy people and a holy God.

The Israelites looking into the ark of God and God striking them down is contrasted in the New Testament. In Hebrews 4, verse 16, it says this, let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Jesus made us holy and so that we could approach a holy God without fear so that we could even approach him with confidence or boldly. When the Israelites said to each other, who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?

[20 : 10] I don't think that in their wildest dreams they ever would have thought that there was going to be a time where us, the people of God, could say, yes, we can. We can reason for that.

Let us know that this woman said cannot be anything but not only