

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 4 Issue 51

December 18, 2005

Our God Reigneth, Part 5

Too Great of Crimes

On December 13, 2005 at 12:01 a.m. the alleged co-founder of the Crips gang, Tookie Williams, was executed for the murder of four people. These murders were committed back in the late 1970's.

Now there was quite a bit of controversy surrounding his execution. Some suggested that he had been rehabilitated and so he ought not to die. Others alluded to his work with youth and the fact that he had been nominated on more than one occasion for the Nobel Peace Prize. Still others demanded his death because he never said, "Sorry."

Of all the statements made, I was amazed by the attitude which said this: "Before God there could be no forgiveness for such a man! His crimes were too great!" And yet we ought not to be shocked, for this attitude has surfaced throughout history.

Think of Jonah and his approach to Nineveh. He didn't want to preach to this pagan people because God might forgive them.¹ He wanted their condemnation! Or think of the religious leaders of Christ's day. One rabbi wrote that "God delights over the downfall of the godless."² And another said, "There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world."³ These are pretty strong statements!

Yet we ought not to be shocked. Such an attitude was named even among Christ's disciples. Let us look at John who spoke on the occasion of the Samaritans' rejection of Christ.

Luke 9:54, "And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?"

In fact, I must admit that there have even been times in my life when have gazed upon an extremely wicked man and have taken pleasure in the knowledge of his condemnation!

And yet our passage would rebuke such thinking. Recall, that on account of Israel's refusal to follow the Lord, God disciplined His people by allowing the Philistines not only to conquer Israel but also to capture

¹ Compare Jonah 3:10 – 4:2

² t. Sanh. 14:10; SB II, 209.

³ *LT2*, page 256.

the Ark of the Covenant.

The Reception

Now 1 Samuel 5-6 details the victory tour of the Ark in which God proved Himself to be the King of kings and Lord of lords,⁴ a glorious⁵ and victorious⁶ warrior, a jealous God who will not share His glory with another.⁷ Now, in the context of the vindication of God we read of God's mercy. Yes He sent a plague to humble the Philistine people. But upon their brokenness — upon their begging for mercy — He relented!

Let's pick up where we left off last time. Recall that the Ark is on a cart which was being pulled to Israel by two cows. The Philistine lords are following from behind. Now, notice the reception.

1 Samuel 6:13, “And they of Bethshemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it.”

The mention of “reaping” during “wheat harvest” is a time-element which places our text in late spring or early summer — May to June. Furthermore, based on the geography of Bethshemesh we know that the reaping would have occurred in the Valley of Sorek — the place where Samson first caught a glimpse of Delilah.⁸

It is early summer and the population of Bethshemesh is out in the fields gathering their crop.

1 Samuel 6:14, “**And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Bethshemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone:** and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the LORD.”

A couple things are worth noting here. The text reads that “the cart came into the field... and stood there.” It would have been obvious on account of the cows' actions that God was guiding/driving the Ark!⁹ That is why we read here — and not for geographical reason since Bethshemesh was a city on an open plane — NOT that the cows stop BUT that the cart stopped.

Do you see the point?

God is still guiding the cart. The cows did not do what they desired here. They were subject to the hand and will of the Lord which both impelled them to leave their young, AND arrested their forward progress-making them stop at Bethshemesh.

And this brings us to the city. The thing that is notable about “Bethshemesh” is that it is listed among the Levitical cities in Joshua 21:16.¹⁰ As such it had a large Levitical population. This is significant for according to Numbers 3:27-32 and Deuteronomy 10:8 the Levites were the custodians of the Ark. Accordingly, God orchestrated the events of this text such that the Ark would be returned to those who

⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 5:1-5

⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 5:6-12

⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 6:1-5

⁷ Compare 1 Samuel 6:6-12

⁸ Compare Judges 16:4

⁹ Compare 1 Samuel 6:12

¹⁰ Compare 1 Chronicles 6:59

had its oversight, could best care for it, and would know what to do!

The Rejoicing

This brings us to the rejoicing.

1 Samuel 6:13, “And they of Bethshemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: **and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced¹¹ to see it.**”

This is an understatement. The text reads that they were “joyful with the whole disposition.” In fact the word used here for *rejoiced* is primarily used in Scripture in reference to a rejoicing over the Lord's salvation.¹² Accordingly and not surprisingly, the entire festival calendar in Israel revolved around the activity of “rejoicing” or “being glad in the Lord.” For example after prescribing a celebration, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the priests said, “For the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

Now why was there so much rejoicing in our text? Why would the return of the ark be such a cause for celebration?

The rejoicing is not just that God proved Himself victorious over the Philistines, but primarily because of what the Ark meant to the people of God serving the role that Christ ultimately would fulfill. The Ark was the vessel where forgiveness was attained by the people of God and fellowship enjoyed!

In essence with the return of the Ark, fellowship with God was now restored! The people rejoiced exceedingly — which naturally led to what we read in verse 14.

1 Samuel 6:14, “And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Bethshemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: **and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the LORD.**”

Their first thought was that of worship! The priests broke apart the cart for fuel. They slaughtered the animals according to the rules for a burnt offering, and then they offered the two cows to the Lord as a symbol of the people's devotion to God.

Recall that the burnt offering — in contrast to the expiatory or communal offerings — was an offering of dedication whereby the entire animal would be offered unto the Lord. In this offering the worshipper expressed his unwavering commitment to serve the Lord. And thus what the Philistines offered as a guilt offering — a means to satisfy the wrath of God — Israel used as a means to dedicate themselves to the Lord.¹³

1 Samuel 6:15, “And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone: and the men of Bethshemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the LORD.”

It is quite clear that this large stone was NOT the altar on which the cows were sacrificed. Rather, a

¹¹ שמחה samach

¹² Compare also 2 Chronicles 20:27; Psalms 5:11; 9:2; 16:9; 32:11; 40:16; 63:11; 64:10; 86:4; 90:15; 92:4.

¹³ It has been suggested by some that the reason that God sent a plague on His people in vv. 19ff was because they offered female cows for a guilt offering (the guilt offering required the offering of male cows). The only problem with this was that the priests here offer NOT a **guilt offering** but a **burnt offering** which allowed female animals to be offered.

makeshift altar would have been erected with whatever stones were laying in the vicinity.

Point of Inconvenience

In contrast this large stone was to be the place where the Israelites placed the Ark of the Covenant and the Philistine tribute! And thus — and don't miss it — what no doubt would have been an inconvenience to the farmer as he yearly had to plow around the stone, now became a memorial to the salvation and deliverance of God!

Now I don't want to belabor this point — yet it is very significant! With the unaided eye, we see the bitter things of this world and lament them. We have setbacks, weaknesses, ill-health, etc., which are the “large stones” of our lives.

Yet when God enters the picture, do you know what happens?

The bitter providences of our lives become a portal into a closer relationship with God. Korah explains this truth:

Psalm 84:5-6, “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.”

The valley of Baca literally is *the valley of weeping*. It is a valley known by all of us.

And yet what happens when God is our strength?

The valley of weeping — the valley of weakness and sorrow — becomes a portal to great gladness. The valley of Baca [becomes] a spring, and thus the one relying upon Christ is described as “going from strength to strength” (Psalm 84:7).

So the large stone in that place became a symbol of God's Victory!

1 Samuel 6:15, “And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone: **and the men of Bethshemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the LORD.**”

Burnt Offerings

This also is an interesting statement. At first glance it appears that this simply is a repeat of verse 14 — where presumably the Levites are said to have offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. Yet read verse 15b again and notice that the offering consisted not only of one burnt offering, but **burnt offerings and sacrifices!** In other words, what the Philistines provided was only the beginning of the celebration. The return of the Ark of the Lord served as the occasion for a dramatic service of worship which incorporated multiple and undisclosed offerings.

The Relief

1 Samuel 6:15, “And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone: **and the men of Bethshemesh**

offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the LORD.”

Though we just read this statement, nevertheless we failed to understand verse 15 from the perspective of the Philistine lords who were watching from a distance.¹⁴ Notice that the burnt offerings and sacrifices were offered that day to the Lord, AND that the offerings and sacrifices were not accompanied by a fire from heaven which devoured the worshippers, or a plague which wiped out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, or a smiting of the worshippers. This would have been taken as a sign that (1) the offering of the Philistines was acceptable to God, (2) war between the Philistines and Yahweh was over, and (3) the plagues now would cease!¹⁵ And thus the text reads this way:

1 Samuel 6:16, “And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day.”

Their return to Ekron is significant because it was the last city hit by the plague, and it was the Philistine city which suffered the most under God's heavy hand.¹⁶ As such, these Philistine lords make haste to travel to Ekron for the assumed purpose of ensuring that the plague had ceased!

With this, we are at the climax of the story involving the victory tour of the Ark. In and throughout the entire episode, God has demonstrated to the Philistines that indeed, He is the King of kings and Lord of lords¹⁷, a glorious¹⁸ and victorious¹⁹ warrior, a jealous God who would not share His glory with another — ALL knees must bow.²⁰

And yet from this text we also see another facet to the Lord of Hosts: He also is a compassionate and gracious God. He NOT ONLY restored the fellowship that His people forfeited when they relegated God to a “lucky charm.” BUT He also relented His heavy hand which severely smote the Philistines. And we the readers are left in wonderment and amazement at the God we have come to know! David it put it this way:

Psalm 145:5, “I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.”

Psalm 145:9, “The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.”

Psalm 145:16, “Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”

Likewise Christ said that God “is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:35).

Speaking to the pagan crowd in Lystra Paul said that God “Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:16-17).

¹⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 6:12

¹⁵ Rayburn wrote, “[The Philistine lords] went back content that they had done what they could and should have done. Their offering had been accepted. They returned to Ekron, the city most recently affected by the plague, to see what the results would be.”

¹⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 5:11-12

¹⁷ Compare 1 Samuel 5:1-5

¹⁸ Compare 1 Samuel 5:6-12

¹⁹ Compare 1 Samuel 6:1-5

²⁰ Compare 1 Samuel 6:6-12

Behold the beauty and glory of the Lord! Yes He reigns supreme over all of creation! And yes, He is offended by any and all sin! But He also is kind and merciful!²¹ To a stubborn and rebellious people who lived for their own glory, God maintained His relationship with them such that they were restored! And to a Philistine nation traumatized by His holiness, God relented when they in humility begged for a cease-fire!

Jonah

Now the “Kindness of God” may not be a source of struggle in your walk today, but it has bothered many a Christian in redemptive history. I want you to think of Jonah again. The book of Jonah was written during a time when Israeli nationalism was at an all-time high.

Around 780 BC God called Jonah to preach the gospel to the Ninevites. Now the Ninevites were a pagan people whom the Jews did not love. And so rather than fulfilling his call, Jonah went in the opposite direction and boarded a ship in the Mediterranean for the purpose of sailing as far away from Nineveh as he could. To make a long story short, through a series of bitter providences God humbled this prophet such that he agreed to fulfill his call.

Now, after preaching to Nineveh, Nineveh repented. God’s compassion was exercised such that the city wasn’t destroyed. And Jonah lamented the day of his birth!²² He didn’t want to live in a world where God forgave Gentiles!

Now regardless of the arrogance of this prophet, nevertheless let us not miss the message of Jonah. God is indeed a sovereign and yet a kind God! If any person in any land will humble themselves and seek Him, He will let them find Him!²³

What that means brothers and sisters is that we mustn’t put anyone beyond the grace of the gospel! There is no sin so great that God cannot nor will not forgive. There is no “unforgivable sin” except that which is mentioned in Matthew 12 where the Pharisees were attributing the work of Christ to Satan.²⁴

Accordingly so long as grace is operative we ought always to work, pray, minister, care, not lose hope, and love!

And yet let’s take this one step further. For if God can forgive a sinner guilty of the most vile sin, extend love and compassion to someone at enmity with Him, and relent concerning a nation then don’t you suppose that when you as His child fail like you did this past week, prove delinquent in your responsibility, and trample underfoot the grace and mercy of our Lord He not only can, but already has forgiven you?

Indeed! Behold the kindness of God! Not only is it the basis for the sinner’s forgiveness! BUT it also is the basis for assurance in the life of the child of God! Let us never forget Romans 5:10.

Romans 5:10, “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

²¹ Romans 11:22a: describes the kindness of God. Paul wrote, “Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness...”

²² Compare Jonah 4

²³ Compare Matthew 7:7-8; and 1 Chronicles 28:9

²⁴ Compare also Matthew 12:24, 30-32

The Rest of the Story

And yet we are not finished with this passage.

1 Samuel 6:17-18, “And these are the golden emerods which the Philistines returned for a trespass offering unto the LORD; for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Ashkelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one; And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities, and of country villages, even unto the great stone of Abel, whereon they set down the ark of the LORD: which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Bethshemite.”

Much of the content of verses 17-18 is familiar to us. I've already introduced you to the five capital cities of the Philistines: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. We were told in verse 4 that the Philistines were to offer five golden tumors to represent the plague that had ravaged their five capital cities. However there are two elements in this passage which come somewhat as a surprise as we close out our examination of the Ark's victory tour.

Many Mice

The first surprising element has to do with the golden mice. Recall in verse 4 that the number of the golden mice was to correspond to the number of the capital cities — which would have been five. Yet here we read that far more than five mice were given along with the Ark.

1 Samuel 6:18, “**And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities, and of country villages**, even unto the great stone of Abel, whereon they set down the ark of the LORD.”

Now this would have been in keeping with the superstition of the Philistines.²⁵ It would have been thought that each individual city of the Philistines needed an offering to assuage God's anger. And thus as an insurance policy, the Philistines offer way more than just the original five mice.

And so behold the nation on whom God extended His compassion. They weren't seeking salvation. Their hearts hadn't been softened to the things of the Lord. Rather they were steeped in their pagan religion and superstition such that they tried to placate Yahweh with golden mice.

And God relented!

Now this doesn't mean that the Philistines were saved. Sadly after receiving so much grace and compassion from God the Philistines returned to their wicked religion and their lost ways. Such that upon the death of each of the Philistines who witnessed God's glory and yet remained unrepentant, they were cast into hell.

Let this sober any who are listening or reading. To the one thinking that the labors of your hands can satisfy God or that what you have done will be the basis of God's forgiveness or that God must be

²⁵ This view dates as far back as the medieval Jewish commentator, Kimchi. He suggested that the people offered more gold rats as insurance that the villages would not be left unprotected and only the cities cleared of the plague.

impressed with you on account of the blessings you have received, I call upon you to turn from all self-effort to the Lord. You need to trust in Christ's work on the cross as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29b). Rely upon Christ as your sacrifice.

Don't miss this truth: the fact that God has been kind to you is not an indication that you will go to heaven when you die. God's kindness and compassion are for the purpose of allowing you time to repent.

Romans 2:4, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

The Stone of Remembrance

And this brings us to the second element in this text that sticks out: The stone of remembrance.

1 Samuel 6:18b, "Even unto the great stone of Abel, whereon they set down the ark of the LORD: which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Bethshemite."

This is an important element to this story. In fact it is also in importance fact in redemptive history. Not only because it testifies to the veracity of what occurred here²⁶ but is also serves as a memorial sign of God's grace!

The giving of memorial signs was a common practice that God instituted amongst the Jews. For example we have these:

- The rainbow, Genesis 9.
- The pile of rocks assembled in the Jordan, Joshua 4.
- The High Priest's breastplate, Exodus 28:29.
- Circumcision, Romans 4:11.
- And the like...

The purpose of these "signs" was to remind the people of God that their Lord was both a compassionate and powerful God.

Who could look at the stones in the Jordan and not be reminded of the power of God by which He parted the Jordan in flood stage ****and**** the grace of God by which the Lord renewed His love with His people in the day that He brought them into the promised land, circumcised them in hostile territory, and powerfully delivered them from the evil nations of the Jordan?

What Old Testament Jew could look upon his circumcision and not be reminded that God saves by grace through faith- and that not of themselves?

Or who in the Old Testament could participate in a Passover meal and not be reminded of the severity and goodness of God?

Even today, who can look upon a rainbow after a storm and not be comforted in knowing that God will never again judge the earth with water?

²⁶ You wouldn't write this unless... (a) There was in fact a large stone in the field of Joshua in Bethshemesh (b) On which were placed the ark and the gold and (c) which could be verified by the local population as in fact the stone of our text.

Now, many a sermon has been preached on the memorial stones of Joshua in which the congregation is called to plant a tree of remembrance at the birth of a child or landscape their home on account of a victory in the kingdom of God.

Brothers and sisters, it is not my intention to criticize any who have done such a thing because to look upon a tree and be reminded of God is a wonderful!

However, let me remind you of an important fact. The signs in Scripture which proclaim the sovereignty and kindness of God were not authored or created by man. Indeed! Every sign was instituted by God!

What that means is that when we come to a passage like ours and discover a sign given by God as a witness to His sovereignty and goodness the application is NOT to create our own signs of remembrance. Rather we are to discover the “signs of remembrance” that God Himself has given to our generation.

Accordingly, behold the “memorial signs” given to our generation: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Each is like the stone table in our text. They have been given to us by God. They proclaim the sovereignty and mercy of God. And they herald the good news that if you turn from your sin unto God, you shall be saved! ***but*** if you refuse to heed the message, you shall perish!

So let us this day not long for the death of the wicked or fret over our sin — like the Jews in our text who lived seven long months alienated from God! But let us gaze upon the stones of remembrance given to our generation. Let us rejoice over the kindness and mercy of God. Let us labor to herald the message!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on December 18, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.