

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Spiritual Growth, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-25

As I mentioned to you last Lord's Day we want to spend a few Sunday nights talking about back to basics. And we began last time by talking about the basic matter of growing spiritually. We talked about what spiritual growth is not. We talked a little bit about the Scriptures that call us to grow spiritually. And I left for this evening what we'll call a definition of spiritual growth. What is it to grow spiritually and to just reduce it to the simplest possible definition?

To grow spiritually means to experience the decreasing frequency of the pattern of sin and the increasing frequency of the pattern of holiness, which moves a believer more and more to be like Christ. It is the decreasing frequency of the pattern of sin and the increasing frequency of the pattern of holiness that moves a believer more and more to be like Jesus Christ. All of us who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ desire to grow spiritually. We desire to be more like Christ. We desire, as Peter said, to grow in grace into the knowledge of our Lord and Savior. We desire, as John said, to not be spiritual children nor spiritual young men but spiritual fathers who have come to a deep knowledge of God. We desire, as Paul said, to go from one level of glory to the next, even being changed by the Holy Spirit into the very image of Christ. Because we are alive in Christ we grow. Now, there are some things in our lives that we do in the power of the spirit to enhance and increase that growth and I want to share with you what I believe to be those things, which are critical to the matter of spiritual growth. Nothing is sadder than a believer whose growth is retarded in any way, whose growth is hindered, whose growth is limited. We want to grow as rapidly as we can into the fullness of the stature of Christ, individually, as well as collectively.

Now, what is it in our lives that contributes to our spiritual growth? What is it that makes us grow? Well let me give you a concept and then we're gonna work around that concept. I believe the key to spiritual growth is focusing on the glory of the Lord. I mentioned a moment ago the statement that Paul made in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and let me just try to touch base briefly with it again. Paul says, "As we behold the glory of the Lord we begin to be moved from one level of glory to another and changed into his image by the Holy Spirit." So somehow spiritual growth is linked to beholding the glory of the Lord. Spiritual growth is linked to a consciousness of glorifying God, living a life to his glory in every dimension. And that's the real key that I want you to hang onto.

Last week we talked a little bit about the importance of glorifying God. We mentioned in Romans 1 that the heathen basically are characterized as those who refused to give God glory, Romans tells us. Believers, on the other hand, are those who, in the present and the future, will be to the praise of the glory of God. We have been saved to give God glory. We have vowed the need to Jesus Christ so

the glory of God the Father.

"Missionaries and preachers go out," according to Romans 1:5 and 3 John 7, "for the sake of the name or for the glory of the one whose name they bear." So we are called then to live to the glory of God. And when we focus on God's glory the spirit of God moves us from one level of glory to the next, more and more to be conformed to Christ. The question then that comes...and that was just a review of last week...the question then that comes is how can I practically live to the glory of God so that my growth increases? How can I do that? And I want to give you over the next couple of Sundays a very clear and simple pattern to follow. The Bible is very explicit about this. If focusing on the glory, that is the perfection and wonder of the person of Christ, is crucial to our spiritual growth, then we'll know specifically how to do that.

Let's start where I think the beginning really is. You will live to the glory of the Lord...this is very simple...when you begin to aim your life at that purpose. Okay? That's point number one. You will not live to the glory of the Lord by accident, you will begin to live to the glory of the when you determine that that's the focus of your life.

First Corinthians 10:31 is a starting point for us tonight as we consider this great truth. And in 1 Corinthians 10:31 it says this, "Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Did you get that? First Corinthians 10:31, "Whatever you do...and he draws out the most mundane thing imaginable; eating and drinking, the most basic thing; eating and drinking, the most routine thing; eating and drinking, the most ...can I say...non-spiritual thing; eating and drinking. And says, "That or whatever else you do, you do all to the glory of God." That becomes then the focus of life. That becomes the objective of everything that we do. Does it glorify God? Will it bring honor to His name? Will it bring glory to His name? Will it be well pleasing in His sight and give Him pleasure?

Even Jesus said in John 8:50, and this is a very important statement, "I seek not my own glory." Jesus sought the glory of the one who sent him. And, thereby, gave us an example. "He, in his incarnation," according to Philippians 2:9-11, "was exalted after the incarnation but in the incarnation," we see in verses 4 and following, "he humbled himself and restricted the prerogatives of deity, in order that he might do all that he could possibly do, even in his humiliation, to give glory to God." He was a servant whose total concern was the glory of God. Jesus then provides for us the example of perfect obedience and perfect commitment to God's glory. Hypocrites seek to steal the glory from God. They may say they desire to serve God but they desire to steal his glory like those in Matthew 6 who, wanting to appear spiritual and parade their supposed spirituality, in effect, were taking glory to themselves rather than giving glory to God. You have to aim your life at that. Whatever you do from the most mundane thing upward.

Let me just give you a little bit of a personal testimony at that point. My life began to change toward a more rapid experience of spiritual growth when I began to understand this principle, so that this principle becomes an over arching sort of grid through which everything passes. That is, will it glorify God? Will it bring honor to God? Will it exalt Jesus Christ? And I continually ask myself that question almost subliminally day after day, hour after hour, no matter what I do. Now let's get more specific. You say, "Alright, I have to aim my life at God's glory. I have to live for God's glory, not my own but his. How do I do that? How do I do that?" Let me give you some practical hints. And these are things that have flowed out of the Scripture to me but flowed also through my own experience and my own life.

First of all it involves preferring Him and His Kingdom above all else. That's the practical outworking of it. It involves preferring Him and His Kingdom above all else. Nothing is as important to you as the Kingdom of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Nothing. Not any agenda of your own, not any possession of your own, not any plan of your own, not any program of your own, not any talent of your own, not anything is as important to you as that which belongs to Christ.

In Exodus there's a very interesting illustration that I would draw to your attention. Chapter 32 verse 25, just listen. "Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control or Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies. . .you remember the golden calf and the whole terrible orgy that went with it?...and Moses saw they were out of control, Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord come to me. If you're for the Lord come to me." "And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him." They said, "We'll stand with you." "And he said to them. . .and listen to this. . .thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, every man of you put his sword on his thigh. Strap on your sword and go back and forth from gate to gate and the camp and kill every man; his brother and every man; his friend, and every man; his neighbor." Now whoa...whoa. ..whoa here. That is an absolutely mind boggling assignment. "You for men then I'm telling you strap on your sword and go through that camp and kill everybody who's your brother, your friend and your neighbor. Wipe them out."

Now folks I would say that those Levites standing there were at a crisis point as to whose glory they really preferred. You see an idol had been made, a false image of the true God. An order of worship had been conducted, a false kind of worship toward a false image of the true God. God's name had been dishonored and an idol had been glorified in the place of God and God said, "I will not give my glory to another." And the price of doing that is always very high. And so God says to these Levites, "Do you stand for me then kill everybody you care about. Kill your brother, kill your friend and kill your neighbor." Now we'll find out whether these guys care more about the glory of God or something else.

Verse 28 says, "So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed and about 3,000 men of the people fell that day." Those Levites, consumed with honoring God took their swords and slaughtered 3,000 of

their brothers; their friends and their neighbors who you can believe for sure did not die willingly. They did it. You say, "Why would they do that?" Because they preferred to honor their God no matter what he asked them to do. And that's how you live life if you live to the glory of God. It may be that no such thing will ever occur in this generation where God would ever even ask anything like that. It only happened once. But that attitude of commitment has stood in my mind as a monumental testimony to the fact that when the Lord said, "Are you on my side?" and they said, "yes," they were serious. Some of you might say, "I prefer God above everything," but you wouldn't give up your car, your house, your vacation, or part of your savings, your bank account, your time, your energy, let alone strap on a sword and kill the people you love the most if God asked. But then again there are those who prefer God's honor above everything, absolutely everything. That's what it is to live to the glory of God, whatever the price, whatever the price. The examples of such dedication are replete in biblical history and in the history of God's redeemed people. There have always been those who would give willingly whatever it was that God asked them to give. No price was too high.

To put it in simple terms, to do that gives testimony of the fact that you love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. You say, "I wanna grow." All right, you're gonna grow when you learn that you have to focus on glorifying God and glorifying Christ. You're going to glorify God and Christ when you begin to do everything you do, even mundane things, routine things every day to His glory. When you aim your life at that that's going to mean that you prefer his glory above everything, no matter what the cost or what the price. Whatever glorifies Him, whatever honors Him.

Let me take it a step further. Aiming your life at glorifying God, not only involves preferring Him and His Kingdom above all else, but secondly it involves being content to do His will at any cost and we've hinted at that. Now let me expand that. Not only the idea that you prefer His glory but that you will literally be content with whatever he asks. Now you're really aiming your life at His glory. Whatever He asks you're content to do it.

In Hebrews chapter 11, you remember verse 38? Talks about "Men of whom the world was not worthy; men who were faithful martyrs because of their unwavering, uncompromised faith in God." It talks about those. . .in verse 35, "Women receiving back their dead by resurrection, others tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might attain a better resurrection. Others experienced mockings, scourgings, chains, imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with a sword, they went about in sheepskins, goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground." The heroes of faith, the unnamed heroes. Back in through the chapter you'll find those that are named, these tremendous heroes of faith who were literally willing to pay any price. They lived to the glory of God, whatever it cost, whatever it cost.

In John chapter 12 Jesus says, "Now my soul has become troubled; what shall I say, "Father save Me from this hour?" But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father glorify thy name." In other

words, glorify your name through my death, Jesus was saying. He was content to do the will of God no matter what the cost. The heroes of faith were content to do the will of God no matter what cost. Paul was on his way to Jerusalem and kept being reminded that he would die and he only wanted to finish the ministry Christ had given him and his life was not dear to himself. Isaiah called for the remnant in the fires to glorify God.

I love the...so many illustrations of this but I love the testimony and you know this testimony well. In Daniel chapter 3 in verse 15, you remember the story about the king Nebuchadnezzar who threw the young Hebrews into the furnace? He says in verse 15, "If you will not worship you will be immediately cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire." And then he says, "What God is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" Wow. What egotism, what failure to recognize a true God? Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this." We don't need to answer you. Pretty brash. And then they say, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king." They said two things: "He is able to get us out of the fire and he will deliver us from your hand." And then they said, "And even if he does not...implying let us be delivered from the fire..." "Let it be known to you, O King, we are not going to serve your Gods or worship the golden image that you set up." Now that's uncompromising. I mean when...you say, "Boy I agree with that. That's wonderful. That's my spirit." Yeah but you're not standing on the edge of a fire. It's a whole different thing. But that's being content to do God's will no matter what the cost, no matter what the price. They said to Daniel, "This is the king's decree, you can't pray." He prayed. He knew the consequence but he wouldn't compromise.

It's a simple thing folks. You start out living to the glory of God when you aim your life. You're never gonna hit what you're not shooting at. Some point in your life you come to grips with the fact that I live to the glory of God and that means I prefer Him and His Kingdom above everything no matter what it is he asks me to do and no matter how much it might cost me personally. I'll do his will. And then I think there's another indicator of the life of one who aims at the glory of God and that is this; if you're really aiming your life at the glory of God you will suffer when he suffers. Okay? You will suffer when he suffers. You will be, to use a biblical term, zealous, zealous. It's a compound affection. It's a mixture of love and a mixture of hate. You love what is right and you hate what threatens right. You love God and you hate what threatens His name or desecrates His truth.

Do you remember the words of our Lord to the church at Ephesus in the Ephesians letter of Revelation chapter 2, verse 2? "I know your deeds, your toil and perseverance." And then I love this line, "You cannot endure evil men." Is that true about you? If you're aiming at the glory of God you'll find it impossible to endure evil men. Let me take you back to Psalm 69 and see I can't explain this even more. In Psalm 69 we have a wonderful statement made by David fulfilled in the messiah, ultimately. Psalm 69:9, the psalmist says this, "For zeal...that is that mixture of love and hate. You love what you love and you hate what threatens what you love. If you love God you hate what

threatens God. "For zeal for thy house has consumed me." And here it is, this is the statement, "And the reproaches of those who reproach Thee have fallen on me." Think about that. "The reproaches of those who reproach Thee have fallen on me." Well what do you mean by that? The psalmist means when Your name is dishonored I feel the pain. When your name is dishonored I feel the pain. When You are slighted I feel the hurt. What an intimate identification with the glory of God. Right? When God is dishonored do you feel the pain? Does it twist something in your stomach; does it wrench something in your heart to see God dishonored? To see Christ dishonored? Are you like Henry Martin who runs out of the pagan temple, "I cannot endure existence of Jesus is continually to be dishonored." Do you understand that kind of mentality, that kind of emotion? If you've aimed your life at the glory of God you understand it.

That prophecy comes back in the 2nd chapter of John. And we find here, in a sense, it's ultimate fulfillment. When Jesus went into the temple in John 2:14, "He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves and the money changers seated." The word seated is an interesting word; it means they've set up permanent shop there. "He made a scourge of cords; a whip, drove them all out of the temple." That must have been an incredible scene because you know they didn't just stand up and leave. "He drove them out, and the sheep and the oxen. He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables." That ought to give you an image of the strength and the power of Jesus Christ, even in his human presence. "To those who were selling the doves he said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise," and get this, "And the disciples remembered that it was written zeal for Thy house will consume Me."

And the messiah became the living reality of the very heart of David back in Psalm 69 and began to feel the pain of God being dishonored. He was so righteously indignant that when he saw the House of God and the name of God, thereby, being dishonored he made a whip and cleaned it up because the pain of God was the pain of Christ. "And beloved when you begin to live to the glory of God the pain of God becomes your pain. And you cannot bear the reproach that falls on the Lord and falls on you." Are you in pain when God is dishonored? When someone uses the name of God in vain does that pain you somehow? Does that cause you to cringe?

How do you live to the glory of God? By focusing at that. What does that mean? That means you prefer him and his Kingdom above everything and it doesn't matter what the price is and whatever hurts him hurts you deeply because you're so identified with his glory and his exaltation. And you're like those saints in the Book of Revelation who are under the altar crying out, "How long, O Lord, how long, O Lord, will you allow this to go on? When will you avenge yourself?" Even John in Revelation, as he eats the little book, which speaks of the things being revealed to him, he finds it both sweet and bitter, bitter because the judgment will fall on the Ungodly, sweet because Christ who has been humiliated will be exalted. You long for the exaltation of Christ, you love for the exaltation of God, you feel the pain when God is dishonored. And then there's one other thought under this first point of aiming at the glory of God and that is this; I believe you can look at your life and you can know you're

aiming your life at the glory of God...follow this thought...when you are content to be outdone by others who do what you do better as long as he is glorified. Did you grab that? You're content to be outdone by others who do what you do better than you do it as long as he's glorified. That's the only issue with you. When I look at the church and I look at the ministry and I see rivalry and jealousy and all that kind of thing that tells me that people aren't living to the glory of God; they're living to the exaltation of self. Because if we were all living to the glory of God then I would be thrilled when God blessed you, no matter what was going on with me. There's no sense of competition there. Can I fully rejoice in what God does through you?

Look at Philippians chapter 1. Perhaps this is at least one illustration of the thought. One writer said, "Let my candle go out as long as the son of righteousness can rise with healing in his beams." That's the idea. Do you remember this wonderful insight into the heart of Paul? In verse 12 he says, "I want you to know brethren... Philippians 1... that my circumstances have turned out for the great purpose of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear." He says, "You know, me being in prison here has really benefited the gospel." How Paul? "Well, first of all I'm having a tremendous time evangelizing the whole praetorian guard and everyone else around here. And then beyond that most of the brethren who are still out running loose preaching are trusting God with far more courage to speak his word without fear because they've seen that my imprisonment hasn't stopped my ministry. And they're just going boldly to preach Christ, assuming that if God wants them to have a jail ministry they'll have jail ministry from the inside."

"So," he says, it's all turned out for the furtherance of the gospel. I'm evangelizing here and other folks are more bold because they can see that even being in jail is a place of ministry." And then he turns the corner in verse 15 and says this, "Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife." What do you mean by that Paul? Well, some are preaching Christ but it's an envious thing. They envy my success, my blessing. They sort of strive against me. Verse 17, "They proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives and they think to cause me distress in my imprisonment." That's unthinkable. This faithful Godly saint is in prison and you mean to tell me there are some people out there preaching Christ envious of Paul, preaching Christ sort of anti-Paul mentality, preaching Christ and saying evil things about Paul because they seek to raise their own star a little higher and out of impure motives they want to cause distress to Paul? Unthinkable but it's true. They must have been saying things like, "Well, you know, Paul's in jail because he blew his ministry. The Lord shelved him. The Lord had to put him away. He's lost touch with the ministry. He's old, he's out of date." Maybe some of them even said, "Well, maybe he sinned a great sin and we don't know it." And out of selfish ambition and impure motive and envy and strife they were pushing themselves up as the new breed of preachers for everyone to admire and honor and acclaim. Not all of them were like that.

Verse 15 he said, "Some preach Christ out of goodwill toward me, implied. Some do it out of love. They know that I'm appointed for the defense of the gospel and they know I'm here just because of that and nothing else. But there are others, those selfish impure ones, who want to tell people that I'm in prison because my ministry's done and I'm no longer the one to look to and they're the new breed and they're the new heroes." And then I just am floored by verse 18, "What then... as if to say, so what? "Only that in every way, whether in pretense...and that's those phonies with the ambition who are saying terrible things about the faithful apostle. "Or in truth...and those are the good ones, the ones who love him, "but either way, whether in pretense or in truth Christ is proclaimed...and this is just marvelous..."and in this I what? There's the character of a man right there. There's the character of a man revealed. "In this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice." What do you rejoice about Paul? Christ is preached who cares who gets the credit. Right? Who cares? Christ is preached. That's an incredible attitude.

And the reason he could say that was because of the way he lived in verse 21, "For to me to live is, what?" Not Paul, Christ...Christ...Christ...Christ. Here was a man content to be outdone by others, accepting criticism animosity, envy, strife and saying, "As long as Christ is preached it's alright." Put yourself in that situation. You've been the hero of everybody; you're the spiritual Father, grandfather, uncle of almost everybody that's a Christian in the Gentile world. Every time you came into town the people fell at your feet, as it were, to hear what you said. You were God's anointed apostle. They would listen to you all night long and even if somebody fell out of the window and died they'd want to hurry up and have a resurrection so they could get back to the Bible study, back to the message. And when you left for the last time they would hold you by the neck and weep and kiss you and cry because they might not see your face again. That's how he was beloved. That's how he was adored. And, yet, that man suffered so deeply. At one point he said, "I have no one who is faithful, who stands by me."

When he faced his trials, it says in 2 Timothy 4, "No one stood to defend me, no one, no one." On one occasion he said, "I have only one person that's really faithful, I'll send him, Timothy. The rest have all forsaken me." And here he finally winds up in prison and they're saying about him, "Yeah, just what we told you see Lord had to put him on a shelf. He's finished." He says, "That's okay. As long as Christ is preached." Can you rejoice in someone else's success spiritually? You young men that are preparing for the ministry you better deal with this issue now because it'll destroy you if you don't. I remember hearing about two churches that had a contest to see who could have the biggest Sunday school and I remember that the pastor who lost got sick, began to throw up and had to be put to bed. Competition, competition because men are viewing their own ambition rather than the glory of God.

So if we're going to grow spiritually we have to gaze at the glory of God. If we're gonna fix our attention on the glory of God that means these are the things that we concentrate on; one, we prefer

his Kingdom above all else, we're content to do his will, no matter what the cost, we suffer when he suffers, and we are willing to be outdone in what we do as long as he receives the glory.

Let me give you a second thought here. The first one was four sub points. Second one, there is a second way you aim your life at glorifying God, a second way you glorify God. First, by focusing your life on it, secondly...hold on to this thought...by confessing sin, by confessing sin. Let me take you to a Scripture, back in Joshua chapter 7. We're just going to look at this one thought. In Joshua chapter 7...I want you to notice this tremendous, tremendous insight. The Children of Israel had come to Ai and their progress in entering the Promised Land; they were soundly defeated there. There was a reason they were defeated. They were defeated because of disobedience. A man named Achan, and obviously his family were in cahoots with him, had disobeyed God and violated what God said. They had stolen boogefrom Jericho. They had buried it in the ground, and as a result of that, they were in a severe situation of judgment from God.

We come to this passage, verse 19, Joshua confronts Achan and he says to him, verse 19, "My son I implore you...watch this one, "give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give praise to him and tell me now what you have done? Do not hide it from me." So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel, and this is what I did." And then he describes it. And what happened, verse 25? "They got all his family and all of his animals and all of his belongings and brought them out to the valley of Achor and they stoned him with stones and they burned it all with fire. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger." So what's going on here? Go back to verse 19, "Give glory to the God of Israel and confess your sin." Give glory to the God of Israel and confess your sin; that's the essence.

Let me tell you something. This is a great truth that's often missed. We're called to confess our sin to give glory to God. You say, "What does that mean?" Think with this one. God has a right to holy reaction against your sin. True? God has a right to be angry with your sin. God has a right to chasten you for your sin because God, as a holy God, cannot tolerate evil. So when you confess your sin and you acknowledge your sin and you affirm that you are guilty and you have sinned against the Lord then when God chastens you he is free from any accusation of being unjust. Therefore, you give glory to Him because you set it up for God to react in holy anger against evil and people will say, "Indeed he is a holy God who did what was right." When you deny sin and you will not acknowledge sin and you will not confess and then comes the disaster, perhaps some might accuse God of being unjust, but not if you have subscribed yourself to the guilt of that sin.

Confessing sin, Beloved, involves accepting the responsibility for my sin so that when God chastens me I have no thought nor does anyone else that he might be unfair or unjust. But that he has every right to a holy reaction. Look at Adam. What is Adam's sin? Who did Adam blame? You remember who he blamed? Didn't blame Eve. Genesis 3:12, listen to what he said, "The woman you gave

me... who did he blame? God. He said, "I went to sleep. I didn't even know what a woman was. I woke up; I'm married. You could have picked any woman. You made her. The woman you gave me." Who did he blame? God. People blame others, blame circumstances, blame Satan, blame demons. It starts with little kids. Little kid mouthing off to his parents, acting terrible. You hear a mother say, "Oh, well, he's tired." He's not tired; he's rotten, he's depraved, he's fallen. It's amazing how the rod of correction can make a tired kid not tired anymore. Works just as well as a nap, maybe better. You want to acknowledge full responsibility of your sin so that you free God to do whatever he wishes to do in reaction to your sin and not be thought to be unjust, but to be known as a holy God and that gives him glory. Do you see? So when you confess sin you are freeing God from any accusation of evil when he reacts.

Let me give you one illustration of this. 1 Samuel; this is so graphic. 1 Samuel chapter 4, and I'm going to go through this rapidly so follow very closely. "Israel, verse 1, went out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped beside Ebenezer while the Philistines camped at Aphek. The Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines killed four thousand men on the battlefield. When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?" That's a pretty sound defeat. You lose four thousand men. They said, "We know what the problem is, let's take ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies." You know what? God isn't here, we gotta go get God.

God was symbolized, at least his presence was symbolized, by the little box known as the ark of the covenant; little box with the poles running through it and the cherubim. They said, "We have to go get God. God's up in Shiloh, of course, we can't win. We have to get God." You could see how far they had sunk in their perception of God and in their attention to God. "So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts who sits above the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas . . . two total losers... were there with ark of the covenant of God." Now follow this. They'd just lost four thousand men, they go get the ark, they bring this little box into the camp and it says the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp. All Israel shouted with a great shout so that the earth resounded." The whole place began to echo with this tremendous, thunderous roar from the People of Israel. "God is here. God is here. We are invincible," that was the idea. "Philistines heard the noise of shout, they said, "What is the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean? Then they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp."

And from the Philistine's viewpoint that was just an idol, that was their deity and now their deity is there. "The Philistines were afraid, they said, "God has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness." Now their panic is starting to set in. They've heard about the power of what they

assumed to be the gods of the Israelites.

"Take courage and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews, as they have been slaves to you. Therefore, be men and fight." And some guy somewhere stands up and gives that pep talk. So they fought and Israel was defeated. Is that amazing? "And every man fled to his tent; and the slaughter was very great, there fell of Israel...listen...thirty thousand foot soldiers and the ark of God was taken; and the two of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas died." That said, "Wait a minute. There was less of a disaster before God arrived. What's going on? God is not a utilitarian genie. You don't rub your little magic lamp, say, "God pop out and give me three wishes." They had paid no attention to God. They had not lived in light of the law of God. They didn't just bring God in and make God do whatever they wanted him to do. They may have believed but they didn't experience any positive confession-kind of theology at all. They thought this is victory, this is victory. Listen, they not only were defeated, they not only lost thirty thousand foot soldier, but the Philistines took the ark away. That's kind of hard on their theology.

Now if you think that's a problem for the Israelites you haven't heard anything yet. The major problem is not with the Philistines because while the Israelites don't have God, the Philistines do. I would guess that maybe a problem worse than not having God would be having God on your hands in a pagan situation. So the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Chapter 5 verse 1 says, "The Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon." Dagon was half fish, half man; that was their deity. So they say, "Well this is the Israelites deity." They thought this little box was the deity of the Israelites. They were into this polytheism kind of stuff. "So we'll just put their God in the temple with our God and then we can worship both of them and we'll have their God's power and our God's power." So they did that.

"The Ashdodites arose early in the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord." They come in the morning and here's this fish/man God dumped over bowing down to this little box with the angels on it. And I'm sure they had a discussion about how that happened, localized earthquake or something. They didn't know what happened so they put Dagon back up in his place again. Must have been a wind or something. "Came back the next morning Dagon has fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord again, verse 4, this time his head and the palms of his hands were cut off and there was only a stump." Do you know what happened? "The priests of Dagon and all the rest of the people never entered Dagon's house in Ashdod again." Why? Who wants to worship a loser? I mean if your deity can't even defend himself against the deity next door forget it. Forget it.

And God was angry with the way he was being treated because he was forced to share his glory with that stupid fish God; a mermaid in reverse with a man's torso and fish head. And so he punished them. Verse 6, "The hand of the Lord is heavy on the Ashdodites. He ravaged them and smote them with tumors...tumors...cancers...tumors of some kind? Well some translation says hemorrhoids.

That's really a poor translation. It does, doesn't it? Some of you have that in your Bible. I can tell by the smirk on your face. But, here, all these people in this society are smitten with tumors. "And the minute Ashdod, verse 7, saw that it was so, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god." They had a committee meeting and decided they ought to get rid of this thing, which you wouldn't have to be Phi Beta Kappa to figure out.

"So they sent and gathered all the lords of the Philistines to them, verse 8, and said, "What are we going to do with this?" They said, "Let's send it to Gath." Do you remember a very large person from Gath? His name was Goliath, another Philistine city. Take it to Gath, which was no solution at all if you lived in Gath. "It came about that after they had brought it around, the hand of the Lord was against the city with very great confusion. He smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them. So they sent the ark to Ekron, another Philistine city. And it happened as the ark came to Ekron the Ekronites cried out, "They brought the ark of the God of Israel around to us, to kill us and our people." Now the whole country is in panic. "So they sent, therefore, and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people, for there was a deadly confusion throughout the city; the hand of God was heavy there." It might well be that that was plague expressed in the word confusion. "And the men who didn't die were smitten with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven." Some men died and some got tumors. It was a plague, incredible plague.

Now what are you going to do with this? You say, "Where's all this going?" Just keep reading. Watch this. Verse 1 chapter 6, "The ark of the Lord had been in the country of the Philistines seven months." Seven months? "And they called all these people together; priests and diviners, "What are we going to do with the ark? Tell us how we send it to its place. We don't wanna just send it back. We're afraid to go near the thing. How are we gonna do this?" And they said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel...now look at this...do not send it empty, but you shall surely return to Him a what? A guilt offering or a sin offering, which is a recognition that what has happened to you is due to your sin." In other words, don't curse that deity, recognize that he is reacting to your violation of him then you'll be healed. That's wisdom. Those guys had their head screwed on that day. "They said, "Well what are we gonna send? What is a guilt offering?"

Look at this in verse 4, "Five golden tumors and five golden mice." What in the world is that? "According to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one plague was on all of you and on your lords." Well the idea here is that they gave what was called votive offerings. In ancient times when a body was diseased or a plague came, in order to placate the deity that they assumed brought the plague or could heal the plague, they would make a clay or wooden image of the diseased member of the body or of the animal, or whatever it was, and offer that to the deity so that the deity would recognize that they saw that situation as directly reflective of their sin and they wanted to placate that

deity.

They had had, obviously, a plague that caused great amount of death. It was carried by mice, a black death bubonic-kind of plague. And the ones, it says, who hadn't died were given these tumors. So they made golden tumors. A votive offering could be made out of wood or clay, terracotta. In this case they made it out of gold. They could have made it out of any substance but they were made out gold to emphasize they wanted to make a serious offering to this God. And while it was a pagan offering, the point was they recognized that He had a right to react the way He reacted because they had violated Him.

By the way, I went to the little room in the museum at Corinth, where the God Esculapius, who is related to shewers and healings, was worshipped. And there's a little room the curator took me to that's locked to the public, in which there are literally thousands of little replicas of all the human parts, organs, limbs, everything, that were collected in ancient times, that were offered as votive offerings to acknowledge to a deity that whatever problem they were having in their body was a reflection of their sin against that deity. So this is a pagan custom.

So verse 5 says, "Make likeness of your tumors, likeness of the mice that ravage your land," and look at this, look at this, "and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods, and your land." Isn't that amazing? They recognized that they needed to glorify God, even the God of Israel, not their God, by acknowledging that their problem was due to their sin, which exonerated God from being thought of as unkind or unfair. I don't know if you've ever thought about that in your whole life. But when you confess your sin you give glory to God because you free Him to chasten in any way He chooses and never be thought to be unfair because you have acknowledged your sin against Him and that such a chastening is a righteous response to that sin.

Nehemiah did it. He vindicated God's righteousness in chapter 9 verse 33 when he said, "Thou art just in all thou has brought on us. Thou art just in all thou has brought on us." Confession is to acknowledge my sin and that gives glory to God. It frees him to chasten me. Let me go a step further. It gives glory to Him too because when He forgives me I can praise him. Right? If I don't acknowledge my sin then I can't acknowledge his forgiveness. If I don't accept my guilt then the fact that he removes that guilt in Christ means nothing. Confess your sin. Confess your sin. And that frees God to put his glory on display in vengeance. It frees God to put his glory on display in forgiveness. You glorify God by aiming your life at that and by confessing your sin. So much more to say about that but our time is gone.

Let's bow together in prayer. Father, we desire to give you glory. We desire to aim our life at that purpose. We would desire that all we do, say would honor you. We want, Lord, to esteem Your Kingdom and Your cause above all else. We want to be content to do Your will, whatever the cost. We want to suffer when Your name is dishonored. We want to be content to be outdone by others

who do what we do better than we do it if You're glorified. And, Lord, we want to confess our sin to you, honestly, forthrightly, that in that confession You may be glorified when You chasten and glorified when You graciously, mercifully forgive.

And we thank You that You do not always chasten us. You do not always bring vengeance on us but you are so gracious and so kind. Lord we ask that you would cause us all to seek to grow more like Christ. To see a decreasing frequency of the pattern of sin and an increasing frequency of the pattern of holiness that conforms us more and more to the Savior as we focus our lives on Him. We pray in his wonderful name. Amen.

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