

# (1 Samuel) the Holiness of God

by David Guzik

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*David Guzik's sermon explores the significance of the Ark of the Covenant and the holiness of God as demonstrated through Israel's actions and God's responses.*

**Duration:** 38:41

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 6:19-21, Matthew 6:33, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Hebrews 9:22, 1 John 1:7

**Topics:** "Gods Holiness", "Obedience To God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the human fascination with the supernatural and the desire to know something beyond our earthly existence. He relates this to the modern fascination with aliens and extraterrestrials, suggesting that it is a misplaced desire to know the holiness of God. The sermon then focuses on the story of the Ark of the Covenant being returned to Israel and the consequences faced by the people of Beth Shemesh for looking into the Ark. The preacher emphasizes the importance of honoring and obeying God, highlighting the need to grapple with the issues presented in the Bible.

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## Transcript

We're going to begin at 1 Samuel chapter 6, beginning right here at verse 13. Now, the people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, and they lifted their eyes and saw the ark and rejoiced to see it. If you've ever been to Israel, you know that this area of Judah, known as Beth Shemesh, is hilly in its terrain, and you have plains and hills, and you can just imagine people around the springtime, April, May, June, that's the time of the wheat harvest, and there they are gathering the wheat together, and it's a happy time, it's a time of hard work, but it's happy because you're bringing in the bounty that God has provided, and there's food.

So it's a wonderful time, but in the midst of all of this, there they are working out in the field, and they look up on the horizon, and maybe up on a hill they see two cows drawing a cart, and what immediately catches their eye is there's nobody driving the cows. I mean, cows and carts, those were precious commodities, and here's one just wandering on a road, nobody there, and isn't that strange? Two cows pulling a cart, and there's no driver, there's no attendant there. Well, what's happening with that? And they're thinking about that, and then all of a sudden they see this glistening in the object that's on the cart, and it's bright and shining, and all of a sudden they realize that must be the Ark of the Covenant, and they rejoiced.

No wonder they rejoiced. You know what the Ark of the Covenant represented, don't you? The Ark of the Covenant represented the very presence of God. It was a physical symbol of the throne of God, of the presence of God in the midst of the people of Israel.

And the Ark of the Covenant was never intended to go on a tour around Israel. It wasn't something that most people who were Israelites ever saw in their lives, because it was to be kept in the Holy of Holies, in the tabernacle of God. There it was, at the house of God, in a little room.

Not very big at all, but it was the Holy of Holies, and it was a place where one man once a year would go in and sprinkle atoning blood upon that Ark of the Covenant. And that's where it stayed. Most of the Israelites never saw it, but they'd heard about it.

And there they saw it. What's it doing on a wagon? What's it doing being pulled into our land, from the land of the Philistines? Well, the Philistines had had the Ark of the Covenant for about seven months. You see, the Israelites, in superstition and foolishness, began to trust more in the Ark of the Covenant of God than in the God of the Covenant represented by the Ark.

And they thought, well, we're battling with the Philistines, we're at war with them. If we bring the Ark of the Covenant with us into battle, then we'll win for sure. And they decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant into battle.

But God wasn't honored by their view of the Ark of the Covenant as like the ultimate lucky rabbit's foot. He said, forget that. I'm going to let you lose the battle.

I'm going to let you lose a bit, and I'm going to let the Ark of the Covenant get carried away into the land of the Philistines. And that's what God did. The nation of Israel was thrown into a crisis.

God's left us. God's abandoned us. God is dead.

Maybe the gods of the Philistines are mightier than the God of Israel. What's going on here? Their whole world, spiritually speaking, had crumbled before them because the unthinkable had happened. The Ark of the Covenant of the God of Israel had been carried away and taken in the land of captivity into the land of the Philistines.

Well, the Philistines had the Ark, and they thought they had some great trophy. But God showed them they had their hands full. He struck them with plagues and with pestilence.

The Ark of the Covenant of the Philistines became a hot potato that they kept transferring around from city to city because everywhere it went, it brought destruction, and nobody could hold on to it too long. And after seven months of taking that kind of punishment, they finally said, let's give it back to the Israelites. And they sent it back under some very interesting and wonderful circumstances that we looked at at our last time together in 1 Samuel.

But now it's come back to Israel. And they're rejoicing. Well, they should be rejoicing.

Friends, they would have felt something like the disciples felt on the day when they first saw the resurrected Jesus. They would have felt that they received God back from the dead. Oh, they shouldn't have felt like that.

They should have known that God was still on His throne, even though the Ark of the Covenant was in the land of the Philistines. They should have known that, but they probably didn't. Their feelings got the best of them, and they felt as though God had been dead.

They felt like God had left them. God had forsaken them, even though He hadn't. Let me tell you something about that kind of feeling.

If you feel that God has forsaken you, if you think that God has left you, let me tell you two things. First of all, you're wrong. Let me tell you the second thing is, as far as your experience goes, He may as well have forsaken you, because you feel that He's gone.

And you know how it is when you feel like that. You feel that everything's gone. Everything's desperate.

Everything's vanished from you. But at the same time, it isn't true. It's like feeling because it's an overcast day or it's cloudy.

The sun is gone. It's departed. It's there all the time.

It's just you're not enjoying it. You're in desperation and discouragement because you think it's gone, but it's not. Israel should have taken joy and courage, even though the Ark was gone.

But now they're rejoicing because it's back, and they want to honor God because it's back. Look at verse 14. Then the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh and stood there.

A large stone was there, so they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. I have to say I feel sorry for these cows. These noble, silent servants of God that the Philistines used in this great test taken.

And there they did it. They did their job perfectly before the Lord. They traveled to some 10 miles without a driver, without a road map, without a global positioning satellite thing.

They just went the right road and didn't turn a side to the right or the left. They ignored the calves back in the stall at home. And what's the reward once they come to Beth Shemesh? Let's have a sacrifice.

Well, you know, a living sacrifice under the Lord, I guess. But I can't help but feel a little sorry for them. But they did it as honoring unto God.

Look at verse 15. The Levites took down the Ark of the Lord and the chest that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone. Then the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices that same day to the Lord.

Well, praise God! Here are the men of Beth Shemesh. They received the Ark of the Covenant unto themselves and they want to honor God through it all. Thank you, Lord.

We're going to honor you, Lord, by making sacrifices unto you, by giving unto you. Let me tell you, cows and carts were expensive commodities back then. And it said something, that they wanted to make such a precious sacrifice to the Lord.

See that cart? Some guy said, man, I could use that cart. They said, forget it, we're going to chop it up and we're going to use the wood to sacrifice these animals. And the Lord said, look at the cows.

You know, I could use a cow, one of the farmers was saying. No, let's sacrifice it unto the Lord. This is a day to honor God.

And they gave God honor through the sacrifice. I'll tell you how else they gave God honor. Did you notice how they unloaded and carried the Ark from the cart? They used Levites.

They used priests. Now, people from the tribe of Levi, that is known as Levites, they were the ones who were given the holy permission from God to handle these sacred things such as the Ark of the Covenant. And so they did the right thing.

They just didn't have any Tom, Dick, or Harry go up and pick up the Ark of the Covenant. No! It had to be somebody from the tribe of Levi. And by the way, Beth Shemesh was a priestly city.

And so there were Levites there and said, fine, we're honoring you, God. We're honoring you by obeying your word and how you tell us to carry the Ark. We're honoring you by sacrifice.

What a great day of rejoicing in Israel. And then they noticed that the Philistines brought some gifts, if you notice here, verse 16. So when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day.

Now, these are the gold tumors which the Philistines returned as a trespass offering to the Lord. One for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ascalon, one for Gath, one for Ekron. And the gold rats, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines, belonged to the five lords.

Both fortified cities and country villages. As far as the large stone of Abel on which they set the Ark of the Lord, which stone remains this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh? Well, so they received these offerings. The Philistines sought to appease God and to atone for their sinful conduct towards the Ark.

They entrusted the Ark with these offerings and sent it back to Israel. And the Israelites received it. And there's just three more verses to the end of the chapter.

And you're thinking, wow, we're almost done here. It's going to be a short sermon this morning. No, it's not.

There's a lot in these last three verses. Matter of fact, might I say that these first verses we've gone over, we've just been setting the stage. Now in verses 19, 20 and 21, this is where we're faced with some issues that we really have to grapple with.

The people of Israel were honoring God. They were rejoicing. They were obeying him by using Levi's to transport the Ark.

They were sacrificing. And Lord, all that's great. Until we come to verse 19.

Then he struck the men of Beth Shemesh because they had looked into the Ark of the Lord. He struck 50,000 and 70 men of the people. And the people lamented because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter.

Wow. I know what you're thinking. You're thinking back to the last scene of the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark, where this guy is arrogant enough to open up the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and to look inside of it.

And when he looks inside, he reaches inside hoping to find something. But instead of finding something significant, all he finds is sand, sand. My friends, the men of Beth Shemesh, when they opened up the Ark of the Covenant, they hope to see something as well.

Because I don't know. By the way, do you know that there's a lot of people who believe that the Ark of the Covenant exists today? Now, there's a group of very secretive Christians in Egypt who say that they have the Ark of the Covenant and that they guard it and possess it. I don't believe that one very much.

Other people believe that it's hidden away somewhere. There's a lot of people, a lot of rabbis, who say that the Ark of the Covenant is hidden in a secret chamber underneath the Temple Mount and that there are some rabbis who say, we know exactly where it is. It's just we don't want to get it right now.

We don't have permission to get it. And so when the Messiah says the time is right, we're going to get the Ark of the Covenant. Now, if they were to find the Ark of the Covenant today and they were to open it up, I don't know what would be in it.

But I know what was in it at the time of 1 Samuel 6. The Bible says that there were three things in the Ark of the Covenant. The Bible says that Moses put the tablets that he brought down from Mount Sinai in the Ark of the Covenant. The Bible also instructed the people of Israel to put a jar or a pot full of manna, that miraculous bread that came down from heaven, and supplied the food needs of the nation of Israel throughout their time in the wilderness.

There was a jar of manna in the Ark of the Covenant. And finally, there was a section of Aaron's rod which budded in the Ark of the Covenant. Now, I need to explain to you just briefly what that was about.

You know, Aaron, like any man back then, would have a rod that he would use as a walking stick. Aaron was an old man. It made sense for him to have a rod.

Aaron's rod was also a symbol of his authority over the people of Israel as the high priest. Well, one day during the Exodus, during the time when Israel was on its way from Egypt to the Promised Land, there came some people who challenged Aaron's authority. They said, well, who are you to make yourself high priest? And Aaron said, listen, man, I didn't make myself high priest.

God made me high priest. They said, well, let's decide who God wants to be high priest. There was a challenge to Aaron's authority.

There was a rebellion against Aaron's authority. And so you know what happened. God said, okay, we'll take Aaron's rod and we'll lay it down, and then we'll take the rod of the leader of this rebellious group and we'll lay it down.

We'll see what God does to these rods. And you know what God did to Aaron's rod now? It's just a stick. It's a dead piece of wood.

But God miraculously made that rod sprout out and grow buds forth on it. It sprouted. And God said, see, I'm showing that the living God is empowering Aaron and the God who can make dead things alive.

I'm with Aaron. This is my seal of authority upon him. And so a section of Aaron's rod which sprouted, that was in the Ark of the Covenant.

Those three things. You need to understand, all of this happened some 400 years before the time of 1 Samuel 6. And so these guys are thinking, man, I want to see that stuff. I heard about these tablets.

I heard about this manna. Maybe I can taste a little manna. I don't know.

Let's check this stuff out. And what did they do? They went up to the Ark. And first of all, they touched it.

Don't touch the Ark of the Covenant. But God said, do not touch it. Matter of fact, you say, well, how would they carry it if you couldn't touch it? It had poles running alongside.

And all you could touch was the poles, not the Ark itself. Do not touch the Ark of the Covenant. Secondly, don't you dare open it up and look into it.

Now friends, why would God command that these three items, the tablets of the law, the jar of manna and Aaron's rod which sprouted, why would he command those three things to be put in there if you couldn't go in and check them out? I mean, wasn't it like a time capsule that years later you could look at these things like museum artifacts? No. Do you know why God commanded those three things put into the Ark of the Covenant? Let me explain to you what the Ark of the Covenant was all about. Friends, it pictured the throne of God.

It was the symbolic or the material representation of the spiritual throne of God among the people of Israel. And there is the throne of God. The picture is God is enthroned at the Ark of the Covenant and he's looking down from heaven upon man.

And as God looks down into the Ark, what does he see? He sees the law, the jar of manna and Aaron's rod which sprouted. Let me tell you, did those three things speak well or speak ill of Israel? The law, did they keep it? No. By the way, you know, that was the second set of tablets.

What happened to the first one? Yeah, Moses broke them. And you know why he broke them? Because the people of Israel were in sin. God looked down and he looked at the law and he said, My people don't measure up to the law.

Then God looked at the jar of manna. The jar of manna. God provided for Israel in the wilderness.

And they were so grateful to him for his provision, weren't they? No, they were not. They whined, they griped, they complained. Not only were they lawbreakers, but they didn't have any gratitude towards God either.

And then the third thing, Aaron's rod which sprouted. Friends, they rebelled against God's authority. God enthroned upon the Ark of the Covenant, looking down upon man.

What does he see? He sees a bunch of ungrateful lawbreakers who are rebels. Doesn't paint a very pretty picture of man. But then what does the high priest do on the Day of Atonement? He comes and he sprinkles atoning, sacrificial blood on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant.

The lid of the Ark of the Covenant was called the mercy seat. And that's where he sprinkled the blood. And so when God looked down from heaven, all of a sudden, he didn't see sinful, ungrateful, rebellious people.

What did he see? He saw atoning, covering blood. Friends, right now, you know that God in heaven is looking down at you, don't you? And he sees that you're a sinner. He sees that you're ungrateful towards

him.

He sees that you've been a rebel. So what do you do? You put yourself under the atoning, covering blood of Jesus Christ. So that God doesn't see that anymore.

All he sees is what Jesus did on your behalf. Friends, that's what it's all about. And that's why God had those things there.

Not to be a museum display piece. That's why it was wrong for the men of Beth Shemesh to pry open the Ark and to look into these things that they shouldn't have looked at. And so what did God do? God struck down.

Now, the text says 50,000 and 70 men. Friends, I don't know about you, but my Bible makes a marginal note there. I think that what the text is really saying, it's saying 70 men among 50,000.

I think it was 70 men who were killed, not 50,000 and 70. There seems to be pretty reliable manuscript evidence for that, and I'm not saying that to try to imply, well, who cares, 50,000, 70 men, that's no big deal. No, it was a big deal.

70 dead bodies laying around the Ark of the Covenant. Now, again, I know you're thinking of that last scene, Raiders of the Lost Ark, where fire came through and it was all gross the way they died and everything. Nobody knows what happened like that.

But all I know is that there were 70 dead bodies around this box, which represented the holy presence of God. The people were struck down because they looked into the Ark of the Lord. Now, let me apply one lesson from this right now directly to your heart.

Friends, there are secrets in the heart of God that you and I have no business looking into. Now, God is good to us. He has revealed a lot to us.

God has told us a lot in His Word, and I don't think there's anybody here in this room who can say, I have discovered everything God has to reveal to me in His Word. But can I say there are other things that God has chosen not to reveal to you? Don't pry into them. There are secrets in the heart of God that you and I must respect.

One of my favorite examples of this in the entire Bible is found in the book of Job. You know the story of Job, don't you? Job has all this crisis, all this calamity befall him in his life. He loses everything.

And Job has some friends who come around to comfort him, and his friends do a good thing at first. They just sit around, and for a week, they're just there with Job. They don't say anything.

We're just there. We're behind you. We're with you, my friend.

But then after that week of silence, they do something actually very stupid, as it turns out. They start talking. And they say, Job! Friend! Take some advice from us.

Let us tell you why this calamity has happened to you. Job, we're just trying to help. We're just trying to help you out.

And let us tell you how we can help you. We'll help you get right with God, Job. This has all come upon you because you've sinned, and you need to get right with God.

Do you know what Job says? He goes, guys, that's not why. He says, look, I'm not trying to say I'm sinlessly perfect. Job never claims that.

But he says, I know that there's no specific or significant sin in my life that God has brought this upon me to try to correct. I know that. And his friends say, yes, there is.

And Job says, no, there isn't. And Job's friends say, yes, there is. And Job says, no, there isn't.

And it goes by chapter after chapter after chapter. Yes, there is. No, there isn't.

Yes, there is. No, it isn't. And so finally, towards the end of the book of Job, Job is so mad.

He's so annoyed. He calls out to God in heaven. He says, God, these friends of mine, they don't know why this has come upon me.

I don't know why this has come upon me. God, you have to tell me. You have to tell me why.

You have to prove it to me, prove it to them. You've got to prove it, Lord. You have to tell me, Lord.

And so God comes and he speaks to Job. You know what God said to Job? Let me read it to you. Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man.

I will question you and you will answer me, God says. Let me tell you, that's sending a chill up the spine of Job. And he stood back and he said, oh, well, Lord, what do you want to question me about? And so God goes on for a couple of chapters in the book of Job, asking Job questions about science, about philosophy, about theology.

And you know what Job's answer is? And by the time Job's little session with God is over, you know what Job's doing? He's not demanding to know an answer from God anymore. Job is standing back and saying, Lord, you know, you know, you know, and I don't. And that's enough.

Friends, there are secrets in the heart and mind of God, which Job had no right to demand to know. And the Lord had to deal with Job about this. Isaiah chapter 55 says, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my way, says the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. And friends, we need to respect the fact that God is God and we're not, and there's just some things that we will not and should not know. You know how annoying it can be when somebody's a busybody into other people's business and sticking their minds into business that's not theirs? Friends, it's bad enough when that happens on a human level.

How much worse it is when somebody's doing on a divine level. There's things bound up in the heart and in the mind of God that just aren't your business. Now, friends, some of you hear that and take it to heart.

No big deal. OK. I'm fine with that.

For some of you, that tortures you. You get depressed and discouraged and maybe even angry because there's just something in your heart that demands to know. I have to know, Lord.

I have to know. Friends, I very kindly and warmly ask you to take that to God and repent of it. Because your demand to know from God is sin.

You're not respecting who God is. I'm not asking you to be happy with not knowing. No.

I don't think anybody can be happy with not knowing. I'm just asking you to love God and to trust Him and to serve Him even when He has secrets that He's telling you nothing about. Well, that's what the men of Beth Shemesh would not do.

And they opened up the Ark of the Covenant of God. God slew 70 men on one day. Now, I think just as significant as what happened right then was the reaction of the men.

Notice what it is here in verse 20. And the men of Beth Shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy God? Well, friends, they recognized something at that moment that they should have recognized before they started prying into the secrets of God. They recognized that God is holy.

And do you know what that word means? We use the word sometimes in our culture. Here you've got holy rollers or holy Bibles or the Holy Spirit or somebody who's holier than thou. Most of the time when we use that term holy in our modern usage, we have in our mind like moral purity.

Oh, they're so holy. They're so straight-laced and morally pure. And we usually don't use it in a very positive sense, do we? Friends, that's not really the idea behind the Bible's usage of the term holy.

When these men of Israel were saying that God was holy, they weren't so much talking about God being morally pure, though of course that's true. What they were talking about is something that I would call, and I'm going to make up a word here, but I think you understand, apartness. That God is apart from us.

And that's an important thing for everybody to understand about God and his nature and his character. God is apart from us. Nobody here should think that God is somehow a superman.

As if, well, he's just smarter than any man, he's just stronger than any man, he's just wiser than any man. No, God isn't a human level. He doesn't live on a human level.

God is God and we're not. God is a different order of being. God is holy.

He's separate. He's apart. That's what it means that God is holy and the men of Beth Shemesh weren't respecting it.

Now, there's something curious about the holiness of God. On the one hand, we're attracted to it. God has put a hunger, a desire for us to know something of the apartness of God, something of the supernatural, something of the other that's out there.

Friends, you see this recurring in culture over and over and over again. I mean, I think of an example from years ago, that movie that came out in the early 90s. It's been one of the more popular movies of the 1990s, that movie Ghost.

You know, when that movie came out and was so popular, the studios wanted to know what made it so popular and so while it was still in the theaters, they put an ad, the studio that sent the movie out, they put an ad in the classifieds saying, if you've seen the movie Ghost six or more times, contact us. They got hundreds of people who replied, who had seen the movie six, seven, eight, twelve, eighteen times. And

I'm not talking about renting the video where you've got that five day thing and you watch it twice a day for five days.

I'm talking about people who went to the movie theater and saw it this many times. And why were they so attracted to it? Because the movie dealt with something we're all attracted to, yet at the same time, we don't know what to do with it. It's the supernatural.

It's that something other. And you see it in movies. You see it in our modern fascination with things like aliens and extraterrestrials.

Friends, what that is, is that's a misplaced desire to know something of the holiness of God. God has put a hunger in you and in me to know something of the other, of the supernatural, of something beyond. And what God means that to be fulfilled in is in a knowledge of Him.

But at the same time, there's something curious about the holy. And that is we're attracted to it, but when men and women encounter the holiness of God, a lot of times we're afraid of it. Friends, when Peter saw the holy power of Jesus, you know what he did? He got down on his knees and he said, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.

When the apostles saw the transfigured Jesus and all His power and holy glory, what did they say? The Bible says that they were filled with great fear. Friends, when we meet the holy God, there's something in it attracting us, but there's something in it that makes us afraid at the same time. You know why? Because at that moment, maybe more clearly than ever, we recognize that God is holy and we're not.

That we're sinful. Remember the vision from Isaiah chapter 6 where Isaiah sees the Lord seated on His throne enthroned in His glory, and His glory fills the temple. What's his reaction? Woe unto me, for I am a man of unclean lips.

Friends, that's the reaction time and time again when people encounter God in truth. They're struck with a sense of their own sinfulness. And there's something attracting them to God, but there's something at the same time saying, oh, I don't know what to do with this.

If I could make a very crude kind of illustration, to me it's kind of like going on a roller coaster. I'm not talking about the up and down motion of a roller coaster. That's not the point I want to make.

I'm thinking of when you're on the roller coaster, you're going on the track that goes up. To me, that's the worst part of the roller coaster. I'm fine waiting in line.

I'm fine just sitting in the thing. And I'm fine once the ride is going. But when you're sitting there going... I'm excited.

At the same time, I'm afraid. There's something in me saying, oh yeah. There's something in me saying, get me out of here.

Friends, that's how it is when we come and meet the Holy God. There's something in us responding to it. But at the same time, we're aware of our own lack of holiness.

And so the men of Beth Shemesh were right in seeing that God is a holy God. But I want you to notice, I think there's something wrong in their question here. Do you catch the tone of their question? Look at it again in verse 20.

And the men of Beth Shemesh said, who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? You know, the tone of their question is not, we're such sinners for prying into the holy things of God that we had no right to pry into. Their question is not, well, God, He's kind of in a bad mood, don't you think? He's kind of harsh. Let me tell you something, friends.

It wasn't the fault of God that these men offended His holiness. It was the fault of these men. And you and I might stand back and say, well, I don't know.

Maybe God was too harsh in His judgment. Listen, you and I, we don't know. We don't understand all the reasons for God's judgment.

I don't think that any man or woman on this earth has any place to be critical of the judgments of God. We might stand back and see God judging or see God doing something in a place. Man, that seems rough.

That seems harsh. Lord, what are you doing? Friends, we're not in any place to be judges of the judgment of God. He knows what He's doing.

God sees the hearts of men that you and I can't see. God sees secret sin. God sees veiled hypocrisy.

God sees it. God knows it. Friends, God will deal with it.

The judgment and the reasons for God's judgment, they may be secret, but they're never unrighteous. God knows what He's doing. So it was wrong for the men of Beth Shemesh in the tone of this question to sort of blame God for what was really their fault.

But on the other hand, I want you to see that this question was a brilliant question. In some ways, I think that this question is the most important question that anybody can ask themselves. Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? Friend, are you able? Can you stand before this holy Lord God? Now, I know what some people might be thinking when I ask that.

Up in their mind flashes their report card before God. And they're thinking, who can stand before this holy Lord God? They say, okay, I'm here at church this morning. That's a good point.

That's good. That's one in my favor. I brought my Bible.

That's good. No, wait a minute. I didn't bring mine.

I had to raise my hand. That's a bad one. I read my Bible.

I didn't read my Bible. I helped an old lady cross. They're adding up the score sheet in their head.

My friends, can I tell you, that is never going to make you able to stand before a holy God. Let's just say that from this point forward, it's getting close to noon on September the 20th, 1998. Let's just say that from this moment forward, you are able to walk in perfect holiness before God.

You guys should be laughing when I say that, because it's laughable to think of anybody doing that. But let's just say you could. That doesn't make up for every way you've sinned and fallen short in your previous days.

So here you are. You can't stand before a holy God in any kind of holiness you can achieve. Any kind of holiness that you can earn.

Friends, you can't make it with the holiness you can achieve, but you can make it with the holiness you can receive. And that's what Jesus Christ does, my friends. Jesus Christ stands and He says, Listen, I'll do two things for you.

I'll take all the guilt that your sin deserves. That's what He did on the cross when He took the guilt that the Holy Father poured out upon God the Son and He received the guilt that you and I deserve. Jesus says, I'll take your guilt and I'll give you my holiness.

Now that's a deal, my friends. He's taken your guilt and He's given you His holiness. And this is what's great about the holiness of God.

You know, we talk about God's holiness being His apartness, how He's separate from us, how He's a different order of being altogether. But God in His holiness doesn't say, I'm holy. Stay away from me.

I'm holy. Here's a wall. Don't come near.

No, God says, I'm holy. I want my holiness to surround you. Come apart to me and be holy with me.

The Lord says, Be holy for I am holy. I'm holy, God says. Come to my holiness.

We sang it this morning. Your holiness surrounds me. That's what God wants to do with His holiness, right? Surround you.

He wants to draw you into His holiness, not exclude you. But it can only happen as you receive the holiness of Jesus Christ in your life. But friends, you're never going to receive it until you stop trying to earn it.

Until you stop trying to receive it. Put away all your efforts to achieve a holiness from God. Receive it from Jesus Christ.

And then a funny thing happens. When you receive that holiness from Jesus Christ, it starts working in your life. And all of a sudden, you want to be more holy.

You want to do the things that mark a holy life. And then God's really working. Now, unfortunately, many people, when they consider the holiness of God, they do not respond the way God would have them respond.

They don't respond by saying, Lord, I need to receive the holiness of Jesus Christ. Make me holy because of what Jesus did. They don't do that.

You know what they do instead? They look of God's holiness as a problem, and they push Him away. That's exactly what the men of Beth Shemesh did. Let's read verse 20 and 21 again.

And the men of Beth Shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy God? And to whom shall it go up from us? So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirith-Jerim, saying, The Philistines have brought back the Ark of the Lord. Come down and take it up with you. This Ark represents the holiness of God to us.

Get it out of here. Friends, if you're falling short before God, and you know it right now in your life today, your reaction may be to push God away. You know, you can be pushing God away and still come to

church.

You can be pushing God away and still do many outward religious things. Friends, when you think about who you are before God, don't push Him away. Embrace Him.

Come and receive the holiness of the Lord. The men of Beth Shemesh said, Well, I don't know. These guys in Kirith-Jerim, they can be their problem.

I don't know if they were friends with the guys in Kirith-Jerim. I don't know if they were enemies. They said, Yeah, let's send it to them.

We'll see what the Lord does to them. You know what the Lord did to the men of Kirith-Jerim? He blessed them because of the presence of the Ark. Because they honored the Lord.

Because they submitted to His holiness. And the Ark of the Covenant stayed at Kirith-Jerim for 70 years until David brought the Ark of the Covenant from there to be installed in the tabernacle which he erected in Jerusalem. Friends, isn't that glorious? So the holiness of God stands before you this morning.

It can be a curse to you, or it can be a blessing. Surrender your heart to God and receive His holiness as a blessing. Let's pray.

Father, we know that You're different. We know that You're holy. It makes us want to respect You, Lord, and fear You as a holy God to whom we should give reverent praise.

To whom we should honor You and Your secrets. But Lord, at the same time, I know there's hearts here this morning sort of struck with the dilemma of how they're going to respond to You in their holiness. I pray that every heart would respond in submission to Your holiness.

And that they would do that and receive Your goodness and receive Your love in their lives. I pray this in Jesus' name.

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