

Saved From What?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pure and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our heavenly Father, our rock and our salvation. Well, it's the summer season and that means it's vacation time. And with vacation time, people miss some Sundays as they go and visit family, friends, national parks, and the result is you might miss a sermon or two. When we're doing a sermon series like this one on the holiness of God, you might find yourself a little lost if you come in part way through. So here is a quick recap. In our first week, we looked at how God reveals Himself as the Holy One, the Holy One of Israel, and how God comes to us when we are in need; comes to us through Holy Communion, and in His presence, we should be in awe like the seraphim who are around His throne in heaven singing, "holy, holy, holy." Last week, we saw that when God does come to us; that when the unholy us-meet the holy Him, it is traumatic. Because we realize that He is the standard. We are to be holy as He is holy. We are not, which means we fall short, and we stand in judgment. That is the third part now of holiness. It's a part of God's holiness that has been changing over the years. It is judgment.

Let's go back in time just a little bit to the 18th century. Watch a good old western, what do you see the preacher doing? You see him carrying Bible and he is preaching hellfire and brimstone. Basically, the message was this, and I'm going to use the superlative of a triple replication like the holy, holy, holy. Man is very, very, very bad and the second part of the message; God is very, very, very mad and that was very traumatic. It was kind of fright evangelism or our first little view of being scared straight.

But following the 18th century, going into the 19 century we saw a dramatic response and a whole new focus on just the New Testament. It focused on the love of God, and the goodness of man. When you have good man meeting a loving God, it is significantly less traumatic. Then the 20th century came, and we went to what is called crisis theology. It comes from the Greek word, "KRISIS" which also is translated as judgment. So, it's judgment theology. And when we take a look at it, it takes the wrath of God and judgment very seriously. And you might say, 'well pastor Matt, that's good.' Well, it is until you take a look at how the theologians, the leaders in the church took the wrath and the judgment of God seriously. Some refer to it as, I quote, "the shadow side of God." It's the irrational aspect of God's anger and judgment. So, you might ask, 'the irrational side or aspect of God's anger and judgment?' Let me just quote some of these theological individuals and what they have written so that you can hear directly from them what they mean by that. "That

anger is not so much a manifestation of God's righteousness, or of His Holiness as it is a manifestation of a defect within God's own character.” Now whenever I hear a theologian talking about a defect of God, I think that's a little bit of a defective theologian.

Or how about this? “A demonic aspect of God that shows itself by sudden unprovoked manifestations of a whimsical, capricious, arbitrary, anger.” Do you see? The focus was on God's wrath and His judgment but in terms of how wrong God is. This is what started in the 20th century. Now where in the world is this coming from? And all we have to do is go to our Old Testament reading this morning from Leviticus, chapter 10, dealing with Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons. Now remember Aaron was the first high priest, so his sons were next in line to become the high priest. And remember the role of the priest was to take the needs of the people to God, or be that intermediary, while also preserving the knowledge of God.

Now pay very close attention to what is written. Each... (Nadab and Abihu) each took his own censor. What's the sensor? Well, it's the Tabernacle vessel in which hot coals were placed, and then you would put incense on top of it and you would waive it. The incense would burn, and a fragrant smell would go up. It symbolized the fragrant smell of our prayers, or the priest's prayers and praises to God going heavenward, up to heaven. But right away when we read; each took his own sensor, we have a problem. It was not their own sensor, it was the tabernacles', it was Gods', and they were supposed to be caring for God's vessels. Secondly, we read, and I quote, “and each offered unauthorized fire before the Lord.” Now this would have been at the altar of incense which would have sat or stood right in front of the curtain of separation. On the other side of that curtain of separation, was the Ark of the Covenant. When they offered unauthorized fire, what do we read, fire came out from the Lord and consumed them. So, fire came out from the Ark of the Covenant under that curtain of separation or maybe through it and killed them. See the irrational, hateful, capricious, arbitrary, anger of God? They were just worshipping Him!

Hold on a second! Here's where we have the problem with people who say, ‘oh, the Old Testament is so old fashioned,’ and try to find defects in God. Actually, take a look at Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus where we have this account. God has just given them the Law. In fact, if we go to Leviticus, chapter 8, we find the consecration of Aaron and his sons as, Aaron the high priest and them as the first priests. When we go to the very next chapter, chapter 9 which immediately precedes this account, Aaron offers the very first sacrifice and he follows God's law, His directions, to the tee, to the letter. And what happens? Well, when we go to Leviticus 9, verse 24 which is the verse that immediately precedes Leviticus 10, verse 1, where we picked up. We read, “fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering

and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.” Wow! So, we have the recording of an offering, fire came out from the Lord, it consumed the offering that Aaron had brought and had done according to what God had just instructed them in. God accepted it and He provided the fire for it.

And in the very next verse, you have Nadab and Abihu going into the temple and basically saying, ‘we're gonna do it our way,’ and they offered unauthorized sacrifices. They did not do it God's way. And please understand, when Aaron offered the sacrifice, that would have been outside of the temple, on the altar outside of the Tabernacle, the most holy place, outside on the altar, and the fire came out from God, from the holy place, and consumed it. Nadab and Abihu go into the holy place, right before, in front of the most holy place and they offer their offering, their way. They did not follow God's Law. They did not preserve knowledge. God struck them dead. And I can just imagine Aaron saying, ‘what in the world?’ Moses comes over to Aaron and says to him from God, “Among those who are near me, I will be sanctified.” That means, set apart as holy, and “before the people I will be glorified.” That's God's message. And how did Aaron respond? “And Aaron held his peace.” He realized that his sons Nadab and Abihu had not sanctified God, set Him apart as holy. They had treated Him like all other people treat the pagan gods and developed their own form of worship and praise. Nadab and Abihu offered *their* worship, *their* prayers in a very open way and they were taking the glory. Kind of like, hey look at us, as we go in to pray.

The Bible is very clear about worship of God and it's not just an Old Testament thing. It is also a New Testament thing. Hebrews 12:28-29 tells us worship God in an acceptable manner and the two things that we are told to have in our worship; from the Bible, reverence, and awe because we are worshipping the holy God. When we look in the Old Testament, yes there are examples where God's anger comes out. In fact, one of those ones that people go on and say, ‘look at God you know there's a defect in God here;’ comes from Numbers chapter 4. This is where Uzza the Kohathite, touched the Ark of the Covenant when it was on an ox cart and an ox stumbled and the wagon shifted, and the Ark started to slide. He reached up and touched it and he died. God struck him dead. This is where the people will be, ‘Oh see how unreasonable God is? He was just trying to keep the Ark from falling on the dirt.’ Again, that's an emotional response, it is not a factual response.

Let's look at the facts. A Kohathite, it's a clan within the Levite's. They were the priests who were to take care of the vessels of the temple, which included the Ark of the Covenant. They were to preserve all the knowledge about that. Part of the knowledge about the Ark of the Covenant is that it was to be carried on two poles with 12 priests, Kohathite priests carrying it. But they wanted to get that Ark to Jerusalem, and they wanted to get there fast, so they put it in an ox cart instead.

They broke the rules. They did their own thing. And so as it's traveling, the ox stumbles, the wagon tilts, the Ark shifts, Uzza is right there by the Ark of the Covenant. How dare he be close to it? He reaches up and touches it and God strikes him dead. Which is exactly what God said He would do because that is the mercy seat of God. It is His physical presence with the people and Uzza dared to assume that it would be better for his sinful hand to touch the Ark than to let the ark slide out and touch the dirt. Now the dirt is also a creation of God and it's doing just what it's supposed to do. It's providing a place for us to walk, soil to grow, or a place to stop the Ark from falling any further. But the dirt has not sinned. It is doing what God created it to do. And Uzza assumed it would be better for him to do what God told him not to do and touch and bring sin to the Ark of the Covenant; than to let the Ark slide and hit the dirt which was doing what God created it to do. You see again people look at that and say what a terrible, angry God. No, it's a just God following His own rules.

And by the way it's not just an Old Testament thing again. Take a look at Acts chapter 5, and you see Ananias and Sapphira. They lied about the offering they were giving to get glory for themselves and what did God do? He struck them both dead. This is God. And people will say 'well that can't possibly be a God of love!' So, let's turn to the most loving person ever, Jesus. And what did He say in the sermon on the mount? After all of the oracles, the blessed ones, he immediately launches into the Law and tells us that not a dot, not an iota, the simplest little addition to a letter, of the Law will pass away. And He goes on further and says, 'those who keep it and teach it will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.'

So, what does that Law say? We go back to Genesis 2:17 and it says very simply to Adam and Eve, 'The day that you eat of it, you will surely die.' If you go against God's Law, you're going to die! It is not just an Old Testament thing because Paul picks it up in Romans 6:23; "the wages of sin is death." When we hear people trying to find a defect of God, or trying to worship in their own way, or make their own rules, what we're dealing with this cosmic treason. That's a title that RC Sproul used. I liked it.

What are some of the hallmarks of cosmic treason? Well, number one is this; we have become so accustomed to sin and sinning that we justify the sin. I think the most heinous one that I can think of right off the bat is abortion. It would be better for the baby to die, for it to be murdered, wrong! That is not what God says.

The second point on cosmic treason is people take God's mercy and grace for granted. 'Oh, He's a loving God, He will forgive me.' And we begin to assume that that grace is always there; not only assume, we begin to demand it. 'He must forgive me.' And when we don't feel His grace, or His forgiveness, or whatever, we throw a temper tantrum, and we call him defective.

The third mark. God gave mankind life. He gave mankind the highest position in creation. He stamped His image on it. Cosmic treason is to say the Stamper is defective, not us. In reality, we rebelled, we continue to rebel from God and in so doing we tarnished that image. The reality is, the wages of sin is death. All sin is a capital offense. You want a merciful God? Go to the Old Testament go right back to those same chapters right before Nadab and Abihu, when God gave the Law. What did He do? He reduced the sentences. All sin is a capital offense. But God had mercy and He cut the number of things that are capital offenses and would be handled with execution down to thirty something, from the entire list of sin. Now that's a merciful reduction of sentences! Do you want God's mercy? We're alive! We deserve to be struck dead.

In reality, you hear people say, 'I'm saved.' **Saved from what?** You are saved from the wrath and the judgment of Holy God. He is never obligated to be merciful other than He said He is. And therefore, we can see He has been. He has been so merciful, so gracious, so loving, that He gave us His only begotten Son, who died for us. And He is so merciful, so gracious, that we are not condemned. Instead, He comes to us still, here as we are worshipping again, where two or three are gathered. And then in just a couple moments, as we celebrate Holy Communion, and He comes to us through the physical elements of the bread and the wine or the juice just as he came to the people of Israel in that Ark of the Covenant.

The difference now, you want mercy; back then before Jesus came don't dare try to touch God. Now, it is just come forward. Come, commune with me, take that bread into your hands, take that cup in your hands and know that I am coming to you through those elements. I'm coming to you, bringing you hope, bringing you my mercy, bringing you, my grace. Because I am saving you from me and my judgment.

When we consider that, it takes us back to that first lesson in God's holiness. We should stand in awe and yet with our heads bowed in humble adoration of the great, the good, the gracious, The Holy God. In His Name, Amen