

## God's Holy Presence – I Samuel 5-6

After the Philistines had captured God's ark, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. <sup>2</sup> The Philistines took God's ark and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it beside Dagon. <sup>3</sup> When the people of Ashdod got up early the next day, there was Dagon—fallen facedown to the ground in front of the Ark of the LORD! So they took Dagon and set him in his place again. <sup>4</sup> When they got up early the following morning, it had happened again! There was Dagon, fallen facedown in front of the Ark of the LORD. The head of Dagon and both of his hands were broken off and were lying on the threshold. Only Dagon's torso was intact. <sup>5</sup> That is why the priests of Dagon and any people who enter Dagon's temple in Ashdod do not step on the threshold of Dagon to this day. I Samuel 5:1-5

The contest of the gods begins! Because of the rebellion of the priests, God allowed the ark to be taken by the Philistines. And what do the Philistines do? They put the ark in the temple of their god, Dagon. So, it seems clear that the Philistines believed that the ark represented the throne to the invisible Israelite God. And put more plainly, the Philistines god had defeated the God of the Israelites, so this meant that the defeated god would serve Dagon, just as the Israelites would serve the Philistines. It was a sign of defeat and servitude to the victor.

The Israelites may be suffering due to their rebellion against God, but Yahweh was not a defeated god. The Philistines would soon find out exactly who was in charge, and the gods of wood and stone do not compare in any way to Yahweh, the God of the universe.

The next day the Philistines get a surprise. Their god has fallen face down on the ground before the ark. Being good worshippers, they set their poor little fake god up again. Tick, tock...another 24 hours goes by and guess what? Dagon is face down again, falling down before the true God. But this time, the head, hands and feet of Dagon were broken off, only his torso was left in tact. What kind of god is that? So, what is happening? Yahweh the defeated god is supposed to be serving Dagon. But instead Dagon is humiliated and found bowing to Yahweh instead. An important note here is that all of us should be bowing down before the holy God. The divine act of Dagon falling to the ground in humble submission should be what all of us do before Yahweh. The fact remains that the Philistine victory was turned on its head. Yahweh became the

victor all by himself. Dagon loses his head, hands and feet, which of course represents a total defeat and even the death of the Philistine god. A few chapters later we are going to see another giant fall, losing his head as well. God needed no help whatsoever defeating a pagan god. But of course this defeat of Dagon was only the beginning.

Then the LORD's hand was heavy against the people of Ashdod. He devastated them and struck them with tumors. He struck Ashdod and its surrounding territory. <sup>7</sup> When the men of Ashdod saw what was taking place, they said, "The Ark of the God of Israel must not stay with us, because his hand is heavy on us and on our god Dagon." <sup>8</sup> They called together a meeting of all the serens of the Philistines and asked, "What shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?"

They answered, "Let the Ark of the God of Israel be carried over to Gath." So they carried the Ark of the God of Israel there. I Samuel 5:6-8

So, here in the city of Ashdod where the ark was, God struck the people with tumors or a plague. The people very quickly realized what they were dealing with was way more powerful than what they or their puny god could handle. Now, Philistia had 5 cities, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, Ashkelon and Gaza. Each of these cities was ruled by a lord or executive. The word, "serens" simply means ruler. So, all the rulers of the cities of Philistia were gathered together to decide what to do about this dangerous ark. I would further point out that God does not play around – he is sovereign and very dangerous to evil-doers and oppressors of his people.

Let's read the rest of chapter 5 (vs. 9-12).

But after they had carried it there, the LORD's hand was against that city, and there was great panic. He struck the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them. <sup>10</sup> So they sent God's ark to Ekron.

When God's ark came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the Ark of the God of Israel here to kill us and our people." <sup>11</sup> They called a meeting of all the serens of the Philistines, and they said, "Send the Ark of the God of Israel away. Let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people." Indeed, the threat of death caused panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there. <sup>12</sup> The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the outcry from the city went up to heaven.

So, now that the Philistines are experiencing a divine plague, they decide to move the ark to two more cities, Gath and Ekron. But of course the same thing happens, God's

hand is against them and they are in fear and panic. The Philistines finally decide that this ark is supposed to be in Israel. God defeated the Philistines all by himself.

Now, before moving on to chapter 6 I want to stop a moment and mention something. There are some difficulties in this text with the MT (Masoretic Text) and the LXX. The MT is the authoritative Hebrew Bible. The LXX is the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The word Septuagint comes from the Latin, meaning 70. According to tradition there were 70 Jewish scholars who translated the Septuagint into Greek. The translation was done in Alexandria, Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 B.C.).

In I Samuel 5 there is mention of mice in the LXX, but it is not in the MT version. Mice are mentioned in the MT in chapter 6:4. P. Kyle McCarter Jr. suggests the MT is flawed due to haplography, which is a scribal error when the scribe would skip over some of the text. I point this out simply to show we have multiple versions of the text that helps us arrive at the most correct reading. The addition or subtraction of the mice in chapter 5 does not do serious violence to the text. However, the mention of the mice in chapter 6 does prove to be important and the reason I am mentioning the differences in the MT and LXX.

Now, let's bear in mind that when the Philistines took the ark to their land, three cities received a plague. God revealed his strong hand and proclaimed himself to the Philistines in a very loud voice. So, let's move to chapter 6 and see what happens to the ark.

The LORD's ark remained in the country of the Philistines seven months. <sup>2</sup> The Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and asked, "What should we do with the LORD's ark? Advise us how we should send it back to its place."

<sup>3</sup> They said, "If you send away the Ark of the God of Israel, do not send it away empty, but, by all means, send it to him with a restitution offering. Then you will be healed, and you will know why his hand has not been removed from you."

<sup>4</sup> Then they said, "What restitution offering should we send to him?"

They said, "There are five serens of the Philistines, so five gold tumors and five gold mice should be sent, because the same plague was on all of you and on your serens. <sup>5</sup> Therefore you should make replicas of your tumors and figurines of the mice that are ruining your land, and you will give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand on you, on your gods, and on your land. <sup>6</sup> Why harden your hearts, as

the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After the LORD had dealt ruthlessly with them, didn't the Egyptians let the people go, and they departed?

<sup>7</sup> "So make a new cart and take two cows that are nursing their calves, cows that have never had a yoke on them. Hitch the cows to the cart, and take their calves away from them and send them home. <sup>8</sup> Then take the Ark of the LORD and place it on the cart. Place the gold objects, which you are sending to him as a restitution offering, into a box beside the ark. Then send it on its way, and let it go on its own. <sup>9</sup> Watch it. If it goes up on the road toward the border of Israel, to Beth Shemesh, then it is their god who has inflicted this disaster on us. But if not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us. It was a coincidence that this happened to us."

<sup>10</sup> So that is what the men did. They took two cows that were nursing calves, hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. <sup>11</sup> Then they put the Ark of the LORD on the cart, along with the box containing the gold mice and the replicas of their tumors. <sup>12</sup> The cows headed straight up the road toward Beth Shemesh. They went straight along the highway without stopping, lowing as they went. They did not turn aside to the right or to the left. The serens of the Philistines followed them to the border of Beth Shemesh.

<sup>13</sup> The people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. They looked up and saw the Ark, and they rejoiced to see it. <sup>14</sup> The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh and stopped there, near the large stone that was there. Then the people split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. <sup>15</sup> The Levites took the LORD's ark and the box with it, which contained the gold objects, and they put them on the large stone. On that same day, the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrifices to the LORD.

<sup>16</sup> When the five serens of the Philistines had seen this, they returned to Ekron that same day.

<sup>17</sup> This is the number of gold tumors that the Philistines sent back as a restitution offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, and one for Ekron. <sup>18</sup> The gold mice also corresponded to the number of all the cities of the Philistines that belonged to the five serens, the fortified cities along with the rural villages. The objects were placed on the large stone on which they had placed the Ark of the LORD. That stone remains in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh to this day. <sup>19</sup> The LORD struck some of the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the Ark of the LORD. He struck seventy men. Then the people mourned, because the LORD had struck the people with such a heavy blow. <sup>20</sup> The men of Beth Shemesh

said, "Who is able to stand before this holy God, the LORD? To whom can we send it<sup>1</sup> to get it away from here?"

<sup>21</sup> So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath Jearim. They said, "The Philistines have sent back the Ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up for yourselves."

So the men of Kiriath Jearim came, took the Ark of the LORD, and brought it into Abinadab's house on the hill. Then they consecrated his son Eleazar to watch over the Ark of the LORD. <sup>2</sup> So from that day the ark stayed in Kiriath Jearim for a long time—twenty years. And the entire house of Israel deeply longed for the return of the LORD. I Samuel 6:1-7:2

The ark was in Philistia for 7 months – but nothing but havoc, plague and suffering came as a result. So, the Philistines asked their priests and diviners what to do. They tell them to send the ark back to Israel with a restitution offering. Why is that? Because the Philistines understand they have made a serious error bringing the ark to Philistia. And here is the kicker of this scenario. Israel, who had a covenant with Yahweh, is supposed to honor God. Did they do that? No, they attempted to use the ark for their own purposes as a way to be rescued from their enemies. God allowed them to be defeated and the ark taken. Instead of God's people giving honor to Yahweh, now the Philistines would honor him with an offering. God will have his way, he will be honored and glorified. If not by his people, then by those who don't know him – even the enemies of God's people. God spoke very loudly to the Philistines and they listened and responded. Do we listen, do we honor God? If we choose to rebel and not honor Yahweh, not giving him his due honor, and not praising his name – others will. He is worthy! He is the King of the Universe. If God is not honored by his own people, then he will be honored by those who do not know him. He will reveal himself, either peacefully or with disaster. Either way, God will be honored. His glory will be proclaimed by the nations.

Now, the next set of verses is very interesting. The Philistines made replicas of gold of their tumors and the mice. They put these replicas in a box beside the ark. The Philistines also recognized how the Egyptians and Pharaoh had hardened their hearts and how Israel's God had dealt with them. In addition, they designed a test to see if all the suffering really was caused by Yahweh. The Philistines take two cows and hitch them to the ark. They send their calves home and see what the cows will do. Will the cows go after the calves or back to Israel? Again, God reveals himself to the Philistines, showing them he is a supernatural deity and that he is the one who afflicted them. The cows head straight to Beth Shemesh. God revealed himself to the pagans because that is who he is – He is Lord of all. And we should take notice – it is easy to take God for granted. Trying to use him as a genie instead of loving him in all circumstances. When we lose

sight of all that God is – he will leave and receive his glory elsewhere. The greatest violators are God’s own people, forgetting who God really is. He reveals himself to those that have eyes to see and ears to hear. Often, the religious bunch is too busy using God or his name for their own purposes to even notice he left. All the while God is revealing himself to those we would never even consider worthy of his name. Shame on us for failing to honor God, for attempting to use his goodness for our own purposes. He knows our hearts. I firmly believe God has left many churches and they did not even notice. He left to reveal himself to those that would listen and honor his holy name.

So, as we move to verse 13, we find out that this whole episode is not just about the Philistines and Israelites, but more broadly is about the holiness of God. In I Samuel chapter 4, the Israelites tried to use the ark for their own purposes, and this is certainly showing a dangerous lack of respect for God’s presence. Well, in the next few verses in chapter 6 we find out that this attitude again prevails. God is teaching his people to respect and honor his holy presence. Something their priests had never learned.

Initially, when the ark shows up in Beth Shemesh, the people rejoice and rightly so. It was a sign of God’s presence returning. But in their rejoicing they lacked all sense and respect for God’s holy presence. The interesting thing is that the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines and the ark is taken. But then Yahweh by himself defeats the Philistines and the ark is sent back to Israel. But the Israelites don’t seem to be any better than the Philistines. God defeats them as well. God’s holiness was not being honored so Yahweh judged not only the Philistines but his own people as well. Now, according to Joshua 21, Beth Shemesh was a Levitical city. So it seems strange they did not know how to handle the ark. First of all, according to Leviticus 1, all burnt offerings were to be male. The people offered cows from the Philistines. But how they treated the ark is really what seems to be so disrespectful. The Levites took down the ark, set it on a stone and looked into or at the ark. Were they supposed to do any of that? P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. in his commentary translates verse 19 this way, “But no members of the priesthood had joined in the celebration with the men of Beth Shemesh when they saw the ark of Yahweh, and so he struck down seventy of the people.”

Listen to Numbers chapter 4:

The LORD told Moses and Aaron <sup>2</sup> to take a census of the descendants of Kohath among the Levites, by their clans, by their fathers’ houses, <sup>3</sup> from thirty years old to fifty years old, everyone eligible for the service of performing the tasks at the Tent of Meeting.

<sup>4</sup> This is the work for the descendants of Kohath at the Tent of Meeting: to take care of the most holy things. <sup>5</sup> When the camp sets out, Aaron and his sons are to go into the Dwelling. They are to take down the veil that screens the ark, cover the Ark of the

Testimony with it, <sup>6</sup> put a covering made from the hides of sea cows over it, spread a solid blue cloth over that, and insert its poles.

<sup>7</sup> Over the table for the Bread of the Presence they are to spread a blue cloth and put the dishes, the small bowls, the larger bowls, and the pitchers for the drink offering on it. The bread that is continually there is to remain on it. <sup>8</sup> Then they are to spread a scarlet cloth over these things, cover them with a covering made from the hides of sea cows, and insert its poles.

<sup>9</sup> They are to take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand used for light, its lamps, its snuffers, its fire pans, and all the jars of oil used to supply it. <sup>10</sup> They are to put the lampstand and all its accessories under a cover made from the hides of sea cows and put it on a carrying frame.

<sup>11</sup> Over the golden altar they are to spread a blue cloth, cover it with a covering made from the hides of sea cows, and insert its poles. <sup>12</sup> They are to take all the utensils which they use in the sanctuary and put them in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering made from the hides of sea cows, and put them on a carrying frame.

<sup>13</sup> They are to remove the fat-soaked ashes from the altar and spread a purple cloth over it. <sup>14</sup> They are to put on it all the utensils which they use around the altar: the fire pans, the meat hooks, the shovels, and the basins—the utensils of the altar. They will spread a covering made of the hides of sea cows over the altar and insert its poles.

<sup>15</sup> After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the items of the sanctuary, when the camp sets out, the descendants of Kohath will come to carry them. But they are not to touch the sanctuary or they will die. The descendants of Kohath are to carry these things associated with the Tent of Meeting.

<sup>16</sup> Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, shall be in charge of the lamp oil, the fragrant incense, the daily grain offering, and the anointing oil. He shall be in charge of the entire Dwelling, everything in it, the holy objects, and its furnishings.

<sup>17</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, <sup>18</sup> "Do not allow the tribe of the Kohathite clans to be cut off from among the Levites. <sup>19</sup> Do this for them so that they may live and not die when they come near the most holy things: Aaron and his sons are to go in and assign to each one of them what he is to do and what he is to carry. <sup>20</sup> But the Kohathites must not go in to see the sanctuary even for a moment or they will die."  
Numbers 4:1-20

God had very specific requirements for the ark – it represented his holy presence. The priests were to cover the ark (v. 5), and even the Kohathites, who carried the ark could not touch or look at the ark. Holy, holy, holy.

Back in I Samuel 6:20, the text says, “Who is able to stand before this holy God, the LORD?”

So, here is my question, did God strike the men of Beth Shemesh because the people celebrated and the priests did not, or because of all the violations of how the ark was handled? Well, there are many things here to think about, but it seems clear God struck down the men because they looked inside the ark. According to Numbers 4:20, which we just read, this violation carried a death sentence. To sum up, the return of the ark to Israel caused the people to rejoice, however the priests did not share in this celebration. And the priests did not treat the ark with the reverence and fear it deserved, nor follow God’s instructions on how to handle the ark. This resulted in a severe judgment.

In the end the people of Beth Shemesh acted just like the Philistines and they send the ark away. The ark is then taken to Kiriath Jearim where Eleazar takes charge of the ark. Ironically the ark remained there 20 years. Now, I think it is very significant where the ark ends up. Kiriath Jearim, although in Israel, was predominantly a Gentile city. This would happen again later in 2 Samuel. The Levites and priests had rejected and mistreated the Lord’s ark, which represents Yahweh’s holy presence. So, Gentiles would keep the ark for a while, in this case 20 years! The final statement of the text is that all the house of Israel turned after Yahweh. Some translations say Israel went lamenting after Yahweh. What is clear is God made sure his people understood that he is no puny god. We often take God lightly and forget who he really is. God answered their rebellion with correction and they would not soon forget how great, awesome, powerful and holy their God is. This seems a hard lesson, but a needed one. Have we forgotten who God really is? Are we taking him for granted – do we care when his holy presence shows up? Revival was coming to Israel, but first God had to put things in order, correct lazy and rebellious thinking and strike at the heart of careless and uncaring priests.

Listen, revival is coming! But first God needs to put things in order – he needs to correct our thinking of who he is. And mark my words, God will judge any careless or uncaring response to his holy presence. Revival, restoration and reformation will come when and how he decides. Our response to a holy and righteous God should be whole-hearted repentance, in dust and ashes! When is the last time everything just stopped, I mean everything. We stop to acknowledge a holy God, to repent, to fall down on our face before God and cry out for his mercy. We are much too married to our culture and sterile practices. Where are our hearts? Do we really care about God at all? We must



stop all the noise and acknowledge him. What is it going to take to get our attention off of ourselves and on the holy One. Let me share some verses with you.

Above the dome that was over their heads, there was something that appeared to be a sapphire that was shaped like a throne. Seated on that throne-like form there was a figure that looked like a man. <sup>27</sup> I saw something like the gleam of glowing metal<sup>[a]</sup> with fire in it and all around it. It extended upward from what appeared to be the man's waist. Below what appeared to be his waist, I saw what appeared to be fire, and a bright light surrounded him. <sup>28</sup> The bright light that surrounded him looked like the rainbow that is in the clouds on a rainy day.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the LORD. When I saw this, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice speaking. Ezekiel 1:26-28

I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. When I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and among the lampstands was one like a son of man. He was clothed with a robe that reached to his feet, and around his chest he wore a gold sash. <sup>14</sup> His head and his hair were white, like white wool or like snow. His eyes were like blazing flames. <sup>15</sup> His feet were like polished bronze being refined in a furnace. His voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup> He held seven stars in his right hand. A sharp two-edged sword was coming out of his mouth. His face was shining as the sun shines in all its brightness.

<sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. He placed his right hand on me and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last— <sup>18</sup> the Living One. I was dead and, see, I am alive forever and ever! I also hold the keys of death and hell. Revelation 1:12-18

As he went on his way and was approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

<sup>5</sup> He asked, "Who are you, Lord?"

He replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you need to do."

<sup>7</sup> The men traveling with him stood there speechless. They heard the voice but did not see anyone.

<sup>8</sup> They raised Saul up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could not see anything. They took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> For three days he could not see, and he did not eat or drink. Acts 9:3-8

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, I will make three shelters here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

<sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them. Just then, a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him."

<sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell face down and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> Jesus approached and as he touched them, he said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." Matthew 17:4-7

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings. With two they covered their faces. With two they covered their feet. With two they flew. <sup>3</sup> One called to another and said,

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies!  
The whole earth is full of his glory!

<sup>4</sup> The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of the one who called, and the temple was filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup> Then I said, "I am doomed! I am ruined, because I am a man with unclean lips, and I dwell among a people with unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies!"

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, carrying a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. <sup>7</sup> He touched my mouth with the coal and said, "Look, this has touched your lips, so your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven."

<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the Lord's voice, saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

Then I said, "Here I am. Send me!" Isaiah 6:1-8

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, I was beside the Great River, that is, the Tigris. <sup>5</sup> I looked up, and there, right in front of me, I saw a man dressed in linen. Around his waist he was wearing a belt made from gold of Uphaz. <sup>6</sup> His body was like topaz, and

his face looked like lightning. His eyes were like burning torches, and his arms and feet were like polished bronze. The sound of his words was like the sound of an army.

<sup>7</sup> Only I, Daniel, saw the vision. The men who were with me did not see the vision, but they were overwhelmed by fear and trembling, so they ran away to hide. <sup>8</sup> I was left alone, and I saw this great vision. No strength was left in me. My appearance changed for the worse. I became very pale, and I had no strength. <sup>9</sup> I heard the sound of his words, but as I heard the sound of his words, I was in a deep sleep, facedown, with my face to the ground.

<sup>10</sup> Then a hand touched me and pulled me up, trembling, to my hands and knees. <sup>11</sup> He said to me, "Daniel, you are a highly valued man. Understand the words that I am speaking to you. Stand up where you are, because now I have been sent to you." When he spoke this word to me, I stood up, shaking. Daniel 10:4-11

When is the last time you were stunned by the glory of God? When is the last time you fell on your face before God just because of who he is? Where is our passion for Jesus? If we want to experience his glory and receive more of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must pursue him. He will reward our passion, our commitment to honor him above everything else.

The earth is the LORD's  
and everything that fills it,  
the world and all who live in it,  
<sup>2</sup> because he founded it on the seas,  
and he established it on the rivers.

<sup>3</sup> Who may go up to the mountain of the LORD?  
Who may stand in his holy place?

<sup>4</sup> He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
whose soul is not set on what is false,  
who does not swear deceitfully.

<sup>5</sup> He will receive blessing from the LORD  
and righteousness from the God who saves him.

<sup>6</sup> Such are the people of Jacob who look for the LORD,  
who seek your face.

<sup>7</sup> Lift up your heads, you gates.  
Lift yourselves up, you ancient doors,  
and the King of Glory will come in.

<sup>8</sup> Who is this King of Glory?  
The LORD strong and mighty,

the LORD mighty in battle.

<sup>9</sup> Lift up your heads, you gates.

Lift up, you ancient doors,  
and the King of Glory will come in.

<sup>10</sup> Who is he, this King of Glory?

The LORD of Armies—he is the King of Glory. Psalm 24

As we have read and talked about this story in I Samuel, we have learned that God will communicate who he is to all people. He is holy! And he will show us the error of our ways, whether we know him or not. So, here is my question. How do we acknowledge God for all that he is, his holiness, goodness, and authoritative sovereignty? How do we do that in a way that honors him? I am very much aware that today in our culture we don't really acknowledge God even when we say we do. I really believe that if Christians would have a better understanding of Church history and the saints of old, they would know what it means to honor God. Here is what I mean. All of us have heard of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and John Bunyan, but you may not know much at all about Bunyan's life. Bunyan was born in 1628 in Elstow, which is close to Bedford, England. It is important to know that during Bunyan's life England was in upheaval. Civil war broke out in 1642 and in 1645 Parliament took control of the monarchy. In 1649, Charles I was executed and Oliver Cromwell led England until 1658. However, after Cromwell died, Parliament passed laws to restrict preachers. After Charles II was proclaimed king in 1660, Bunyan was sent to prison for preaching. But mark this, Bunyan had a choice, he could stop preaching and remain free. He chose to continue preaching and thus to prison he went. Bunyan was in prison for 12 years. He was also later imprisoned from 1675-76. During one of these imprisonments (probably the first time) he penned the mighty and influential *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan actually wrote many books, but *The Pilgrim's Progress* is perhaps one of the best-selling books of all times, being translated into over 200 languages.

When Bunyan was in prison his wife, Elizabeth, went to London to appeal to the judges. Judge Twisden asked Elizabeth, "Will your husband leave off preaching?" She replies, "He dare not leave preaching as long as he can speak." She further comments, "he is a tinker and a poor man, therefore he is despised and cannot have justice." Elizabeth notes about her experience with the English judges, "before I went out, I could not but break forth into tears – not so much because they were so hard-hearted against me and my husband, but to think what a sad account such poor creatures will have to give at the coming of the Lord." In 1671, the last year of Bunyan's imprisonment, he was licensed as the pastor of the Baptist Church in Bedford. After his release, a new church building was built where Bunyan preached the rest of his life. What does it look like to honor God and his holiness? It looks a lot like the life of John Bunyan. We often expect miracles to fall from the sky. When in fact honoring God through trials bears the fruit of

righteousness. Because Bunyan refused to stop preaching, he went to prison where he penned one of the greatest works ever written. God honors those who honor him.

It is believed that Bunyan wrote 58 books. A man with very little formal education, no knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, and certainly no degree in theology. John Burton said of Bunyan, "This man is not chosen out of an earthly but out of the heavenly university, the Church of Christ. . . He hath, through grace, taken these three heavenly degrees, to wit, union with Christ, the anointing of the Spirit, and experiences of the temptations of Satan, which do more fit a man for that mighty work of preaching the Gospel than all university learning and degrees that can be had."

God's presence is glorious, holy and pure. He will not bestow it on a people who lightly regard him or his word. Sometimes God's presence is revealed in a beautiful tapestry of suffering. But a suffering that produces God's glory, righteousness, purity and peace.