

DOES GOD NEED A MAKEOVER?

ser3960 When God Seems Mean, Pt2

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Today is Part 2 of our short sermon series called “When God Seems Mean,” which Pastor Bruce introduced to us last week.

I believe that this topic is one of those areas in desperate need of discussion as a church because so many of us have fallen victim to a nagging question: *“If God is good, why is there so much bad in our world?”*

Why do we see all these terrible things happening in our own country?

All this hate? All this unfairness? And why, why are things going so wrong in my own life? All of my pain and suffering? It just seems like God has abandoned me, my family, my nation and even my church.

If you have ever asked these questions, you certainly are not alone.

Many of us have wondered why God would allow certain things to prevail in our world. But what is disturbing to me is where these questions have led us. I am seeing many people in our culture today who are not just questioning God’s direction in their lives, but His very character.

God’s character has been assassinated by our modern “woke” “cancel culture” who views the God of the Bible as mean... and that cannot be.

And so, this harsh, judgmental, egotistical God of the Bible needs to be, in their minds, refashioned. He needs a rebranding, if you will.

All this leads me to a simple question...

Does God Need a Makeover?

I mean, has our perception of God been wrong all these years, having been pushed on us by a bunch of old fashioned, unenlightened, suit-wearing bigots who project their image of God onto us from days long gone?

After all, God cannot be mean. God is love.

So, let's not view Him that way. Let's give Him a makeover. Let's dress Him up in new clothes (do away with the robe and sandals), put some makeup on Him, and teach Him how to act and talk and behave in a manner that isn't offensive. Let's make Him more obtainable and let's present God in the way that makes sense...**to us.**

If this is our thinking in our post modernistic world, I would like to say with respect... **NO!** God doesn't need a makeover, our minds do!

Let's begin this process of renewing our minds by opening up our Bibles and turning to 1st Samuel 4:1. Let's go over the narrative of this portion of God's word.

Overview

Samuel was the last judge of Israel. It was at a time when Israel was warring with their long-time arch enemy, the Philistines.

In chapter 4 we read that the Israelite's had just lost a significant battle to the Philistines, in which 4000 of them had been killed. It says, "When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the Lord bring defeat on us today before the Philistines?"

Here comes their 1st great idea:

“Let us bring the Ark of the Lord’s covenant from Shiloh, so that He may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.”

Great idea! Let’s take the Ark, where the very presence of God literally would hover, and bring it onto the battlefield to use as a means to ensure victory over our enemy!

But that’s not what happened.

When the Philistines saw the Ark, at first they were terrified, remembering all the stories they heard of the power of the God of Israel. But they went from being fearful to being emboldened.

Verse 9: “Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!” And fight they did.

They won **another** victory over the Israelites. Worse yet, they took possession of the Ark and bought it back with them and placed it in a city called “Ashdod,” next to a statue of their false god, Dagon.

When Eli, who was the Chief Priest and Judge before Samuel, heard that not only did they lose the battle and his two sons died in that battle, but that the Ark itself was captured, he flung back in his chair and accidentally broke his neck.

Then his son’s pregnant wife, upon hearing the news of the loss of her husband, her father in law, Eli, and the loss of the Ark, went into labor. She delivered a son, but then she also died from bearing her child under all that distress. Then the whole assembly began asking, “What’s going on? Has God abandoned us?”

Even the Philistines, who won the battle, faced God's wrath as the people of Ashdod, where the ark was being kept, developed tumors on their bodies and rats infested their city. Since they were being so afflicted, they sent the Ark to a town called Gath and the people became sick there, too.

From there, the Ark went to Ekron. The people died and complained about the Ark there as well and wanted it removed. So they cried out that this god had **bought trouble onto them**. This was a mean God!

Finally after 7 months of affliction, the people decided to send the Ark back to Israel. This is how they did it: I Samuel 6:7 "Now then, get a **new cart** ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart 8 Take the Ark of the Lord and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold objects you are sending back to Him as a guilt offering. Send it on its way."

So, they sent the cart in the direction of Israel, but it stopped at the border of Israel, at Beth she-mesh. There it was discovered by some Levites who rejoiced and made a burnt offering to God. Some of the people (who apparently never watched Raiders of the Lost Ark), however, looked into the ark and 50,000 of them died because of it. Wow! That's a lot of meanness!

Being fearful of God's presence, they brought the Ark to Eleazar's house, where it stayed for 20 years. But it doesn't end there! After the 20 years, David became King of Israel and after defeating the Philistines, decided to bring the Ark back to Israel. How they decided to get it there was interesting. And we read, "3 They set the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart 4 with the Ark of God on it 5 David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals. 6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the

ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 7 The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore, God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God. 8 Then David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah."

Wow...that's mean. Right? Well, the truth is, when our modern culture reads this passage of scripture and others like it they are turned off to this side of God's character to the point where they literally remove it from their view of who God is.

What they don't understand is that God isn't being mean. He's being **meaningful**. God has **reasons** why. Unfortunately, our modern culture has tried to give God a makeover and make Him less than what He is. Instead of us being the image of God, they try to transform God into the image of us.

It's a new religious philosophy founded on making God more appealing to our overly sensitive world. In fact, It has become the most popular religious philosophy in our world today. And it has a name. It's called **Moralistic Therapeutic Deism or MTD**.

Now, its followers don't call it that. They generally call it "Modern Christianity". It is a term that was first introduced in the 2005 book **Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers**, by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton.

It is not really a new religion or theology, as such, but identified as a set of commonly held spiritual beliefs:

- 1. A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.**
- 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as**

taught in the Bible and by most world religions.

3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.

4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.

5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

So, you don't need to go to church, obey the Sabbath, read or follow the Bible, especially in its teaching on repentance, tithing or holiness. This god is one who is about tending to **our** needs. And is never, ever mean.

In fact, all the songs written and sung by its followers are always about thanking God for getting them through, making them a victor in their trials, how much God loves them and other feel good about themselves lyrics.

Actually, if you compare pop love song lyrics and modern church lyrics, it is sometimes hard to distinguish the two.

In the book **Soul Searching**, the author describes God in this way:

"God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he's always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally, helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process."

Kenda Creasy Dean, in "**Almost Christian**," writes:

"Moralistic Therapeutic Deism has little to do with God or a sense of divine mission in the world. It offers comfort, bolsters self-esteem,

helps solve problems, and lubricates interpersonal relationships by encouraging people to do good, feel good, and keep God at arm's length."

In other words, it is a religious viewpoint **disguised as Christianity**, based on a gentle, kind, always nice, always there for you, non – judgmental god.

And because the Bible shows a God who is all those things but is also LORD, it is never looked on beyond a helpful guide in life.

In fact, it is why the author argues that American teenagers have bought into MTD. **It is not because they have misunderstood what the church has taught them, but precisely because it is what the church has taught them. And is the very reason why Church attendance has dropped amongst the youth because they are only interested in their self-help god and not the God of the Bible.**

They are deciding what is godly and what isn't. This is the same mistake that we saw Samuel and the elders make, or David made, or Uzzah made. **They didn't respect God!**

Listen...Why would the Israelites carry the Ark into battle? Because they were using God to get their way, to win their battles. They made God into a weapon of the battle instead of their Leader in that battle.

Why did David think he should put the Ark on a cart when God clearly told them how to transport it? God said, in Exodus 25: 12-15, "12 Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. 13 Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 14 Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to **carry it**. 15 The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed."

Why did David not follow these instructions? Because He was approaching God **his** way. He wanted to use this brilliant, new-fangled ark-moving device. You couldn't have any old cart. This was a new cart to transport Israel's holiest article, the Ark of God.

Makes sense, right? They were moving it a distance of some 15 kilometers, over pretty hilly territory, with lots of ups and downs. Someone had gotten practical and thought of an easier way to move it over such a distance. Sure, it makes sense. Just like our modern Christian viewpoints make sense, too.

Why carry it on our shoulders when we can put it on wheels? So efficient! Much quicker! But God wanted them to carry it as a demonstration of their faithfulness. He wanted them to do what is hard just because He asked them to. Like tithing, like fasting, like serving.

You see, making sense while ignoring God's sense is nonsense!

Where did David get the idea to begin with? Pay attention to this... David got his idea on how God should be treated from the Philistines. From...the world. He saw that they put the Ark on a new cart and were okay, and so he did the same.

(What the world gets away with is not what we get away with. That's why we see so many Christians failing, because they are trying to do what the world does. We follow nonsense instead of Gods sense.)

This disobedience caused God to be angry. This is why He was mean! He became angry at those who were disrespecting Him at the same time they were trying to serve Him.

It was the same with Uzzah. You know, his name literally means

Strength. He knew that those whose job it was to carry the Ark were forbidden to touch it (Num. 4:15). But He “took hold of it” using his strength, his way.

You see, if God had compromised His holiness by overlooking Uzzah’s and David’s lack of care and respect, people could understandably conclude that His holiness was not that big of a deal. They would then (and are today) treat God with a doctrine of disrespect. By showing the seriousness of these actions, God is teaching us all about respecting His word because if we don’t, we suffer from it **eternally**.

Do we sometimes lose respect for God because we think we are “all that?” Do we think we will worship and serve God on our own terms? Then when God rebukes us...we get mad. We sit back and say, “I did this and I did that for God and look what it got me. I have this bill and that bad doctor’s report and I lost my job and am facing a divorce. God’s mean, so I’m mad!”

You see...there are 2 reasons we get mad at God: Either we didn't get what we wanted, or we got what we didn't want.

The truth is, to have conditions on how God has to respond to our efforts in life shows the flaw in our thinking and the condition of our hearts. We have to love, serve, honor, and obey God **unconditionally**.

When we are faced with trials and hardships and start showing our displeasure with God and even walking away, we have shown that our relationship with God was based on conditions.

Pastor Bruce made an excellent point last week. Sometimes we just won’t have the answers to the questions we ask. We want to know, “WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME? WHY IS GOD DOING THIS TO ME?”

Because... we are talking about God. And God is without limits. How can something of limitless wisdom ever be able to explain the whys of

life?

It reminds me of my son, Tristan, and new baby girl, Zoe. They are very different from one another (discuss crying). Tristan wants to know, 'Why can't I have that cookie? Why can't I watch that show on YouTube?' I have to tell him, "Because I said no. Answer enough!"

The reason I say that is not to be mean, but because **it's impossible for me to explain it to his little 4 year old brain.** "Why can't I have the cookie?" "Because, son, cookies are high in sugar which displaces more nutritious foods in your diet, which means you're screening out nutrient-dense foods and will increase your blood sugar and your triglycerides, which will train your body to crave the blood fat levels and set you up later in life for a higher risk for heart disease. That's why." Now, was my answer helpful? Not to him. It would be as if I didn't answer the question at all.

We can't know all the whys. It would have been too hard for people in our scripture passage to understand, in the moment, the depth of what God was trying to teach them: RESPECT. If God simply said over and over, "Don't touch the Ark this way. Don't roll it on a cart and don't look inside." Over and over, what would people think of God then? Would they listen? Would they respect the Lord as **LORD???** No!

That would make God come across like so many parents I see who let their kids walk all over them and are bringing up a generation of kids who don't respect authority. I mean...isn't this what we're seeing today? Kids arguing with teachers. Even violent against teachers. People saying no police, no God, no religion, no Church, no laws, no work, no this and no that.

There is no respect. God was trying to not have man become the frail wimps that many are today. He wanted there to be a fear of God! Respect. He made consequences for people's actions. It wasn't just a

bunch of no's over and over. One No and then consequences to be paid.

Because God IS our father who is in heaven. Hallowed be His name. His Kingdom come...His will be done on earth...Just like it certainly is in heaven. He is our heavenly Father. And just like when we were young, we thought our earthly fathers were so cool. "My dad gets me toys and tells me how wonderful I am and is strong and protective." But as we got older, Dad had to be tough and our attitudes changed. Now DAD'S mean!

Wasn't that us when we first got saved? God was great. He did everything for us, was so forgiving and understanding. But as we got older in the faith, God had to push us more to be like Him because we weren't kids anymore. He wanted us to grow up. **And that seems mean.**

So, you know what I'm gonna do? Well, like a child, I'm gonna run away from home. Yeah, I'm gonna pack my stuff up and leave. Except when things get bad. Then we start finding it hard to blame our situations on dad. Then we finally come home and say, "Dad, I'm sorry. I'm older now and I've learned through hindsight that you were right. You were always right. You weren't mean. You just told me not to eat those cookies because you loved me, not because you were mean."

When we see the backstory of Uzzah we realize that there was more to the picture. It was a lifelong reminder of what is right. We **must** respect God.

We cannot redo God. We can't do a God update. We must take God on His terms, not ours. That's why we call Him Lord.

Think of that. If you are call God, Lord, what is He Lord over in your

life? If you say, 'I gave my life to Jesus,' then is it His? **We promised God we would love AND respect Him, not turn on a dime when things don't go our way.**

We can't just have God be the easy answer to our problems in life. It's like David thought with the Ark. God will allow life to get uncomfortable, unfair, unpredictable, because we have to love Him TRULY through it all.

God doesn't want a new religion. He wants a true religion.

He wants something real that doesn't base love and respect for Him on what we think things should be. We are not God. He is. And His ways are higher than our ways. If anything needs a makeover, it's not God. It's our heart towards Him.