

“When Justice is More Amazing Than Grace” Leviticus 10:1-7, Sermon Notes
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Saving Grace Bible Church
June 18th, 2017
Morning Worship Service

Before we get into our text for today, I want us to begin by considering a timely and insightful quote by RC Sproul

He writes: “there is an age-old difference between the way natural man sees the problem of his relation to God and the way the Bible sees the problem of man’s relation to God. Man-centered humans are amazed that God should withhold life and joy from his creatures. But the God-centered Bible is amazed that God should withhold judgment from sinners”

That’s exactly right. Mankind is born with the assumption that He is the center of the universe. He is the standard by which all things are measured. He even assumes he has the intrinsic authority to determine what is true and right

You can see this so evident in our culture today. Let alone man’s attempt at redefining marriage, we have reached the next level of depravity as we are even attempting to determine our own gender

The underlying assumption man operates with is “Who is God to tell me how to feel, how to live, who is God to determine what is true and false?”

In fact, sadly, we could appropriately put a subtitle under the name of our country: America, the land where fallen man assumes deity

It is this assumption that allows many to believe they have a right to have a problem with God, but God does not have the right to have a problem with them

Speaking with the average person today, you can quickly see that God is often viewed as nothing more than an unwise, unloving deity who welcomes the scrutiny and examination of His creatures every time they deem He has made a mistake

When He is relevant in man’s eyes, man will allow God to coexist with him. But when God gets in the way of man serving and worshipping himself, He is quickly eliminated from the picture

But as long as God keeps doing His job, dispensing grace and mercy, holding back His wrath, sustaining His creation, and as long as God is doing His part, then the natural man will tolerate Him

But, as soon as God upholds His character in a way that threatens man’s ability to worship himself, man quickly accuses God of being unjust

Indeed, the justice of God as it relates to God’s judgment of sinners, this is one of the most misunderstood areas of theology, indeed it is one of the most hated areas of Christian theology

Often times when people have a problem with the Scriptures, or even God Himself, it is because they have assumed the role of telling God not only if He can judge, but also who He can judge, and when He can judge them

Few things illustrate this better than noting where our source of amazement lies, what is it that just astonishes us, when it comes to the justice of God and His judgments?

We'll just look at a few passages here before we get to our text. For the first one, turn over to 2 Samuel 6:6-8:

The text says, "But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. [7](#) And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God. [8](#) David became angry because of the LORD'S outburst against Uzzah, and that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day."

So, there were the Israelites, transporting the ark of God back to where it belonged. The oxen that were supporting the rods that were carrying the ark, one of them started to stumble and go down, the ark starts to lose balance and it's about ready to fall off to the ground

Uzzah, instinctively reaches out his hand to steady the ark, and instantaneously the Lord strikes him down dead

And typically where is our amazement, what astonishes us when we read passages like that? Even as believers, we are typically amazed, not at the grace and mercy of God, but at the justice and wrath of God

Our gut instinct when we read passages like that is, "That's not fair God! That's a little harsh Lord, I am shocked that you would do such a thing God."

And some might say, "Well, that's the God of the OT, full of wrath and fury. The God of the New Testament is much more loving and patient."

Well, the book of Acts is in the New Testament and in that book we read of the account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-6, "But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, [2](#) and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. [3](#) But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? [4](#) "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." [5](#) And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. [6](#) The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him."

So here you have the newly formed church. Getting a great amount of momentum, the believers are all fellowshiping with one another in sacrificial love and service.

And you have a man and his wife tell a lie in an attempt to make themselves look righteous before the church, and there is instant judgment from the Lord

And often times, the source of astonishment, our amazement, is in the same place: "Lord, why? There are millions of lies told every day and you don't do that? Why would you do such a thing?"

“You’re not doing your job anymore, it’s your job to forgive people and show them mercy and grace, not respond in wrath instantly when someone sins? This seems unjust, you at least owe them a second chance?”

One last text to illustrate this. And this one is especially helpful because it illustrates how Jesus Himself processed the justice of God and His judgment of sinners

Take a look at Luke 13:1-5. “Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. [2](#) And Jesus said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? [3](#) “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. [4](#) “Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? [5](#) “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

So here’s the scene: Some who were gathered around Jesus came to Him with some questions. “Jesus, you seem to have theological answers, you seem to have an inroad with God and His ways, how do you explain what happened with the slaughtering of these Galileans in light of who you say God is?”

In other words, where is your good and wise God now? Don’t you know about the evil and suffering in the world?

First of all, did you notice that Jesus added an additional tragedy to the discussion that they didn’t even bring up? The tower falling on 18 people

And notice what He does in His response: He teaches them where the true source of their amazement should be. He shows them how they should be viewing these calamities in light of human rebellion and sin against a holy God

Don’t be amazed that the tower fell, be amazed it didn’t fall on you! That’s where your amazement should be

Sproul also has a catchy little redo of a few words of the hymn “Amazing Grace” where he inserts the word justice for grace because often times we confuse the two and we are actually more amazed at justice than we are grace

In light of this Luke 13 passage he writes, “Amazing justice, cruel and sharp, that wounds a saint like me, I’m so darn good it makes no sense the tower fell on me.”

I like to imagine if someone like Jesus appeared on CNN after a devastating hurricane or earthquake destroyed a region and there was much suffering, and when they ask Him about it He gives this Luke 13 answer

“oh, don’t be surprised at the category 5 hurricane demolishing a couple of cities, be surprised it only devastated a couple of cities. Be surprised that you weren’t taken out with the others.”

Our natural reaction to these texts illustrates our problem well. We are prone to become conditioned to think like the world, our own hearts are prone to man-centeredness and therefore

we not only presume upon grace but we are perplexed and even tempted toward being outraged when God chooses to give justice instead of grace

John Piper said, "God makes headlines only when man mocks His power but no headlines for 10,000 days of wrath withheld."

Indeed, we don't hear headlines about God when one year goes by without a massive tsunami. We don't hear headlines about God when one month goes by without any commercial planes going down. We don't hear headlines about God when millions of people are healed from sicknesses, and recover from ailments

We only hear headlines when He gives justice instead of grace

We assume, expect, even demand grace and mercy, and when it is seemingly withheld, we shove God in the dock like a prosecutor and demand He give an accounting of Himself

Mankind's source of amazement is corrupted, it's backwards. It's so rare today to encounter a person who is amazed and perplexed at the right things

For instance, how much sleep have you lost trying to solve the dilemma Paul raises in Romans 3, "How can God be just and still forgive sinners?"

Tragically, this isn't even on the radar of many today. And because of this, because mankind is often guilty of presuming upon the grace of God, expecting and demanding that justice pass over us, the Lord chooses from time to time to break in and show the dreadful power of His wrath and justice

We need reminders. And it's as if the Lord is saying, "while you enjoy the benefits of my grace and mercy, don't forget my justice. Don't forget the gravity of sin. Remember that I am holy."

Remember that I am a God of justice who can choose to exercise that justice at any moment

This is the topic we come to this morning in Leviticus 10:1-7, you can turn there now. The title of this sermon is, "When justice is more amazing than grace."

I titled the sermon that because that is often the response that is produced in people when confronted by a text like this

And typically I would like to read the entire text before we start to unpack it, but I think it will be helpful to just read it as we go through it and explain it because the text in and of itself is so powerful and I believe even more so if we allow to unfold little by little

So, by way of outline, in this text we are going to see the justice of God realign the source of our amazement in 3 vivid scenes:

Let's look at the first vivid scene: Divine justice executed: Notice verses 1-2, "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. ² And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD."

Nadab and Abihu. Every time you hear these two names you automatically think of this event. You don't think about their ordination, or their preparation for ministry, or their mountaintop experience worshipping the Lord in the book of Exodus with Moses and Aaron. No, all you can think of when you hear these two names is this dreadful account

That is a testimony of the incredible power and consequences of sin. Their legacy, their remembrance, consists of one disastrous event in their lives

Sin speaks so loud when we have failed significantly. For instance, every time you hear the word Judas you don't think about any good he might have accomplished, all you think about is his betrayal

When you hear the names Ananias and Sapphira, you don't think about anything other than their lie

The same is true with these two young men. Who were Nadab and Abihu? Well there in verse 1 the text tells us they were the sons of Aaron, actually his two eldest sons

So they were next in line behind Aaron. Aaron was the brother of Moses and really the first ever high priest for the people of God

And here are his sons. After being given chapter after chapter after chapter of specific instructions for priestly ministry, here they are performing one of their first tasks as priests

One specific instruction they had been given which is worth noting is Exodus 30:9 which clearly says, "you shall not offer unauthorized (same word for strange or foreign) incense on the altar, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it."

So, this wasn't ignorance. There was clear, previous instruction prohibiting this act

One common theory about this is that Nadab and Abihu had been drinking and were inebriated and therefore they had carelessly forgotten in their inebriated state that they weren't to offer this strange or unauthorized fire

This is a possibility in light of the Lord's warning to Aaron in verses 8-9 where He tells him to abstain from wine or strong drink so that he doesn't die when does his priestly duties.

But, even with that contextual clue, I don't think we can be definitive in saying that is what influenced Nadab and Abihu because the text itself simply doesn't tell us

Speculation abounds in commentaries as to the nature of this strange fire, and I'm sure some of you with more intellectual curiosities really want to know the specifics here, but I think the only way you can ensure you are wrong is to insist you know exactly what it means

The point in either case is that it didn't belong there. Notice the end of verse 1, "which he had not commanded them."

Neglecting what the Lord had called them to in worship, or adding something flippantly that the Lord had not called them to add

In either case, as priests they were called to be exemplary in obedience to the law

Here is what their actions in verse 1 communicate: “God won’t mind, disobedience isn’t that big of a deal, He’ll forgive us, it’s His job to forgive us.” Besides, He doesn’t always have to be glorified.”

There’s the mindset that fuels all disobedience. A low view of God leads to a high view of man which results in a superficial approach to sin. There’s the church today in a nutshell

Reducing God down to someone who is more like us than God. He’s just a little more powerful, a little more righteous, a little more concerned about holiness than we are

And that’s why when we come across passages like this we aren’t sure exactly how to process it because we’ve created a comfortable God

A God who is merely one of grace, love, and mercy. A God who exists for us. Instead of embracing the biblical doctrine that all God owes sinners is judgment, and we exist for Him

Notice here in verse 2, Nadab and Abihu disregard the Lord and therefore they die before the Lord.

The text says, “fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.”

It’s interesting if you glance back a few verses at chapter 9:24 we see the very same language and action of the Lord, as fire comes out from before him and consumes the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar

Now, a few verses later it is Nadab and Abihu receiving this same perfect justice

Now, let’s just pause and think about this: These were the sons of Aaron, the servant of the Lord, nephews to Moses, another faithful servant of the Lord

God Himself had set apart these men for the priestly ministry. As far as we know they have been diligently obeying the Lord up until this point

And yet all that was not able to atone for this rashness. It did not excuse them that they were young men, and inexperienced in these services, or that it was the first offense

They weren’t excused because they had a rich spiritual heritage. No, the Lord required that His priests be holy as He is holy

Exodus 19:22 says, “let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them.”

Priests must represent holiness and justice. But this warning didn’t stop Nadab and Abihu from having a casual and flippant approach to their worship of God

The very sad thing is, Nadab and Abihu, if they were alive and in ministry today in our culture, they would be admired and held up as great innovators in the church

“Oh, look at how those guys do worship. That’s different, that’s drawing a crowd, they must be doing something right, after all look at all the people they are reaching.”

“People will go to Nadab and Abihu’s church who wouldn’t go to boring old Moses’ church. Nadab and Abihu have found a way to reach the unchurched crowd.”

Surely, they would be invited to speak at all the church growth conferences because today it’s a virtue to be on the edge, to break the mold, to try new methods. To completely disregard what the Lord has said about how to do ministry

“Don’t worry about how God says to do ministry, let’s just do it our way, it can’t make that big of a difference if we don’t do it exactly how God has said.” Besides look at how many people we are reaching.”

Well, sadly we can see that unbiblical philosophies of ministry are not new. Ever since corporate worship has existed, even at the commencement of the priesthood in Israel, man has taken worship into his own hands

Now, we don’t know exactly what these two young men were thinking when they engaged in this act, but let us be mindful that there is a Nadab and Abihu in all of us because is this not what our hearts do when we want to engage in sin?

Not only do we presume upon the grace of God to forgive us, but we also believe the lie, “I’ll do this sin this one time and then I will quickly confess and repent and it won’t be that big of a deal, I’ll never do it again.”

Well, it’s interesting when we consider that mindset in light of this text: If Nadab and Abihu had said that to themselves, they were right. They never did this again, because they never had a chance to do it again, one time is all it took

This is why it’s so serious when we make excuses and justifications for sin in our lives. Other than being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, what we fail to realize is that every sin, no matter how insignificant or great we might classify it, every sin carries with it the seed of total apostasy

In other words, every sin that you won’t deal with, every sin you’re unwilling to battle, is tilling the soil of a heart that will could potentially fall away from the Lord and prove you never belonged to Him in the first place

That’s what James 1:14-15 tells us. Every sin starts off in seed form, as we feed it and believe the lie that it is offering, it grows and we start to live it out

And eventually if we don’t repent, we continue to believe the lie and live it out, it becomes fully grown so that it now characterizes and consumes us. And its end is death, James says

Nadab and Abihu didn’t get that second chance. God didn’t allow them to lead the people of Israel in presuming upon His grace. His justice demanded death and death is what came

Now, just from the first couple of verses we’ve looked at, you can test whether you have a godly mind in how you respond to passages like this

The secular, natural mind reads this passage and thinks, "that's pretty harsh God, you should have given them a second chance. Why can't you be more merciful, God?"

A godly, righteous mind reads this passage and thinks, "That's what we all deserve God, I can't believe that hasn't happened to me. I can't believe there aren't accounts like this on every single page of the Bible."

So consider, are you more amazed at justice than grace this morning?

This is the first scene which serves to realign the locus of our astonishment: The execution of divine justice

The second scene is the explanation of divine justice, notice verse 3, "3 Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent."

Here is Moses' explanation to Aaron about the divine justice he has just witnessed. And notice, this explanation is an appeal to the supremacy of God's purposes in all things

What is God's purpose in this context? It's the same ultimate purpose for which He does everything: To be regarded as holy, and to be glorified before the people. So, when the Lord is upheld as holy before the eyes of the people, He is glorified. What does it mean that God is holy?

There are two parts to the holiness of God. The first part is that God is holy in that He is separated from common or ordinary or sinful things. Included in this would be God's moral perfection

"you shall be holy for I am holy." Lev. 11:45. You shall be devoted to purity and separate from all that is sinful and corrupt

But the second aspect of the holiness of God is something that He alone possesses. So in one sense we can strive to holy as God is holy, and in another sense we cannot

This second sense is that God's holiness means He is in a class by Himself. So not only utterly separate from His creation and morally perfect, but also distinct, in a class of His own

A few quick references to illustrate this: 1 Samuel 2:2, "There is none holy like the Lord, there is none besides thee." So there's the link between the holiness of God and the impossibility of finding anything in existence that is similar to Him

Isaiah 40:25, "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? Says the Holy One." I am utterly distinct and separate from you. I'm in a class of my own. Who are you going to compare me to?

Have you ever noticed that you can't describe God to someone by using comparisons? Somebody asks you, "What is God like?" And you try to answer, "oh, He's like a" You can't do it. He is entirely in a class of His own

So God's holiness is His utterly unique divine essence. We can try to call it His majesty, His divinity, His greatness, but if you try to go much further language simply runs out to describe it

Now, with that as a backdrop let's look at verse 3 where Moses said, "this is what the Lord has said, among those who are near me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be glorified."

If I am not regarded before the eyes of the people as totally distinct and in a class by myself, as the standard of moral perfection, I will not be glorified

If you're familiar with your old testament and the history of Israel, you are aware that later on in Israel's history, Uncle Moses followed in very similar footsteps

Even similar language is used over in Numbers 20, turn there. You're probably familiar with the story. The people of Israel are in the wilderness, after being delivered from their Egyptian bondage

But they have no water. And they assemble themselves against Moses and against Aaron, contending with them, saying things like you see in verse 3, "we wish would have perished when our brothers perished before the Lord instead of suffering out here like this."

So Moses goes before the Lord and the Lord speaks to Moses and says in verse 8, "take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water."

Notice, a three-fold command is given to Moses here. Take the staff, assemble the people, tell the rock to yield its water

And do you remember what happens? Let's look at what Moses did, and notice how it is vastly different from the Lord had commanded him, verse 10, "and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" ¹¹ Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank."

Notice the differences: Instead of addressing the rock, he addresses the people, and calls them rebels, "ones who behave obstinately." So he takes a cheap shot at the people as he responds in self-righteousness, out of his frustration

He continues, "Shall we bring forth water from this rock for you?" So now he has usurped the authority and place of God by saying, "shall we bring water for you out of this rock?"

And also, he has prevented the full power and might of the Lord from becoming evident to the people, and thereby robbed the Lord of the fear and reverence due to Him

Notice also Moses didn't speak to the rock, but struck the rock, and not once but twice as he vented his anger and frustration over the people

The irony is clear: Moses had fallen into the same trap he had just accused the people of being guilty of. He was rebellious. He was complaining, he was frustrated at circumstances and he was taking it out on God, just like them

Notice verse 12, and here's the key for the relationship with our text in Leviticus: "But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the

sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”

Moses, in his position of leadership, had communicated to the people of Israel, “God is more like man than God, He’s not holy after all. He’s ordinary. He doesn’t care about obedience. His glory isn’t that big of a deal.”

And with Moses, just like in Leviticus 10, there is swift judgment. Moses will not see the promise land and Aaron dies shortly after this account

Turn back to Leviticus 10. When the Lord is upheld as holy, He is glorified. He is given the honor and praise due His name. When His holiness is subverted or minimized, He is robbed of the glory due His name

If someone were to watch your life for a day, a week, a month, would they get the impression that God is holy, righteous, and just, or would they get the impression that it’s not really that big of deal to obey God? Would they get the impression that you presume upon the grace of God to forgive your lethargy?

Back to verse 3, Moses’ words to Aaron here are not a rebuke or a reproach that somehow made him responsible

Rather, this is simply an explanation of the judgment of God from heaven’s perspective. Aaron, being in the priestly line needed to hear and understand heaven’s perspective. No earthly explanation would have sufficed

Now, before we move on, we also must consider the timing of this judgment. If we’re not careful we might read our Bibles and see things like this and think this is just a totally random judgment where Nadab and Abihu just happened to catch the Lord on a bad day

But I think if we consider the timing of this judgment we can see that this is not random at all

No, this was the beginning of the priestly service. And think about the corruption of this ministry which would have inevitably happened if Nadab and Abihu were allowed to continue to be priests in this way. Casually and flippantly doing ministry however they wanted at the commencement of the priesthood

If they were allowed to go on their way they would have afterwards carelessly neglected the entire law

So the priesthood needed to be purified, that is the reason for the severity of the judgment. For instance, think about the person who performed this ceremonial duty the very next time

Think about if it was you. You were next in line. The priestly garments were taken off the charred bodies of the two dead priests and immediately put on you

And the very next time there was a scheduled incense burning on the altar it was your job. And you had either witnessed this incident or heard about it in graphic detail

Would you be quick to presume on God's grace or be negligent in your service? Would you enter into His presence in a relaxed state, casually approaching God like a buddy?

Would you assume that, "hey if I disobey it's no big deal, it's God's job to forgive me. After all, He's not that holy, He doesn't always have to be glorified."

No, would you not rather be absolutely terrified in the presence of the Lord? Which is exactly what should have happened the first time

But now, because of this event, the corruption of the priestly ministry would be halted in its tracks

In fact it's interesting, most of the events in Scripture similar to this, we mentioned a few before, where the Lord seemingly runs out of patience, it's quick judgment instead of mercy and grace

We can just highlight a few: We have Nadab and Abihu, we think of Achan in Joshua 7, Uzzah and the ark in 2 Samuel 6. We think of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, they all seem to have at least one thing in common:

A new era in redemptive history was being inaugurated and a new community of believers needed a fresh reminder of the holiness of God

They needed a fresh reminder that God does not exist for them, they rather exist for God. These judgments are not random. They are strategic. And because of God's mercy and grace, they are not the norm

The very fact that we can easily count on both hands dreadful accounts like this in Scripture should communicate to us that the Lord is "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

Now, we haven't even touched on one of the more remarkable things in this passage, namely Aaron's response at the end of verse 3

And you would imagine that the father of these two men, Aaron, would have some questions for Moses, maybe even some anger towards God, maybe questioning God's wisdom and purposes

"Lord, what is going on? A little warning would have been nice. Why did we go through the entire ordination process and train them up to be priests and teach them the law if you were just going to wipe them out the first time they did performed their priestly duties?"

But remarkably, Aaron's response is a submissive one. Look at the end of verse 3 "So Aaron therefore, kept silent." "he held his peace." Some other versions might say

We need more Aaron's around today. We need humble responses, humble interaction with the Lord in the midst of dark providences

We need Aaron's today who understand the justice of God in the judgment of sinners. That no matter who He judges and when He judges, He is good and just to do so

Jonathan Edwards certainly knew this. Paraphrasing a few excerpts from his most well-known sermon, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." He said this to the people in attendance that day:

“apart from the grace of God you cannot give one reason why God has not cast you into hell yesterday, why He has allowed you to awake again today. And there is no reason you can give as to why you have not been cast into hell since you awoke this morning other than the fact that God’s hand has kept you from falling.”

That’s a true understanding of God’s grace and God’s justice

The only rational response to the justice of God in the judgment of sinners is the submissive response that Aaron had, and that is to “hold your peace.”

Any other response indicates that we have forgotten what grace really is. This is the common flaw in someone’s thinking when they are upset with God about why He doesn’t save everyone

They have confused grace with justice. Grace is totally undeserved divine favor flowing towards sinners. And therefore grace, to be grace, must be undeserved and never demanded. If God owes it to everyone, if God obligated to give it to sinners, that’s called justice, not grace

Another way this misunderstanding of grace and justice manifests itself in is in the life of the complaining Christian. There is no such thing as a complaining Christian who understands the difference between grace and justice

The moment we complain, we are communicating to the Lord that you owe me better treatment than I am getting. In other words, an injustice has occurred and you need to make it right Lord. That’s the root of all complaining

Someone as good as me should not be experiencing the things I am experiencing. I deserve not only to not go to hell, but I deserve a trouble free path to heaven as well

If you merely remember this simple truth the vast majority of your complaining would end: Like Aaron, you need to understand that the Lord either gives grace or justice, but never injustice to anyone

This is the second scene which powerfully realigns our locus of astonishment, namely, the explanation of divine justice

So we’ve seen the execution of divine justice, the explanation of divine justice, and now:

The third and final scene, the effect of divine justice, is seen in verses 4-7, “Moses called also to Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron’s uncle Uzziel, and said to them, “Come forward, carry your relatives (your brothers) away from the front of the sanctuary to the outside of the camp.”⁵ So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moses had said. ⁶Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, “Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, so that you will not die and that He will not become wrathful against all the congregation. But your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the burning which the LORD has brought about.⁷ You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the LORD’S anointing oil is upon you.” So they did according to the word of Moses.”

Here, the Lord commands that even the reaction to this event, including the cleanup process, the mourning, the corporate response, must be done in such a way to preserve the holiness and justice of God

In other words, because of the nature of the offense, the Lord's purposes could be overshadowed, usurped, if human grieving took center stage

Because God's holiness is higher than human emotions those in leadership and priestly roles were not allowed to mourn like the rest of the people

Look at what happens here: Nadab and Abihu, lying dead in their brand new priestly garments and coats. The tabernacle was located directly in the middle of the camp of Israel: so what does that mean practically?

It means there is no way this event can stay hidden. These two dead men are to be carried lifeless from the middle of the camp, through, and eventually out of the camp

What an awful sight this must have been: Those next in line behind Moses and Aaron. Respected and honored among all the people, looked up to as examples, now being carried lifeless, just like the useless parts of the animal sacrifices, carried through the midst of the camp as recipients of divine vengeance

What would be going through your mind if you were an Israelite and you saw these men being carried out of the camp after being slain by the Lord? What effect do you think this had on the people of Israel?

Would not the people with one accord say, "if they can't make it what hope is there for us?" What kind of God are we dealing with here, what kind of holiness is in our midst if Aaron's sons received wrath? Who then can possibly stand before the Lord and not be consumed?"

It has such a purifying effect. We read it earlier, but a similar thing happens in the account of Ananias and Sapphira. In Acts 5, Peter rebukes Ananias, saying to him, "you have not lied to men, but to God. When Ananias heard these words he fell down and breathed his last."

And then we read these words in 5:5, "and great fear came upon all the people who heard it." Great fear came upon the people. It has a purifying effect. God is holy and will by no means clear the guilty, that's the message that God is saying to His people

This is the effect it is designed to have on the people here. Back in our text, in verses 6-7, we see that Aaron and his two surviving sons, distraught in spirit, no doubt wanting to weep and grieve the death of their loved ones, are not allowed to use any external signs of mourning or grief

The beginning of verse 7 tells us they weren't even allowed to follow the dead corpses out of the tabernacle and see where they lay. They are picked up before their eyes and taken away into the darkness

And you read that and you immediately think why? Why can't they at least go say good bye? Why can't they mourn like any normal person would do? It's not sinful to mourn over the death of loved ones, regardless of how they died. It's part of life. It's part of being human

Well, this is a unique case. Aaron and his family are not allowed to mourn for them in the sense that it might portray to the people that they disagreed with the justice that came upon them

In other words, as priests, instead of lamenting their own personal loss, they must applaud the sentence, and affirm the justice of it

Their mourning in this case would have expressed dissatisfaction with the judgment of God and in their respective office they did not have the option to do this because what does the priestly office represent: justice and holiness

One commentator said: Aaron and his sons were in danger of being too much affected with the providence, and therefore they are forbidden to mourn: the house of Israel however, they were in danger of being too little affected with it, and therefore they are commanded to lament

You see that at the end of verse 6, "But your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the burning which the LORD has brought about." Bewail, to weep in a state of grief."

Let the people mourn, let the people weep. They need to feel the weight of this. They need to be affected and stand in fear over such a thing. They need to be purified

And have you noticed in this text the emphasis that this was the Lord Himself responsible for this. We saw the emphasis again up in verses 1-2. Fire came out from the Lord. They died before the Lord

And now here in verse 6, "the burning which the Lord has brought about." The Spirit of God leaves no room for us mistaking this event to be an accident. The Lord Himself was responsible for this

Do you ever experience the temptation to communicate to someone in the context of evangelism or whatever it may be that we are embarrassed about certain passages of Scripture, or embarrassed about the Lord's actions in the Scriptures

"I'm sorry, yeah, I know it's weird, but this is what the text says."

But I love how in the Scriptures the Lord Himself is not embarrassed, the Lord Himself never leaves us guessing who is responsible

And if the Lord, the holy and righteous one, is not embarrassed about His actions, what possible motive or right do we have to be embarrassed?

We do not stand above the Scriptures, the Scriptures stand above us. The Scriptures judge us, we never judge them

As we noted earlier, anything we read in the Scriptures falls into one of two categories: grace or justice. When we get embarrassed or timid about certain passages, it's evidence that we are believing the lie that the Lord gives injustice to some people, but that is never the case

The Lord brought about this event, and like everything the Lord does, there are good and holy reasons for Him doing it

In verse 7, further instructions are given to Aaron and his remaining sons, thus continuing to regulate the effect this justice was to have: "You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the LORD'S anointing oil is upon you."

In other words, we're not going to skip a beat in priestly ministry as a result of this event. You are functioning as priests and you will continue to function as priests

You can't go join the mourners

And I love the last words of verse 7, "So they did according to the word of Moses." Of course they did according to the word of Moses. I'm sure their obedience was quite strong and timely for some time after this

That indeed is the intended effect of divine justice. A renewed passion to follow the Lord wholeheartedly

That is always one of the purposes divine justice is intended to have on all who hear of it. Spiritual inventory of their own lives resulting in a renewal to follow the Lord wholeheartedly

Now, by way of review, we've seen the execution of divine justice, the explanation of divine justice, and the effect of divine justice

And now that hopefully our perspective has been realigned, let's draw a few implications from what we've seen

First, this text should produce fear. For the unconverted, the unregenerate in our midst, fear of wrath, fear of judgment

This is the God with whom you must deal. This is the God you will face one day

You have two options before God: perfection or punishment. If you are not sinless, if you have not loved God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength every second of every day of your life, the wrath of God abides on you this very moment.

And you don't even need a preacher to tell you that, no matter how hard you try to suppress it, no matter how many forms of escapism you try, your guilt, your own conscience testifies to the fact that you are guilty before God and you will face Him one day

But let me say this to the unconverted, this same God is in the business of forgiving sin and declaring you righteous in His sight

The gospel is the good news that God saves sinners through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. And it is available to everyone who repents and believes in Him

There is no reason for anyone hearing this to experience the judgment of God. Flee to Christ now.

For the converted, the regenerate, the people of God, this text should also produce fear in us. But it is not a fear of judgment or wrath, it is a fear associated with reverence and obedience

Psalm 130:3-4, "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared."

This is a familial fear, somewhat similar to how a son fears his father. Those that experience forgiveness no longer fear God in a dreadful way, the way a death-row inmate fears his executioner. But they do fear God in another way

It's a fear which means honoring, holding in high esteem. A reverential fear

For believers, we need to ask ourselves, "where is the evidence in my life that I fear God in this way?" Have I become casual and flippant in my obedience and relationship to Him?

Do I justify my sin, do I rationalize my sin, have I become comfortable with my sin, and have I created a more comfortable God who will tolerate my partial obedience and is indifferent to it?

And lastly, this text in Leviticus should cause us worship and adore Christ all the more

Let's turn to Hebrews 7:23-28 as we draw to a close: "The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, (that's an understatement based on what we've just seen) ²⁴ but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. ²⁵ Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, (and here's the superiority of Christ) holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;²⁷ who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. ²⁸ For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

There's our hope. When Nadab and Abihu were consumed by the Lord's wrath, they didn't atone for anyone else's sin by their death because they themselves were sinners. Their death brought no saving benefit to anyone."

Even if that hadn't happened to them they would have eventually died because they themselves were sinners

But Christ is a different kind of priest: Christ is where we turn when we read the account of Nadab and Abihu, or any other account in Scripture where it seems like we simply can't escape sin, it corrupts everyone and everything ever made. Christ is the great exception to this

There is one who has ensured that we can worship the Lord and draw near to Him but not be consumed by His justice and holiness, because He Himself was consumed by that justice on our behalf

And it's interesting, as we circle back around to our introduction: the account we just read of Nadab and Abihu is not the most perplexing passage in Scripture

Neither is the account of Uzzah and the Ark, nor Ananias and Sapphira, nor any other passage where God simply chooses to give someone justice instead of grace

The list of problem passages in Scripture are a problem merely because we are viewing them in light of the worth and perceived innocence of man instead of the holiness and justice of God

The question should never be, "why do we see suffering and judgment?" it's rather, why do we not see and experience more of those things in light of our rebellion against God?

Viewing it through that lens, the most perplexing passage and question in the Bible, the most perplexing issue facing mankind is one that ironically never shows up on the list of problem passages in the Bible

It's one that is never talked about on the news or the talk shows when the hosts are asking pastors and Christians "where was God when this was happening?" what's the deal with this passage about God commanding the murder of hundreds of people in the OT?"

No, those aren't problem passages at all. If anything, the problem is that we don't see more of them in Scripture

No, the Bible itself gives us the real problem passage, the real perplexing question in the Bible is the same one that Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God My God why have you forsaken me?"

That should be where our astonishment is. That's where we should marvel the most. That's the biggest problem passage in the Bible

It's the cross that should keep us up at night perplexed at the thought that God would act in such a way as to slay His own innocent Son so that I, the guilty one, can go free. So again, where is your amazement? What is it that just astonishes you?

Is it the fact that God could ever forgive someone like you? Or is it more like the world's astonishment, "how could God ever give justice to anyone, why does God always have to be glorified."

Let's allow this text to realign our thinking and propel our thoughts Godward, where they ought to be, so that we can among those who are truly amazed at grace, not justice

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