

Does John 3:16 Amaze You?

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Turn in your Bibles if you would to John 3. You know, balance - we heard about it in the first hour. Balance. You know what we tend to do; we tend to define balance by ourselves. Because the truth is, we do tend to look at ourselves as being balanced. Because the thing is if you were really convinced you were out of balance, you would move that pendulum to where you thought it was balanced. We all have a tendency to think we're right. And because that's the case, we all tend to evaluate balance by ourselves. And if you've ever said to somebody, "They're imbalanced," what you were doing probably was you were using yourself as a reference point when you said that because you were using your own thought about what balance is. Now the key, we know that of a truth - this is balanced. This really is the only infallible reference point to what balance is. So what we have to make sure is that we're constantly fine tuning our own thinking by this book.

But you know, balance is a funny thing. For instance, if you listen to Della - I'm going to put you on the spot - all she talks about is the crisis pregnancy. I don't hear her talk about other ministries. But then if you hear James talk about I'll Be Honest, it's like, "get balanced, man!" Why do you not talk like Della talks? Well, because one of the things is that we have diversity in the church. We have diversity of gift and diversity of strengths and diversity of personality. And so we need to be careful that we don't take this concept of balance and misapply it. The other thing is, balance is something that you see in the big picture of things. If you want to ask, well, is the church balanced? You don't look just at Della or just at James, you look at the big picture. The same thing could be said for preaching. Can you imagine if you walked into Jonathan Edwards' church the day he preached "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"? Now, maybe you've never read that message, but if you have, you would say, this guy's not balanced. Well, that would be an unfair assessment. You really need to hear Jonathan Edwards preach for a year probably. I'm not saying that expositional preaching is the only way to preach. I certainly would not say that a man cannot preach topical messages. But, expositional preaching does help to foster balance. At least, it requires us to not pass over parts of Scripture. Now how a man preaches a certain portion of Scripture, that may be right or it may not be right. It depends on how much he's preaching his own opinion or he's preaching exactly what God intends to be taught by that passage.

I'm saying all this because I'm justifying the fact that I'm going to preach to you a very imbalanced message today. And if I didn't say anything, after hearing James you'd say, now that wasn't balanced. But you see, one of the things is, it was like Martin Luther actually made a comment about you can preach all the truth in the world, but you know, if you neglect that one truth that's most under attack in your generation, you're being unfaithful. And the thing is, if a preacher's being faithful and he's dealing with the very point of Satanic attack in his day, it may seem imbalanced. Especially if you were to read it 100 years from now. You know sometimes, when we go back and we read some of the guys from the past we don't really recognize why they're emphasizing what they're emphasizing. Now a lot of times it had to do with the attacks that they were facing. And it could seem imbalanced till you recognized that the pendulum in

their day had swung way over here, and a balanced message was not what their day needed. They needed that pendulum hit with a good crack to send it back centerward. Yes, I know, the message that I want to bring today is imbalanced. But it is because it's meant to be corrective.

John 3:16. Let's look at it. You see, we live in a day - I don't know what comes to your mind when you hear John 3:16. I can tell you as a young believer, if I would have sat down and somebody said please open your Bibles to John 3:16, I'd think I'm going to get a shallow, typical evangelistic message today. I would have cringed if I heard John 3:16 was the text. Maybe you don't respond that way. But it has to do with the way that I perceive the text is used. Unquestionably, this is the most well-known biblical passage. And I don't even mean to spend the majority of my time here on it, but let's read it.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." I would challenge you, go to your colleges; go to your workplaces; go up and down your street. Quote John 3:16 to people. You know what the truth is? Most of the world yawns at that text. I mean, it encapsulates the gospel and the truth. If it was even possible that people in hell could be partakers of that promise, and you took that to them right now, they would find that to be the greatest imaginable news possible.

God redeeming sinners. It doesn't seem to shock us. America expects God to be merciful. Have you ever noticed when good things happen? The media is not looking for some explanation. It's when a hurricane comes and a bunch of people die, or there's a tsunami in another part of the world and a bunch of people are drowned. And then it's like the world wants an explanation. How could a loving God do this? How can this be permitted? This is how our world is. You know it is. We expect God to so love the world. It's expected. Oh yeah, well, that's nice. God so loved the world. But see, that doesn't shake anybody's worldview. Because typically, it's expected. We're shocked and outraged when God does the opposite. And it does - it outrages people. "How could God let this happen?" How often do people in this world talk that way? What are they saying? I'll tell you what, that's massive, massive amounts of ignorance behind that.

I remember telling a family member - because you know, after I was saved, I came to recognize my Catholic (horribly nominal Catholic) pagan family - I recognized my family members who had died, they perished. And it's like I had family members say, "Grandma in hell??" You can have that God. My god's not like that. No, I remember a preacher friend saying one time he was sitting in a Dairy Queen, and he got to telling a woman about the gospel, and this woman was outraged. She said, "My god is not like that." And he said, "You're right, ma'am. Your god is not like that." See, that's the problem. Our world expects John 3:16. (Incomplete thought)

Listen to what's promised. Whoever believes in Christ should not perish, but have eternal life. Eternal life. It's precisely because we don't have - this world around us doesn't have eternal life that's promised in this verse that they miss it. You say, what do you mean? Look, if I took a survey; if I took a survey here, passed out a piece of paper - but more than that, up and down these streets throughout San Antonio to take a survey. Define for me what eternal life is. Well, many would respond with the obvious. To live forever. But perhaps that begs another question.

Let me ask you this. Do you those in hell live forever? Sort of. They exist forever. They're conscious forever. But an eternity of destruction, an eternity of judgment, an eternity of punishment, an eternity of fire - all four, which are plainly stated in Scripture, eternally are the lot of the damned. See, that's hardly "life." The reality is eternal life is not just existing no matter what else is true of our existence.

But here's the question, what is it that really defines life? What is it that really defines eternal life? And here's the thing, we know the answer if we know our Bibles. But the thing is even knowing it, because you know John 17:3, it's incomprehensible to the world at large. You say, what does it say over there in John 17:3? Well, "this is eternal life." This is eternal life. And what is it? What is it? Right. It is to know You - God is being prayed to by His Son. Christ is looking to His Father, and He's speaking to Him. "This is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." But the truth is, think about that. To the lost world, that's incomprehensible. What? Knowing God is life? That's not the way the world thinks. I mean, look, do you want a deer in the headlights stare? Just go up and down the street here and tell men and women this reality. Eternal life is knowing God. It doesn't register. Would it have registered with you when you were lost? If somebody would have come and told you that? This is what eternal life is all about. You want to know what it's all about? It's right here. It's knowing God.

You see what the apostle said? "Without God in the world..." Remember that from Ephesus? We're going to get back to Ephesians in a few weeks. "Without God in the world..." We like that. You know, the apostle says the same thing about the Galatians. "Formerly, when you did not know God." That's what lost people are like. But you know what - we like that. To us, any concept of living when we're lost - ah, that's living! The further we could get away from God. Which one of you when you were lost thought: "Going to church! Ah, that's living!" It's like if somebody asked you to go, it's like ugh... what excuse can I come up with? Because anything is better than that! That's how we think. That's how we were.

And you know the thing is, that's life - knowing God. Death - it's the opposite. It's not knowing Him. Isn't that interesting? The apostle says both about the condition of the lost. Formerly when you did not know God; also formerly, again, the letter to the Ephesians, he said, you were dead in trespasses and sins. This is the thing, people who have not been saved by the grace of Christ, they don't live. And the issue is they don't know God. That's it. Death is not annihilation. Death is not ceasing to exist. Death is simply living without God. That's it. Without God.

Listen to Paul. He says this to the Corinthians. "Some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame." And you know what's interesting about that? He's not talking about the pagans out there. He's talking about people in the church, and he says, "Some of you don't know God." Now, look, if you would have tagged those people that he's talking about, they'd have had plenty to tell you about God. You recognize that. Just because you've got a lot to say about God, doesn't mean that you know God. I find that, again, take the survey. Go up and down the streets, which a lot of us have. Everybody's got their theories on God, and that doesn't change in the church. You've got people thinking all sorts of things. These people that he's talking to - there's some among you - they were denying the resurrection. Very authoritatively could tell you things about God, but they were wrong. So the question is this: who is God? Do

we know Him? I mean, when it says, "God so loved the world..." one of the problems is we don't really even know who that God is. You know, if you understand more thoroughly who that God is, then all of a sudden John 3:16 becomes marvelous. But the world doesn't know. And the scary thing is that we don't know in the church. You talk about being balanced. One of the most balanced realities that we need to have in Scripture, and I don't know if it's even balance, is just we need to know God. That's eternal life. We need to know God. We need to delve in and dive in. We need to know Him. We need to realize Him. We need the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. We need to grow in that - this Spirit working in us. A greater, greater, and greater perception.

This is why it's so important to read all of the Bible. Listen, if you've been in the Lord for a number of years and you have not read this book cover to cover, no excuse. Because you know what's going to happen if you don't read it cover to cover? It's kind of like if you walk in here and you listen to one sermon that's preached. And you say, that's imbalanced. That's right. You're going to end up with an imbalanced view of reality, truth, who God is. Read all of your Bible. Because it's all speaking to us about Him.

Who is this God? Man thinks he knows. You want to know why we need to be soaked in this Word so much? Because we have an image of God in our minds, and we need it corrected; we need to see more accurately who He is and dispel our own false notions of who He is. This is critical. Critical. Scripture just tears away these distorted images. And I'll tell you this, it reveals a God to us who is very much bigger and greater and more fearful than ever imagined. And kind, and compassionate.

I can remember one time years ago reading Charles Spurgeon on John 3:16. And he said when this verse is taken - it's kind of like the rainbow, against the dark storm clouds. It's very vivid. He was emphasizing John 3:16 is like that rainbow. Very beautiful. But it's when it's viewed against this dark, stormy backdrop that it becomes most vivid and most beautiful.

See, I was all the more reminded of this just in the last couple of weeks. I've been moving through the Pentateuch. I'm in Joshua now, but just coming through - especially through the book of Numbers. That's where the Hebrew children are in the wilderness. I want you to turn there. Numbers 11:1. "And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes." I know if you've got the King James Version, it doesn't say "about their misfortunes," but I did see that in the Hebrew, it's actually there. "The people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes." The New American Standard says, "about their adversities." "And when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp." You know you read, but sometimes you stop. Sometimes you read parts of the Bible and it's like, you know, you're taking it in. You're hearing it. But then there's other times where you stop and some reality hits you. And the reality of this hit me. And I began to think, what if your tent had been in the outlying part of the camp? What was that like? It says (verse 2), "Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord and the fire died down. So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them."

Taberah. You have a place called Taberah. Can you imagine? You're driving down the interstate, there's the sign: Taberah, next exit. Dad, what's that mean? Burning. It was Calvin or Gill - one of them - it means combustion. Yeah, children, that's combustion. Why? Well, here's

why. Spontaneous combustion. Now think about that. Why? They were complaining. We'll talk more about that in a second. You know, it doesn't say, "the fire of the Lord fell." It says that in some places. At Sodom and Gomorrah, fire fell from heaven. It doesn't say lightning, thunderbolt. Just spontaneous combustion. Sinners exploded in flames. And you know, here's the thing, God's anger - we don't sense it. We don't feel it. Do you know men and women and children in this room who have heard the truth of the gospel and still are not bowing the knee to the Lord - have not repented - do you know God's anger with you is such that Scripture specifically says it's going to be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you? His anger burns against you greater than it burned against them. But you know what? We don't feel it. There's no low rumble of thunder. We don't feel it. I mean, it's like that wind isn't blowing in here. There's no wind of vengeance. I can't feel it. I can't hear it. And you know, because people don't, and because they sin, and the sentence against that sin is not exacted immediately, they just become real confident. You know, there's a verse in the Bible that says that? Ecclesiastes 8. The sentence is not carried out immediately against people's sin, and what do they do? They become all the more confident. There's no sense of this judgment; this anger, this wrath.

But you know what? Here's a glimpse at a time when sinners are doing what sinners do. They weren't raping and killing children. They weren't cannibals. You know what they were doing? Murmuring. They weren't even complaining directly to God. Listen to how it reads: It says, "the people complained in the hearing of the Lord." Complaining. What's that? Certainly a small sin. Not murder, not rape, not kidnapping. None of that stuff. What was causing the complaining? We're told: misfortunes. Their adversities. Things didn't go just the way that they wanted them to go. After all, I mean, living in that wilderness - listen, living out in the wilderness would not be nice. No water. I mean, the idea I get about that wilderness is that it was pretty much desert. You're out there for 40 years, you're probably not going to be overly happy. Didn't they have some things to complain about? God was listening, and He incinerated a number of them on the spot.

Can you imagine? A sinner just exploding in flames. You can't. And because the reality of that is so far removed from us, and because sinners get away with sinning so often and they don't burst into flames, we can get very casual about sin. We can get very casual about grace. We can get very casual about John 3:16. But I'll tell you what you get a glimpse of here. You get a glimpse of the way God feels towards sinners. And it bursts forth. They were dead on the spot.

Do you know the God of Scripture? Do you really know Him? Do you know that God is like this? You say, like what? Like this! Like we find here in this passage. Provoked, angry, and ready to break forth against sinners. Do you know? You can come across these things in the New Testament. You just kind of pass over them. Like, "storing up wrath for the day of wrath." Do you recognize that that's what's happening? God is getting angrier and angrier and His wrath is storing, it's building, it's becoming greater. That's what's happening to sinners. That's what's happening to men and women and children who do not surrender to Christ. It's just increasing. It's getting bigger. We find this very truth in John 3 where John 3:16 is. You find this reality. That "those who believe in the Son have eternal life," but if you do not believe or you do not obey the Son, "you shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on you." It's on you! If you're not

saved here, it's on you. The only thing that prevents you from exploding into flames like these people is nothing other than God's kindness. That's it. Your sins deserve every bit and more what happened to them.

And you think about this. Just stop and think. Because if you really take yourself back there, these were real people. They had names. They had faces. They had feelings. They had emotions. They had families. I mean, you get the feeling, they burst into flames right along with the rest of their family. You can't do anything. You burst into flames - your husband, your wife bursts into flame; your children bursts into flame - you can't protect them. Have you ever seen anything thrown in a fire? It's not thinking about protecting anything else in the fire. It just yields to it. It's gone. Fire. And I don't know where I saw it, but some news clip or YouTube clip or something - some guy accidentally got fire on himself. When you get fire on yourself, you don't think about other things. It's not: oh, I need to mow the lawn. You've got fire on your leg! Using starter fluid on the motor and all of a sudden "poof!" And your pants are on fire. You're not thinking about lunch. You don't think about anything else.

These are real people. And the wilderness was not a very friendly place. They were unhappy. They voiced it. They died. It wasn't a peaceful passing. Fire. We don't live in the days of Smithsfield when they burned Christians at the stake. Can you imagine watching a person burn? You know what happens. It burns their hair off. Burns their flesh. Burns their clothing off. God did this to sinners. Why? Righteous judgment. Righteous judgment. This is not God overreacting. These people were not innocent. You know what they were doing? They were openly manifesting their hatred for God.

And you know what? We don't want to admit it, because if we admit that's what they were doing, we have to admit our own complaining is just as wicked. And it is. Because when you complain, you're saying to this God of Scripture - who is holy, who is perfect, who is righteous, who is good - you're saying to Him, "I want my own way!" "I don't like Your ways!" "And I don't like what You're doing!" And you know you get somebody that says, "I don't like how you act and I don't like what you do and I don't like your laws." You know what you're basically saying, "I don't like you." And that's what they're saying. And more than that, if there was ever a people not to complain, here God comes along and He's done so many kindnesses for them, so many miracles on their behalf. He's delivered them. Listen, God is holy, and there is nothing strange about Him punishing sinners for their sin. Nothing is strange about that. But the reality is, what shocks and offends us is the suddenness and the violence of it. We don't like it. We don't like it. And when we find these kind of things in Scripture, you know - people are always looking for an explanation: "Oh, that's the God of the Old Testament." Listen, the God of the Old Testament is the God of John 3:16. It is the God who so loved the world. It's the same God.

Sodom and Gomorrah. Let's think about Sodom and Gomorrah. Okay, that's Old Testament. Yes, it is. It is precisely that. You know what we read? You don't need to turn here. It says, "The Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire... from the Lord out of Heaven." It says this, "Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord..." Where he had pleaded with the Lord not to destroy them if righteous could be found there. "And he looked down towards Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace." Again, this is not fiction. Oh, the world would have us think so. It's not a fairy tale.

And let me tell you something, we have this idea: oh, they're super sinners. Yeah, you just remember what Jesus said. He said if you heard this gospel - my disciples go out, they proclaim this gospel to you and you refuse to hear it, more tolerable for Sodom in that day than for you. Super sinners? You know what Scripture says as well in the New Testament? You've got it in 2 Peter and you've also got it in Jude. You've got this reality. "God by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, He condemned them to extinction." Now listen to this: "...Making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly."

Do you realize you can go to a hospital - it might seem relatively quiet. Our brother Kenny Lee might - you work as a nurse? People die. It may be peaceful. That body is now still. No more heavy breathing; labored breathing. No more groans. No more sighs. From our vantage point, the moment they pass away, there's silence. If you were in their shoes, the moment they pass away, they're met by the same thing Sodom and Gomorrah were met with in this life: fire and brimstone. It just bursts forth on them. You see, when God brings it this side of death so that the fire actually falls or the vengeance falls here, we want an explanation. Explain that hurricane! Explain that earthquake that took those people out! We want God to explain Himself! How could He be so brutal? Listen, all God is doing in those cases is He's backing this thing up into this world by just a few moments. Because this is precisely what's happening to the wicked the moment they pass out of this world. And it's what will happen to you if you pass out of this world without embracing the reality of John 3:16.

Listen, the God of Scripture does not mess around with unrepentant sinners. There may be kindness. Your death sentence might be stayed for a time. but your wrath is building up. Do you know it is the New Testament, not the Old Testament, that says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God? It is the New Testament, not the Old, that says our God is a consuming fire. Beware of the God of Scripture. You do not want to play with Scripture and get to the place where you can yawn at John 3:16. You do so to your own peril. You do well to remember that the term "perish" is found in that verse. (incomplete thought)

Listen, brethren, I can still remember my own experience as a young Christian, first time through the Old Testament. I came across such things as I did not expect to find. I came face to face with the God I had not known prior to that, and I'll tell you, I was shaken. I remember it still vividly. I was in awe. I kept asking: Who is this God? He was not what I expected. Look, I'm not saying it was a bad thing. I'm just saying it rocked my little world. It rocked my small views of God. God's bigness, His terribleness, His holiness. It broke forth in the pages of Scripture. I was filled with fear. The thing was, I wasn't repulsed; I wasn't turned away. I was drawn to it. It made me afraid. But you know what? Over and over and over again, I found that the God of Scripture - this holy, holy, holy God of Scripture - He does violent things to sinful men. Violent things. And it doesn't change today. He has not changed today. He is the same God.

Think of the flood. Just think of the flood. Again, we can get to almost fairy tale status on this thing. God looked at mankind. He saw that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is only evil continuously. Now let me just remind you of something. That is exactly the way He sees unbelievers today as well. Dead in trespasses and sins. There is nothing in man to comply with God's law. He is just as embittered against God and hostile to God and fighting against God - not the god of his imagination. All you have to do - go up and down the street again. Describe the God of Scripture. Describe what I'm saying to you. See how well it's received.

People hate this God of Scripture. They hate it. They hate that there is a God that is going to hold them accountable for their sins.

The flood. God sees the condition of man and He says, "I'm grieved." It says, "The Lord regretted that He had made man on the earth. It grieved Him to His heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out man who I have created from the face of the land.'" All those people. What about their feelings? Do you realize if you wipe that family out the children will not graduate from high school and college? They'll never get to be married? I'm never going to get to enjoy my grandkids. See, that's how we think, like we're entitled to these things. And when God doesn't let us have those things, it's like, "Explain Yourself, God!" "I want an explanation!" There is such an entitlement mindset in this country. We think we are entitled to everything. The flood.

You know, man just imagines, God just wants me to be happy. He'd never cast me in hell. One of my close family members told me that recently. I told him, you do not have the biblical grounds to divorce your wife. He said, "Tim, I think God just wants me to be happy."

Do you know, we like to ignore certain verses in Scripture. But mark this: those aren't my words; those are God's words: "Mark this, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart." Wow. God speaks like that? Yeah. Psalm 50. You want something from the New Testament? Luke 19: "But as for these enemies of mine who did not want Me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before Me."

I can remember my first time going through the Old Testament, it's like you're going along, and it's all new. Here's Aaron. God's got all the garments and their vesture. The sons - they have their assignments and the offerings they need to make. And they're going along and whoof! Fire comes out, and Aaron's two oldest sons are gone. Can you imagine? Can you imagine if you're Aaron and you're looking at what probably his two sons looked like? I mean, you imagine enough fire to come out from God to kill them. How much fire does it take to kill a person? They got that dose and probably more. And that's what they looked like. Have you ever seen somebody burned? Not just anybody. This isn't a paramedic showing up at a car accident. These are your two oldest sons. Do you know what it says? It says that Aaron held his peace. Why? Because His sons were not innocent, and that's the problem. None of the sons of Adam ever are. We act as though we have a right to something. Do we not remember? "The soul that sinneth must die." The first time we sinned, we lost the right to everything. We lost rights to mercy, to grace, to compassion, to God's kindness. We forfeited it all. And yet we forget that. And so when violent things happen; when God breaks out; when His providence takes - we get shocked! And sinners get offended. That's what happens.

Do you know what Nadab and Abihu did? They offered strange fire in their censers. Unauthorized. They just simply offered something that God hadn't told them to offer. You say, ah, they were young, they were being creative. It's not like they were sacrificing humans on the altar or anything. You know what? You know what the problem with sin is? It falls short of the glory of God. And what God said there was, "I will be honored." You see, sin dishonors Him. Because sin says, "No, God! No!" "It doesn't matter that You told me that I should love my wife and that I should not separate what God has joined together. You know what? I want a God that I think just wants me to be happy. And I really don't care that God told me that He hates divorce." See, that's how man is. You just create this god - create this god... God says, "I will be honored." Such a measure of punishment - it shakes us! Really? God killed them? God killed

them on the spot! But the case was clear, and that's why Aaron was silent. And I'll tell you, I cannot tell you how many times going door to door, evangelizing on the streets, probably even sometimes people who visit this church - they so boldly say, "Well, when I stand before God on judgment day, I'm going to tell Him..." Yeah. All you have to do go read these accounts and you know that's not going to happen. They're going to be just like Aaron. Because they're going to know. That's judgment day. Silence. All these braggarts and boastfuls who think they're going to talk. They don't know. Sinners are not going to have an answer.

You remember Korah? Korah. He had Dathan and Abiram. Remember the 250 people? 250 men. Prominent men. They're saying, "Moses, Aaron, who are you guys?" These guys were of the Levitical line saying, "We're holy too." The ground opened up and swallowed some of them. Fire came out and consumed 250 of them. But you know what, more than that? You know what God said? God said, "Moses, Aaron, step aside from the whole congregation. I'm taking them all out." Have you ever noticed how many times in Exodus and Numbers especially, that God said, "Moses, aside. I'm taking out all of them." Moses played the intercessor.

Of course, there's Uzzah. I know about Uzzah now. Of course, I read R.C. Sproul's book on the holiness of God and he talks all about that. But the first time I was reading through my Bible, I didn't know about Sproul's book. I didn't know about that account. And you're reading along - everything's great! They're bringing the ark back in and David is coming to the throne. The ark has been recovered, and everything is good. They're dancing and they're playing all the instruments. What happened? I'll tell you what happened, that ark was on an ox cart and the ox stumbled. The Ark of the Covenant was in danger of coming off or upsetting. Something. Something that caused a knee-jerk reaction on the part of Uzzah. He put out his hand and steadied the ark, and God killed him on the spot. What do you think? Overreaction? The reality was it was a death penalty to even look upon the ark. The ark was never supposed to be transported uncovered. It was never supposed to be transported in an ox cart - only by hand with poles through the rings. The real miracle is that God did not kill them all. Because they all were guilty of capital crimes.

But you see, it's Uzzah that gets our attention. That's how it is. We read: "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated." "Ahh! God hates Esau! I'm offended! How could He do that?" That's how we are. It doesn't blow us away that God would actually love a sinner. If you really start thinking what sin is - the crime that it is, the wickedness that it is, and how it insults this holy God. Listen, God is not in debt to us. Not to a single one of us. Our right to life was forfeited the moment we sinned. We have a right to one thing: fire. Destruction. That's our right.

You see, the problem is, we live in a climate today where people demand a god who is all love and all kindness. That's the truth. You know it is. And it affects us too in the church. Now, the glory is this God - He does have such a love that He would look at the plight of sinners and say, "I'm willing at the price and the cost of My own Son to save sinners." But you see, that becomes so precious against this black backdrop of these storm clouds.

If you've ever taken a hose and you know you spray it in the air and you get the rainbow... that's a clear blue sky. And you try to look at that against that backdrop. It's not as impressive. There's beauty there. But when you look up and the sky is black, and there's this rainbow. See, the beauty just becomes so vivid.

God killed Nadab. He killed Abihu. He killed Uzzah. He killed Sodom. He killed Gomorrah. He killed those people in the outlying parts. When they didn't trust Him, He said every one of you, 20 years old and up except Caleb and Joshua, you're dead. Your bodies are going to fall dead in this wilderness. And they did. They did. God punishes sin.

We are on death row. Our time here - short. What you need to remember is this: The very fact you can sin and you're not consumed by a ball of fire, it's God's kindness. But you need to read that kindness right. That kindness is not meant to tell you that God has forgotten your sin. Or that He doesn't mean to deal with it. That kindness is for one reason. It is meant to lead you to repentance. It is meant for you to look and say: "Oh... God has spared me when I don't deserve to be spared. That is a good indication that He will receive me and forgive all of my sin if I embrace this Christ - His own Son, the Son of God, who He didn't spare, but He offered Him up."

Listen, God did it. God killed these people. And God will kill us. We look at ourselves and we feel like - we love ourselves. We want to preserve ourselves. We want to protect ourselves. We don't like to imagine that God is going to do terrible harm to us. We tend to like to imagine that He won't. Somehow He must like us. There's only one way of acceptance with God, and that is under the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. It's embracing Christ. No confidence in anything else. It's embracing Him. God so loved... but listen. Perishing is in that verse. And if you do not believe in Jesus Christ, you perish. That's the reality. There's one way of escape. Only one. I'll tell you, grace should surprise us.

And one of the things, when we think about the wrath of God, the fury of God just exploding, don't miss it that there at the cross, we see the most violent expression of God's fury ever known. Listen, it shouldn't stagger us that Uzzah reaches out, touches that ark, and drops dead. What should stagger us is that an innocent Man - do you know what happened with Him? God's wrath exploded on Him. An innocent Man. He was accursed because He became sin; because He became sin. Sin. Sin. Think with me. It causes God to incinerate sinners on the spot. What do you think happens to Christ when He becomes sin? God incinerated Him on the spot. You read Psalm 22. He melted. Melted. Isaiah 53. God laid into Him. Struck Him. Smote Him. An innocent Man. Why? God's justice must be satisfied. There was no mercy on the cross. No mercy. That's how hell is. There is no mercy. That's what sin deserves. Hell is going to be a brutal awakening for millions and millions of human beings who are going to be unspeakably wretched forever. Hell - we are so humanistic; so man-centered. Hell tells us there is a holy God in whose eyes we are dreadfully guilty. And we do forget. We so easily forget that when we committed our first sin, we just forfeited every right to anything.

Listen. God is saying to us: "Don't take My grace for granted. Don't take My Son for granted. I have such a love that I crushed My own Son. I was willing to do that for sinners. But if you despise Him, oh, it will not go well with you." Listen. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Just cast yourself wholly on Christ. If you're not saved, this verse - this whole book is a lie and God is a liar. But that can never be. God is no liar. The reality is God is kind and He is willing to save. He is willing to not spare His own Son. This is the sort of God that we have. This is the sort of God who though His anger burns ever so fiercely, there's also a love that designs a way for that wrath to be satisfied in just fashion. For God to be just and yet justify you. And

everything is good. Whoever. That's what it says. Whoever believes. You can't be too old. You can't be too young. You can't be too wretched. You can't be too sinful. You can't have sinned for too long. Whoever believes should not perish. It's all gone. But, have eternal life. Not just to live forever, it's to be swept into the very intimacy of God. Knowing God. Beholding His face. All the tears wiped away. All the sins wiped away. And coming to know Him through all these coming ages. You think about it. That truth there. Do you remember it? Ephesians 1. "That through all the coming ages, He might show the unsearchable riches of His grace in kindness to those in Christ Jesus."

Father, that You would do such a thing for sinners. Just think with the songwriter, what language shall we borrow to thank Thee dearest Friend. Thank You. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You. Amen.