

Why These Scripture Passages Deeply Bothered Francis Chan

I was bothered the first time I read about God killing Uzzah just because he tried to keep the ark of the covenant from falling. Uzzah touched the ark because the cart it was riding on hit a pothole (2 Sam. 6). It seemed like a trivial mistake with good intentions. Sure, God had forbidden anyone from touching the ark, but what was Uzzah supposed to do? Let the holy ark of God fall to the ground?

Isn't it a little puzzling that King Saul's sacrifice cost him the kingdom (1 Sam. 13)? After all, he waited seven days for Samuel the priest to come and make the offering, but Samuel didn't show up when he said he would. To me, it seems noble that Saul offered the sacrifice because he didn't want to go to war without first acknowledging God. Now the kingdom would be torn from him?

Or what about Moses, who didn't get to see the promised land because he struck the rock rather than speaking to it (Num. 20)? After everything Moses went through, was it such a big crime to be frustrated with the people and strike the rock in anger?

Then there are Ananias and Sapphira. They were both struck dead because they lied about how much money they donated to the church (Acts 5). And this is in the New Testament! Really, who hasn't exaggerated?

To top it off, Paul told the Corinthians that many of them were sick and some had even died because they celebrated Communion in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:30). If Paul wasn't exaggerating, could we be one sip away from death?

To us, many situations in Scripture involve a punishment that was too severe for the crime. But why do we feel this way?

We don't understand what it means for something to be "sacred." We live in a human-centered world among people who see themselves as the highest authority. We are quick to say things like "That isn't fair!" because we believe we deserve certain rights as humans. Yet we give little thought to the rights God deserves as God. Even in the church, we can act as though God's actions should revolve around us. The stories in Scripture are meant to show us that there exists something of greater value than our existence and rights. There are things that belong to God. Sacred things. His ark of the covenant, His command to Moses, His offerings in the temple, His Holy Spirit, His Holy Communion, His sacred church.

In all the above situations, people rushed into something sacred and paid the price. We shouldn't be surprised; we should be humbled. We have all done things more irreverent than those mentioned above. Let's thank God for His mercy and tread more carefully into sacred matters.

Rushing Into the Sacred

We live in a world where people carelessly rush into things. If we don't rush, we will be passed up and miss out. So we frantically follow the pattern of the world and ignore the fact that God calls us to act differently. Productivity is no sin, but when it comes to the sacred, God commands us to proceed with caution. Others may treat these things as common, but we cannot. While others quickly judge God's actions and question His commands, we are to be careful even to speak His name. We don't carelessly question His actions or inaction. Instead, we pray, "Hallowed be Your name" (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2). While others rush into prayer with opinions and demands, we cautiously approach His throne in reverence. Like the high priest entering the holy of holies, we are to treat prayer as sacred.

Guard your steps when you enter the house of God, and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools,

for they do not know that they are doing evil. Do not be quick to speak with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God.

For God is in heaven, and you are on the earth; therefore may your words be few. For a dream comes when there is a great burden, and a foolish voice when there are many words (Eccl. 5:1-3).

Sacred Mystery

There is no greater honor on earth than to be part of God's church.

When was the last time you were awestruck by the fact that you are part of Christ's body? Have you ever marveled at this privilege?

"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ cares for the church. For we are members of His body" (Eph. 5:29-30a).

Every believer needs to stare at those verses long enough to be stunned. I mean really stunned. Paul referred to it as a profound mystery. If achievement is your idol, you won't make time for mystery. You will rush to the next sentence so you can finish this book rather than meditate on the miracle that you are a human being who is currently joined to a God "who [lives] in unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16).

"This is a great mystery, but I am speaking about Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32).

Slow down long enough to marvel.

The sun is 93 million miles away, and you are unable to stare at it. You obviously can't touch the sun and live, so how is it possible that we are currently attached to the one who shines brighter than the sun? High angels cover themselves

with their wings in His presence (Isa. 6:2), yet you are a member of His body. Why would someone so extraordinary choose to care for you like His own arm?

Please tell me you didn't just keep reading. Please tell me you paused for even a minute to worship. You can't be that busy. It's no wonder we aren't known as those who "rejoice with joy that is inexpressible" (1 Pet. 1:8). We don't make time to meditate on His mysteries.

A Small Piece of Heaven

You are a part of something much bigger than yourself, something sacred. Through Jesus' sacrifice, you have been joined to His church. Because of this, you are not only a part of God's sacred temple but also a part of the heavenly community. This is huge!

Take some time to read Revelation 4–5 as it describes the scene in heaven. This section begins with a majestic picture of God on His throne. The scene is busy and intense: the four living creatures are declaring His holiness, the seven spirits of God are blazing, myriads of angels are praising Jesus with loud voices and the 24 elders are flat on their faces while laying their crowns before Him. Then in 5:8, we finally appear.

"When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of saints" (Rev. 5:8).

There you are! Did you see it? Those are your prayers in the bowl of incense! Isn't that awesome? We get to be part of this unbelievable scene!

Maybe you feel a bit insulted by this. You're thinking, *That's it? My only part is that my prayers are lumped in with the prayers of all other believers to form a bowl of incense?*

Don't worry—you're also mentioned in verse 13 when your voice joins the chorus of billions.

"Then I heard every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that are in them, saying: 'To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!' (Rev. 5:13).

What is a tremendous, unspeakable honor may feel insufficient for those who are used to being god of their own blogs and Twitter accounts. It feels insignificant to those who have erected their own shrines on Facebook and Instagram, filled with beautiful pictures of themselves.

Herein lies the danger of clamoring for attention: We don't realize that true joy comes from the opposite. Joy comes as we stand among those Jesus has redeemed and get lost in a sea of worship, becoming fully a part of something sacred.

Gathering with the church should lead us to holy ground. You get to come and worship someone else, with someone else. You get to pour out love to Him by serving those around you and considering them more important than yourself. It's not about you. And you are glad it's not about you.

Because this is something far greater than you.

It is sacred. {eoa}

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