

# Taking God Out of the Box

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 15 January 2022

Preacher: Chris Thornton

[ 0 : 00 ] Scripture reading comes from 1 Samuel chapters 4 and 5. Please follow along on the screen, in your bulletin, or your own Bible. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines.

They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistine encamped at Aphek. The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about 4,000 men on the field of battle.

And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.

So the people sent to Shiloh, and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord, a host. He was enthroned on a cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

As soon as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?

[ 1 : 27 ] And when they learned that the ark of the Lord had come to the camp, the Philistines were afraid. For they said, A God has come into the camp. And they said, Woe to us, for nothing like this has happened before.

Woe to us. Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. Take courage and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you.

Be men and fight. So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, and thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell.

And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head.

When he arrived, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road, watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out.

[ 2 : 46 ] When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, What is this uproar? Then the man hurried and came and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were set so that he could not see.

And the man said to Eli, I am he who has come from the battle. I fled from the battle today. And he said, How did it go, my son?

He who brought the news answered and said, Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.

As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died. For the man was old and heavy.

He had judged Israel forty years. Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth.

[ 4 : 00 ] For her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death, the women attending her said to her, Do not be afraid, for ye have born a son. But she did not answer or pay attention.

And she named the child Ishabod, saying, The glory has departed from Israel, because the ark of God had been captured, and because her father-in-law and her husband.

And she said, The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured. When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod, then the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it up beside Dagon.

And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.

But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold.

[ 5 : 11 ] Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon, our God.

This is the word of God. Great. Thank you so much, Celeste, for reading to us. I know it's a long passage that we're looking at. As we go through Samuel, some of these are going to be longer passages, but it's really important for us to actually hear God's word in full.

We've actually going to, I'm going to summarize some of the last part because we haven't looked at all of it. But I hope actually, as we're back on Zoom again, that we can actually just still our hearts to really hear what God wants to say to us this morning.

I don't know what kind of day you've had. I don't know what kind of morning you've had. I had a little bit of a crazy morning with my kids. But actually, Jesus is still on the throne. Whether we're gathering physically or whether we're on Zoom, Jesus is still here with us.

[ 6 : 31 ] So let me just pray for us as we get into God's word and invite him to speak to us. Father, we thank you that you are not the God that we imagine you to be.

You're not the God that we try and make you to be, but you're a God who's so much better than you, than we think you are. And I pray today, even as we look at this tricky passage where there's a whole load of stuff, even about judgment.

And Lord, I pray that we would see you for who you really are, that you would come and open our eyes to see that we don't come before you casually, but we come before you joyfully because you're a God who is so awesome and yet so present and so merciful and gracious.

So speak to us, we pray. Amen. In Jesus' mighty name. Amen. Great. Great to see a lot of you. I can see, I saw Jesse and Victoria earlier.

I saw the Yangs and Edward and Ada and a few others. Great to see you. So we're continuing in our series in Samuel. And today's going to be, there's a challenging passage in many ways.

[ 7 : 48 ] But as I start, I was reading a professor from New York University. He's an atheist and he's a very prominent philosopher called Thomas Nagel.

And he said this, he said, I want atheism to be true. It isn't just that I don't believe in God. It's that I hope there is no God. I don't want there to be a God.

I don't want the universe to be like that. Now, I actually appreciate his honesty because what he's saying is how we view God is often less to do with our kind of rational arguments that we live by, but more to do with the desires that we have in our hearts.

An atheist like Nagel might not want God to exist so his life can carry on without interference. Or a religious person might want God to exist but to be the kind of God that they want rather than the God that he actually is.

I was talking to Alan in the week and he told me in Nepalese culture, the Nepalese church is fine with a God of judgment, but they have real problems with a God of mercy and forgiveness and grace.

[ 8 : 58 ] I've spoken to some other people who said to me, yeah, I believe in a God of compassion and forgiveness, but I don't like this kind of God and this stuff about a God of judgment. You see, today's passage is difficult for many of us because it calls us to stop making God in our own image.

It calls us to take God for who he really is, not for who I want him to be, you want him to be, or your culture wants him to be because actually who he really is is a place of life and a place of blessing better than we can ever conjure up for ourselves.

And so this series we're looking at in 1 Samuel, we've seen how the real theme that's going through is how man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. God raises up the humble who turn to him and he brings down the proud who trust in themselves.

And we've seen that with Hannah, who was honored as she ran with desperation to God and God provided her with a son. We've seen that with Samuel, the little boy, but actually he was listening to God's word and how God honors him as the last judge of Israel and how God has promised to bring down the sons of Eli and Eli himself and his household because they were dishonoring God and treating his word with contempt.

And today in chapters four through to seven, this is the kind of block we're gonna look at, we see how God plays out his promises of what he had said to the sons, how his judgment comes.

[10:27] So he removes the weeds from the garden of Israel so that new life and new flowers can flourish and blossom in the kingdom and the new king can come. So I'm gonna look at three things.

I'm gonna look at putting God in a box and then when God breaks the box and then our response to that. So let's start off, putting God in a box. And so I encourage you to have the passage in front of you.

I'm just gonna pull through a few key verses to show you what's going on. So background, Israel has been in an on and off conflict with the tribes of the Philistines and it's been going on throughout the book of the Judges and now they're back on the battlefield again.

And this time they suffer a crushing defeat. And in the book of Judges, which were dark times, when they were kept defeating, even then the people would actually cry out to God and God would come and deliver them.

But here we see the Israelites don't do that at all because we see the Israelites are users of God, not those who turn to God.

[11:38] And so here we see verse three. Their response is, why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? That's a good reflection question.

And notice they say, why has the Lord defeated us? Not the Philistines defeated us. Because you see defeat in battle in those times was seen as either a sign of the weakness of your God or a sign that your God was displeased with you.

And here we see the Israelites see that their God, Yahweh, is not happy with them. But how do they respond? Do they repent? Do they go back to see what does God require of us? No, they come up with their own little fix, their own plan to deal with the situation.

Verse three continues. Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.

Well, just stop and think about it. What is the ark of the covenant? If you know your Old Testament, you know the ark was a wooden box overlaid with gold, which symbolized the footstool of the throne of God himself.

[12:51] It's the throne of the Lord of hosts. And that means the God of the heavenly armies, the all-powerful one. This is a sign of his rule. And it's a holy thing.

Numbers four tells us that no one was to look at it. It was meant to be kept hidden behind a curtain in the tabernacle, in the holiest place, and treated with great reverence because it shows the presence of God himself.

And it's the ark of the covenant of the Lord. And so inside were the Ten Commandments, the tablets of the Ten Commandments, showing that God's covenant with his word, with his people, is right at the center of a relationship with him.

And then on the very top was what's called the mercy seat. And this is the place where the high priest would come in and would offer blood from the sacrifice of an animal to bring forgiveness and cleansing for the people's sin.

You see, the ark was about God's holy rule, his presence. It's about his covenant through his word. And it's about the place of forgiveness and reconciliation to a sinful people.

[13:56] It's a highly significant thing. And so the Israelites, they figure, well, this box is from the Lord of hosts, God of the armies. So like Joshua defeated Jericho when he took the ark before him, let's bring out our secret weapon, carry out the ark, out of the tabernacle, put it on the battlefield, and ya-ra-ra, we're going to win this thing.

And do you see who's actually organizing the whole thing? It's da-da-da, the sons of Eli. Remember them? Okay, they're the ones who just treated God with utter contempt.

They had taken and used their position, priestly position, to get for themselves, sleeping with all the women around, because it was all about them, their whole religion. And yet, they're organizing the whole of this, and the Israelites go wild.

They're excited. They're now confident they've got their box with them. Okay? God's going to come and defeat the Israelites, Philistines for them. But it's all a load of hot air, because they have literally put God in a box to use him to get them out of trouble, but they don't actually want him for who he really is.

You see, isn't that actually sometimes what we often do? You know, we can have problems at work, or you've got a job interview, or you've got a health crisis, and suddenly, you haven't really been praying very much, you haven't really been engaging with God, but suddenly, your prayer life just takes off.

[15:31] You're kind of at church, you're really trying to do whatever it takes that you can get from God the answer that you need. And then, when he fixes your situation, what do we do? What happens to our prayer life?

Suddenly, we go back to what we always were. We just kind of move on. We kind of put God back in the box. You know, we kind of wheel him out, like giving us some lincey, for New Year, like an elderly relative, and then wheeling him back to his nursing home, leaving him there, ignoring him for the rest of the time until we need him again.

I don't know if you've ever felt used by someone, but it's not nice. Because when we do that, we're not seeking the holy God of the universe in relationship with him.

We're using him, putting him in a box, and that's actually contempt of God. And the thing this passage is going to show us is God will not be put in a box. That's the Israelites.

They're religious users. But then, let's look at the pagan, the Philistines. They are pagan refusers. Because what do they do as the ark comes out? They go, a God has come into the camp.

[16:39] Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? You see, they've actually got more reverence for this than the Israelites. They've heard of the power of this God. They've heard of the victory over the Egyptians.

But they don't go, wow, let's just surrender before this awesome, powerful God. Instead, they go, take courage, be men of Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you.

Be men and fight. You see, they've heard this God, but they, like Thomas Nagel, don't want him to be their God. They prefer their idols because they think they're going to lose their freedom if they surrender to him.

They'll become slaves and restricted. And so they refuse God and they actually fight against him. Because you see, some of us may be users, some of us may be refusers.

But the result of this is bad. Israel is demolished by the Philistines. 30,000 dead, Eli's son's dead, the ark of the covenant of God captured, and Eli waits trembling to hear the news.

[17:51] Remember, in chapter 2, verse 34, God had promised him that both of his sons would die on the same day. The news, when the news came of their death, it didn't shock him.

What did shock him was the news that the ark of God's presence had gone, had been captured. And it kills him, literally. He falls over backwards and he dies.

And it says, because the man was old and heavy. And actually, it's a play on words here, because the word for heavy is the word kabod, kabod in Hebrew.

It's actually the same word for glory. See, the glory of God in the Old Testament is his weightiness, his substance, that when he speaks, there is power and weight behind who he is.

But Eli, in honoring his sons above God, you see, he had lived for his own kabod, his own glory, and it ends up killing him. That's really sobering.

[18:53] And then, his daughter-in-law hears the news, and it gets even worse, because she goes into labor and she dies, proclaiming, in the name of her son, she says, her son is called Ichabod, kabod, same word, saying, the glory, kabod, has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.

You see, literally, she says, the glory has gone into exile. But do you know she was wrong? God's glory and God's presence didn't depart from them when the ark left.

The glory of God had long since departed because Israel had long since departed from honoring their God. And the amazing thing is this, the pagan news at the time, would have gone, Yahweh

defeated, Dagon, the Philistine god, reigns supreme, because warfare shows whose God is strongest.

But God doesn't work in our ways. You see, man looks at the outward appearance of defeat, but God was fulfilling his promise to Eli, he was bringing an end to the family's corrupt rule, and he was wiping the slate clean to prepare for a fresh, clean start that he wanted to bring.

God's judgment clears the dead branches out so that new life can come. A scholar named Dale Ralph Davis said this, a very challenging quote, he says, Yahweh will suffer shame rather than allow you to carry on a false relationship with him.

[ 20 : 31 ] He will allow you to be disappointed with him if it will awaken you to the sort of God that he is. You know, when I was in the UK, where I studied, the university, many of the lecture halls and the drama studio and even flats were actually old church buildings which had closed and they'd been taken over.

And many people I heard lamented, oh, the glory departed when the building shut. No, the glory doesn't depart then. It departed long before when people had treated God as a user and weren't lovers of him.

You see, God may, and this is challenging, but this is what the passage is saying, God may allow your plans, he may allow your prayers, he may even allow his church to be defeated to wake us up to who he really is.

And you know, I've talked to people who say things like, I used to pray before job interviews and every time I prayed, God gave me the job, but I prayed this time and I didn't get the job. Like, what went wrong?

Like, what's the point in praying? But maybe we've made God our genie, we've put him in a box, he is so gracious to us, but sometimes he'll disappoint us so that we come to him for him, we come to him for his face, not just for his hand of what he's going to give us.

[ 21 : 55 ] So that we learn how to honour him as the holy God, the sovereign God, the gracious God, but who God really is not to use him. That's the first thing.

When we put God in a box. But the second thing is this. When God breaks the box. And I love this, this is kind of, I'd love to see this acted out, but maybe Annabelle and Justin can do this for us later. But just when Yahweh seems down and out for the count, God proves that he's still on the throne. Do you remember in chapter 2, Hannah's prayer says, the adversaries of the Lord will be broken in pieces.

And so what happens? Verse 5, sorry, chapter 5, verse 1 and 2. When the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. And then the Philistines took the Ark of God and they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon.

See, remember, I said warfare was a battle of gods. And so when pagans won a victory, pagan nations won a victory over another nation, what would they do? They would bring the image of that nation's god and like a hunter's trophy cabinet, they'd put it in their temple to show, look at all the people we've defeated.

[ 23 : 13 ] It was, because you know, refusers, when they seem successful, they love to mock and to look down on those who seem defeated and weak. But here's what I love. I love this part. And when, this is verse 3, when the people of Ashdod rose early next day, okay, they're probably like kind of, a bit kind of cocky after the victory of the day before, they walk into their temple and it says this, behold, Dagon had fallen face down on the ground before the Ark of the Lord.

You see, what's happening is Dagon is literally prostrate on the floor before the Ark of Yahweh. That's actually how people used to work, worship. If you see how Muslims pray, that's how people would do it.

Dagon is worshipping Yahweh. It's kind of comical. It's tragic. And so, what do the people do? They go, oh, do they repent? No. They prop their idol back up into their place.

And so, what does it say? They took Dagon, put him back in his place, and the next morning, okay, what happens? Behold, Dagon had fallen face down on the ground before the Ark of the Lord.

And now, the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. Do you get the message?

[ 24 : 33 ] Okay? Your idols suck. That's what he's saying. Okay? What you think is the source of your success actually is just a museum piece. because anything you trust in, anything you give glory to for your success or for anything in your life other than God himself will ultimately at some point be exposed and brought low and been shown for a dead, worthless idol for what it really is.

You see, you haven't kind of COVID and even you think back to like the financial crisis in 2008 and a thousand other things shown us things like we're not in control. Our plans are not God.

Yet how many of us kind of, we continue to prop that idol back up in its place, you know, trust our own plans, our own abilities, our own success for what can make us through. And you know, God is sometimes so gracious to us to actually smash our plans, to actually smash the things we trust into pieces to wake us up to see that his holiness is the source of life that you are craving for and longing for.

He is the source of everything that you ultimately desire. He is our oxygen. He is our life. And he keeps going, come to me. I want to give you life.

Let me show you that, you know, that your kind of, your self-made snorkels don't work in deep water. Let me show you, come to me.

[ 26 : 06 ] But if you, like the Philistines and like a diver who continually refuses, no, I don't want your oxygen. I don't want your oxygen. I can do it by myself. I'm going to cut the line. Trust yourself.

At some point, God will not force his life upon us. And we will die cut off eternally from God if we continually, continually refuse him.

And you can't go, well, God's just mean, isn't he? No, if you choose to go, hey, I want my life, my way, not his way, he will eventually hand us over to the consequences of our choices.

And even if you're a believer, you're not going to, there's not a place of eternal death, but actually he can wake us up through bringing consequences of our decisions to us. you know, Paul in the Romans says the wages of sin is death.

God says, don't walk away from me. And what happens is God brings a deadly plague on the Philistines. It's quite heavy in many ways.

[ 27 : 13 ] And that's where we got up to in the reading. Because actually scripture is really clear. All of us at some point are users or refusers of God. at some point. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the kavod, the glory of God.

We all of us have not treated God as God in some way. And all of us experience our sin and at some point experience the consequences when we get exposed and God exposes us in different ways.

And God is gracious to bring our idols to fail. But when you feel the consequences of your sin, do you know what users and refusers do? They either become self-atoners or they become minimizers and deniers of their sin.

And here's where chapter 6 comes into play. We didn't read this but here's where chapter 6 kind of picks up the story and I'm going to go quickly and summarize this.

But what happens is the Philistines seek to self-atone and remove the consequences by appeasing God. So they produce a guilt offering for God.

[ 28 : 22 ] And that's good. Scripture tells you that sin requires a guilt offering for healing. But what offering do they bring? Do they bring a sacrifice of an animal blood to God's altar as he required?

No. They actually say this and this is verse 5. They say you must make images the word is idols of your tumors and images idols of your mice that's actually rats that ravage the land and give glory to the God of Israel perhaps he will lighten his hands off you and your gods and your land.

Do you see what they're doing? They feel the consequence of their sin on them. Okay. And so they're appeasing God by making golden idols of boils and rats.

That's just gross. In fact in scripture it's unclean all of it. And they're putting them they put them on a cart next to the holy ark of God and they think that these disgusting images in some way are going to please this God.

And they send it back with the ark and kind of hope that they've just kind of removed the consequences they can get on with their lives and their gods and all the other stuff. Because you see this is them self-atoners making up trying to remove the consequences of their sin while still trying to stay in control without coming to God on his terms.

[ 29 : 48 ] You know I've got friends who self-harm and you know self-harm is a way to try and remove feelings of guilt and shame through shedding our own blood.

It's a form of self-atonement and it's devastating. It feels good for a moment but it leaves scars. But it's I think we can do that also psychologically too.

You know I talked to a lady who said I know God forgives me but I can't forgive myself for what I've done. You know what she's saying is sure I understand the idea that God forgives but that's not

enough so I've got to self-atone by being really hard on myself.

Thinking that maybe the worse or the more guilty I feel the more likely God is to forgive you or to get you out of it. That's actually psychological self-harm. Some of us self-atone by serving or doing charity.

Others through confessing your sin in CG removing the guilty feeling you just had a nice therapy session in your CG and then you go away and you just carry on with the rest of your life and then you come back again next week just confess the same thing but you have no sense of actually trying to really change or to make any difference in your life.

[ 31 : 00 ] It's actually a form of self-atonement. Remove the consequences of sin without running to God to truly cleanse you from your sin and to truly change you so that you want him for him.

Now that's what the Philistines do self-atonement. The Israelites they do something else. When the ark returns they are ones who minimize or fail to own their sin.

The ark gets back and the Israelites don't kind of repent sorry God we've just been users of you. No they go oh everything's fine the ark's back let's have a party.

They sacrifice the cows when only bulls were meant to be sacrificed. They put the ark on a huge stone for everyone to look at when actually it was meant to be hidden and treated respect behind the curtain of the tabernacle.

God is still in their box. They're still users after all that has happened to them and the judgment of God comes upon them and death comes upon them and they go oh this is a problem.

[ 32 : 03 ] Who is able to stand before the Lord this holy God? Okay that's a great question. Psalm 24 says yeah only those who've got a pure heart and clean hands. And so they don't go let's repent.

They go oh to whom shall he go up away from us? Let's get rid of him. We don't want him. Okay. We don't want him because he doesn't fit in our box. You see when self-atoners and minimizers still have God in their box they do so because they don't realize that when you come to God on his terms when you let him break your box you can quit being hard on yourself.

You can quit all your self-atonement. You can quit denying or minimizing your sin because he has made a way to face it fully and to remove all of your sin and consequences.

Because the crazy thing in the story is the whole way along the top of this holy ark of the covenant which has been with the Israelites which has been with the Philistines all along was the mercy seat where through the blood of an animal sacrifice the people would be cleansed forgiven healed and could experience God's blessing into their life again.

And we know as Christians if you kind of fast track the story those of us who've been in Watermark a while we know that actually we have a new covenant that's the ark of the old covenant that we have a new covenant in Jesus' blood which as we celebrate communion later we're celebrating this new covenant which is sealed with Christ came to die to atone for every ounce of God's judgment on us every ounce of all need for self-atonement removed because Jesus paid it all.

[ 33 : 56 ] He drained every morsel and every drop of it. There's nothing but grace left it's a throne of grace Hebrew says for those who come to it and who come to him.

God's mercy triumphs over judgment for those who come to God in his way not in our way. His forgiveness is total. No believer needs to live in a cringing fear that God is somehow going to condemn you God is somehow going to be disappointed in you God is somehow going to turn his back on you you haven't done enough for him because if you run to the one who wants to give you oxygen and life he's not withholding it from you he's been wanting to give it to you all along. Nothing delights him more than when sinners come and repent before him. He delights to call us his beloved sons and daughters and the only condition to receive mercy is to quit using and quit refusing God and return to God on his terms with empty hands in repentance.

20 years later chapter 7 Samuel finally appears he hasn't been anywhere in these last two chapters he finally appears and he calls the people back to relationship to himself.

7 verse 3 says this he says if you are returning to the Lord with all your heart put away the foreign gods the Ashteroth that's an idol from among you and direct your heart to the Lord not just to use him not just to refuse him but to actually want him and do you know what they did?

[ 35 : 42 ] I mean this is like one of the highlights of the book of Samuel it's like the one of the few times to actually do something right so the people of Israel they put away the Baals and the Ashteroth and they served the Lord only you see what happens revival begins to break out in the people of Israel and God brings them the very victory over the Philistines that they had wanted all along because finally they've woken up to see that when you love God for God when you honestly

turn to him he can deal with everything else in our lives when you come in his way there is life there is life there is life what does this mean for us?

here's the final thing we're going to take communion actually in a second and that's that symbol I said of the presence of a holy God with us bringing us this incredible forgiveness through Jesus death as the only way that you can come to God do you know some of us don't truly enjoy communion and everything it represents we don't truly enjoy and get excited at the grace of God because you read passages about judgment like this in the Bible and because of upbringing you've had or experiences you've had we know theoretically that God loves us and that Jesus forgives us we kind of know that because you've been in church a while but we still put God in this box of harsh or hard or demanding or disappointed but you know God so loved the world that he sent Jesus to die for you not to forgive you theoretically but to smash that box it's actually a false idol it's a false image it's an idol the box that God is harsh towards you that's maybe your parents that's maybe your culture but it's not God he wants you to come to him as you come to communion firstly to repent of all the ways that we try and self-atone be totally honest and real before him about sin don't have any hiding and when you do that you can find the most joy filled freedom that there is full forgiveness for you every time you confess sin let me tell you never just confess sin and confess sin always finish thanking God that it is dealt with and don't take it up and don't you know that phrase in that song it says when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin if Satan comes to make you despair you tell him where to go because Jesus has already dealt with it some of you need to hear that some of us need to hear a different message some of us we get God's forgiveness but here's the challenge of the passage we actually take it lightly it doesn't thrill us we come casually to communion we come casually confessing we respond to sermons casually because we don't want to face the cost of change we don't really want

God to be God in every area of our lives John the Baptist says bear fruit in keeping with repentance let's not carry on as users or refusers of God Paul actually says and here's actually we often don't read this part but Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11 some people have died after taking communion because they took it so lightly because they didn't think about the sin of the way they were treating their other relationships and the way they were treating God God says take my discipline seriously it's gracious it's gracious but I want to break the box where you treat me as your mate I'm not a tame lion as C.S. Lewis says in the Chronicles of Narnia but I am good really good so take me for who I am on my terms come and repent and that is where you're going to find life I want you to just take a minute and just think for yourself where are you with God who do you resonate more within this story what's the box that you've placed

God in are you a user are you a refuser if you haven't got the communion elements I encourage you to have them now because we're going to take it in a second but before we do we don't come lightly this is a holy moment this is an awesome moment this is a joyful moment for those who come to God on his terms so let's just really take a moment to actually examine where we are with God how are you viewing him what does your life show you about where you are with him he longs for you to run back if you need to repent just take this time to actually come before him and repent if you're not a believer you need to take seriously who is this God don't make him in your own image you've got to take him as he is will you be like the Philistines or will you be like the Israelites at the end who really do turn and recognise that he is the only one some of you actually need to allow him to just show you his grace maybe you just need to actually open up your hands and release to him some of those boxes that you've placed him in and ask him to change them and break break out of those boxes