

Is God in the Camp? (1 Samuel 4:1b-11 & Colossians 2:6-15)

01-July-2018

We're continuing our series on the OT book of 1 Samuel.

Please have your Bibles turned to 1 Samuel chapter 4 - we're looking at the whole of the chapter

You can take notes on the outline in your bulletin.

Let's pray before we take a look at this passage

Recap

Just a quick recap so far

[PowerPoint 1-Recap]

Recap

- The spiritual leadership of Israel is corrupt
- This leads to spiritual decline of the nation of Israel
- The spiritual leaders of Israel – Eli and his sons Hophni and Phinehas are accountable before God because they are leading the people astray
- So last week we learnt that God calls the young boy – Samuel to be His new priest and prophet & spiritual leader

Let's also remind ourselves of the problem with Eli and his sons anyway,

[PowerPoint 2a-1 Sam 2:29]

From 1 Samuel 2:29 - God says to Eli:

29 Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening

yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?’

And let’s remind ourselves of God’s verdict on this, God promises to cut off Eli’s family line from the priesthood and then in 1 Samuel 2:30b, God says:

[PowerPoint 2b-1 Sam 2:30

Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained [treated with dishonour].

And let’s remind ourselves of God’s judgment on Eli’s sons:

From 1 Samuel 2:34:

[PowerPoint 2c-1 Sam 2:34]

“And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day.

So file God’s promise and judgment away for a moment. They’ll become important in a few minutes as we’ll see

Intro

[PowerPoint 3-Question?]

So a question to begin with this morning [evening]

When does something that seems like a good thing - become a bad thing?

[Example Family Service: My Aunty praying for me – praying to St. Anthony – patron saint of hopeless cases? Should I be flattered because she is praying for me? Or insulted because she thinks I’m a hopeless case? Would does the Bible say about praying to saints? The Bible tells us to pray to Our Father in Heaven, and pray in Jesus’ name...]

[Example Café Church: When I lived in Ireland. It came on the news that there was a statue of Mary in a country church that was weeping tears of water from one eye and tears of blood from the other. It certainly, got many people coming back to church? But what does the Bible say about statutes? From Exodus 20:4-5: You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God...]

I wonder if sometimes we can think we are doing the right thing but actually doing the wrong thing - because our motives are all wrong - and we're not paying attention to what God wants?

Which brings us to our passage from 1 Samuel chapter 4

DANGERS OF SUPERSTITION (1 Samuel 4:1-4)

[PowerPoint 4-Superstition]

We pick up the story where Israel go out to fight one of their arch enemies

The Philistines

And they may have expected to win the battle against the Philistines based on recent history - like in Judges 15 - where the judge, Samson, killed a thousand Philistines with a donkey's jawbone

But not so!

The Philistines defeat the Israelites - with 4000 Israeli men killed (v2)

The problem is the Israelites were taking God for granted

They thought they just needed to show up and God would just automatically make sure they win the battle - after all they are God's people - right?

Is that what the Bible teaches? Just show up and God will do the rest?

(pause)

God's law - given to the people in Moses' time says this from Deuteronomy 6:4-6

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

[PowerPoint 4b-Genie]

So it's not just a matter of showing up - it's a matter of honouring God, worshipping God and obeying God - with a heartfelt love for God

The Israelites have a responsibility

And so do we!

We must not take God for granted

He's not some 'Genie God in a bottle'

(pause)

So the elders of Israel reflect on their defeat in verse 3

Why did the Lord bring defeat on us today?

Oh - so it's God's fault is it?

It never dawned on them that their defeat might be down to them!

Down to their sinfulness

Down to their lack of spiritual worship of God

Down to their lack of obedience and faithfulness to God?

[PowerPoint 4c-Blame]

They were convinced it was the Lord's decision they be defeated and it had nothing to do with the Philistine enemy being better soldiers
 And it didn't occur to them to ask questions about their own attitudes or behaviour or military strategies

We can learn from this too!

Yes - God is in control of all things - but that doesn't mean there are not consequences because of our behaviour and wrong choices!

Example of story of Joseph: Joseph's brothers' sold him to slavery in Egypt - God is in control of Joseph's life - that is a primary cause.

But there are secondary causes - Jacob having Joseph as his favourite son, the brother's jealousy and hatred of Joseph, Potiphar's wife lying about Joseph - none of those decisions are God's

But at the end of the story of Joseph - God used the bad thing that happened to Joseph - to save the people of Egypt and save Joseph's family from starvation

Sometimes instead of looking at the secondary causes - we bypass them and reflect on why God [the primary cause] allowed a particular situation to arise

[PowerPoint 4d-Ark]

In this instance rather than questioning themselves and their actions the Israelites jump to the somewhat superstitious conclusion that what must be missing is the physical symbol of God's presence - the Ark of the Covenant

Let's remind ourselves of the Ark of the Covenant

[PowerPoint 5-Ark Picture]

God made a covenant (an agreement) with the people of Israel through His servant Moses. He promised good to them and their children for generations if they obeyed Him and His laws; but He always warned of despair, punishment, and dispersion if they were to disobey. As a sign of His covenant He had the Israelites make a box according to His own design, in which to place [Exodus 25] the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments. This box, or chest, was called an "ark" and was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. The Ark was to be housed in the inner sanctum of the tabernacle in the desert and eventually in the Temple when it was built in Jerusalem. This chest is known as the Ark of the Covenant.

The real significance of the Ark of the Covenant was what took place involving the lid of the box, known as the "Mercy Seat." The term 'mercy seat' comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to cover, placate, appease, cleanse, cancel or make atonement for." The Mercy Seat represented the presence of God. It was here at the Mercy Seat that the high priest, only once a year (Leviticus 16), entered the Holy of Holies where the Ark was kept and atoned for his sins and the sins of the Israelites. The priest sprinkled blood of a sacrificed animal onto the Mercy Seat to appease the wrath and anger of God for past sins committed. This was the only place in the world where this atonement could take place.

So the Israelites superstitiously thought having the Ark of the Covenant with them was a way of guaranteeing God's help in their battle against the Philistines - like some sort of good luck charm!

God has given symbols and signs which are helpful and a reminder to us:

Like: Baptism - a symbol of the washing away of sin by Jesus' death

Like: Bread and Wine of the Lord's Supper - a symbol of Jesus body and blood

Like: Rainbow - a sign of God's promise never to flood the whole earth again

Like: The Sign of Jonah - empty tomb

Like: The cross of Jesus

We are not to worship those symbols and signs - they are reminder of who God is and what He has done through His Son Jesus and what He expects of us

Perhaps we are guilty of adding our own superstitious practices

Statues and stain glass windows - they're nice - but is there a danger of worshipping them or putting more value in them than God?

Does kneeling and genuflecting make us more holy in God's eyes?

Does singing only psalms without musical instruments make us more Godly?

Should we only be singing older hymns from the Rejoice Presbyterian Hymnbook - that's what Godly people do - right?

Are modern hymns and worships songs with a band and drums - are they distracting or helpful? Are we a better church with them or without them? Are we putting emphasis on music before God?

Does reading the Bible each morning - in the same way we take our medication and vitamin pills - make us closer to God - or does it depend on our motivation in reading the Bible? Is our motivation to tick a box - or is our motivation to genuinely get closer to God and know Him and His Son better?

What about dress code at church? Should the minister wear a collar and robes - does that make Him godlier or a better preacher? Should we wear shorts and t-shirts to church? Are we majoring on minor things rather than majoring on God?

[PowerPoint 6-Challenge]

It's easy for us to get bogged down in all of these signs and symbols - are put more emphasis on them - than on the *real presence of God* - and on the worship of God.

Are we in danger - even as sincere believers - in viewing some of these things in a superstitious way of guaranteeing our spirituality or as a means of getting God's blessings? Is there something we need to confess and repent of this morning [evening]?

(pause)

Back to the story of the Israelites

They sent for the ark in verse 3 and it arrived accompanied by Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas - who no doubt given what we know of their character - are revelling in their role as priests and guardians of the ark

GOD CAN'T BE CONTROLLED BY OUR ACTIONS (1 Samuel 4:5-11)

Picking up from verse 5 then

When the ark arrives in the camp

[PowerPoint 7a-Control]

The people of Israel get excited and enthused by the arrival of the ark

Whereas the Philistines get scared by ark - they recall the historical events of the Egyptian gods being defeated by the 10 plagues sent by Israel's "gods"

Both the Israelites and the Philistines are making the same mistake - thinking it is the *ark* (the object) that has the power - but it's *God's power* not the ark's power

Perhaps we trust in objects or other people's power or our own power - and not fully on God's power?

(pause)

Perhaps we get excited by the power of objects (like money, status, prosperity, position or authority) - rather than being excited by the power and authority of having God in our camp - so to speak?

(pause)

Or perhaps like the Philistines we get frightened by knowing we can't control a particular situation ourselves and we fight even harder to keep it all together - rather than relying fully and totally on God?

(pause)

The Israelite army were ecstatic at the presence of the ark - there was no doubt in their mind their victory was assured

On the other side - the Philistines are terrified - what chance did they have against such powerful magic?

So one army is complacent - and the other army is fighting in desperation

Look at the wording of verse 10:

The Philistines FOUGHT and the Israelites were DEFEATED with no mention of Israel's effort!

The relationship with the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned in verses 3, 4 and 5 - so it should remind us that what God really wanted was Israel to live a life in accordance with the principles of this covenant

[PowerPoint 7b-controlling God]

But instead - there was an assumption that God could be controlled by Israel's actions - their trust was in the presence of the ark and not in God Himself

It is an ongoing temptation for us as believers to think we can control God and manipulate Him to do what we want Him to do - rather than what He plans to do!

As Isaiah 55:8 points out

For my thoughts are not your thoughts neither my ways your ways –
says the Lord

And as Isaiah 55:10-11 say...

¹⁰As the rain and the snow

come down from heaven,

and do not return to it

without watering the earth

and making it bud and flourish,

so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty,

but will accomplish what I desire

and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

God cannot be controlled or manipulated. God's will - will be done - His way!

(pause)

So the Israelites fought against the Philistines again in v10 - fully convinced
God is in the camp!

But the Israelites are defeated!

It's a massive defeat - they lost 30,000 soldiers

[PowerPoint 7c-God promises/prophecies]

God's promises must be fulfilled

Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained [treated with dishonour].

God's prophecy must be fulfilled - Eli's sons - Hophni and Phinehas are killed on same day - just as God said they would be!

Is God in our Camp?

To finish up then

When the Philistines heard that the ark had come into the camp (v6)

They thought **a god** had come into the camp?

When the Israelites brought the ark from Shiloh - they too thought God was in their camp?

We might think the same thing

God is our camp!

How can we be sure God is in our camp?

[PowerPoint 8-Is God in our camp?]

Well - The Mercy Seat on the Ark was a symbolic foreshadowing of the ultimate sacrifice for all sin—by the blood of Jesus on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

Just as there was only one place for atonement of sins in the Old Testament—the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant—so there is also only one place for atonement of sins in the New Testament and in our time now —that one place

for mercy and forgiveness is the cross of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we no longer look to the Ark but to the Lord Jesus Himself as the way to be right with God

[PowerPoint 8b-Jesus=Ark]

The bottom line is that JESUS is now the Ark of the Covenant

He's the presence of God in our lives through His Spirit living in us and through Him interceding for us in Heaven

This passage warns us

Not to take God's gift of Jesus' forgiveness for granted

Not to superstitiously trust in other objects and people ahead of Jesus

Not to forget God is in control

And for us to realize God cannot be manipulated

Our NT reading today - from Colossians 2 - gives us to some timely reminders of how to be sure that God is in our camp?

[PowerPoint 8c-v6-7]

From Colossians 2:6-7

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

[PowerPoint 8d-v8]

And verse 8

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

The bottom line is v14-15

[PowerPoint 8e-v14/15]

¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

God is in our camp - when we believe and trust in Jesus - as our Lord and Saviour

As the hymn goes:

*In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.*

Let's stand and sing together now!