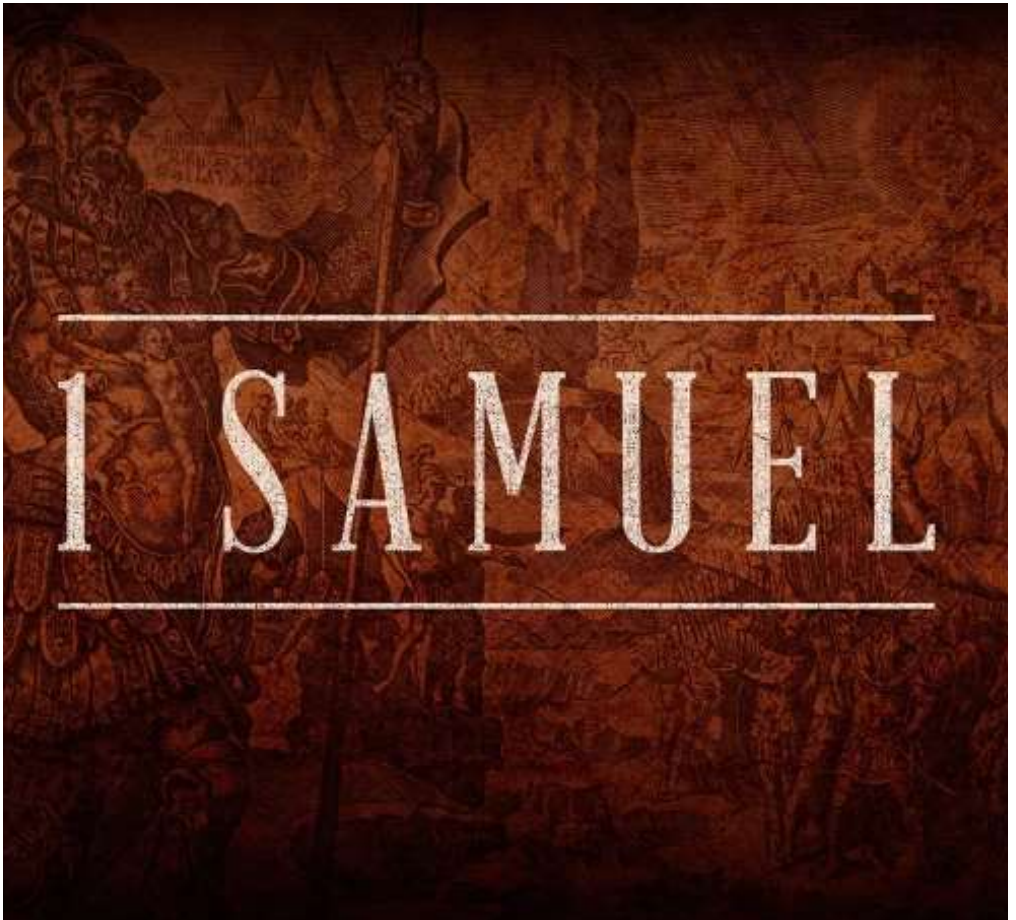


Let's Worship God

18th-23rd May 2020

1 Samuel



1 SAMUEL

Monday - 1 Samuel 4 - Raiders and the Lost Ark

A new section in the story begins in chapter 4. God has placed his priest and prophet, in preparation for raising up his King. Now we come to the story arc about the Ark. I'm stretching the Indiana Jones reference in the title a little. This chapter is about the loss of the Ark of the Covenant, and the Philistine people who capture it are referred to as "raiders". But not until chapter 13! Though, the Indiana Jones reference is not totally useless for anchoring this passage in our consciousness. The object at the centre of chapter 4 is the same object pursued by the Nazis in "Raiders of the Lost Ark". The wooden, gold covered, cherubim topped box was the symbol of three things: God's rule over his people (4:4); God's revelation to his people (the 10 Commandments were kept inside); and God's reconciliation with his people (blood was sprinkled on it to atone for sin). It was kept in the Holy of Holies and only the High Priest could go in to it. And he could only go in once a year. It was Israel's most precious and most holy object. The very symbol of God's presence among them.

In the movie the Nazis are pursuing it because it is believed that "the army that carries the ark before it is invincible." For once Hollywood is not way off the charts. The ark did go into battle before Israel. Each time they moved in the wilderness it went before them with a battle shout, (Numbers 10:35). It crossed the Jordan into the promised land at the head of the people and as they marched round Jericho. As for the belief that the army would thus be invincible, this seems to be behind the actions of God's people in 1 Samuel 4. But as for the Nazis in the film, so it is a cataclysmic miscalculation by God's people. The events of chapter 4 are catastrophic and calamitous, an unprecedented national disaster. This is her greatest defeat in battle thus far. This is the darkest day in the darkest period of her history (the days of the Judges) up to now. This is midnight. The anarchy and depravity of the period of the Judges is encapsulated by the impious and immoral behaviour of the priests Hophni and Phinehas. This chapter is God's response.

Questions

1. Why was the ark so important to Israel?
2. At the same time as raising Samuel up to bless his people, God judges his people by sending this national disaster. What does this teach us about God's ways in the world?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would speak to us of his glory and his wrath as we study this chapter this week.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. Isaiah 48:10-11

Praise: Psalm 78A:1-4 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

1 SAMUEL

Tuesday - 1 Samuel 4:1-11 - The LORD Defeated

It's around 1104BC. The Philistines have been oppressing Israel for 20 years, allowed to by God because of Israel's idolatry. They gather at Aphek, about 20 miles west of Shiloh, Israel's religious centre. It's possible this is retaliation for some of Samson's early maraudings, as Samson and Samuel seem to overlap. Israel camp 2 miles south-east at Ebenezer. The ensuing battle is a disaster for Israel: 4000 are lost. The leaders ask exactly the question they should: v3a. But they don't answer them. Instead they summon the Ark of the Covenant. One writer calls this "rabbit foot theology" - a lucky charm. Maybe they thought they were bringing God to the battlefield. The arrival of the ark has a mighty lifting effect: the earth resounds with the shouts of the army (v5). But it galvanises the Philistines. Though it initially terrifies them, having heard the tales of the Exodus, they use it to motivate them (v9). The arrival of the Ark has the opposite of the intended effect, and the Philistines rout Israel (v10). Thirty thousand are killed, and the writer describes it using the same Hebrew term as Egypt's plagues (v8 & 10 - obscured in translation). But amidst all the corpses, carnage, death and destruction, there is an even greater tragedy: "the Ark of God was captured" (v11).

It's hard to grasp the seismic shock of this comprehensive catastrophe. It looks like God himself has been defeated. It looks like God is now in exile. The symbol of God's power, peace, and presence is under the power of his enemies. We get a sense of it in the grand title given God in v4. "The Ark of the Covenant": the God of love-bound relationship to his people. "The LORD of Hosts": "the God whose universal rule encompasses every host, force and army, heavenly, earthly and cosmic; the God with the total resources of the universe at his command". "Enthroned": reigning and ruling. "On the Cherubim": even magnificent angelic creatures shield their face before him. The lid of this box is his earthly throne. Here in verse 4 is a full description of his glory. Here is the full horror of what has happened: the LORD of Hosts who is enthroned between the cherubim is captured and defeated. Or so it seems for now.

Questions

1. What is the cause of God's "defeat" and shaming among the nations?
2. How do we see a foreshadow of the cross here?

Prayer Points

1. Ask God for a heart sensitive to the dishonour our sin brings him among the nations.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. Isaiah 48:10-11

Praise: Psalm 78A:22-23 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

1 SAMUEL

Wednesday - 1 Samuel 4:11-18 - The LORD Determining

God has been defeated. Or so it seems. But the rest of this mini story about God in exile (chapters 5-7) will show that he is anything but defeated. This in book about the rise of a king who will rule, we see that God rules. Even in seeming defeat and even over his enemies. We have a hint of this in this scene today.

The camera goes from the battlefield to Shiloh, 20 miles east. The narrator tells us with a hint of irony that Eli, who can't see, is watching for news of the Ark of the Covenant. A battle weary messenger comes and word spreads of Israel's defeat. There's a panic. The Philistines are possibly marching on Shiloh. There is archeological evidence of destruction there around this time. Eli, unable to see the dishevelled appearance of the messenger, asks what the outcry is about. The messenger, painfully slowly, reports the bad news: "I have come from the battle. I have fled. The Israelites fled. There has been a great defeat. Your sons are dead. The Ark has been captured." There's some redemption for Eli at the end. It's not news of defeat that kills him, not even his sons' deaths. But news that the ark is captured (v18). He feels the horror of what has happened - God defeated and dishonoured

But we see this unfolding against the backdrop of the judgement God pronounced on Eli's house (2:34). Judgement is coming exactly as God determined and announced. God seems to have been defeated, but he's not. He's still in control. He is freeing his house from the shame and scandal of the impious and immoral sons of Eli. Seeming defeat, yet God is determining it all. He is restoring his honour through seeming dishonour, and revealing his power through apparent weakness.

This is God's way, all the way to the cross, and beyond. At the cross his Son hangs lifeless and cursed. The place reeks of judgement and wrath. But God is determining all that happens, and he is delivering. This is God's way today. In our lives and in our congregation, he is determining all that happens for his glory and the deliverance of his people. The believer can look at dark acts of judgement with hope.

Questions

1. This is Israel's darkest day. But why is it not all doom and disaster?
2. Can you look back on your life and times and see any dark periods that turned out to be the beginning of restoration?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks that God remembers mercy in his wrath, and rebuilds out of the ruins of his judgement.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. Isaiah 48:10-11

Praise: Psalm 78A:23-24 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

1 SAMUEL

Thursday - 1 Samuel 3:18-22 - The LORD Departs

The camera lingers on Eli's obese, mangled remains as the narrator gives a brief summary of his rule. This scene then fades out and we move to another short scene involving his daughter-in-law. This too brings home to us what is really going on.

News of the defeat of Israel, perhaps too the march of the Philistines on Shiloh and the sanctuary, the news of the death of her husband and the capture of the ark, send Phinehas' wife into premature labour. Complications ensue, and as she dies in childbirth she names the baby Ichabod. Ichabod means 'no glory' or 'where is the glory?'. It's a sad name for a sorry situation. What should have been her greatest honour in that culture, giving birth to a son, is eclipsed by shame.

This sums up the whole sad and sorry state of affairs in Israel. Verse 21 gets to the heart of the issue: "the glory of the Lord has departed from Israel" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And it's repeated in verse 22 just incase we haven't paid attention. The ark is a picture of God's presence. God has departed from his people.

This is the greatest tragedy that could befall them. God's presence among them was what made them different from other nations. God's presence was their great blessing. God's presence was their chief joy. But now God has departed. It is dark, dire, desperate, and dreadful.

If God were to leave your life, where would it rank in your list of tragedies? Paul was prepared to reckon everything else as a loss, a liability, compared to knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7). Think about what Phinehas' wife lost: her father-in-law, her husband, her son, and her own life. Yet it is the loss of God that is most lamented. When he leaves, the glory leaves. Is that true of your heart?

Questions

1. Why was the ark of the Covenant the glory (honour) of Israel?
2. Have you ever felt that God has departed from you?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for a heart that loves God ahead of anything else, even fathers-in-law, husbands, sons, and anyone else.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. Isaiah 48:10-11

Praise: Psalm 80:1-2 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

1 SAMUEL

Friday - Leviticus 26:3-4, 14-17, 25, 30-31 - Why the LORD Departs.

Darkness, desperation, and disaster. God has been defeated and deported. That's what it looks like anyway. If only someone had actually tried to answer the question asked in 1 Samuel 4:3: "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?" But no-one asked Samuel, the prophet of God bringing God's Word to his people (3:19-4:1). The story opens (4:1) by telling us that he's been bringing God's Word to all Israel. Yet he is absent from this chapter. To have God's Word and not consult it or listen to it, that is the route to disaster. If only Hophni and Phinehas had spent more time listening to the Law they were supposed to teach to Israel. But they were too busy feasting and frolicking.

The verses of today's reading in Leviticus set out a simple deal for Israel. Serve God, and he will bless you. Don't serve God, and he will curse, or punish, you. This is not salvation by works. Serving God in the Old Testament meant repenting of your sins and trusting in God's provided sacrifice. Same as the New Testament. This is the deal between God and his people. It's called a covenant. It's like a contract, but less business-like and more loving. And Israel has broken their side of the agreement. If they do not live as the faith-filled people of God, God would not be their God. And so now, God departs from them. This is not just defeat in 1 Samuel 4. This is covenant-breaking defeat - punishment for unfaithfulness to their God. It is illustrated powerfully by the way God is referred to in 1 Samuel 4. Every time the ark is referred to in v3-11 the word 'covenant' or the covenant name 'LORD' is attached to it. From its capture in v11 onwards it is simply the "ark of God". The covenant is broken.

Here is the sin that breaks the covenant. Bringing the ark to the battle was not an act of faith. It was a superstitious ritual designed to force God into blessing. When our religion looks only to external rituals like our attendance at church, giving, and good deeds, then we are breaking God's covenant. Faith and repentance come from the heart. Where there's no real faith, God departs.

Questions

1. Someone says to you that Leviticus 26 sounds like God blesses us because of our works. How do you respond to them?

Prayer Points

1. Ask God that our religion would not be mere outward ritual and routine but heart reality.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. Isaiah 48:10-11

Praise: Psalm 106:30-34 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

1 SAMUEL

Saturday - 1 Samuel 4 - Ichabod No Longer

This chapter is just one example of how unbelieving sinful hearts kept getting in the way of God's relationship to his people. This scene is played out for us again, many years later, in Ezekiel 10. In a vision the prophet sees the glory of the LORD leave the Temple, as the Babylonian armies ransack Jerusalem. It's the same problem, with the same cause, resulting in the same issue. Something has to change. God kept departing from his people. Not because he changes or wavers, but because of their sin. He had to depart, for their own good. But something had to change.

So he sent "Immanuel" (God with us; Matthew 1:23). The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory (John 1:14). God with us, glory with us, in Jesus Christ. To deal with sin, so there would be no reason for God to depart from his people.

You see, the true believer, believing and repenting from his heart, God will never depart from. Even though faith and repentance be imperfect and inconstant, where it is from the heart, there will "Ichabod" never be written. God will not depart from his blood-bought, Son-redeemed people.

Because on the cross he "departed" from his Son, Jesus Christ. He abandoned him, and Jesus became "Ichabod" (no glory), that we might never be left.

In Jesus we will never be "Ichabod". He lives in us by his Spirit. He transforms us from glory to more glory. Glory never departs from us. Even when we sin and fall short. We might lose the sense of his presence because of our sin. He might let a cloud of hardship come between us and the light of his face. But the Sun is still behind the clouds, working on the clouds. So God is always with us. He never departs. "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

Questions

1. Where or why do you fear that God has or will depart from you?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks that Jesus became "no glory" that we might share his glory.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. Isaiah 48:10-11

Praise: Psalm 23 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

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