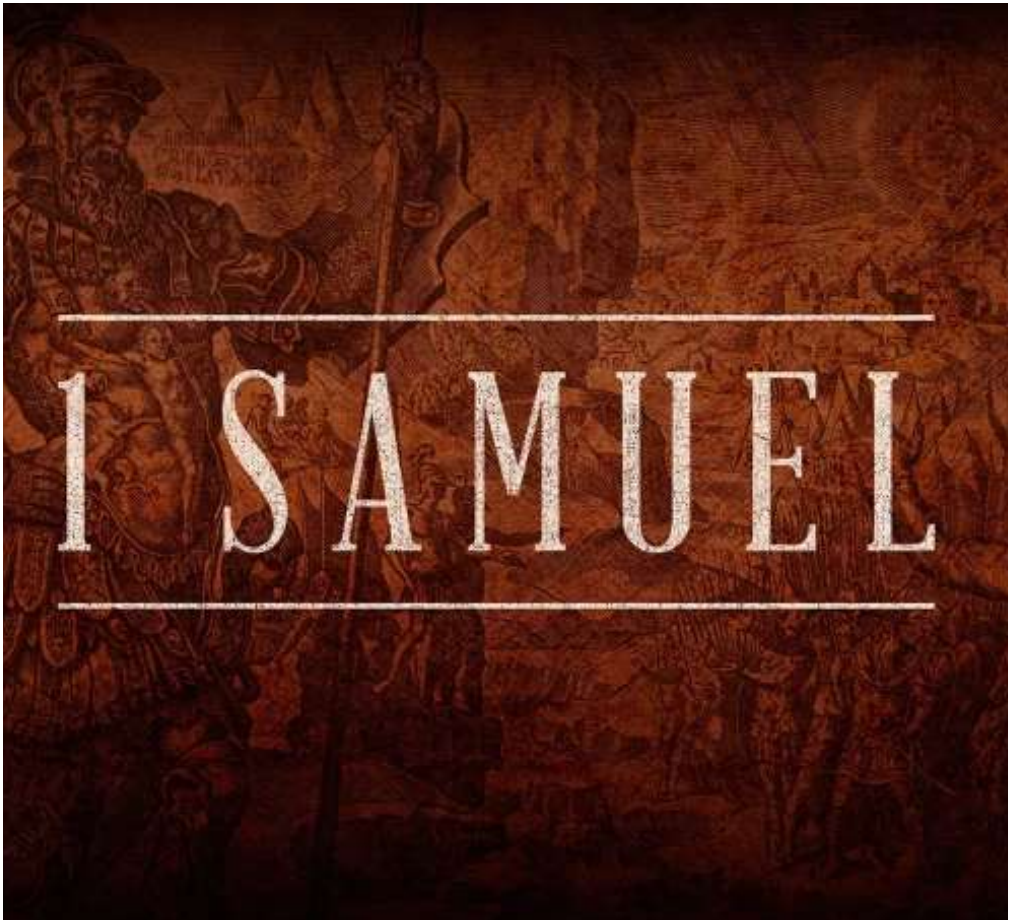


Let's Worship God

28th July - 2nd August
1 Samuel



1 SAMUEL

Monday - 1 Samuel 5-6 - God in Captivity

This is a long reading today, but hopefully it will help us set the compass correctly for the week ahead. Don't miss how shocking this whole situation is, the culmination of a shocking chain of events. The Ark of the Covenant, the golden box symbolising God's presence with his people, was brought into battle by Israel. Israel were routed and the ark captured. The newly widowed and dying wife of Phinehas captured the significance of the moment in naming her newborn son Ichabod, meaning 'the glory has departed'. It seems like God himself has been defeated and exiled. He's been led away into enemy territory and set before the image of the 'victorious' god of the Philistines, Dagon. He is scorned, shamed, and surrounded by a culture that hates him. What is he going to do about it?

The one resounding truth through these two chapters is that God, even in 'captivity', still rules. He guards his own honour, vindicates his own name, maintains his own cause, demonstrates his own power, and defends his own authority. Where's the glory? It's where God is. He still rules.

Do you see the relevance of these chapters? In our secular, post-Christian world, where God is shamed and scorned, he seems to have been deposed and disposed of. The academics seem to have bound him up tight in philosophical and scientific chains. He has been exiled from public life by politicians. He is ignored by most people. God is in 'captivity'. But God still rules.

Questions

1. Over the last week, in the media or in your own life, have you seen any expressions of the 'captivity of God' in our culture?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would encourage us this week as we see how God works in a culture hostile to him.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"Give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land. Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?" - 1 Samuel 6:5b-6a

Praise: Psalm 115:1-6 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

1 SAMUEL

Tuesday - 1 Samuel 5:1-5 - God Still Rules ... Over False Gods

The defeated god, Yahweh (the LORD), is set before the victorious god, Dagon. Dagon was one of the main gods of the Philistines, apparently ruling over grain, vegetation, and fertility. All in Ashdod were to marvel at his triumph over Yahweh, Israel's God. Even the mighty Egyptians had not been able to do this (see Exodus!). But the next morning Dagon is fallen, face down in the dust, bowing before Yahweh. This is the position of worship and adoration. The god needs a hand up. The next morning, he hasn't just fallen over, his head and hands have fallen off. This looks like a wartime execution, like the Philistines would have carried out countless times on their defeated enemies. In the battle of the gods, poor Dagon really lost his head. One writer says, "Dagon gets the god-ness knocked out of him".

Here, with no-one to fight his battles, it is just Yahweh versus Dagon, 'mano-a-mano'. Yahweh is the away team, Dagon has home advantage. Yet Dagon ends up headless on the floor. God still rules, even over false gods.

3,000 years ago they believed Dagon sent blessings and happiness. Most people in the West don't look to idols of wood and stone anymore, but they still look for someone else, or something else, apart from God, to send blessing, peace, prosperity, and happiness. Our worship, love, service, and energy are directed to seeking happiness, blessing, security, and peace from romance, relationships, money, leisure, and popularity. Dagon is still worshipped. He just has different names. He still has temples. The stadium temples hold tens of thousands of people at their weekly services, where they sing together. The shopping mall temples enable all of life worship seven days a week. The online temples enable next-day delivery of 'happiness' and an echo chamber of empty praise from 'Friends'. How easily these gods are defeated. For example, a tiny virus - and all the world's idols lie broken at the feet of Yahweh.

Questions

1. How have we seen the modern day Dagon's broken by recent events?
2. Who or what is your Dagon - who or what are you looking for peace, prosperity, and happiness?

Prayer Points

1. Confess your idolatry and acknowledge God as the only, living and true God.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"Give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land. Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?" - 1 Samuel 6:5b-6a

Praise: Psalm 115:7-11 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

1 SAMUEL

Wednesday - 1 Samuel 5:6-12 - God Still Rules... Over the Nations

The ark is in enemy territory. In fact, it moves round enemy territory - Ashdod, Gath, Ekron. It moves round because "the hand of the LORD was heavy". Dagon was now handless (v4), but the hand of God acts mightily. Everywhere it goes tumours afflict the people. It may possibly have been what we now know as bubonic plague - hence the link to mice and boils in 6:4. it may have been hemorrhoids - one old Latin translation puts verse 9 as, "he smote them in the more secret parts of their posteriors"! Cities and regions are thrown into panic (v9-10). Death, disease, and dread. The ark is passed around like a ticking bomb, and Yahweh's stay in Philistia becomes a victory march.

You see, God rules. Not just in Israel, but in Philistia too. Not just over the nation of Israel, but over the nations of the earth. The Philistines don't acknowledge his rule or worship him. But he rules over them, and he judges them. Scotland, Ireland, France, America may not acknowledge his rule or worship him. But he still rules over them, like it or not. They can stick their fingers in their ears and sing loudly to try and ignore him, but that doesn't stop the wrecking ball of judgment that is swinging towards them. You might not acknowledge his rule or worship him. But he still rules over you, like it or not.

Here is Yahweh's greatest defeat. He'd been captured and put in the stocks to be ridiculed. But he carves victory and vindication from seeming defeat. Glory follows humiliation. In seeming defeat, and from seeming defeat, he reveals his glory. Our eyes are automatically drawn from this scale model to the reality. The battered lifeless corpse on the cross, the most glorious thing in the world, the sign of God with us - smashed by God's enemies. The King of Glory wears a crown of thorns. But this is his greatest victory, displaying his rule over the nations. Do you look at your congregation and see what looks like defeat? He rules over the nations. He crafts victory from seeming defeat. He will display his glory.

Questions

1. What does God's rule over the nations mean for your country?
2. Look at the areas of seeming defeat in your life. What should you expect to see here, in time, by God's power?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would be acknowledged as ruler over your nation.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"Give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land. Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?" - 1 Samuel 6:5b-6a

Praise: Psalm 22:1, 21-22 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

1 SAMUEL

Thursday - 1 Samuel 6:1-12 - God Still Rules... Over His Cause

After Yahweh's seven month victory parade around Philistia, they can take no more disease, death, and dread. They devise a test. By putting gold images of tumours and mice in a box they plan to appease God in the hope he will lighten his hand. It is a costly offering, intended to give glory to God. The ark is to be put on a cart pulled by nursing cows, who would not be used to pulling a cart, and whose calves are removed from them. Their natural tendency would be to return home to their calves. The Philistines will sit back and watch. It is, "a situation devised in which the probability is so strongly stacked in one direction that only the power of God could bring about a different outcome." If the cows and cart head for Israel, then clearly it all has been Yahweh's doing (v9). And any more messing with him risks a similar fate as Egypt (see Exodus!), v6.

So was Dagon's demise, the disease, death, and dread of the last seven months simply bad luck, or the power of God? Re-read v12. It could hardly be any clearer!

God vindicated his own name when there was no-one else there to do it. He didn't need his people's help. He ruled over his own cause. The Philistines saw his glory, without their help.

God doesn't need us. He doesn't need you in Cloughmills, Cork, Colorado, or Cairo. God can glorify his own name in his own way. Your service in your church - it's not doing him a favour. He doesn't owe us anything, he doesn't need us for anything. If we packed up and turned off the light, he wouldn't be stuck.

And sometimes too, God has to bring us to a pretty dark place before we realise this. When we find ourselves most helpless and inadequate, we see most clearly that he does not need our help, and he is more than adequate. And then we can spiritually relax. For he is our helper, and we are adequate for all things in him

Questions

1. What area of God's cause that you are involved with would collapse if you pulled back from it immediately?

Prayer Points

1. Repent of believing that any aspect of God's cause would collapse without your involvement.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"Give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land. Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?" - 1 Samuel 6:5b-6a

Praise: Psalm 96A:1-4 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

1 SAMUEL

Friday - 1 Samuel 6:13-21 - God Still Rules.... Over his People

The ark is gladly received by the Israelites of Beth-shemesh after its 7 month exile in the land of the Philistines. But it soon turns sour as 70 men are struck down. During his "exile" Yahweh has shown that he rules over false gods, over the nations, and over his cause, But his people have still not grasped what that means for them.

Their God was a holy God. That meant he was to be treated with reverence. That meant the Ark of the Covenant was not to be touched (Numbers 4:15-20). Certainly not by ordinary folk. There was a whole class of priests set apart for handling the ark. It was not to be looked into. Perhaps it was not even to be looked upon. Numbers 4:4-6 states that it was to be covered when it was moved. The High Priest only saw it through a cloud of smoke. Perhaps that's why the lengthy "boring" descriptions in Exodus are so detailed - they were only to see it in their mind's eye, like us. Yet the men of Beth-shemesh look upon it. It's hard to know what exactly they did, as the details of the passage are a bit obscure. But at its root is this - they did not treat God as holy: "Who is able to stand before Yahweh, this holy God" (6:20).

God is holy. He is wonderfully separate from us, 'other-ly'. He is separately sinless. And the fact that he is our God does not mean we can be flippant and careless. How does our approach to worship each week reflect his holiness? Do we approach Sundays thinking: here is a whole day set apart (kept holy) to him? Do we approach worship reminding ourselves that we are coming into the presence of God? He rules over us. We come to praise our King. We come to listen to our King. We come to serve our king.

Questions

1. This incident underlines the holiness of God and his justice. Where do you see his grace in it?

Prayer Points

1. Ask God for a sense of his holiness that impacts how you approach him in worship, public and private.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"Give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land. Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?" - 1 Samuel 6:5b-6a

Praise: Psalm 99A:all - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

1 SAMUEL

Saturday - 1 Samuel 5-6 - God Still Rules

Later in 1 Samuel God's people will reject his rule over them, and God will raise up a human king over them. But these chapters show us that regardless of what happens, he still rules. You can reject his rule, but he still rules over you. You are still answerable to him, still obligated to keep his law, still required to serve him. You might think you have God in captivity, all tied up with your cleverness, knowledge, and experiences. Like you've conquered God and placed him before yourself that all may marvel at your victory, like Dagon and the Philistines did.

But he rules. He rules every aspect of your life. He can crush the idols you chase. He is victorious in seeming defeat. The cross doesn't look like victory, but it is. He doesn't need you to do him any favours. You don't do him a favour by accepting him. He is a holy God, to be treated with reverent fear. Not terror, but as the powerful, special, significant Being he is. He is a God whose hand could be heavy upon you, and that would be far worse than bubonic plague or hemorrhoids.

Perhaps you feel this - his heavy hand upon you. The Philistines, ignorant pagans that they were, still knew a little truth. 6:5 is as close to gospel hope as this incident gets: "Give glory to the God of Israel...perhaps he will lighten his hand." They are grasping at a truth far more glorious than they can imagine. For there is no "perhaps" about it. Give glory to him, and he will certainly "lighten his hand". Not because of your valuable offerings, like their golden tumours and mice. But because of his valuable offering - His Son.

He rules. But his crown was of thorns. He suffered under God's heavy hand, so that we might have God's hand lightened. No, even better, he suffered that God's punishing hand may be removed from us. So submit your life to him. All of it.

Questions

1. Have you been feeling God's hand heavy upon you?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks that Jesus felt the full weight of God's hand of justice, as the valuable offering that appeases him.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters

Memory Verse

"Give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land. Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?" - 1 Samuel 6:5b-6a

Praise: Psalm 24 - 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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