

Where is the glory?

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[0 : 00] A few weeks ago, when the weather wasn't quite as warm and sunny as it is now, I thought it was time that I finally get to wear shorts.

It was a Thursday morning. I remember the day before had been sunny and I thought I'm getting warm in these jeans, so I'll wear some shorts, take the opportunity.

And certainly through the morning, it was warm and it was sunny. The sun was gloriously shining. But then by about lunchtime, the clouds had come over and I was feeling a little chilly and the clouds remained and the sun never appeared again.

The glory of the sunshine had been covered by the clouds. And that thought is helpful, I think. That thought, not of me wearing shorts, but of the clouds covering the glory of the sunshine is helpful as we come to this passage.

Because that seems to be what is going on here. Last week, if you remember, God spoke into the silence. God's word was rare. People hadn't really heard from the Lord. Not many people had seen visions.

[1 : 20] But finally, God's voice spoke out and called the boy Samuel. And by the end of the chapter, and it was read for us by Shammar earlier, Samuel's word came to all Israel.

The light of God's word was going forth. But as we get into chapter 4, it's like the clouds are coming and covering the glory that was seen.

There was certainly a glimpse there at the end of chapter 3. And we read these words at the end of the chapter saying, The glory has departed for Israel.

For the ark of God has been captured. The clouds have come. The clouds of darkness. The clouds of judgment. How do we get there?

Well, we join at the beginning of this passage. We join Israel who are camped out and ready to go to war. Ready to go and fight against the Philistines.

[2 : 28] Have a look there in verse 1. Now the Israelites, they went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer and the Philistines at Aphek.

A scene is set for us. The Israelites, they're camped at Ebenezer. The Philistines, they're camped at Aphek. And they're ready to go to battle. They're ready to go and fight. And surely Israel, as God's people, surely they can be confident in the Lord.

The battle belongs to the Lord. The battle will be won by them because the Lord is on their side. But have a look at what happens in verse 2.

The Philistines, they deployed their forces to meet Israel. And as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines.

He killed about 4,000 of them on the battlefields. Israel are defeated. Israel are defeated. Israel are defeated.

[3 : 38] And so the question goes up for us there in verse 3. Why? Why did the Lord bring defeat on us today before the Philistines?

Surely the Lord is on our side. He makes sure we win, doesn't he? But why has he allowed us to lose? Why have these 4,000 people died?

Why have those Philistines over there won? Well, we get no indication. No indication here that the Israelites are really seeking God for help here.

They go out and they seem to fight in their own strength. In their own power. And yet we're told that they camp at a place called Ebenezer.

And Ebenezer, it means stone of God's help. And as we'll see in just a few chapters time, Samuel will literally lay a stone there to say that the Lord has helped us so far.

[4 : 45] But right now, they're not even looking to the Lord for help, it seems. And they are left defeated. They go in their own power and in their own strength.

And as Hannah prayed, and Hannah's prayer I think is a helpful lens for us to read 1 Samuel through. Hannah prayed in the end of chapter 2 and verse 9.

The end of verse 9. She prays it is not by strength that one prevails. It is not by our own strength that we prevail. Hannah knew the strength of the Lord in her life.

In helping her. She'd gone through that pain of childlessness. And gave her her son. But Israel itself, Israel as a whole, they're not looking to the Lord for his strength.

They're going in their own strength. It's not by our own strength that one prevails. And so, came this question.

[5 : 59] Why did the Lord bring defeat on us today before the Philistines? And so, they think that they have a bright idea to solve this problem. They think they know how they can get the upper hand on the Philistines.

And this idea comes to them. Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh. So that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.

Now, this bright idea. Let's go fetch the ark. Do you know about the ark that lived in the temple? The ark of the covenant? They go to Shiloh where the tabernacle was.

And they go and get it from the Holy of Holies. And get this important, important piece of furniture for them.

A sacred object. They get it. And take it to the battlefield. It's so important. As it tells us in verse 4, it's the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty.

[7 : 09] The Lord Almighty. Who was enthroned between the cherubim. It's an important, important object. An important part of the life of the worship of God's people.

And it reminds us of a few things. The ark of the covenant reminds us of a few things. It reminds us of God's covenant. It was in the ark. You had the stone tablets.

It's God's covenant with His people. You have as well a symbol of God's provision there. You've got a piece of manna in the ark of the covenant.

It's a symbol of God's provision. It's a symbol of God's presence with His people. It's to live. It's to be placed in the Holy of Holies. The place where God dwells.

And it's also a symbol of God's mercy. Because there, once a year, the high priest would go and splatter blood from an animal on the ark.

[8 : 16] To make atonement between the people and God. It's a symbol of God's covenant, God's provision, God's presence, God's mercy. But they're taking it to the battlefield.

They're going and grabbing it and using it as a way to maybe manipulate God to bring them victory. They're using it as a kind of lucky charm. Like a lucky pair of socks that you might own because they're lucky to you because you once won a football match in them.

It's that kind of thing. That's what they're doing with the ark, this precious, precious, sacred object.

We get a clue as to how bad this is, this move is in these verses.

So when they say, let us bring, apparently that word bring, it's like taking, grabbing for themselves. They just go and grab.

[9 : 23] Grab the ark. Grab the ark from the Holy of Holies. That's no way to treat it. It's no way to go and just enter God's presence and grab out of it. And then it seems to be all about them.

So as we read that in verse three, let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.

It's not about the Lord. It's about them. It's not about God's glory. It's about theirs. And on top of all that, in verse four, look who's there with the ark.

So the people, verse four, sent men to Shiloh and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty who was enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

Hophni and Phinehas, those two scandalous sons of Eli, those two scandalous priests are there. And that should kind of strike an ominous tone for us.

[10 : 32] Like if you're watching Star Wars and Darth Vader appears or if you're watching Harry Potter and Voldemort appears, something bad is happening, something dark. And that's happening here as we read that Hophni and Phinehas are there.

They're involved. This can't be that good. The ark of the covenant being wheeled out in the hope that God might then give them victory.

And as it comes out, we read this in verse five. When the ark of the Lord's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook.

They raised a shout. The ark is here. We're going to be fine. A shout of hope, of expectation. Maybe like the hope that England fans, when they see Harry Kane is on the ball, they raise a great shout in the hope that England might score.

Or maybe on a Friday evening when work is finished, you raise a great shout of hope, of victory. Work is finished and the weekend has come.

[11 : 49] And it's going to be good. All will be well now. But as they let out this great shout, we also read that the ground shook.

And I think that kind of raises some alarm bells, should raise some alarm bells surely for them. The ground shakes. You're messing around with the Lord Almighty.

His presence is where it's not meant to be. Ground shaking. Surely it should raise some fear of God in them.

There's no way to treat the Lord bringing out the ark of the covenant just as a mere way to try and win a war.

Just as a lucky charm. You wouldn't, you would let, wouldn't you, a child play with a toy car, but you wouldn't let them go and drive around with a real car.

[12 : 56] That's dangerous. And it's dangerous for the Philistines here as they try and play around with the ark of the covenant. It seems to me that kind of Israel's theology, their view of God is a bit faulty here.

It's misguided. It's wrong. It's treating God like a kind of means to an end. Trying to get them to do what they want him to do.

Bring them a victory by having the ark there. But it seems to me that the Philistines have a much better theology. So have a look at their reaction when they hear of the ark of God being there.

So down towards the end of verse 6, when they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid. A God has come into the camp, they said.

Oh no, nothing like this has happened before. We're doomed. Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods?

[14 : 05] They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues and in the wilderness. The Philistines at least have a little bit of fear of God in them.

It's not all right, but they know that this God is the almighty God. They know that he is powerful, that he is strong, that he could strike down Pharaoh and his mighty army.

They know about the plagues that he sent on Egypt. They're trembling, they're fearful. And the Israelites are just using God as a bit of a lucky charm.

They're not really fearing God as they ought. They think, oh, we'll be fine now. No honor and glory of God among the Israelites, but there seems to be a fear of God among the Philistines.

They seem to have got something right. But the Philistines, they kind of look at the situation and they see themselves and they see the Israelites and they say, actually, we are quite strong, really.

[15 : 22] So verse 9, be strong, Philistines. Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews as they have been to you. Be men and fight. They rally around.

They think, let's not spend too much time dwelling on this. Sure, they have this God on their side, but we're still strong.

We're the stronger army. We're the better, mighty army. We'll be fine. And so the Philistines, they have their round two. Round two of the fight.

And what happens? Verse 10, so the Philistines fought and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent.

The slaughter was very great. Israel lost 30,000 foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

[16 : 27] They thought they'd wheel out the ark. They thought it'd be a lucky charm for them, really. And what happens? They're defeated. The Israelites are defeated.

The ark of God, that's such a special, prized object that they had. Reminder of God's covenant, God's provision, God's presence, God's mercy.

It's been carried off by the Philistines. It's added to their kind of trophy cabinet. And Hophni and Phinehas, they're dead.

They struck down dead. We shouldn't be too surprised by that if we remember a few weeks ago when we looked at chapter 2. Chapter 2, verse 34, Eli was told, what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be assigned to you.

They will both die on the same day. And this was the day God's judgment was being executed. God was defeated. God was bringing those scandalous sons of Eli down.

[17:46] Israel was defeated. God was not bowing down to their treatment of him. It seems to me they treat God a bit like maybe a bit like we might treat a convenience store like a Tesco Express, a Sainsbury's local or wherever you, your preferred convenience store is.

You just pop down there whenever you kind of feel like it. I really want a bit of chocolate. So you pop around the corner for some. Israel's kind of treating God like this.

will him out because they want a victory. They're not really honoring God. And it's a warning for us. As we read this passage, it's a warning for us not to be treating God like that. Not to be treating God like he's just kind of a genie in a bottle ready to grant our three wishes when we want him to.

not just going to talk to him when we just want a little bit of help, when we want to pass an exam or maybe when we want the trains not to be delayed any more than they are now.

[19:02] That's not how we treat God. We need him through the whole of our life. Walk with him through all the changing scenes of life in troubles and enjoys.

It's not just a good luck charm. He should be everything for us. We need to remember as Christians, as people that know the Lord Jesus now, remember the Lord Jesus and his covenant in his blood. Remember his provision for us, everything that he's provided for us. Remember his mercy to us, his grace to us day by day. Remember his presence with us.

Remember that he is the great Lord Almighty. Don't just use him at your own convenience. Israel's defeated.

the sons of Eli have been struck down. The ark of God has been carried off by the Philistines.

[20:13] Surely it can't get much worse than this. And yet it does. Secondly, we see that Israel's glory departs.

Israel's glory departs. We're about to join Eli. Eli Hophni and Phinehas' dads.

The priest, the guy who's been kind of meant to be leading Israel over these last 40 years or so. The priest who is now blind.

He's now 98 years old. He can't be on the battlefield. He can only sit in Shiloh and anxiously wait. He knows about the ark of God being carried off and he's very anxious about it.

Is it going to come back safe? Is it going to come back in one piece? Is it going back at all? He's probably thinking. He has no idea what's going on. going on.

[21:15] And so down in verse 12 we see a Benjamite who goes to Shiloh with the bad news.

Have a look verse 12. That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dust on his head. Surely a sign of his anguish about the defeat.

And verse 13 when he arrived there there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road watching because his heart feared for the ark of God.

When the man entered the town and told what had happened the whole town sent up a cry.

Benjamite goes and shares the news with the town of Shiloh Israel's been defeated the ark of God it's gone.

Hophni and Phinehas they've died. Shiloh the town sends up a cry. It's a dark day dark news.

[22:24] Eli still hasn't really heard but he does hear the outcry outcry of grief of pain of sorrow.

Verse 14 Eli heard the outcry and asked what is the meaning of this uproar?

The man hurried over to Eli who was 98 years old and whose eyes had failed so they could not see and he told Eli this I have just come from the battle line I fled from it this very day.

Eli wants to know what happened he's anxious to remember about the ark that's his main concern what happened my son he says the man who brought the news replied Israel fled before the Philistines and the army has suffered heavy losses also your two sons Hophni and Phinehas are dead and the ark of God has been captured finally the news gets to Eli it's all being explained to him and I'm sure he's he's no doubt distressed by the news of Israel's defeat he's no doubt distressed by the news of his two sons and their death but even more than anything else he's distressed about the news of the ark of God the ark of the covenant it's been captured it's been taken away the glory

of God taken away the symbol of God's presence his provision his mercy it's gone and that literally tips

Eli over the edge have a look at verse 18 when he mentioned the ark of God Eli fell backwards off his chair by the side of the gate his neck was broken and he died for he was an old man and he was heavy he had led Israel for 40 years told you it literally tipped him over the edge he fell off his chair his neck broke he died a sad ending he tells us that he was a heavy man on a heavy day after hearing heavy news of heavy losses and a heavy death and yet things get even worse he thought that was bad it gets even worse verse 19 his daughter in law the wife of Phineas was pregnant and near the time of delivery when she heard the news that the ark of

God had been captured and that her father in law and her husband were dead she went into labor and gave birth but was overcome by her labor pains what a day it's been for this lady her husband died her brother in law died her father in law died I don't know if she's got any family left and she was pregnant and clearly the stress had brought the labor on I don't know but that's certainly what happens she went into labor and gave birth at least surely something good new life comes verse 20 as she was dying the woman attending her said don't despair you've given birth to a son surely good news among the bad but no she did not even respond or pay any attention and we get the final moments of her life recorded for us her final words really verse 21 22 she named the boy [26 : 29] Ichabod saying the glory has departed from Israel because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband she said the glory has departed from Israel for the ark has been captured with her final breaths her final words sad words I named this boy Ichabod Ichabod it means the glory has departed or as some interpret it where is the glory the glory has departed and her main concern here really is that the ark of God has been captured that's the first thing she mentions that's the first thing that we're told that she hears about the ark of God has been captured the glory is gone where is the glory it's name

Ichabod apparently the word for glory in Hebrew is kabod and it means glory it kind of means weightiness thinking about today we might sometimes say someone's argument about something has weight listen to it pay attention to it it's important it deserves listening to who has weight who has glory where is the glory where is the honour where is it because it seems to have departed that's what this woman says where is God's glory well it's it's been robbed by the priests do you remember those events in chapter two we saw Eli and his sons stealing meat meat reserved for God the fat portions which were to be burned up as a sacrifice to God had been stolen by Eli and his sons they were fattening themselves on the parts which were meant to be for God they were eating what was meant to be for the glory of God and so Eli was told in chapter two verse twenty nine to remind ourselves what he was told he he's asked why do you honour your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel Eli was part of it too fattening themselves on the parts that were meant to be offered to God and so where is the glory well a very similar word is used of Eli and his death word heavy where was the glory well it was around

Eli's waist he was eating what was meant to be for God fattening himself on that the glory wasn't being given to God it was being used for their own enjoyment their own satisfaction not for God's honour and glory and so Phineas' wife is right where is the glory it's departed Eli's now dead the ark of God which should be glorious is gone it's been captured it's been taken off they thought they were okay on their own they thought they could go their own way trying to think of a kind of helpful illustration for us and forgive me if this isn't helpful but it certainly helped me

Brighton and Hove Albion until last autumn were managed by Graham Potter he was much loved was much loved and much good for Brighton Hove Albion established them as a Premier League club and yet angered many Brighton Hove Albion fans he left he left Brighton to go and join Chelsea after all they'd done after all they'd been through left to join Chelsea and it didn't go so well for him at Chelsea this season he thought he could go alone without Brighton go and join some other club and find even more success and yet Brighton have found they're okay without him Israel think they're okay without God Eli and his sons they thought they were okay without God they thought they could go their own way but now the glory of God has left them the ark of God is gone the glory is just not there at the moment

[32 : 00] God through this chapter he's executing his judgment which he said would come his word has not failed he's bringing the old regime down but in order for a new one to be able to be raised up in Samuel the prophet in installing a king actually it was necessary for Eli and his sons to be

removed from their positions it was necessary for the good of God's people sometimes it's necessary to remove the dead and the lifeless for new life to come and we as Christian people we know that don't we in the Lord Jesus we know that he has taken on our death and our sin on the cross in order to give us new life by his grace and we praise

God for that but as we listen to this chapter as we see these dark events happening let them also be a warning to us that we don't forget the love that we have for our Lord Jesus that we don't go off and do things the way we think they should be done that we don't forget God that we don't treat him that we treat him with honour and respect that he deserves see in the New Testament the Lord Jesus he speaks to a church in the church in Ephesus and he warns them he tells them firstly that they're doing a great job they're busy doing all sorts of things but he also warns them he holds this against them you've forsaken the love you had at first consider how far you've fallen repent and do the things you did at first if you do not repent

I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place church that was so busy doing all sorts of things maybe good things but forgetting forgetting their love for the Lord Jesus forgetting to honour and glorify him and Israel did that here it's a warning for us we can be busy doing all manner of things all manner of good things serving in the church looking after our family working hard and God's just kind of been moved slowly and slowly more and more out of the picture we don't offer him the worship that he is due we don't express to him the thanks and praise that he is due we don't don't treat him like we need to depend on him like we want to glorify him we just do what they were doing and treat him as a convenience as a lucky charm and so we need to hear the warning maybe for some of us this is really relevant and we need to turn back and repent and come back to our first love the Lord Jesus calls us maybe a good prayer we could pray is like we kind of sung earlier Lord I'm prone to wonder Lord I'm prone to leave you the God that I love here's my heart Lord take and seal it seal it from your courts above return to the Lord and give him the glory and honor that he deserves