

Ichabod

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 April 2018

[0:00] 1 Samuel 4 verse 21. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel, because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband.

And she said, The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken. To set the scene here is the occasion where a son is born.

A son is born, it should have been a time of joy and of rejoicing, yet it was not. Ichabod. This word means the kabod, the glory, is gone.

Ichabod. Where is the glory? The glory is gone. The glory has departed. It speaks of God's glory. Lost, gone, departed. God's power had left the building.

He had gone. He had left the scene. God's power, God's favour, God's blessing. At this time, this birth of the son, Ichabod.

[1:07] He was the son of Phineas. He was born on the day that the Philistines took the ark. The ark of God. Where God's glory was manifest.

The Philistines, the enemies of Israel, took the ark away. And his mother went into labour at the shocking news. As she heard this shocking news, hearing that her husband and father-in-law had died, that the ark had been captured and taken away.

She saw that the presence of God had gone. Because the ark of God was where the presence of God was very much manifest. And now, it had been taken by the enemies of God's people.

And shortly after giving birth, And having named her son, Ichabod, the glory is departed, she died. What a tragic set of circumstances.

The background here is that Israel went into battle against the Philistines. And 4,000 of God's chosen people died. The battle was lost. 4,000.

[2:16] And those who remained asked, Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? 1 Samuel 4, verse 3. Why did the Lord bring defeat on us today? Before the Philistines.

Why, Lord? Israel's leaders then took the ark of the coming, went then to the next battle. They thought, Here's our good luck charm. Here's our magical talisman, our rabbit's foot, our good luck charm, so to speak.

When the ark has been with us, we've always triumphed before. And they thought that by taking this ark into the battleground, into that next battle, the next day, that the Lord would bring victory over the enemy.

But then, they lost again. They lost again. 30,000 this time. 30,000 soldiers. A messenger brought word to God's man, Eli the priest, the religious leader of Israel.

And the messenger told Eli, The battle is lost. Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, had died. And the treasured ark of the covenant now belonged.

[3:29] It was captured by the pagan Philistines. The pagans had taken the ark of the covenant. And this news shocked this old man. He fell off his seat and he broke his neck.

He fell down dead at this news. Eli the priest. The people were unfaithful. God's people were astray from God. The leaders went astray from God.

In every city where the ark of the covenant was taken, the Philistines took the ark thinking that they now had some wonderful blessing in having this ark in their possession.

And when they took the ark of the covenant, they themselves then suffered horrible sores and died from them. God was bringing down his wrath on the Philistines. They had taken the ark that belonged to Israel and suffered such suffering with sores and afflictions.

So they took the ark back to Israel in humility. God humbled them. They took the ark back to Israel with offerings to the Lord God. Eli the grandfather of Ichabod was not the godly man that he should

have been.

[4:42] Eli was the high priest. Everyone looked to him. But he had stopped rebuking the sins of his own sons. And he was not delivering the word of God to the people. He had fallen short here.

And Hophni and Phinehas were allowed to serve in the temple yet they were really very astray from God.

The context there, that's 1 Samuel 2, verse 17, 22 to 25, 3 verse 1 and verse 13. So Eli was failing in his duty as the father of Phinehas.

Phinehas, the father of Ichabod, was one of the leaders who had abused the holy ark of God. He helped in leading the people to desire the ark just so that they might win a battle. This was not a holy purpose to use the ark as if it were some magical genie, some lucky charm, to get God on their side.

It was a very unholy purpose for the ark of the covenant. That wasn't God's will. It wasn't God's design. And so Phinehas was quite foolish in this.

[5:55] It was like to end in the book of Daniel. A king took the holy vessels from the temple and he used them in a drunken feast. And then he saw the handwriting of God upon the wall and the judgment of God fell upon him.

Twenty years after Eli's death, Samuel preached and the children of Israel returned to the Lord. They put away the sensual worship of Baal and of the false gods and idol worship.

As Samuel preached the truth, there was repentance and faith. There was a revival of holiness in the land. And the people returned to the one true God, the Lord of hosts.

The next time the Israelites went into battle, God's people had victory and they walked as they walked with God in faith. And we see that at that time, twenty years after Eli's death, Jericho fell as Israel followed God's instructions, as they followed God's plan of walking around the city and walking around seven times, blowing the trumpets and shouting.

And then a final time, God brought great victory. We see Samson, he killed a thousand men with the jawbone from a donkey. God gave Samson great ability and strength.

[7:11] God gives victory then to three hundred men under Gideon, just three hundred against such a multitude and brought great victory there.

So God's presence came back to Israel. It was gone, Ichabod, but it came back. God's presence was among them as they were obedient, as they trusted in the Lord, they won great victories and the Lord blessed and overcame their enemies.

But when Israel was in sin, the presence of God was against them. What do we know about the glory of God, the presence of God? We see it's a very evident truth in the word of God.

Through the scriptures, we see the glory of God as God's manifest presence that was evident and to be seen. We see in Exodus 3 where Moses encountered God at the burning bush.

The burning bush. In Exodus 33, verse 14, God says, My presence shall go with thee and I'll give thee rest. God shows up with Moses.

[8:19] The presence of God, the person of God. And that's just really the beginning. We see that right through the scriptures as we see the people of God, they followed the pillar of fire by night, the cloud by day.

They received God's direction and purpose and leading in that very tangible, visible way. The glory of God.

He speaks of God's presence, of his person, of his being with his own people. And what a tragedy when Ichabod happens, when there's no glory, when God's presence leaves, when God's glory is missing.

And some have likened it in reflection about the church that in some ways some have suggested he could write Ichabod over the entrance of some churches that the glory of God is gone.

The glory of God is missing. The will of God is missing. The worship of God is missing. Something's wrong, dreadfully wrong. Something's missing. It's the glory of God. And we see as as a gathering of God's people.

[9:42] We must have that as our purpose, as our longing that God will be glorified in his church. It's his will that he is glorified in his church.

And these scriptures speak to us in a kind of type, a kind of illustration, a picture of God leaving the gathering of his people when they are astray.

God's glory is for us a glorious type, an assurance of God's presence. And just as Ichabod happened, the return of the glory happened.

And we can trust in that. The return of the glory, the revival of the people of God is what we can hope and pray for too. So where we see at times where a church might almost be condemned, God's written Ichabod over the doorposts and the entrance where there used to be the glory but it's missing now.

To kind of illustrate this for example, some of thought for example how you could suggest we see the glory missing, the glory gone when we see for example in some settings there's churches for example inviting teenagers to come to church and play an ultra-violent PlayStation 3 game called Halo 3.

[11:13] I guess it's probably Halo 4 by now, I think that's an old illustration. To come and play this violent video game in the hope that in so doing somehow teenagers will come to love coming to church because they can come and play violent, gory video games.

That's modern day evangelism now. It's connecting youth in the name of Jesus. Another church would offer flat screen TVs and Harley Davidson motorcycles and cars to first time visitors or anybody who accepted Jesus into their hearts.

It's almost like a raffle or some churches they get the pastor drinks a slice of live goldfish or something or if they achieve something.

All these gimmicks and oddball things that some churches resort to. That's not to say we might do some fun things.

I imagine we can be imaginative and creative. I'm not saying that we can't do some various things but it's when that becomes a focus as if you've got to gear everything to that to draw a crowd.

[12:32] It's kind of debasing the God who we serve, isn't it? It's demeaning the church and it's making us just like some kind of shop down the road that's got to have some promotion or marketing or some jazzy things that draw people.

And that can be really a sad thing I think that we replace the glory with some kind of man made kind of draw card that is really it's almost like the people of God as they tried to carry the ark on a cart and it was some kind of thought that seemed like a good idea.

It might have been a nice looking cart. It might have been very beautifully created and carved and designed and had four wheel drive and it was just a beautiful vehicle for the ark to travel on.

That's what the Philistines did. That's what they tried and yet it wasn't God's will for the ark to be carried that way. They were disobeying God by making the cart and by trying to use the cart.

And so it's likewise at times in modern days where people resort to all kinds of things that are actually counterproductive.

[13:51] It's drawing people away from why we're here today to worship, to honour him, to revere him, to uphold him, to exalt him and to point people to him, to trust him.

Where's the discernment gone? Where's the glory gone? Where's the faithful preaching gone?

Ichabod could be written over some churches today. Of course you've got a big scale of churches where you've got some that are dry and stale and dusty and hardly a breath of life in them and you have some that are like it's a big rock concert type thing as well.

There's two ends of the scale here. The glory's gone in some settings. We see that. And woe to us if it would happen to us that we would fail God such that his glory would leave us, that he would depart.

Judgment must begin at the house of God, it says. Ichabod is the story of judgment really. It's a church that's left its first love. Like the church at Ephesus, it needed to repent and get back and do the first works.

Sometimes God takes us right back to the beginning, doesn't he? To get back to the base, get back to the basics, to get back to do the first works. And the glory is spoken on as the manifestation of God in the temple at Jerusalem, the place where God resided.

[15:16] The glory shone, the glory shone at the burning bush with Moses, the glory shone in the bright light when the angels came to announce the

birth of the Saviour of the world, when the Ark of the Covenant was in its proper place in the Holy of Holies, in the very centre of the temple of the tabernacle.

The glory of God was there in the Ark. And whenever the Ark was not in the temple, the temple was said to be Ihabod. The glory was gone. If the glory was missing, it was just an empty building. Because the essence, the glory of God was gone. That was the whole point. The glory of God, God's power, our relationship with God, God's interaction with his own people, his splendour, his magnificence, his praise, his radiance.

In contrast, the Lord told Ezekiel of some in Ezekiel 14 verse 3 that they'd set up their idols in their hearts. Idols in their hearts. taking the place of God with an idol, replacing God.

But God's will is that the glory of God shine in our hearts, shine in our lives as we follow and serve him. And him helping us will know his glory.

[16:30] There still might be moments when we seem, or it seems God may seem far, far away. But yet, if we just yield again and know he never leaves us nor forsakes us, he's always there.

And our lives are meant to be as living sacrifices, day by day, moment by moment. And really, we should take our Christianity really seriously, shouldn't we?

I know I was talking to someone this morning who's struggling about becoming a Christian and I commended him, but he's taking it very seriously, that decision.

He's not wanting to make just a light decision. He's really seriously contemplating that decision. As much as we shouldn't, I believe, we shouldn't dilly dally when God's moving us to trust him, we should resign to his will.

But it is a very serious thing, isn't it? These are holy truths. This is a book that should make us tremble and should make us really take to heart.

[17:42] These truths are life-changing and eternal and not to be taken superficially. And here in this setting, there's no glory in Israel. God's people have left him and God's approval had been withdrawn for his people.

When God leaves you, it is Ihabod. But we can be encouraged today to know that the glory can return, as it did for Israel. God's will for his church, for the assembly of God, for the assembly of his own people, of his gathered people, is that it be a glorious church.

A glorious church. That's what our Lord is coming back for. In Ephesians 5, 27, we see that our Lord describes his church as such a church.

Ephesians 5, verse 27. And it's pictured there in the context as a light to a bride for a husband. Ephesians 5, 27, it tells how he might present to himself, present it to himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that should be holy and without blemish.

[18:55] The glorious church is God's desire. God has desired that. He wants that for his church. Some of us put it like this, that the true glory of a church consists in the purity of its members, in its spiritual progress, in its unity of its fellowship, in the spiritual children born into its household of faith, in its self-sacrificing spirit towards others, and in the prayer life of the whole group.

When a church is in a healthy condition, hypocrisy will be limited. Progress and purity will be constant. Strife and discord will disappear. Sympathy for the lost will seek means for their rescue. Recruits will outnumber the losses from backsliding, removal and death. Private devotion will be a pleasure. Family religion a joy and public worship a sought delight.

A glorious church. That's God's design. That's God's purpose for you, for me, for his people. As we gather, as we are that public group, that group of people who are saved people in a place that we should be a glorious church.

That's his will. Yet we see at times the glory has gone, the touch of God. Now you could think how in times gone by there was great movements of God, great revival, flood tides across nations and God rose up, God raised up men and women of God to be a blessed example as churches were planted and as there was great movements of souls swept into the kingdom of God.

[20:47] God. And yet, today, those same churches are at times dwindling and scarcely visible or they're just a very poor kind of remainder of

just a shadow.

Yeah, that's the word. But that helps me with the odd word here and there. They're just a shadow of what they used to be, aren't they? I mean, you can think of them yourselves, of different churches and where you see various churches have now dwindled so much that they're combined and combined in the uniting and such that used to be very strong in their early stages.

In those pioneer days, they just dwindled and scarcely a shadow of what they were. And there's one old-time preacher in the US who said in 1876 he was called to a very fashionable Presbyterian congregation and he says in one of his books, this Presbyterian preacher of old, he says, the building was a beautiful edifice but it was completely unsuitable for evangelism and soul winning. And he said that one night he went home broken-hearted at the formalism and the deadness of this church and he said, he went home and he prayed, O Lord, set my church on fire.

And that night the Lord literally answered his prayer. The church went on fire and was burnt to the ground. And as he stood among the ashes he said, Lord, I didn't mean it that way but the Lord did a mighty thing.

[22:32] They hired, as they were building their new building, an old opera house, a larger building and he records, this is a preacher, he records in the 16 months that they were sojourning, just temporarily in this building, that more souls were saved in that building than in the past 16 years of his ministry.

And because he said not only did the church catch fire, but the members moved with love, moved with the circumstances, started to pray. And when the church starts to pray, the fire is not far away. And you can see that, I can think of some examples myself of various church gatherings, they're in a building that's very pokey and small, very constrained, and it really limits their growth.

And the church is more than the building. This is just a place we gather. And if we outgrow this building, amen, let's find a bigger one.

God helping us. It's not like the building is the be all and end all. But in this case, he prayed, Lord, set my church on fire. And the Lord did, and it was a blessing as a result.

[23:43] So the glory of God is what we seek, isn't it? That God will be glorified in his church. And when a church will water down the gospel message, sin, righteousness, judgment, when a church has lost that vital message of Christ and him crucified, such a church gets overtaken by a half-heartedness, by a lukewarmness, a false spirituality, and a falling away, a degeneration, and a decay.

And it's as if God has written over the entrance, Ichabod, the glory of God is departed. Yet God's will is that we be, as Ephesians 3.21, unto him be glory in the church, by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.

God's will, his desire, his word tells us, is that unto him be glory in the church. The glory has gone. In some circles, it's just, people have just got religion.

There's a lack of power, a lack of joy, of life, of the gospel itself. You hear of some churches, you know, and it's what people often think of as churches, you know, the ones that are, you know, the Anglican, the Catholic, whatever it be, where some people have got those in their minds, that such institutions, sadly, not entirely, but in many cases, the gospel's not even preached.

It's not evident. Thank God there are some evangelical Anglicans, but we know that there are some circles where the gospel is missing entirely, and people come and just get some kind of lecture, some kind of social pep talk.

[25:31] And that can happen in the jazzy churches too. It's just a superficial message. It's not the life-changing gospel. It's not Christ and him crucified. And the glory is gone.

The glory is gone. How we need to pray, to pray church, to pray for our church, for other churches represented, that we will pray to be a church fervent, a blaze, on fire, with God's zeal and fervour and vibrancy.

A church fervent, a blaze. Not a church where it's just lip service, where it's shallow and superficial, with hearts far, far from God, where the glory is gone.

But that will be as in Israel. The glory returned. The glory came back. It was Ichabod for a season, but the glory returned.

The glory has gone, but the glory can return. As God's people seek him in repentance, in faith, in getting back to God, getting back to the basics, God can move upon us with a spiritual awakening. [26:41] As we are a people confronted by the glory of God in true transforming worship, as we'll realise again the holiness of God, the majesty of God, the greatness of God, the awe of God.

And as God's people get awakened and enlivened and set ablaze, that we'll be those lights in the world that we're meant to be. As was prayed earlier, ambassadors, that will be those containers of the glory of God, dispensers of the glory of God.

That God doesn't just fill us with his glory, he doesn't just awaken us and give us that light, as it were, that indwelling of himself, of his spirit, that there'll be transmitters of it, will be reflectors of his glory, that we will shine and others will catch the blaze, that others will catch the glory, as it were, that lives can be radically changed and that we'll be a people that will be consecrated in everything that we do unto the Lord.

And whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, 1 Corinthians 10, 31, let it all be unto, unto his glory. Do all things to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10, 31.

To have that as that driving force in our decision making, that it's all to his glory, to his glory. God helping us will be a glorious church. And there'll be a glorious gospel preached a glorious gospel. [28:15] We see that in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 4. In a world dark and darkening, we need the glory of God. We need the glorious gospel. We see that in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 4, where it tells of a world in whom the God, small g of this world, hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

And the glory has gone. The glorious gospel must be preached. Paul says in Acts 20, 27, For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

He says, I'm not going to hold anything back. I must declare unto you the whole counsel, all the counsel of God. God. The gospel is the message of the cross.

It brings an offense, a conviction. And the gospel is being spread. We've got maps on the wall. I think whether that was part of my reference to the Jehovah's Witnesses having maps on the wall, but we've got a map on the wall too.

Amen? And we're getting some sections and we're doing some visits here around this area. And I know someone that was telling me, after I mentioned it last Sunday night, I think, was telling me that as they went down the street, they were told that the Jehovah's Witnesses had gone down that same street just hours before that same day.

[29:47] And what an amazing thing that is. And yet the people were actually getting in some good conversations. They were receptive. Because, you know, they made a point of saying we're not Jehovah's Witnesses.

But we are actually Christians. Giving the Christian gospel message. So the gospel, the glorious gospel, we've got such a blessed message, that life changing message of the good news, of salvation.

It's an offense, it brings conviction, yet it must be preached, that glorious gospel. There's a preacher that tells of D.L. Moody. Moody was a well-known evangelist who especially started in children's ministry as a younger man.

And Moody took a pew in the church. In those days they would rent pews. You had to, I guess you paid for your pew. So you're lucky tonight we didn't charge you. But they used to pay for their pews, apparently.

And so they had pews, these benches set aside. And you could rent the whole pew if you wanted to. And this man, Moody, the preacher said to him, you don't need a whole pew.

[30:57] You can sit in the whole pew. You can't sit in the whole pew, just rent one seat. You know, just, you know, 20 cents, not a dollar, whatever it was. But the preacher said, you must be very proud.

Oh, says Moody, I'm renting the pew, a big one, I want a big pew. The preacher said, you must be very proud. And Moody said, you'll see how proud I am. And the first day Moody had that pew, he'd filled it from end to end with some of the toughest people of the streets of Chicago.

And when he got the pew filled, he prayed until every one of them was saved. And then he made every one of them hire a pew and fill a pew. And soon that church that was sleeping was awakened. What a blessing, what a story. One man, Moody, he was just a seller of shoes. He wasn't anybody special that the world would reckon. Just a shoe seller.

Just a cobbler. You know, he made shoes and fixed them, sold them. A shoe seller with little ability. But when God came in, what a mighty man of God he became.

[32:04] When the glory came in to Moody, God mightily used him with the glorious gospel. And this preacher is recounting this. You know, when he started off, he said, I couldn't speak to older people, I'll speak to children.

So he started a Sunday school. A children's program. And he built that Sunday school for children. Until it had almost 2,000 members. What a Sunday school.

And he said, what a dim on Sunday afternoon before the service started. Now we've got some sound proofing here. But, you know, this place was filled with 2,000 children.

And this preacher says, if they're anything like my two boys, I'm telling you, they would have been a racket, alright. And Moody knew every child. He knew every home they came from. He loved them. And he prayed for them. He prayed them into the arms of Jesus. The glorious gospel. It's life changing, isn't it? The glorious gospel. The gospel ought to be cherished. We should love the gospel.

[33:06] Obey the gospel. Proclaim the gospel. The glorious gospel. Give yourself to the Lord. And be a messenger of this glorious gospel. Friends, how can we be challenged tonight to realise this in this place, in this church, in our hearts, in your life?

Another preacher, William Booth, said this. And just try to take this in. Try to take this in as if it were a challenge from God.

This is what Moody Booth says. Booth says this. Go stand by the gates of hell, and hear the damned entreat you to go to their father's house, and bid their brothers and sisters and servants and masters not to come there.

And then look Christ in the face, whose mercy you have professed to obey, and tell him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish his mercy to the world.

Stand by the gates of hell. We've got a glorious gospel. This world is dark, ever darkening. It's dark. It's dreary. It's dreadful.

[34:28] We see the world news at this time. We're on the brink of disaster. How we need this glorious gospel in such a time as this.

Is God within you? Or are you Ichabod? Is Ichabod your name? Thank God the glory can return. Amen? As it did for Israel, the glory came back.

As the people sought him, as they sought after God, as they realised the majesty, the glory, the awe of God, the greatness of God.

The glory had gone, but the glory came back. And that same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives within us. We must follow the cloud, the glory, as it were.

Of course, we don't see it in such a tangible way necessarily. But there's that sense of the awe of who we serve.

[35:28] Who is our God? He is glorious and majestic. He is the great God. The glory of God is his hallmark through the scriptures from the burning bush right through the scriptures.

We see the glory. The glory was departed with Ichabod's birth, yet the glory returned. And whatever our circumstance, the glory of God can revive us again.

In Isaiah 66, verse 1, Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you build unto me?

And where is the place of my rest? God doesn't dwell in buildings made by men. He goes on, For all those things have been made and all those things have been, saith the Lord.

But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word. He comes and lives within living vessels, vessels of clay, frail, faulty, failing, oft times, yet we are containers for the glory of God.

[36:44] And your humble heart is God's dwelling place. As my brother, as my sister, God's glory is in you. We have this glory in earthen vessels.

It's a wonder, isn't it? And how we need to value people as truly vessels of God's glory. We've all got a value in God's sight as precious containers.

We've all been through different experiences and travelled through different journeys of life. And we've all got our personalities and our ways about us.

Yet, let's love one another as God's people, as brothers and sisters together, as vessels unto honour, earthen vessels that the glory of God can fill.

And when the glory is gone, thank God, he can return again. God's glory is in us. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that your word tells us that you're coming back for a glorious church.

[37:49] A glorious church. Lord, we know for the meantime as your word tells us we all fall short of the glory of God. Yet, Lord, you have your will, your design, that ultimate purpose that will be fulfilled, that we will be that glorious church at your coming without spot, without wrinkle or any such thing.

Lord, that we can be vessels unto honour, vessels that your glory fills and flows out of, that we can shine as lights in the world, in this darkened world, shine that glorious gospel message that we are given to transmit.

Help us, Lord, to fix any transmission problems that we might have with our messaging. Lord, let it be that we'll be free-flowing, that message won't be interrupted or messed up, Lord, that message that we will declare, that glorious gospel message will be on our lips, in our hearts and lived out in our lives, Lord.

Let it be for your glory we pray. Amen. Amen.