

The true king

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[0 : 0 0] We're reading 1 Samuel chapter 4 verses 1 to 11. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

! Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphec. The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, we killed about 4,000 men on the field of battle.

And when the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it might come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.

So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of hosts. who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Ophni and Phinehas, were there with the Ark of the Covenant of God.

As soon as the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout so that the earth resounded. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?

[1 : 2 9] And when they learned that the Ark of the Lord had come to the camp, the Philistines were afraid. For they said, A God has come into the camp. And they said, Woe to us, for nothing like this has happened before.

Woe to us, who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. Take courage and be men, all Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you.

Be men and fight. So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated. And they fled, every man to his home.

And there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel 30,000 fruit soldiers. And the Ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Ophni and Phinehas, died.

Thanks, Italia, very much for reading. Good morning, everyone. Let's pray. Our loving Father, we thank you for this time now to listen to you speak in your word.

[2 : 5 2] Thank you that your word brings light to our darkened hearts. And we pray, indeed, that your word would be bringing light this morning.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're carrying on in this rip-roaring story of 1 Samuel. The problem we've got is, I guess we're doing something slightly experimental.

So we don't have time to read it all on Sunday mornings. And yet, we need to understand that it is an unfolding story. And so, as we dip in, the challenge is that I and others preaching somehow kind of managed to sort of get us to understand the story as well as it's unfolding.

What can help with that, of course, is if you want to go and read big bits of chunks of 1 Samuel before, that will help as well. So I suppose what we're doing is slightly experimental.

We're going to see how it goes. And the aim is that really we do grasp what God is saying through the whole book this term. Who God is and what he's doing through this book.

[4 : 09] Well, last week, we were in Hannah's prayer and we saw that Hannah was treating God as God. The next thing we see in the story is a great contrast to Hannah, which lasts for five chapters, chapter 2 to chapter 7.

And I've called those chapters Trifling with the True King. Whereas Hannah treats God as God, the priests don't, the elders don't, the people don't, the Philistines don't.

They trifle with the True King. And it's actually all building up to chapter 8, which is the big moment which we'll come to next week, where we see that the people definitively reject God as being their king.

I looked up the meaning of the word to trifle, to trifle with, in the Cambridge Dictionary. It said this, to trifle means to treat someone or something carelessly or without respect.

can God be trifled with? Now the interesting thing is that it's not that they didn't believe in God, we're going to see that, it's that they didn't know him.

[5 : 37] They didn't know him or treat him as he truly is. The true king of the universe, holy beyond compare, they trifled with him. And we'll see this morning, I hope, that this couldn't be more relevant for us today.

Because actually, it's how we all treat God by nature. It's all around us. We're going to focus on chapter four. There are two points for us really, and just so that you know, most of our time is in point one, points two and three are very, very brief.

But firstly, God was their true king, but they trifled with him. Just look down with me at chapter four, verses one to three. Again, the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. The Philistines drew up in line for battle against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about 4,000 men on the field of battle.

And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.

[7 : 00] So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of Hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas were there with the Ark of the Covenant.

You remember the genie from Aladdin, the big blue genie? Everyone's seen Aladdin? Don't miss it. It's a classic. Just rub the lamp and he'll give you those wishes.

The genie is the powerful servant who is there to supply and realize my ambitions. Rub-a-dub-dub, give me that career.

Rub-a-dub-dub, make her fall in love with me. Rub-a-dub-dub, make me a partner. Well, that is how they were treating God at this point in their history.

It is important to know the wider context here. So, they are in the promised land. They have been there for about 300 years. God's people.

[8 : 03] God has blessed them. He's saved them. He's brought them to a beautiful land. But things have not been going well. These are dark times. And at the end of the book of Judges, which is just before 1 Samuel in history, you get everyone doing what is right in their own eyes.

It is complete anarchy, wickedness across the lands. at the beginning of 1 Samuel, the situation is the same. These are dark times.

The priests, the priests, Hophni and Phinehas, taking God's sacrifices that are meant for him and plunging the fork in and eating them for themselves and then going off and sleeping with the women who are working in the temple.

Complete despising of the Lord. The nation, if that was the priests, then think of the nation. The nation was worshipping idols at this point.

To see this, I think it's important to see that this is happening right now at this point in the story. Flick forward with me to chapter 7, verse 3. A few months later and Samuel says, if you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods that are among you.

[9 : 27] They are currently worshipping idols at this point in their history in chapter 4. God had raised up enemies. By this stage, it looks like the Philistines are the main one.

And so, come back to 4, verse 1. The people go out to battle against the Philistines to try to get some peace. But they go out on their own and without reference to God.

Just look at verse 1 again. You see the contrast? The word of Samuel came to all Israel. It's very stark, isn't it? Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines.

I think that is clear in verse 1 that they have gone out on their own without reference to God. After all, God has in his kindness raised up for them a prophet.

That is the point of chapter 3. You know the famous story with Samuel being raised up as a prophet. He hears God speak to him three times, Samuel, Samuel, Samuel.

[10 : 32] They don't deserve it. I mean, 300 years of idolatry. Amazing, isn't it? Here is God holding out his arms to them again. Here's my prophet.

I remember one of my lecturers at college, theological college when I was at Oak Hill, once saying that he's yet to come across a single chapter in the Bible where the grace and kindness of God is not present.

I think he's right. Just flick back with me to see the end of chapter 3. Verse 20. Samuel has been established as a prophet and there, verse 20, all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord.

4 verse 1. They pay no attention to him. God is there through his word but they don't want him and they went out to battle.

What 4 verse 1 should read I think is and the elders of the people went to Samuel and said, what does the Lord want us to do? How can we honour him? Will he go out to fight with us?

[11 : 52] They took matters into their own hands. Now it's not hard to see the parallels to today. Bibles are everywhere, right, in this country. Just a couple of clicks online.

God has gone to great lengths to make himself known by giving us the Bible. Not just one prophet but the whole council of scripture. And how do we treat it by nature?

We don't want it because we don't want him. I'm told there is a Bible on the table of the House of Commons. You know, those books that stand between the two parties as they're fighting it out.

There's a Bible there. remains firmly closed as we decide our domestic and foreign policy. Well, the battle spreads and they suffer their first defeat in verse 2 and then verse 3 they regroup.

People come back to the camp and as they regroup do you notice there in verse 3 the elders then blame God. You see there in verse 3 why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?

[13 : 10] Why doesn't he care? Again, how familiar this is to us. How often does God get the blame when things go wrong?

Some personal crisis? A national event? How can God let this happen? How can God allow so much suffering in the world? God is exactly what they said but they said it of the God that they did not know or care about and of the God who they despised.

Why hasn't he come to our rescue? They've shown no interest in treating God as God up until that point until the point of crisis crisis and so they blame God and then as if that wasn't bad enough they then call on him like a genie.

Get the lamp they say verse 3 let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh rub-a-dub-dub go and get the box that he lives in and notice there that it says that it may come among us and save us now that word could be you'll see the footnote could be translated he it reads much more naturally in the original as it which is why the translators have put it even if it's he it's still go and get God that it or he the God who lives in that box may come and save us how small how pathetic they think he is they believe he exists probably but they don't know him call the butler some of our children are listening to Jeeves and Worcester good stuff

I'd recommend it Worcester is the guy he has his butler Jeeves and when things go wrong he calls the butler this is God the butler get the butler in ding-a-ling God the lucky charm go get the magic object actually they're treating God like any pagan God I don't know if you've been to the British Museum recently I was surprised to see when I went a year ago the gift shop you can buy all sorts of genuine charms and necklaces pagan things objects that are supposed to bring luck in the gift shop at the British Museum that is how God's people at this point were treating their holy creator God who had given them everything by the way I think this describes well does it not so much of what is called cultural

[16:10] Christianity it's really this kind of treatment of God isn't it think of the crucifix the necklace the magic necklace let me wear my magic crucifix which will bring me the protection and blessing of God while actually showing no interest in living with Jesus as my Lord and Savior God my lucky charm God my butler my servant my PA my genie God to serve me rather than me to serve him his job is to bless my ambitions well just look down at verse 4 where it goes on so the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim now I think the author here is bringing something out I think he's bringing out gently and subtly the utter absurdity of this treatment of God he is the

Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim by the way that's who he really is the Lord of hosts speaking of his lordship over heavenly armies almighty and then enthroned on the cherubim sitting as king on the throne of the universe oh the throne is in heaven by the way not on earth and they think they have to carry him they think he lives in a box three feet long the one whose glory is unimaginably great so holy no one can see him and live and so they are treating the true invisible lord of the universe whose throne is in heaven like a pathetic genie like their butler they believe he may exist but they don't know him just try this to try and get a sense of what's happening here try if you work try going back to the office if that's your context and saying to your boss you couldn't nip out and get me a coffee could you and while you're at it post this letter for me maybe your boss is really kind and they'd be like yeah delighted but I doubt it or they would maybe yes you've only got a couple of days left if you're at school try walking into class and slapping your homework on the desk to the teacher do that we'll try that and we get the slightest glimpse of this kind of dishonoring of the glorious king of the universe who loves us and made us notice in verse five they give a great cheer so the ark comes into the camp and all

Israel gives a mighty shout hooray we're saved and the earth resounded I take it when you've got that number of men shouting the valleys resound in a way that the Philistines could hear but it is a cheer of delusion God is not with them the battle is about to be lost it is a temporary elation before reality hits home that God is not with them as they think and it is possible to live our whole lives in a state of verse five delusion a false joy a baseless peace peace but there is no peace in the end for us if we refuse to know God in his word and treat him as nothing more than my servant whose job it is to bless my ambitions notice again it is not that they don't believe in him many people today believe in something out there don't they of course we do we know we've been created it's not that they don't believe in him it's that they don't know him who he truly is even the

Philistines knew more than they did at this point isn't it I think that's why we get the rest of these they consider him to be powerful enough to defeat them recorded I think to show us how far God's people have sunk in their treatment of their own God well what is the outcome secondly God will not be trifled with verse 10 so the Philistines fought it's so matter of fact isn't it and Israel was defeated and they fled every man to his home and there was a very great slaughter for 30,000 foot soldiers of Israel fell and the ark of God was captured and the two sons of Eli Hophni and Phinehas died God will not be trifled with contrary to what they thought God was not on their side he allowed them to be defeated he allowed the ark the box to be taken which he doesn't need and

Hophni and Phinehas who had despised him trifled with him they meet their end God will not be trifled with as we read the rest of these chapters the Philistines discover the same thing as they try to bring God into their temple and it all ends in chapter 6 verse 20 which I think is the conclusion of this whole section of narrative where the Jewish people in Beth Shemesh say who is able to stand before the Lord this holy God God is not a pocket God he is the true king over the universe and he will not be despised well what should we conclude today but one thing I want to say is that let's see where the story goes this is a developing story come back next week as we look at chapter 8 but

[22 : 43] I think one very simple conclusion for us though God cannot be seen his throne is in heaven he is greatly to be feared and I think this question comes to us from this text though we can't see him will we treat him as God he has made himself known through his word the Bible it may be that for someone here the question is very present are you trifling with God oh I believe there's something out there or are you willing to take him seriously and to surrender your life to him to treat God as God that is what true repentance means to repent is to say I no longer live with you as my servant but I give my life to you my whole life to you as your servant and to those of us who would call ourselves

Christians God is a loving father and he is greatly to be feared so how seriously are we treating our Christian life this year as we come into a new academic year it's possible to have a casual kind of Christian faith a casual Christianity to trifle with Jesus to pursue my ambitions and to take Jesus with me if needed to strike out this year as they struck out the battle without reference to God and if this has been convicting which it has been for me this week well the wonderful news is that we can come freshly to Jesus who said this in Mark chapter 2 son your sins are forgiven let's pray now heavenly father we do confess our sin to you now how this is like looking in the mirror how often we have dishonored you treating you as if you were our servants forgive us in the name of

Jesus Christ and may we now give our whole lives to you do with us as you wish this year may our lives be to your glory may our ambitions be yours rather than ours and we pray these things in the name of Jesus Amen