

1 Samuel

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[0 : 00] Father God, we thank you for the opportunity to gather tonight. We thank you for your word, and we thank you for this passage that we're looking at tonight, that you have put it there because you want to teach us something about yourself.

God, I pray that you would help us to understand it, and I pray that as we understand this truth, that it would shape who we are. Amen. Who you are, sorry, who you're with makes all the difference.

When I was growing up, I think I might have shared with some of you before that my family moved to Paris at one point. It was cheaper for them to stick my dad into Paris because he was working in Africa a lot, and it was cheaper to fly from Paris to Africa than Sydney to Africa.

So being a kid, we just got dragged along. So me, and at that point, my one brother and two sisters all went with my parents to Paris. We moved into a small one-bedroom apartment with the six of us, and I was four at the time, and so my brother was six, sister five, me four, another sister three.

And so that meant my older brother went into kindergarten, and me and my older sister went to preschool while my younger sister won the prize and got to stay at home where everybody spoke English.

[1 : 12] And I remember going to preschool. I was always a fairly big kid, so me and my brother are both quite tall, but my older sister is adopted, and even aside from that, she probably would have been shorter than us, but my older sister now is literally about this tall.

She's absolutely tiny, and has been small her whole life. And I remember going to this preschool, and we both basically couldn't talk to anyone. We could fumble about in French, but not to the point where anybody understood what we were saying, including the teachers.

So when we would try and talk to them, they had no idea. They'd just smile, pat us on the head, and then move on to someone they understood. And look, it wouldn't have been so bad, because preschool basically consisted of painting.

I remember we had to wear ballet shoes and run around on some padded castle. That was all fun. I don't know why, but that was part of preschool. But the thing that killed it for me was a kid who, in my life, became affectionately known as the black jacket boy.

He wore a black jacket. It's not more creative than that. But the reason he was so significant for me is because every day, he would come and find the weird Australian kid who didn't speak French, beat me up and take my food.

[2 : 21] He had a bunch of his friends with him, so they would do it day after day. And I'd go to the teachers, and I couldn't even explain what was going on. And I'd go home and tell my mum, and she couldn't explain to the teacher what was going on. So every day, I went to school and got my lunch taken, and this kid would pick on me.

I developed a fairly significant hatred for this kid, but there was nothing I could do. There was him and his friends. I was by myself. They were bigger than me. And so every day, day after day, they would pick on me and pick on me and pick on me.

And one day, my sister noticed that this was going on. Now, again, I was four, so you've got me down here somewhere. My sister was five, so she's down here somewhere.

And she's noticed what was going on, and she's like, you know, are you okay? And I said, yeah, there's nothing I can do. She's like, sure there is. And she walks over and kicks this kid fair in the shins, and never once after that point did I get attacked by the black jacket boy.

So, who you're with makes all the difference. My intimidating little sister had rescued me, because up to that point, all I'd had was myself.

[3 : 23] Now, last week, in 1 Samuel 4, we found Israel having just lost a battle. Just lost 4,000 soldiers, feeling kind of terrible, but then they suddenly regain their confidence, because the ark of God is carried into camp.

They figure ark of God means automatic victory. For them, that's the same as God walking into camp with them, armor on, ready to go. They figure we're set now. Now, it turned out to be false confidence.

We saw that last week as well. But it wasn't false confidence because God couldn't deliver. However, it was false confidence because Israel had failed to grasp just how powerful God was.

They'd failed to understand that his power was about more than just protecting them. His power had a bigger agenda. They'd kind of limited him down to hurting their enemies and being good to them.

But they hadn't understood that there was more to God than just being their genie rescuer. And, of course, the result last week, they had an even more significant loss. 4,000 dead, God comes in, they're feeling really confident, and then they lose 30,000.

[4 : 34] And then we get to the passage that Gus just read out for us. Having lost the battle, now a messenger arrives from the front line back at Shiloh to deliver the bad news. Have a look at verse 12 with me.

That same day, a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh. His clothes were torn and dust on his head. When he arrived, 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. Sorry, I've managed to lose a page there. Now, it's only a few verses ago.

If you flick back to verse 5, the ark of the Lord's covenant comes into the camp, and Israel raises a huge shout that shakes the ground, because they are so confident that they're going to win now.

And then we get down to verse 13, and another shout is raised, but this one's a little bit different. This is the shout of widows and orphans.

[5 : 35] This is the shout of a country that no longer has an identity. The thing that made Israel was God. He chose them. He called them. He rescued them.

He protected them. And now they had lost the symbol that made them his. They have lost the thing that makes them unique. Now, I was reading this this week and trying to wonder what it would have been like as this messenger arrived.

I mean, if all of Israel is as misguided as the soldiers were when the ark arrived a few verses ago, they probably assumed that the army was going to win. I mean, that's what the soldiers assumed, so I'm sure that their wives and their kids and their cousins and their aunties and their uncles just assumed that victory was guaranteed.

They probably weren't waiting eagerly to find out what had happened, because they figured, we're going to win. They might have been even making preparations for a victory celebration. And then in the middle of that, instead of a victory march arriving through the gate, one disheveled soldier with torn clothes comes running through, out of breath, to deliver news not only of defeat, but the ark is gone.

The center of their nation is gone. Now, in this story, Eli is kind of a confusing character. This has happened a couple of times in 1 Samuel. We know that Eli is under the judgment of God, because that came up in chapter 3.

[7 : 01] But every now and then, we get kind of glimpses as if he's doing the right thing. And this is one of those confusing bits, I think. Everyone else might have been thinking, this is a sure thing. We're going to win.

But Eli is sitting next to the road, waiting and watching, scared. He fears for the ark. But I wonder if it's not as noble as it first looks.

What was Eli worried about? Was he fearing that the ark would get captured by the Philistines like it did? Or did he fear something that was maybe a little bit more selfish?

I mean, think about it. So far in 1 Samuel, Eli has been told twice, explicitly, your two sons will die on the same day. God has told him this twice.

He has just watched his two sons carry the ark of God off into battle. Maybe he figured out that that wasn't a good idea.

[8 : 03] Maybe what he feared wasn't that the ark would get taken, but that the ark was going to deliver the judgment that God had been promising. Maybe his issue isn't so much that he fears for the ark, but he actually fears the ark.

He fears God. He fears the judgment that the ark will represent. Could it be that Eli had sensed God's about to do what he's been promising? God is about to judge his two sons.

I mean, Eli's a priest. He hasn't done a great job of it, but on some level he knows who his God is. He knows what his God has done in the past.

And even a small understanding of God would have meant that Eli wasn't worried about the Philistines. He knows that if God wants to, all he has to do is think it and the army falls over dead.

I don't think Eli is worried about the ark here. I think he's worried about what God is about to do. Finally, at this late stage, it's almost as if Eli recognizes that God is to be feared, but it's too little and it's too late.

[9 : 16] Verse 14. Eli heard the outcry and asked, What's the meaning of this uproar? The man hurried over to Eli, who was 98 years old and whose eyes were so set that he could not see.

Does that... Eli is sitting by the road watching, but he's blind. He's so helpless at this stage, all he can do is sit and look, even though he can't see.

He was 98 years old and the man tells Eli, Eli, I've just come from the battle line. I've fled from it this very day. And Eli asked, What happened? 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. When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate.

His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led Israel 40 years. So Eli is blind when this guy comes running in. He doesn't get to see a guy who is torn clothes, dirty, out of breath.

[10 : 22] But his clue comes when everybody else starts crying out. His clue that something is wrong comes because everybody else screams. And so the messenger comes to Eli individually and delivers the report of what's happened at the front line.

And listen really carefully to what this messenger says. And listen closely to the order that he says it. Verse 17. The man who brought the news replied, Israel fled before the Philistines.

The army has suffered heavy losses. Your two sons are dead. And the ark of God has been captured. There's almost a crescendo in the way he says it.

You would assume that the worst thing for Eli to happen would be to lose his two sons. But the crescendo from the messenger is, the army fled. Suffered heavy losses.

Your sons are dead. And the ark is gone. The ark is the issue here. When Eli hears of the ark, not of his sons, he falls over and dies.

[11 : 31] It's a pretty undignified end to Eli's life. He dies because he's so fat that when he falls over, his neck breaks. That's basically what it's saying. He's 98.

He's blind. He's heavy. He falls over. And his neck can't support the weight. And so it's all over. God has poured out the judgment that he promised in chapter 3. God had said Hophni and Phinehas would die.

And God had said Eli too would face his judgment. And the fact that the ark is mentioned right there in that list means that we're in no doubt God did this.

This isn't the Philistines coming up with an amazing new battle plan. God did this. Now God might have used the Philistines. But ultimately this is God doing what he said he would do.

He said he would kill Hophni and Phinehas. He said that he would judge Eli. And into this judgment being poured out one after the other, there's a strange little bit at the end of this story.

[12 : 33] A baby gets born. One of the hardest things about becoming a parent, I think, is naming your baby. There is an absolute plethora of options.

And as celebrities get more and more creative, it's really hard to have an individual sounding name that doesn't sound weird. Now that Apple has become okay, there's not really anywhere else to go from there.

I did a bit of research on some terrible baby names. A few for your entertainment. Harry Pitts. Emma Royd. And a genuine one that my parents considered for my older brother was Job.

Which would have made him Job Low. And I'm not joking. That's the sad part. I even discovered that in New Zealand there are 71 names that are illegal to name your baby.

People have tried. They've submitted these as genuine names and they've been rejected. Some of them I can't tell you. But some of them are things like an asterisk or a full stop, which on the list was in brackets as a period.

[13 : 41] There are a lot of really bad baby names out there. But I think this one might take the cake. Not because it sounds ridiculous, although that's potentially true.

But listen. Verse 19. His daughter-in-law, this is Eli, 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.

As she was dying, the woman attending her said, Don't despair. You have given birth to a son. But she did not respond or pay any attention. She named the boy 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 of God has been captured. The wife of Phineas, after finding out that her husband and father-in-law are dead, gives birth and dies herself, only surviving long enough to name her child Ichabod.

which means no glory. For the rest of this kid's life, he will be remembered as marking the occasion when God left.

[15 : 02] He may as well have been called hopeless. I mean, it's like calling the kid genocide. It's almost as if she's given up and she's given him a name that is like a curse, because God's left and there's no hope anyway.

But listen to the way she words it in verse 22. It's really important. That glory has departed from Israel. Both this woman, when she's giving birth, and Eli know that what's going on here is God is leaving.

This is judgment. God hasn't been kidnapped. God's not trapped in the Ark, wishing that Israel had a better army. God has departed as an act of judgment on sinful and unworthy people.

This is active. God's not just getting carried along by other people's action. He's in control here. But, in the judgment, this is grace.

Now, I've been wrestling with this passage all week and it took me until yesterday to figure this out. It took me until yesterday to understand how significant this is. God departs in judgment on a people who are unworthy of his presence.

[16 : 20] He leaves because they don't deserve to have him around. But, that departure is a gift. It's actually an act of love on the heart part of God.

I mean, if God were to stay, if he were to remain among these sinful, disobedient people, his holiness would consume them. His perfection would destroy them.

As fewer and fewer of them recognize his power and significance, then more and more of them would have died. Something similar to the way that Hophni and Phinehas and Eli did.

It's quite similar to what happens at the beginning of the Bible in the Garden of Eden. If you're familiar with the story, you've got Adam and Eve in the garden. They've been given everything they possibly need. They're in a relationship with God.

They've got food. They've got, basically, freedom to do it. They want everything. Everything's fantastic. And they go and eat of the tree, the one tree that God has instructed them not to. They sin. They reject God as the one who is in charge and in control.

[17 : 23] And at that point, they get kicked out of the garden. They get separated out from one other tree, which is equally important, the tree of life. Now, that is judgment, plain and simple.

They did the wrong thing. They did the one wrong thing that God said not to do. And so they get kicked out. But it is also grace. If God leaves them in the garden at that point, and they eat from the tree of life, they live forever, but they live forever in a damaged relationship with God because they are disobedient.

So God kicks them out and begins a rescue plan, which ultimately ends in Jesus. In his judgment, he actually shows grace and love and generosity to his people.

And the same thing is going on here. God actually takes them out of the firing line because his righteous anger is rightly burning against them.

And he departs to spare them. He still pours out his judgment on Hophni and Phinehas and Eli and ultimately still on 30,000 soldiers.

[18 : 26] But he saves so many more. If he stayed, 30,000 would seem like a fairly insignificant number.

And this is what Eli is worried about as he sits by the road. Not that somebody is going to pinch the ark, but he knows that the power of God, which has been used for Israel's good for so long, is about to be poured out in judgment on his two sons and on Israel as a nation.

For Israel, the presence of God was who they were. His power was central to them existing. But they need to realize that it's something outside of their control.

That's why God gave them priests in the first place. That's why they've got sacrifices in a temple. It's a buffer for sinful people and a holy God. It's a safety thing so that Israel can have the benefits of God being around, the benefits of his power, the benefits of his love, without being destroyed by his holiness.

But instead, the temple and the ark has just become a way of domesticating God. It's become a way of kind of putting him in a box that they can manage and they can carry around to pull out as they think is helpful.

[19 : 50] They've basically reduced him so that when they want him, they can wheel him out and when they don't, they can do whatever they want. Now, I just want to throw a warning in here that there is a possibility that we can do this to God now.

We can actually take a God who created everything, a God who is in control of everything, a God who sustains everything, and we can just kind of shrink him down into church, into something that we do and gather around for an hour on a Sunday.

Important, but not so important. Significant, but only for a little bit of time. And so when I'm stressed, God, I need you. When I'm in danger, God, I need you.

But when I want to do something and God has told me it's wrong, I can just put him back in the Sunday box. I can put him back in the when it's convenient box. Israel's done it, but I wonder if you've done it as well.

Have you domesticated God to the point where not only do you endanger yourself, but you actually reject the good stuff that he wants to give you as well? This isn't just about fleeing the judgment of God.

[21 : 06] God's not just some angry guy in the background looking for an excuse to pour out his wrath. But Israel is actually cutting God out of their day-to-day life and they're missing out on the good gifts that he's got for them.

They're missing out on the guidance that he has for them and ultimately, it costs them the blessing of his presence altogether. Even in his judgment, God graciously spares Israel complete annihilation.

Don't get me wrong, 30,000 people dying is huge, but it would have seemed pretty insignificant if God had stayed and Israel had continued to reject him.

God is supposed to be the defining reality for Israel. That's why he was in the ark, which was in the center of the temple, which was in the center of Shiloh, which was the center of Israel.

He was supposed to flow out into all parts of their life. Everything was to revolve around him and his law. It was what was supposed to make them different. He was supposed to define how they used their money, how they treated one another, how they settled disputes.

[22 : 11] He was supposed to be what made them different. But now, it's his absence that defines Israel. They're the people without a God.

Now, for us as Christians, we don't have a temple building or a tent like they did. There's no ark for us. There's no priestly system. We are the temple of God.

I want to read to you two verses really quickly out of Corinthians. One's out of 1 Corinthians 3, and it says this, Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple? This is talking to the church as a group, and that God's spirit lives in you.

The second one is in 2 Corinthians 6, in verse 16, it says, We are the temple of the living God. Those are the same promises that God made to Israel.

But for us as Christians, we get the fuller version of it. We get the better version of it. If you are a Christian, let that sit for a second, the power of God lives in you.

[23 : 42] The same power that created, the power of God in your life, working through you. What a blessing. But is it something that's scary as well?

Is it something we should be afraid of? I mean, what if we stuff up like Eli did? Do we have to fear that God is going to turn around and do what he did to them? What about when we do things that are shameful and rebellious?

What will happen to us if God's there in that moment? Well, there might not be a tent or an ark, but there is a priest.

In Hebrews chapter 10, we are encouraged, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened up for us through the curtain, that's his body.

Since we have a great priest over the house of God, he's the key bit, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, having our bodies washed with pure water.

[24 : 54] Jesus makes God's presence with sinful people possible. Jesus takes away that fear that Eli rightly felt because in Jesus, God's judgment is satisfied.

God's judgment for sin, for your sin, for my sin, is poured out on Jesus completely and fully so that for us, the presence of God is still powerful, but it's a blessing.

It's not something to be feared. I think one of the reasons that we wrestle with this is because when we talk about the cross, when we go to Easter, it's really easy to be distracted by the fact that Jesus is bleeding on the cross.

It's really easy to be distracted by the fact that he's in excruciating physical pain, that Roman crucifixion is brutal, but you've got to understand there is more going on there than Jesus suffering physically.

On the cross, Jesus bears the full weight of God's judgment. That's not about physical affliction. The judgment for sin is a break in relationship.

[26 : 03] That's why God departs from Israel in this passage. And the judgment that Jesus cops is the judgment that all of us deserve.

Jesus doesn't go to the cross to take your crucifixion. That's not the swap that's going on. Jesus goes to the cross to take your punishment, to take God's judgment, and he makes it possible for you to stand confident in the presence of a God who is holy and powerful and who will not tolerate sin.

Because Jesus has taken all that is required. There is no more. There's nothing extra. And so we can look forward to the day when Jesus comes back to judge the earth.

Because our judgment is paid for. It's satisfied. It's dealt with. We still wrestle with sin in our lives now as Christians. And so we look forward to the day when that's finally and completely gone and we get to know Jesus fully and forever.

But even now, if you are a Christian, the power of God, God himself, dwells in you. Not near you, not around you, not occasionally, but God dwells in you always.

- [27 : 20] Now that has got to shape the way that we live. That's got to impact who we are even when no one else is around. I remember when I was growing up in high school, I had a fairly foul mouth.
- I don't know why, I just swore a lot. And I remember one of the teacher's strategies was to ask me, would you say that if your mum was here? My first reaction was, yeah, what's she going to do? But if she'd asked dad, then I would have been a little bit more scared.
- But sometimes I think we approach the presence of God like that. We think that the presence of God, would you do that if God was here, is a way to kind of remind us or guilt us into doing the right thing.
- But it's more than that. It sounds simple, but we need to sit in this because we forget. If the power of God dwells in you, and God's word says that it does, that should give us confidence.
- Not just confidence that one day we will spend forever with God, but confidence that there is nothing that we cannot achieve with God's help. confidence that there is no insurmountable task.
- [28 : 29] It should give us peace when we face unknown situations. In our stress and uncertainty, we know that the power in us, the God in us, is certain, is sure, is in control.
- It should give us security when we feel like no one else around us cares because His love is unfailing. He's proved it. He sent His only Son. God has promised us in His word, in Matthew 28, surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.
- In Hebrews 13, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. God is with you. If you are a Christian, the same God that spoke the earth into motion, the same God that put breath in your lungs when you were born, walks in every situation and every circumstance for your good.
- In verse 5 of the passage we read last week, Israel lets out a cry that shakes the ground. Faced with an army that had just killed 4,000 of their soldiers, they let out a cry of confidence because they think God is with them.
- And who you're with makes all the difference. Israel's false confidence in battle is now our rock-solid assurance. There's nothing false about it for us because we know that Jesus came, died, and rose again, and that God has given us His Holy Spirit.
- [30 : 03] We stand before God confident in the forgiveness that He offers in Jesus. We stand before exams, unemployment, relationship struggles, temptation, financial stress, anxiety, whatever we stand before, we stand with confidence because the God of heaven stands with us.
- There'll still be hard times, there'll still be moments where suffering comes so that God can open your eyes to understand just how sufficient He is.
- But in all of that, He will never leave you. In Him, there is and there will never be anything to fear.
- Let me finish with the words of Psalm 27. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?
- When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear.
- [31 : 14] Though war break out against me, even then, I will be confident. Amen. Samson 7000 seanger, le Dolyn was the S-T-Gaae, Heo, I