



+ This week at Magdalen Road church we continued our series on Sunday mornings in 1 Samuel. This week we attempted to understand chapters 4 to 6 as the people of God and their enemies the Philistines are starkly confronted by the holiness and power of God.

We saw that the Lord was not safe.

From chapter 4 we saw that...

... the Lord is not a trinket.

Chapter 4 describes two defeats in battle for the people of God. They enter combat initially and lose the battle but then decide the next time to take with them the Ark of the covenant; seeking to take the Lord with them into battle that they might be victorious.

However they still lose the battle and the Ark is captured. It seems that their concern for the Lord's presence was more 'superstition' or a 'lucky rabbits foot' then genuinely seeking his blessing. In v4 we read that Eli's two sons with there with the Ark and remembering them from previous weeks, we get a glimpse of perhaps the wrong way in which the Ark is being used. Strikingly God allows his Ark to be captured as he wants to teach them and us that this is not how he works.

We considered how at times we can easily slide into thinking that our faith is about us making bargains with God as we trust in objects or actions rather than him alone.

The surprise from the rest of chapter 4 is that both Eli and the wife of Phineas seem to care more about the Glory of God leaving the land as the Philistines steal the Ark, rather than the death of their family members.

... the Lord is not trounced (5v1-5)

The start of chapter 5 sees us in the temple of Dagon as the Ark has been captured and plundered and it looks like God has been defeated. It looks as if the God who made the world is simply a spoil of war. It looks as if he is now worshipping Dagon in Dagon's Temple, because Dagon is more powerful. However as the story unfolds we see that God is not helpless and he is still very much in charge.

We noted that often in the Scriptures God works from a place of seeming defeat and we see that rather than being helpless and weak is at work and powerful. We also noted that the

Bible will sometimes mock the worship of idols highlighting how false gods (like Dagon) do not and cannot work.

... the Lord is not tame (5v6-6v21)

The rest of our section then emphasises this idea that the Lord is not tame. The Philistines recognise that the Lord's hand was against them - 5v6 is the turning point But you see this message repeated again and again e.g. v6, v7, v9, v11 etc

The Philistines want to return the Ark back to Israel on the back of a cart laden with a kind of guilt offering. It seemed like the Lord had fallen into the hands of the Philistines, but actually the Philistines had fallen into the hands of the Lord. At this point a country-wide game of hot potato ensues as no one wants to be left holding the Ark and so contracting tumours and disease.

This section models three responses to us as we see the Lord is not tame:

+ 1 the Philistines want to get rid of him (ch 5-6)

These unbelievers personally encounter that God is powerful and dangerous, but rather than worshipping him they simply want to get rid of him. Just as in the gospels where unbelievers experience the power of Jesus but prefer to bow down to the old so-called gods with whom they were comfortable and in control. Maybe they would rather worship false gods like Dagon because life is simpler and they feel as if they can control him?

+ 2 Israel doesn't take him seriously (6v19)

Some of the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh die because they gaze into the Ark of the Lord. From the Law (Numbers 4v20) this was totally unacceptable. God is holy and we must take that holiness seriously, by his Spirit we have to get rid of sin in our lives, putting to death our old self and putting on Christ.

+ 3 Israel asked the question who can stand in the presence of the holy God? (6v20)

In many ways this is where the passage has been heading, we have seen the holiness of God and the unholiness of his people and so we are left asking the question with the Israelites, who can stand in the presence of the Lord??

The answer of course is none of us on our own. But we can stand in his presence as we stand in Christ. Jesus took the justice and righteousness of God upon himself as he suffered and died for our sins, that we might be forgiven and so able to stand in the presence of the holy God. Jesus is the answer to 6v20. Hallelujah!

Here are some questions to help your group discuss some of these ideas:

- Brainstorm what you remember from previous weeks in Samuel...
- Why do you think the Israelites want to take the Ark into battle in chapter 4? Was it a good idea? Why do you think the Lord allowed his Ark to be captured?
- What are we taught at the start of chapter 5 about God and about false gods?
- How do we see the Lord not being 'tame' in the rest of our section? What is our response to that aspect of his character?
- What is the answer to 6v20? What ought our response be to the section of scripture?