

# Keynotes from Steven Drivers am Sermon on 24/4/2022

## Series: "The Real King Part 5"

### "What happens when you put God in a box"

#### Text: 1 Samuel 4 v 1-4

#### Scripture references from the ESV

1 Samuel 4:1- 4 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 Aphek. <sup>2</sup>The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. <sup>3</sup>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 may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies." <sup>4</sup>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 of God. <sup>5</sup>When the ark of the LORD's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. <sup>6</sup>Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?" When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, <sup>7</sup>the Philistines were afraid. "A god has<sup>[a]</sup> come into the camp," they said. "Oh no! Nothing like this has happened before. <sup>8</sup>We're doomed! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. <sup>9</sup>Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!"

#### See p4 for the full chapter

Tragically, we read here that Israel has lost a battle to their great enemy, the Philistines, with 4000 Israelites killed. The elders realised, correctly, that it was God himself who had brought this about, not the might of the Philistines. The question was why had God done this (v3 above)? They assumed that what was missing was the Ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence with them. At Jericho, this had appeared to be what won the victory. Normally the Ark lived in the most holy place in the tabernacle in Shiloh, but in order to ensure victory (or so the Israelites thought -v5 above) the Ark was now brought to be with them in the battle. Even the Philistines were afraid, knowing what God had done previously for his people. Surely victory for the Israelites was a certainty!

Yet, immediately (v10 see p4) we read of an even greater defeat for Israel. 30,000 people were killed, along with the priests Hophni and Phinehas, and most surprisingly and tragically, the Ark itself was captured.

When the news was taken back to Shiloh, the whole town cried out (v13 see p4). Eli (the old priest and former judge of Israel) was told that his sons (Hophni and Phinehas) had died, but it was the news of the capture of the Ark that caused him to fall off his chair and thus die (v18 see p4). The leadership and priesthood of Israel are no more, and Israel is lost. Phinehas' pregnant wife went into labour (vv19-22 see p4) and gave birth to a son, dying in the process. Before she died, she named her son Ithabod, which means 'where is glory?' so that all who see him would answer that glory has departed from Israel because the Ark has been captured. There are questions to be answered here:

- What went wrong?
- Did God actually lose, though surely that is not possible?
- What will happen to Israel?

Underlying this physical tragedy is an even bigger tragedy. From it we can learn the importance of not just understanding God's glory but of worshipping him with our whole hearts and lives. We need to know that, try as we might, we cannot seek to control God.

### **We cannot put God in a box**

Israel has been trying to do just this, as we see from the very first verse.

1. **God's people forgot God's glory.** (v1 above) There is no indication that God has called his people to go out to battle against the Philistines. They are arch-enemies but this is not a battle that God has purposed.

- God is an afterthought for the people of Israel
- God's glory, his rule and his direction are not important

Israel seem to be assuming that God will just be there for them, no matter what they decide to do. In their eyes, God is there to make **them** glorious, not the other way round. They have either forgotten him or they have forgotten how the relationship is supposed to work.

- God's people are there for God's glory not for their own glory

We need to ask ourselves whether we too have forgotten this.

- Is God's glory an afterthought in our daily lives?
- Do we see him as some sort of eternal Santa Claus who give us what we want if we have been good enough?
- Are we treating God lightly and not with the weight he deserves?

The Hebrew word for **glory** has the same root as the word for weight. It is used in the Bible as a way to describe something serious, such as a meeting, or perhaps a heavy heart. Certainly it implies that there is a gravity about it. **The glory of God is his weightiness, his gravity –**

**the seriousness with which he must be taken**

When we forget his glory, we forget how seriously he must be taken. We lose sight of him and make ungodly decisions in our life as a result. We treat God as an afterthought, just as Israel did. When they realised that there was potentially a problem in their relationship with God, they tried to do something about it and they needed to do that, but they went from forgetting about him to manipulating him.

**2. God's people manipulated God's glory (v3 above)** Having realised that it was God who had caused their defeat, the Israelites rightly asked why, and came to the wrong conclusion. Rather than seeking God to find his will and seek forgiveness from him, they thought that bringing the Ark to the battlefield would bring God to their rescue. They tried to force his hand and manipulate him, assuming that God would be forced to deliver them from the Philistines for the sake of his honour.

- They are not showing faith in God, but rather they are treating the Ark as a religious magic trick.

The Israelites have put God in a box of their own making. There is no real relationship here, and they think that they have God's power and glory under their control (**v5** above). Even the Philistine army has a better understanding of God than the Israelites (**vv6-9** above)! They know enough to be afraid and take God more seriously than God's people do.

- The reality is that no one can put God in a box and twist his arm to force him to do something that he has not willed to do. We cannot have a relationship with him where we expect him to help us out on our terms. Today, in our society that is so self-obsessed, we can see that people are making God in their own image, and thinking that they are their own miracle.

Christians can seek to manipulate God too. We use the means of grace (prayer, reading scripture, gathering in church) as a way to try and make God say yes to what we ask of him.

- Instead of delighting in God as we meet with him in prayer, we want him just to make our lives how we want them to be.
- Rather than reading his word so that we can know more of him and enjoy him more, we read just to gain brownie points so that he will give us what we want.
- Coming to church, we create our own agenda and expect God to fit in with us, domesticating him and treating him lightly in the very place where on the face of it, we are taking him more seriously.

**3. God's people have stolen God's glory (v12ff see p4).** Now the underlying cause of Israel's problems is revealed through Eli himself. He was now 98, and had judged Israel for 40 years. He was blind, but we are also told that he was heavy, and in part that was what killed him. Why do we need to know this? Earlier, (**1 Sam 2:12-36** please read in your Bible), God had spoken to Eli (**v29** see p4) and we learned that his sons (priests in the house of God) had made a mockery of God. They slept with the women who worked in the tabernacle and used their power as priests to take glory for themselves. The worst of this was that they had been eating not just the meat but also the fatty parts of the sacrifices that were meant for God alone.

The sacrifices were meant to be a means to restore the relationship between God and his people, so that his glory could be amongst them. God's glory had been stolen, and eaten. Eli's heaviness clearly showed that he had been complicit in this. All the problems facing Israel can be laid at the door of Eli and his sons having led the people astray.

Having seen the connection between weight and glory, it is no surprise that it is Eli's weight that breaks the chair. As Hannah sang (2:3 see p4), the Lord has weighed the actions of Eli and his household and is bringing judgement. God is clearing out the corrupt leadership that has led the people astray and stolen his glory.

Then God's glory will be seen again in Israel, as the Ark fulfils its proper function and God's people remember who he really is. They will make sacrifices in obedience to his commandments and his glory will fill the holiest place again.

**God's glory did not depart from his people when the Ark was captured.**

**The Ark was captured because God's glory had already departed**

The outcome of the battle did **not** mean that God had lost!

**The outcome of the battle was the means God was using to restore the people to himself.**

We are no different from the Israelites in our attitude to God. We forget him, try to manipulate him, and steal his glory. What is the answer to this problem?

**Through his great love and mercy, God himself, as Jesus the Son, came to earth to restore our relationship with him.**

We don't deserve this and we need to remind ourselves of it every day. The Ark points to the coming of Jesus, the word made flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14 see p4). Unlike Eli, who had become blind to the glory of God, we can see that glory in Jesus as he opens our eyes to it.

The glory of God is revealed to us more every time we sit under his word with a desire to meet with him, not to score brownie points. This is just a foretaste of the weight of glory that will be revealed to us when Jesus returns. (2 Cor 4: 16-18 see p4). As we reflect on God's mercy and love, we are drawn more and more to him and we become living sacrifices, worshiping our holy God. (Romans 12: 1 see p4)

- Instead of stealing God's glory, manipulating his glory or forgetting his glory, we will live a life that reflects his glory to the rest of the world, as it overflows from us.

- As we cast our gaze on Christ, seeing God's mercy and love displayed, we see afresh the glory of God, bringing us to a life of true worship as we repent from our wrong attitudes to God.
- As we revel in the glory of Christ, we become living sacrifices because we want to, not because we have to.
- Then our churches become places of true and proper worship, reflecting on the gravity and majesty of God.

**As we look to Jesus, we are taken from the tragedy of seeking our own glory, to joining in his great glory. This is what we need to pray for.**

**1 Samuel 4: 10-22** <sup>10</sup> 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 thirty thousand foot soldiers. <sup>11</sup> And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

<sup>12</sup> A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head. <sup>13</sup> When he arrived, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. <sup>14</sup> When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this uproar?" Then the man hurried and came and told Eli. <sup>15</sup> Now Eli was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set so that he could not see. <sup>16</sup> And the man said to Eli, "I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today." And he said, "How did it go, my son?" <sup>17</sup> He who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." <sup>18</sup> As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backwards from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel for forty years.

<sup>19</sup> Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth, for her pains came upon her. <sup>20</sup> And about the time of her death the women attending her said to her, "Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer or pay attention. <sup>21</sup> And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed<sup>[a]</sup> from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. <sup>22</sup> And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

**1 Sam 2:29** <sup>29</sup>Why then do you scorn<sup>[d]</sup> my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded, and honour your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?’

**1 Sam 2:3** for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed

**John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**2 Cor 4: 16-18** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

**Romans 12: 1** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.