

Title: God's Glory Alone!
Scripture: 1 Samuel 4
Series: God, the True King

1. Introduction:

- a. Our passage today begins the work of God in Judgment.
 - i. The focus of chapters 4-6 shifts from God's work in preparing Samuel to the Ark of God and God's judgment poured out on the unholy leadership of Israel.
- b. In this portion of Scripture, God teaches Israel and all His people a valuable lesson. Our dependence must be upon God through His Word and not on men (elders and Eli), objects (the Ark of the covenant), or outward identification with God (we are God's people).
- c. Our passage can be outlined in two sections:
 1. The first is the battle that ends with the death of Hophni and Phinehas.
 2. The second relates the news of the battle and closes with the death of Eli and Eli's daughter-in-law.
- d. The focus of the chapter is the misuse of the Ark of the Covenant. To understand our passage, we must realize what the Ark of the Covenant was and what it symbolized to Israel:
 - i. The Ark held the covenant between the people and God (the ten commandments),

- ii. It was also “God’s footstool.”
 - 1. **1 Chronicles 28:2** Then King David rose to his feet and said: “Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the Ark of the covenant of the LORD and for the footstool of our God, and I made preparations for building.
- iii. On top of the Ark was the mercy seat which symbolized the divine throne itself.
- iv. The Ark was the visible sign of the holy presence of God, whose real throne is on high above the heavens.
 - 1. No better verses demonstrates this than **Exodus 25:21-22** And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the Ark, and in the Ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. (22) There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the Ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.
- v. We know that the Ark had gone into battle with the people, by God’s command, as a visible sign of God fighting for His people. However, the people had wrongly come to think that the Ark’s presence in any battle would guarantee victory for Israel, no matter their obedience to God. In essence, the Ark became an idol as the people worshiped the Ark and not the Lord it represented.

1. Idolatry is a prohibited sin in the covenant. We read in **Exodus 20:4-5** “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (5) You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,
 - a. God’s jealousy speaks to the truth that he loves us. As John Donne once said, “Oh, if thou carest not whom I love, Alas! Thou Lovest not me.”
 - b. God’s love will be displayed as he removes any idolatry found within His people so that they can keep the second commandment.

2. Verse 1A: A Refusal to Listen to God Speaks of Great Sin:

And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

- a. During the events before us, we learn that Samuel was busy fulfilling the ministry of the prophet. The word of Samuel is the Word of the Lord. As Samuel received God’s Word, he delivered it to God’s people.
- b. However, Samuel had not yet assumed his judgeship because Eli, the priest, was still alive.
- c. Beloved, the tragedy of our story is that the people depended on political leaders (i.e., the elders) who

sought help from an object, the “ark of God,” and yet did not seek the word of the Lord from God’s prophet.

i. The implication of our passage is, “Though the people knew that Samuel was God’s prophet, nevertheless the people went out to battle without asking the will of the Lord.” They chose to do what was right in their own eyes. The results were disastrous.

d. Like then, too many Christians make decisions that are based on the opinions of others, their gut feeling, what seems right, and do not consult the Word of God. It appears that God’s word has no place or value in us.

e. How sad this is because we have learned that God’s Word is Theopneustos, the breath of God. The Word of God is a lamp and light to guide us through the darkness of this world. To walk in our own council is to invite tragedy and demonstrates a lack of discernment.

i. Such foolishness can only lead to catastrophe.

3. Verses 1B and 2: Self-determination leads to Death: Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. (2) The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle.

a. When the people went into battle without first seeking the Word of the Lord, they demonstrated their

obstinance, and that very obstinance leads to defeat and death.

i. **Psalms 50:16-17** But to the wicked God says: “What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? (17) For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you.

b. Notice the price that is paid when God’s Word will not govern us.

i. Four thousand men died that day. These were needless deaths brought about by obstinancy. The price of self-determination is always very high.

4. Verse 3A: God is Sovereign: And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?”

a. The elders asked the right question: **Why had the Lord defeated them before the Philistines?**

i. The elders demonstrate an understanding of the sovereignty of God. If they had lost, it was God that had caused it to happen. Here they have an incredible opportunity to seek God through His word. They had the opportunity to bring in Samuel and be instructed.

ii. Yet, again they refuse to seek the word of the Lord through his servant, the prophet.

1. We learn that obstinacy is a sin that is not easily defeated.

2. The people would rather trust in objects and religion than in the living God.

5. Verses 3B-5: Religion is Idolatry: 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.” (4) 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. (5) 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.

a. The people put their hope on the Ark without first humbly coming to the Lord of the Ark. They will not live rightly nor heed God’s word.

i. The bible teaches us that the people began to treat the Ark without respect. The Ark became an instrument, an amulet, a lucky charm through which victory might be attained. God’s people had lost the sense of the awesomeness of God.

ii. The people assumed that if they brought the Ark of God to the battle, God would be forced to grant victory to protect His honor.

1. God, they assumed, cannot allow Himself to be defeated.

2. They were trying to twist God’s arm behind His back.

iii. We tend to do the very same thing. We say, “God, I have all these plans, and if you don’t come

through on your end, your reputation will be ruined.”

1. God, if you will do this for me, then I will do that for you.

iv. When we operate this way, our concern is not to seek God but to control Him, not to submit to God but to use Him.

1. **Commentary:** This is to prefer religious magic to spiritual holiness; we are interested in success, not repentance.

b. God had warned Israel about this idolatrous attitude that presumes the blessing of God without a surrendered heart to Him.

i. **Leviticus 26:14-17** “But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, (15) if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, (16) then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. (17) I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you.”

c. **Israel gave a mighty shout:** This shout points to the overconfidence of the covenant people in Ark. They

trusted in the Ark of the Lord rather than the word of the Lord.

- i. In doing so, they painted a wrong picture of God to the world.

6. Verse 6-9: The World's View of God: And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the Ark of the LORD had come to the camp, (7) 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. (8) 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. (9) Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight."

- a. The pagan Philistines heard the shout and concluded that the Israelites had brought the image of "their gods" into the battle, and hence God Himself was present. This is the way idolatry thinks.
- b. The Philistines understood that God had delivered Israel on previous occasions. They wrongly assumed that they would fall in battle before the Ark.
 - i. However, they refused to surrender. This, too, was of the Lord. The Philistines would rather die than serve Israel.

7. Verses 10 and 11: Idolatry Leads to Ruin: So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell.
- (11) And the Ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.
- a. We read that the people suffered the loss of thirty thousand soldiers. The priests who served by the Ark died in the war. And then, the unthinkable happened. The pagans had captured the Ark of the Lord.
 - b. **Notice that the people fled to their own tents.** They abandoned military service altogether.
 - c. Our text forces us to acknowledge the following truths:
 - i. God would rather suffer shame than allow us to carry on a false relationship with him.
 - ii. God will allow us to be disappointed with Him if it will awaken us to the sort of God He is.
 - d. Beloved, we are not immune from this type of superstitious faith.
 - i. We can easily subscribe to a faith that fails to confess, “God, You are worthy!” and instead confesses, “God, You are useful!”
 - ii. We say that Christians must pray, but only because we long for communing with God and not to get what we want from God.
 - iii. We say that Christians must congregate but only as an authentic expression of our love for God and His

people and not fulfill the religious duty by which God is indebted to us.

- e. Brothers and sisters, please notice the irony of this passage. The people bring the Ark to the battle to secure their victory, but God brings the Ark to battle to fulfill His word and put Hophni and Phinehas to death. The purposes of God and the people are entirely different.
 - i. If there will be new godly leadership, the godless leadership of yesterday must be done away with.
 - 1. We must pay close attention to the twist in this story. The people assumed that God had lost, but that is far from the truth. God was beginning to protect his honor and restore it. God will no more allow the religious leaders to despise His name.
8. Verses 12-17: The Certainty of the Fulfillment of God's Word: 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. (13) 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. (14) When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this uproar?" Then the man hurried and came and told Eli. (15) Now Eli was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set so that he could not see. (16) 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?” (17) 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.”

- a. The term “**watching**” is here used symbolically for waiting anxiously. Remember, Eli could not see.
- b. Eli was keenly aware of the prophecies made against him and his house, and a spirit of dread was over the aging high priest and judge.
- c. Eli seems to know disaster has come; only he could not weep yet because it was not yet confirmed.

9. Verse 18: Idolatry Eventually Kills: As soon as he mentioned the Ark of God, Eli fell over backward 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 forty years.

- a. Notice what killed Eli. It was not the news of the death of the people or his two sons. The news of the capture of God’s Ark was too much to bear. Eli fell backward, his neck snapped, and he died.
 - i. The bible mentions Eli’s weight as a contributing factor of his death. Remember the accusation of God.
 1. **1 Samuel 2:29** Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your sons above me by

fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?’

2. Eli loved the pleasures of this world more than God, and it was the love for the pleasures of this world that contributed to His death. God will not be mocked.

a. **1 John 2:15-16** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

i. The Love of the world is incompatible with the love we are supposed to have for Jesus Christ. We cannot love both the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and this current world.

ii. **Matthew 6:24A** “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other...”

b. As we have discussed, these other loves are idolatry. These other loves lead to death.

10. Verses 19-22: God Will Always be Glorified: 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. (20) 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. (21) And she named the child Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel!” because the Ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. (22) And she said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”

- a. This passage urges us to think about whose “glory” had departed: Israel’s glory or God’s glory. For Phinehas’s wife, the loss of the Ark meant the loss of “Israel’s glory.”
 - i. But the apparent exile of the Ark into the Philistine’s land was not the defeat of God himself. God will reveal his glory even in the land of Philistia. God never has and will never lose.
 - ii. The glory of God had indeed departed, but not because the Ark of God had been captured; the Ark had been captured because the glory had already departed. It was because God was glorifying Himself that the events happened as recorded for us in Scripture.
 1. **Psalms 46:10** “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”
 - iii. Sometimes, God must depart from us so that we might seek him rightly.

- b. The name **Ichabod** (’î-kābôd) means inglorious or the glory has departed.
- i. Where has the glory gone? This is the question we must consider. Where is God’s glory in our lives? Do we live for Him and His glory alone? Beloved, we exist for Him; He does not exist for us!
 - ii. I fear that there are a significant number of churches and Christians who God has renamed Ichabod because the glory of God has left their lives and pews.
 1. May you never be one of them.
 2. May you never trust in anything alone but Christ Jesus the Savior. May you ever delight in the gospel of your salvation.
 3. To seek Christ is to glorify God in your lives.
 - a. **John 17:1-5** When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, (2) since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. (3) And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (4) I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. (5) And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

i. Beloved, seek Christ!

11. Benediction:

- a. **Psalms 93:2** Your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.

Public Reading of Scripture
Psalm 93