

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 28 August 2022
Services: *Across the diocese*
Series: 1 Samuel – In search of a King
Passage: 1 Samuel 4-7 (READING FOR CHURCH – 1 Samuel 5)
Title: God is King – like it or not

PRELIMINARIES

- Imagine with me you're at your local Harvey Norman store... and on the TVs come tonight's news headlines:
- ✘ Israel takes on the **Philistines** with a big box – and **loses**,
- ✘ the great battle between the **God** of Israel and **Dagon** the god of the Philistines – we tell you who **wins**...
- And **finally** – ✘ Israel's **treasure chest** wreaks **havoc** on its **return**...
- Those stories and **more**... ///
- What we see in these chapters is fascinating – and often – just bizarre!!
- This is the second in our series from the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel – and we're looking today at chapters 4-7.
- But some **background** on three words will help:
- ✘ Philistines
- ✘ The ark
- ✘ Shiloh

1. ...The Philistines

- They were a **common political enemy of Israel** – especially during the time of the **Judges** – and in fact, God often **used** them to **chastise** his **people**. //
- ✘ When the **Israelites** left **Egypt**, the **Philistines** were extensively settled along the ✘ **coastal strip** between **Egypt** and **Gaza**... The Israelites detoured **inland** to **avoid** them.
- The **Philistines** had set out to conquer **Canaan** at approximately the **same time** as the **Israelites**, and attempted to take possession of the land from the ✘ **coastal side**, while Israel used the approach from the ✘ **desert**.
- **Their** land – ✘ which included the coastal cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza – they called **Palestine**!
- They were considered with great contempt as those '**uncircumcised Philistines**'.
- It was always a serious **contest** when these two met!
- Now – the **second** piece of background:

2. ✘ The ark

- - and no – we don't mean **Noah's ark**! – though an understandable mistake!

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- We mean – the **ark of the covenant** – the one made famous by ✂Harrison Ford in the movie *‘the Raiders of the Lost Ark’*
 - it was an **extremely significant symbol** for Israel...
 - ✂It was a **rectangular box**. It measured 1200mm by 760mm by 760mm
 - ✂It was covered completely with **gold** and was carried on **poles** inserted in **rings** at the **four corners**.
 - It had its beginnings when Moses was given the **ten commandments** – and in fact two stone tablets on which were **carved** the **ten commandments** were kept in the **box**.
 - It was the symbol of **God’s presence** with his **people**... it was placed in the ✂ **tabernacle** – the **portable temple** – as the Israelites **wandered** through the **desert**...
 - Once God’s people moved into the **promised land**, it was taken to a **shrine** at **Shiloh**...
- 3. ✂ Shiloh**
- ...where the **tent of meeting** ✂ was set up in the early days of Israel conquering the inhabitants of the promised land. ✂
 - So Shiloh became an important **gathering place** for Israel during the period of the **Judges**.
 - And it was here – in this **temporary temple** – **beside** the **ark** – where **Samuel** had been sleeping **last week** when God first called out to **him!** //
 - Now with **that background** let’s ask the three questions we’re going to ask every week in this series – what is the passage about, what does it teach us about God and how does it point us to Jesus?

1) ✂ WHAT IS THIS PASSAGE ABOUT?

a. God in a box

- We went out ✂to fight the Philistines. ✂**WE** were at **Ebenezer**. ✂ **THEY** were at **Aphek**.
- It was a bad day. We lost **4,000 men**.
- We couldn’t work out **why** the Lord had let us **lose** like that!
- But we thought if we brought ✂the **ark** of the covenant from ✂**Shiloh**, we’d be right.
- we thought having that ark with us would be like having **God** there... he would do his **magic!**
- The whole camp went **mad** when the ark arrived... it was like God himself **WAS** here!
- And the **Philistines** – should have heard **them** – When they found out we had the ark with us, they were **scared** – they were **convinced** we had **‘god’** in our camp and on our side!
- They thought they were in **big trouble** – they **heard about** all the plagues the Lord had brought on the **Egyptians**.
- We could hear them **yelling** – “be **men Philistines** – be **men and fight!**” //
- **WE** on the other hand, were pretty **complacent** going out to the battle that day – **we thought that with the ark with us // we had it made!** //
- But we lost ✂ **30,000 SOLDIERS** – **30,000!**

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- And those **Philistines** – they **captured** the ark... **Eli's boys, Hophni and Phinehas died**... and when the messenger went back to **Shiloh** to tell everyone, old Eli was apparently **waiting** for **news** of what had **happened**.
- And he **handled** the news of the **defeat**, even handled the news of his **sons' death**...! but once he knew that the **ark** was **captured**... he fell backward off his **chair**, broke his **neck** and **died**. //
- Did you hear about **Phinehas' wife**? She was **pregnant** you see – and when she found out that her **husband** was **dead**, her **father-in-law** was **dead** and the **ark** had been **captured** – she went into **labour** and lost her life in **childbirth** – but not before she named the baby – **Ichabod** – **no glory** – because she reckoned with the **ark gone**, God's **glory** had **departed** from **Israel**.
- It really felt like **God himself** *had left us!* //

b. God vs. Dagon

- Where was God? How could he allow this? The ark in enemy hands?
- The Philistines took the ark and put it in the **temple** of their god **Dagon** at **Ashdod**.
- Their way of **showing off**... and rubbing in our **defeat**.
- Well – **that** tide soon **turned**.
- The next day when the people of **Ashdod** got **up** – there was **Dagon** – he was a **statue** you **understand** – fallen on his **face** on the **ground** before the **ark** of the **Lord**! – it was just like **Dagon** was **prostrate** in **worship** in front of the **ark** – you know – **worshipping God**!
- Well – they stood **Dagon** back up again.... And then the **next day** – the **next day** – not only was he on the **ground** in front of the **ark** again – his **head** and **hands** were **broken off**!
- And then all the people of **Ashdod** came out in all these **tumours**... **terrible things** – and there was a **plague** of **rats**... and **people dying**...
- The **Philistine** leaders all reckoned it was because of the **ark**... and started to ask – **what shall we do with it?**

c. Hot potato

- Anyway – they sent it up to the city of **Gath** – and the **same thing** happened **there** – **mass panic** broke out as they all came out in **tumours**... and in **unmentionable** places on the **body** – shocking!
- Then like a **hot potato** they kept **passing it** on... so it went to **Ekron** – and even as it was **entering** the **city**, the people were yelling out – **it'll kill the lot of us!**
- **Heaps** of people **died**, **people** were **panicking** and – if they *didn't die*, they had these shocking **tumours**...
- So all the leaders decided it send it to **back** to **US** – **send it back** before it killed the **lot** of **them!**

d. It's back!

- The question was though - HOW TO SEND IT BACK?
- So they **decided** – set it on a **new cart**, send it back with **gifts** – **gold models** of the **tumours** and the **rats** that had been **plaguing** them - to make sure it's their God who is taking it back, send it off with **cows** which have never been **hitched up** before...

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- **If it goes off** and heads for ✕ **Bethshemesh**, then we'll know for sure that all of this is the **Lord's doing!** //
- Well **off** it **went** – the leaders following it all the **way** – to make sure it **didn't come back!**
- And the people of **Bethshemesh** stopped **harvesting**, used the **wood** of the cart for a **fire**, **sacrificed** the **cows** as a **burnt offering** and the **rock** on which they **sacrificed** – it's **still there** to this **day!** //
- But the Lord **humbled** **US** that day too... **70 men** from **Beth Shemesh** took the **cover** off the **ark** and **looked inside**... and they **died** – right **there** and **then.** //
- We asked a **crucial question** that day... **'WHO CAN STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD, THIS HOLY GOD?'**
- After that – they took the ark to ✕ **Kiriath Jearim** – to **Abinadab's house**... and his son **Eleazar** was **appointed** to **guard it.** //

2) ✕WHAT DOES IT TEACH US ABOUT GOD?

a. ✕God is not under our control

- If you ever thought you could **manipulate God**, **use** God, tell God what to **do**... as Israel thought they could do by bringing the ark into the battle... **think again.**
- God is **not** under our **control.**
- If you ever thought any **symbol** of **God** or his **presence** had any **magical power** or could **hold** any power – as if wearing a **cross guaranteed** anything... or having a **shrine** at **home** or following **little rules** you had made up... **think again.**
- **Any symbol** of God's **power** or **presence** is just **that** – it has no **power** of its **own**, and is no **guarantee** of **anything.**
- **GOD IS NOT UNDER OUR CONTROL.**
- He is not there to perform for us on cue. //

b. ✕No contest

- The second thing this teaches us about God – is that there is simply **no contest** between **him** and **other gods.**
- **...BECAUSE THERE ARE NO OTHER GODS!** //
- There was no actual **contest** between **Yahweh** and **Dagon** – because **Dagon** didn't **EXIST!** He was a **lifeless, speechless, completely powerless statue!**
- **No other god** you may **ever try serving** will be any sort of **match** for **God!**
- ...for our God who is all **powerful**, all **knowing**...
- now of course, we have no **intention** of **bowing before** or **praying** to a **statue** or anything **like it**... but I tell you the name of the **non-existent** god I **most often serve?**
- **Mark Calder!**
- I do what **he** wants.
- I serve and follow **him.**

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- I want **his** glory.
 - And in a contest between **Mark and God – who will win?**
 - **There is no contest!**
 - c. ✘Who can stand?
 - and finally – he’s not to be **fooled with**
 - **Both** those who **ARE** his **people** and those who are **NOT**, learn that here, **don’t they!?**
 - **Israel** – that he cannot be **manipulated** into doing their **will**, and the **Philistines** – that his **presence** is an **awesome** and **terrifying thing**.
 - And **Israel** asks that **sobering question... ‘Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God’.**
 - you don’t **meet God** as an **equal... Only a fool, only a blind person** thinks they meet **God** as an **equal... God** is not your **equal... he is far above** and **exalted** above you and he is **enormous**
 - With our **stain** and **rebellion** – our **uncleanness** – your **unholiness.... we cannot be in the same place as God.**
 - **‘Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God’? //**
 - Both the **Philistines** AND the **Israelites** learnt – that **you cannot mess with God!!**
 - **The question is – will WE learn it? ///**
- 3) ✘HOW DOES IT POINT US TO JESUS?**
- Do you recall why we said last week that this was **important question?** Because the **Lord Jesus himself** taught that the **Old Testament** was about **him...**
 - So how does **this passage** do that?
 - a. ✘Symbolic presence → actual presence
 - The **symbolic presence** of **God** in the **ark** of the **covenant**, points us **forward** to the **actual presence** of **God** in the **person** of the **Lord Jesus!**
 - In fact – we are told in **John 1:14** – referring to Jesus, that *the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...* And the word is – that he **TABERNACLED** among us...
 - The **presence** of **God** with his **people** – not represented **symbolically** by the **ark** – but in **REALITY** – in **flesh and blood** – in His Son!
 - **God with his people** – not in a **box** – but in a **person**.
 - **Revealing his will, his character, his love, his mission and his future.**
 - And among his **last words?** – surely am I with you **always** – to the **very end of the age**.
 - **With US** now by his **Holy Spirit** – who **now dwells** in us.
 - And this not only **now** – but into the **future** – for all eternity as God will be our God, dwelling with us in **eternity**. //
 - How **blessed** are **we?**
 - And the second way this points us to Jesus... brings us back to that question...

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b. ✕Who can stand? → a new way has opened for us

- I'm sure we are all **sobered** by that question of **God's holiness** – 'who can **stand** in his **presence?**', the Israelites ask as 70 people **died** looking into the **ark** of the **covenant?**
- But **again** – this points us forward to the **Lord Jesus** – for the answer to this dilemma – more than a **dilemma** – this terrifying **truth** of God's **holiness...** we find in **Jesus**
- We read in the letter to the Hebrews 10:19 that *we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...*
- You will remember that when Jesus died, the curtain in the temple keeping people out of the part where the ark was kept – was torn in two from top to bottom... signifying that **access** to God was **open**.
- **We can stand now in the presence of God** – because Jesus has removed all our **unholiness**. How **blessed** are we...? For it now to be possible for us, to **stand** in the **presence** of our **holy God?**