

1 Samuel 4

I. INTRO: Relationships vs. Routine

- A. Imagine being on your very first Valentine's Date with a special someone...
 - 1. The flowers, the dinner, maybe a box of chocolates
- B. The first year, the first date is special, but after 2, 5, 10, 40 years, the same exact thing every Valentine's Day no longer feels special... it feels routine and thoughtless
 - 1. As people, we want relationship, not routine
 - 2. We want to be known, understood, pursued, and to pursue
 - 3. But when things become mechanical, it pushes us away, makes us feel unseen
- C. Sometimes I wonder if God feels this way. Hallow App #1 // Lent – Nothing bad
 - 1. Maybe one year you fasted snacks during Lent and you felt like you grew so much, tasted the love of God in a tangible way
 - 2. But now that you're on your 10th year fasting snacks, you don't feel as close to God during that time. Instead, you actually feel a little frustrated → isn't God supposed to respond to this?
 - 3. Isn't God pleased by 40 days of sacrifice?
- D. In both these situations → with a person or with the Lord, it is easy to replace relationship with routine, and to begin treating the other person as a formula
 - 1. But if we take the time to hear... to listen... to know (in our relationship with God and one another), maybe we can learn some important lessons

E. God is not a power to be manipulated, but a being to be revered.

II. 1 Samuel 4, What does it say? Observation

A. [1b] 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. [3] And when the people 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." [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.

- 1. Who are the Philistines, not to be confused with the Palestinians?
 - a) Archenemies of Israel; Sea Peoples who had moved southward from the islands and coasts of Asia Minor until the Egyptians checked their advance 100 years prior (c. 1200 BC).
 - b) Settled and intermarried in coastal zone of Palestine (roughly the modern Gaza Strip), adopted the Canaanite language & religions
 - c) As they expanded eastward, they invaded Israelite territory

2. Israel gets pummeled, and the elders... the LEADERS... come up with an idea: Get the Ark (they saw Raiders of the Lost Ark...)
 - a) Elders are thinking about Jericho
 3. Notice what the verse says, **IT** may save us from the power
 4. The people have faith in the Ark as a talisman of power, not in God as the Warrior, the Lord of hosts (Do you catch the literary irony in v4?)
 - a) The weapon, not the warrior // IT not HIM
 - b) People often want the POWER over the PRESENCE b/c that still lets them be in control instead of surrendered
 - c) They want ROUTINE not RELATIONSHIP b/c it's transactional
 5. The real cause of Israel's defeat isn't a lack of a secret weapon or ritual, but their continued disobedience in their relationship with God
 - a) Deuteronomy 28:25-26 explains that the defeat of the Israelites is b/c they abandoned God and didn't follow him: *"The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. Your carcasses will be food for all the birds and the wild animals, and there will be no one to frighten them away."*
 6. Who is leading the charge? Hophni and Phinehas, the two terrible priests from chapter 2 who abuse the people and sexually exploit women
 7. The elders? The priests? Eli? Something's rotten in Israel's leadership!
- B.** *[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. [6] 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."*
1. How are the Philistines aware of the stories yet ignorant to YHWH, thinking he is a pagan god? (The Hebrew term used for pagan gods)
 2. The Philistines consider the ark to be similar to an idol
 3. Israel was supposed to be a lighthouse to the nations, but their neighbors have NO CLUE who their God even is and treat him as a pagan god
- C.** *[10] 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.*
1. 30,000 men plus the 4,000 before - not just defeat, a slaughter
 2. Beyond that, the ark of God was captured!

3. This is an inconceivable outcome! It is mentioned five times (also in 4:17, 19, 21, 22), almost implying, “What the heck happened, God?!”
 - a) How on earth could God allow himself to become a PoW?
4. They had put their hope in the Ark instead of God, so God lets it get captured → he’s not gonna lose any sleep or stress about it

D. [12] 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.” [18] 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.

1. Eli is there waiting, but not for his kids or the army, but the ark
2. As one commentary stated, “It is not stated if he had protested to his sons when they took the ark, or if it was moved without his knowledge. But Eli knows the Lord cannot be coerced into supporting Israel’s military ventures, as the people in general thought.”
3. Eli’s blind and old - he can’t see this disheveled, blood man before him
4. Struck by the news of the defeat and capture of the Ark, he falls backwards b/c he was “heavy” - a play on words b/c it is almost the word for honorable. Instead of being an honorable priest [kabad], he was overweight [kabad] from the sin of his sons & the fatty meat

E. [19] 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.”

1. The tragedy for Eli’s family continues with a triple defeat for his DiL
2. With her dying breath she names the child “I-chabod,” which means either “no glory” or “where is the glory?”
 - a) What does that mean? Literally: the glory “has gone into exile”

- b) Banishment from the presence of God was a penalty threatened in the covenant, but here, rather than kicking the people out of the Land, God has removed himself from it
- c) The priests weren't honorable KABAD b/c they were heavy with the fat of God's sacrifices KABED. Therefore God wasn't glorified KABODE (to give weight) in Israel
- 3. Israel gave weight to the wrong things, so while Eli got heavier, God wasn't being honored. So, he exiles his glory from among the people
- 4. The name I-chabod becomes a question of the future of Israel
 - a) Has God abandoned his people? Has God been defeated?
 - b) What will happen next? I guess we will have to wait to find out...

III. Interpretation: What does all that mean?

- A. God will not be controlled or manipulated by human action
- B. God acts according to His own will and purposes
 - 1. He exiles / removes himself from Israel and shows it by letting the Ark get captured
- C. Mankind has a tendency to rely on external symbols or rituals rather than genuine faith and obedience.
- D. Sin and disobedience carry consequences

IV. Application: What does it mean for us?

- A. Do not treat God as someone who can be manipulated or wielded like a talisman.
God is not a power to be manipulated, but a being to be revered.
- B. What might this look like in your life?
 - 1. **Superstitious Practices:** Some engage in superstitious rituals or practices with the belief that it will bring them favor or protection from God. → Ex: carrying lucky charms, crucifixes, praying saints, performing certain rituals for specific outcomes, or adhering strictly to certain religious practices without genuine faith
 - a) Ex: Holy Water // Praying to St XYZ // A crucifix // Shrouds
 - 2. **Prosperity Gospel Teaching:** The heretical prosperity gospel movement promotes the idea that if you have enough faith or if you give enough money to a particular ministry, God is obligated to bless you financially or with material possessions. This reduces God to a cosmic vending machine that can be manipulated through financial transactions
 - 3. **Prayer as a Means of Control:** Some people view prayer as a tool for manipulating God to do their bidding rather than as a means of aligning themselves with God's will and purposes. → Ex: Name it, claim it
 - 4. **"You Owe Me" Obedience:** Some people believe that by obeying certain rules or engaging in certain religious activities, they can earn favor with God or avoid negative consequences. → Ex: Why is HE getting a wife?
 - 5. **Misuse of Scripture:** People may cherry-pick Bible verses or twist scripture to become a sort of mantra rather than seeking to understand and apply it in its proper context. → Ex: Psalm 91

- C. Revival at Asbury... how do you duplicate it? What did they do? How do we do the same thing?
- D. **God is not a power to be manipulated, but a being to be revered.**
- E. As a BEING, how should we live before his face?
1. Repentance → Return... Remove... **Remain...**
 2. It's not about being a good boy so Jesus blesses you...
 3. It's about falling on your face in surrender to him and asking for forgiveness, and then following him wholeheartedly
 4. It's about walking with your king in loving **relationship**, not treating him like a slot machine → pop in the quarter, pull the lever, and hope for the best
 5. Teach us to **remain**
 6. How much of your life has slipped into routine w/ God instead of relationship? How much of your life is about trying to be spiritually manipulative or transactional?