

(1 Samuel) What Happens by Chance

by David Guzik

David Guzik's sermon explores the significance of the Ark of the Covenant, the consequences of misplaced trust, and the importance of recognizing God's sovereignty over chance events in our lives.

Duration: 37:51

Scripture: 1 Samuel 6:1-11

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Trusting God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the power and sovereignty of God. He highlights the contrast between chance and the God who lives in heaven, asserting that God is in control of everything and leaves nothing to chance. The preacher addresses the question of why life can be tough and filled with tragedy, acknowledging that these are valid concerns. However, he encourages listeners to trust in God's loving plan for their lives and reminds them that they have no reason to be afraid or miserable because God is watching over them.

Transcript

First Samuel, chapter six, amen. I'm just going to start reading and I'll explain as I go along. You know, we've been making our way through this book of first Samuel and it, you know, it's kind of like picking up a mini series in the middle, but I'll cover back as we make our way here.

First Samuel, chapter six, verse one. Now the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months and the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners saying, what shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us how we should send it to its place. Now, you know what the ark of the covenant was all about.

You saw that movie Raiders of the Lost Ark and you might have thought that that was just kind of a fantasy thing. Well, of course, the idea of the ark existing today, some people say it does, some people say it doesn't. Nobody really knows for sure.

But we know that it certainly did used to exist. We know that it's something that was present in the days of the Old Testament and more than anything else on planet Earth, the ark of the covenant in and of itself pictured and symbolized the presence and the power of God among the people of Israel. That's what it was all about.

It was a physical representation of the spiritual throne of God among God's people in the land of Israel. And as we read here in first Samuel, chapter six, we kind of scratch our heads and we say, wait a minute, if this is the representation of the God of Israel, this is something that belongs to the people of Israel. Why did the Philistines have it? The Philistines are the mortal enemies of the Israelites.

They want to destroy the Israelites. What's the ark of the covenant doing in the hands of Israel's enemies? Well, it's because the Israelites were foolish enough to take the ark of the covenant into battle with them, trusting in the ark of the covenant as if it was like the ultimate lucky charm or rabbit's foot that would rescue them. And and they weren't trusting in the God of the ark of the covenant.

They were trusting in the ark of the covenant itself. And God saw that as idolatry. You know, it's like somebody thinking their Bible's lucky or is going to have some kind of power or something like that.

Friends, the book in and of itself doesn't have that power. The message in it, the God of the book has that power. And so God wouldn't tolerate the superstitious trust or or or faith in in this kind of superstition that the Israelites had.

And so when they took the ark of the covenant into battle with them, they lost that battle in a big way. Thirty thousand soldiers of Israel laid dead on the field of battle and the ark of the covenant was captured and taken away to the land of the Philistines. Well, the Philistines thought they'd have a great time with the ark of the covenant.

They they thought that God was really behind them or actually they thought that their gods were mightier than the gods of Israel. So they took the ark of the covenant. They brought it into the temple of their God, Dagon, who was kind of a funny half fish, half man sort of thing.

And well, we saw last week how God dealt with that. God just wiped out Dagon and humiliated him. And they figured, well, this isn't working.

Let's take this ark of the covenant out of Dagon's temple. But everywhere they took the ark of the covenant, every city where they would take it, God would strike that city with tumors and with plagues. And and it was wiping out the whole country of the Philistines.

So what do you do when you get rid of it? The ark's like a hot potato. You can't hold on to this thing. Look what it says here.

Now, the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months. I think it's remarkable that they hung on to it for seven months. There was destroying everywhere.

It went laneways, tumors, plagues, destroying their gods. And we'll hold on to it, though. I mean, it's a great trophy.

But after a while, they said, look, this just isn't making any sense. Let's give it back to the Israelites. It's not doing any good for us.

We can kind of laugh at the Philistines. It took them seven months. I don't know anybody here in this room ever resist God for seven months? How about seven years? How about, I don't know, seven decades for some of us? But the Philistines finally got the message.

And I suppose we should credit it to them. And they decide, well, we need to send it back. But how do you send the ark of the covenant back? How do you send it on its way? Well, this is what they come to in verse three.

So they said, if you send away the ark of God of Israel, the ark of the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty. But by all means, return it to him with a trespass offering. Then you will be healed and it will be known to you why his hand is not removed from you.

In other words, you've got to do something to honor the God of the ark of the covenant to show him that you're sorry to express your repentance. You can't send it away empty handed. And so you send it with an offering.

Well, OK, that kind of makes sense. What's the offering that they're going to make with it? Take a look here. Verse four.

Then they said, what is the trespass offering which we should return to him? And they answered five golden tumors and five golden rats, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague was on you and on all of your lords. Therefore, you shall make images of your tumors and images of your wrath that ravaged the land.

And you should give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from you and from your gods and from your land. Well, what should we send back as an offering to the God of Israel? Well, he struck us with tumors.

He struck us with rats, maybe some kind of pestilence. We'll make golden images of these things. And that's what we'll send back with the ark.

And what were these tumors? Well, some people think the tumors were tied to with some kind of bubonic plague, and they think that's a connection between the rodents and the tumors. And so it might have been. But all the old Jewish rabbis and all the older commentators insist that the tumors here were.

Well, it was the heartbreak of of hemorrhoids that came upon the Philistines in a very significant way. And so they made golden images of the tumors. You know, sometimes you're glad the Bible isn't illustrated and I don't know what it looked like and I don't really care to know.

But but they're just saying, Lord, we humble ourselves before you. We just admit our humility. It would have been humiliating.

It's a testimony of your humiliation. They're leaving this monument of their own shame and their own misery. And will God have pity on us, have mercy on us, Lord? And that's what they were crying out for.

So in doing so, they hoped, if you notice, verse five, they're hoping to give glory to the God of Israel. You know, when we repent of our own stubbornness, when we submit ourselves to God, it gives glory to him. And that's what they're being called on to do.

When we just go along in our own way and all the calamity that befalls us in our life, well, that's just bad luck. That's just fate. That's just this.

That's it. No, we need to wake up sometimes and see the chastening hand of God. And that gives glory to the God of Israel when we do that.

And they're hoping that perhaps he will lighten his hand from among you and from your gods and from your lands. I want you to take a close look at verse six, because I think here the Philistines, even though the Philistines, they ask a great question that we should be asking, too. They ask you in verse six, why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts when he did mighty things among them? Did they not let the people go that they might depart? Friends, the Philistines were doing a little biblical history lesson and they were remembering back 400 years before their time to the days of the Exodus, when God delivered the people of Israel and the Pharaoh didn't want them to be taken from the land of Egypt.

He wanted their slave labor. So Pharaoh hardened his heart against the Lord. And as Pharaoh kept hardening his heart, God brought increasingly severe plagues upon the land of Egypt until one day he had to wipe out the entire firstborn of the entire land of Egypt.

And the Philistines say, look, let's not go the same road. We keep resisting God. He's going to make his hand more and more heavy upon us.

Let's quit while we're not too far behind. If we keep going, keep hardening our hearts like the Pharaoh did, it's going to turn out to be an absolute disaster for us. Well, I think we should compliment the Philistines for a couple of things.

First of all, for realizing their biblical history. I mean, they could look at an event in their own lives and relate it to something that happened in the Bible. That's a good thing.

I think also we should take a look here and understand what they observed about the hardening of heart among Pharaoh. They said he hardened his own heart. You know, I think it's interesting about this.

It says right here that Pharaoh hardened his heart against the Lord and the Philistines said, let's not go there. You go back to the book of Exodus and it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. But it also says in the book of Exodus that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.

So which was it? Did the Lord harden Pharaoh's heart or did Pharaoh harden his heart? The answer is yes. They both did it. But friends, you shouldn't think for a moment that somehow Pharaoh wanted to do good for the people of Israel.

Oh, there's nice old Pharaoh. Oh, I just want to bless the people of Israel. But somehow God was overcoming all the goodness that was in Pharaoh's heart and making him do evil against the people of Israel.

No. How did God harden Pharaoh's heart? He simply confirmed him in the direction he was going. Friends, that's a sobering thing for us to realize right now, this morning, think about your walk with God, think about where your heart is right now with Lord.

And if you were to extend that direction to keep it going, where would you be if God were to confirm you right now in the direction, in the inclination of your heart? Would that be a good thing or a bad thing? Some of you are thinking, oh, no, Lord, please don't let me get right with you first. Well, why don't you get right with him today? Some of you are saying, yes, Lord, I want my heart to be strengthened. I want you to confirm me.

I love you, God, and I want to love you more. Draw me closer. Draw me deeper.

But it's almost as if there's a spiritual law at work in the universe and that God will give us what we really want from him. If you want Jesus Christ, if you want the Lord God, you'll find him. He said, you seek me, you'll find me.

But friends, if you don't want the Lord, he'll turn away from you. So what do you want? God will confirm you in that direction. Friends, we should be asking ourselves the same question the Philistines ask of themselves.

Why would we ever harden our hearts? Don't harden your heart before the Lord. There's a beautiful passage in Hosea, chapter 10, where he says, so for yourself and righteousness, reap in mercy, break up the fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord. Do you know what fallow ground is? Fallow ground is a farmer's field where he would plant crops, but it's laying unplowed for a year or more and it's become hard and it's become resistant to the plow where you need to drag the plow through and break it up.

And I get that fallow ground. If it could talk when the plows going through, it's all stop. You're hurting me, plow.

That's how it feels when the Lord has to deal with our hard hearts, isn't it? It's like, Lord, you're drawing that plow of your word through my heart. God, it hurts. But you need that, don't you? You want the Lord to break up that fallow ground.

And even if it doesn't feel so good at the time, let him do it. We'll give you a soft heart before the Lord. Well, now the Philistines here, it's time for them to decide to return the ark.

But how do you do it? How do you send it back? You just don't call up Federal Express and tell her Philistine Express and tell him, take this ark back to the back to the people of Israel. No. What do you do? We'll look at verse seven.

Now, therefore, make a new cart, take to milk cows, which has never been yoked and hitch the cows to the cart and take the calves home away from them. Then take the ark of the Lord and set it on the cart and put the articles of gold, which are returning to him as a trespass offering in a chest by its side. Notice the Philistines were smart enough not to open the ark of the covenant and put the gold things inside the ark.

We'll kind of talk more about that next week, but just kind of keep that in mind. They put it in a box next to the ark of the covenant, then send it away and let it go. And watch if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then he has done to us this great evil.

But if not, then we shall know that it's not his hand that struck us. It was by chance that it happened to us. Well, now maybe the Philistines aren't so sure, you know, that little incident in the temple of Dagon, all the tumors, all the plagues.

Maybe it wasn't the Lord after all. Maybe it was just a bad seven months in the land of Philistine. Who knows? Maybe it wasn't the Lord.

And after all, we don't want to be repenting if we don't have to. Right. So let's devise a little test.

This is what we'll do. We'll stack the deck against God and basically we'll go before God, hitch up our pants and we'll say, God, if you really did this, prove it to us. And this is the proof.

First of all, you take two milk cows, not cows that are used to drawing anything to milk cows that have never been yoked. They've never pulled anything. They've never pulled anything by themselves.

They never pulled anything together as a team. You take those two cows, you hitch them to a cart, you put them on a road that they've never been upon and you don't give them a map and you say, go. They don't have a driver, they don't have a map and to really stack the deck against it all.

You leave their calves at home. And you say, OK, now, if the Ark goes and returns home, then I know it was the Lord. Wow, have they stacked the deck against the Lord? Friends, it should have never happened.

You know, cows that have that yoke on them that have never worn a yoke before, they should resist it. They shouldn't submit to it. At the very least, their own maternal instinct should take them back.

But friends, no, that was the test that they were devising. So they said, we'll put the articles of gold next to it, we'll put it on them, make all the arrangements and we'll send it on its way. And they say, maybe look at verse nine again with me, please.

They say, but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us. It was by chance that it happened to us. Well, they're thinking maybe it wasn't the Lord God of Israel that struck us with this.

Maybe it was Mr. Chance that did this to us. Well, that's what they say, right? They say maybe chance caused this. I think this is very interesting.

And many people think this, don't they? Many people think that things happen by chance. I don't know if they think that there's some invisible man out there named Mr. Chance, or if there's just some spirit in the air named Chance. But people think that chance makes things happen.

Some people think that the world was created by chance. Well, oftentimes people who are otherwise very intelligent fall into this delusion. Astrophysicists, biochemists, all sorts of scientists.

They'll look you square in the eye and they'll say things like, chance alone is the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere. Pure chance, absolutely free but blind at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution. That's a world-famous biochemist that said that.

Chance alone created it, he says. But friends, can I just tell you, this man doesn't know what he's talking about. You and I know very well there's no Mr. Chance running around the universe doing things.

Chance can't accomplish anything. Chance only describes a statistical probability. Let me explain it to you this way.

Let's say you take a coin and you flip a quarter, okay? Heads or tails? You say, heads. Well, what made it land heads? You say, chance. Friends, chance did not make that coin land heads.

You know what made it land heads? Well, first of all, whether or not it was heads or tails, it was sitting in my thumb. And then how hard I flicked it. And then how many spins it went.

And then if there's air currents or winds blowing in the room. And then where I decided to catch it and whether or not I decided to flip it. That's what made it land heads or tails.

There wasn't some guy Chance grabbing the coin and flipping it and putting it on my hand in a certain way. And you know what? If I could do it exactly the same way every time in exactly the same conditions, it would happen the same way every time, wouldn't it? Because it's cause and effect. Chance didn't make anything happen.

And yet people will go around saying that chance can do this. Chance can do that. The world is created by chance.

Maybe all this Ark of the Covenant stuff happened by chance. Friends, when anybody says that the universe or anything else came about by chance, they're either ignorant, superstitious, or you know what it is most of the time? They're just repeating something they've heard before, but never really thought about. Isn't that true? You know, Christians do that.

And sometimes non-Christians do that. They hear something, they believe it, but they don't really think about it. But friends, chance makes nothing happen.

It's merely a way of describing statistical probabilities. We live in a cause and effect world. Let me tell you what the great cause is.

The Lord God who sits enthroned in the heavens, not chance. Now, let me say something else along these same lines. I think some Christians get off into the other extreme.

In other words, we realize that nothing happens by chance, right? Nothing. But at the same time, we shouldn't go around thinking that every little thing that happens in our lives is full of important meaning from God. In other words, I woke up this morning and I looked out and it was foggy.

And I said, Lord, are you trying to tell me that a fog is coming into my life? And then I went down and had breakfast. And I burned the toast. And I said, Lord, are you trying to tell me that a burning work is going to happen in my life? You know what I'm talking about? Some people get off on this kick where every little thing in their life has this really profound spiritual importance.

And if I could really listen to God in heaven, when I burn the toast, the Lord isn't trying to tell me that there's some burning work going on in my life. He's trying to say, set the toaster lighter. That's what the Lord would be trying to say to me.

Nothing happens by chance, my friends. But not every little thing in our life is full of this great weighty spiritual importance. Some things just happen and we don't have to figure out why or what or wherever.

But friends, nothing happens by chance, even though we can get off track by trying to see a message from God in everything. But we see what's happening with the Philistines here, right? They've kind of thrown down the gauntlet before God, haven't they? Prove yourself to us, Lord. We're going to stack the decks against you and we want you to prove yourself.

So go ahead and do it. And let me ask you a question. Is God under any obligation to answer somebody when they kind of hitch up their pants and say, prove it to me, Lord? I don't think God is under any obligation to do so.

You ever heard somebody say, well, if there's a God in heaven, let him strike me with lightning right now. And then it doesn't happen and they're, oh, I guess there's no God in heaven. Listen, there is a God in

heaven, but you better be glad that he's merciful and long-suffering and that he will suffer fools such as those who would ask for such a silly thing.

Now, friends, God is under no obligation to answer the unbeliever when they call him on such a test. But sometimes God does it, not because he has to, but because God likes to blow people's minds sometimes. And that's what he's going to do to these Philistines.

Look at verse 10. Then the men did so. They took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart and shut up their calves at home.

And they set the ark of the Lord on the cart. Well, maybe we should stop right there. You see what they did with the ark of the Lord? They set it on a cart.

I want you to file that away in your mind, because weeks and weeks from now, when we're in 2 Samuel, you're going to see an incident where men put the ark of the Lord on a cart and God ended up killing some people over it. You know why? Because God commanded very specifically in the law of Moses that you should not transport the ark of the covenant on a cart. It should only be carried between two priests.

Matter of fact, the ark of the covenant didn't have handles per se. What it had was it had a golden rings on the side and poles were inserted through those rings. And you were never supposed to touch the ark itself, only the poles that were through the rings.

But the Philistines loaded up the ark and put it on a cart and God did not kill them. And we might say, Lord, that's not fair. You know, this other occasion you killed the Israelites, but you didn't kill the Philistines.

Well, let me give you some reasons why. Number one, it's because the Philistines did not have delivered unto them the law of Moses. That's where God gave those instructions.

And the Philistines didn't have a law of Moses. Secondly, the Philistines didn't have the priest of the Lord God that the Israelites had. They didn't have the right people to carry the ark.

But thirdly, and the great reason why God did not do this is because God is rich in mercy. Friends, is that how we're going to be before the Lord? Hey, Lord, what's fair is fair. You got to judge everybody for their sin, Lord.

Don't judge anybody. You know, Lord, you got to put on everybody the maximum punishment and do it immediately. Fair is fair, God.

Does anybody in this room really want to say that before the Lord? No. When we say that kind of attitude, when we have that kind of attitude, we mean it for other people, not for us, right? We don't want God to be fair with us. No, let him be fair with those other people.

Friends, if we are glad to receive mercy from the Lord. Are we going to begrudge God the gift of being able to give mercy to whom he pleases? So they put it on the cart, verse 11, and they set the ark of the Lord on the cart and the chest with the gold rats and the images of their tumors. And the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh and went along the highway, lowing as they went and did not turn aside to the right hand or the left.

And the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh. Friends, that's a miracle of God. I don't know how you rank miracles.

You know, sometimes I think, you know, you got, you know, different categories and some miracles are harder than others. I guess a miracle is a miracle and one's not any harder than others. But I know this is a miracle.

You don't take two cows that have never drawn anything in their life, hitch them up to a cart, just kind of whack them on the back. No driver, nobody leading them, no road map. They're out on their way.

They leave their calves at home and they head straight up and head straight for the city of Beth Shemesh. And you notice what it says here. It says they headed straight for the road and they did not turn aside to the right hand or the left.

Friends, they didn't even stop for a rest break. They didn't even stop to eat some grass on the side of the road. They never made a wrong turn.

They never stopped. They never got off meander off to the side. They never went back to their own calves at home.

They went right for the city of Beth Shemesh, going some 10 miles on exactly the right roads, never stopping, never wavering from the trail. And the lords of the Philistines were watching all the way. And they're saying, wow, I guess maybe the Lord was doing something.

Now, if I was filming this and making a movie of this, I would have the camera shot on those cows drawing the cart, right? You can see it, can't you? They're sort of meandering, going on the trail, you know, through the hills of Judea there. And it's beautiful, green, hilly country there in that part of Israel. And there they are taking the Ark of the Covenant.

You know, they're being drawn by those two cows. And then I would fade from that scene and I would switch the scene over to the tabernacle of the Lord. And there they are at the tabernacle of the Lord, weeping and wailing.

Lord, where's the Ark of the Covenant? The glory has departed. God, it's been seven months since we've lost the Ark. Surely you don't love us anymore, Lord.

Surely the glory has departed. Maybe the gods of the Philistines are stronger than the God of Israel. Oh, Lord, everything's ruined.

Everything's a disaster. And there they are mourning and weeping and wailing because all they can see is that the Ark isn't there. Lord, what's going to happen to you? Can you really take care of yourself, God? And all the while, God is saying, listen, I'm more, more than able to take care of myself.

I'm more than able to glorify myself. They thought the glory had departed. They were saying, Ichabod, the glory has departed.

But my friends, God's glory hadn't left anywhere. The Israelites wouldn't submit to the glory of God, so he wasn't showing it there. The Philistines wouldn't submit to the glory of God, so he wouldn't show it there.

So you know what God did? God said, hey, I see a couple of cows that I can show my glory through. I'm going to show it through those cows. Israelites won't do it.

The Philistines won't do it. Cows will do it. And so Israel had no reason to mourn, no reason to be afraid, even though they thought all was lost, all was without hope because they thought that the glory had departed.

Let me show you something else I think is just so interesting about this. If you notice it here in verse 12, it says that the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh and went along the highway lowing as they went. Now, you know, I'm not exactly Mr. Farm Boy, and I don't know about animals and that.

And I had to ask people, what does it mean when cattle are lowing? I mean, I know a way in the manger, right? The cattle are lowing and all that. I don't know what it means. I was wondering, are cows happy or sad when they're lowing? At first, I thought they were happy.

And I thought these cows are just so happy to be doing the will of God. Matter of fact, if you look it up, and I have a fascinating set of books on Jewish legends, and they're just all rabbinical fairy tales, basically. But they like to spin stories about things in the Bible.

And the rabbis say that as these cows were marching back with the Ark of the Covenant to Beth Shemesh, that they went singing a song as they were walking along. And the rabbis even can quote you the lines to the song. I could sing it for you, but I don't know.

Tom doesn't know the music, and so we won't be doing that right now. But here it is. It's a song that the cows sang.

And, you know, well, are they happy taking the Ark back? But I did a little more research, and I found out that when cows are lowing, they're not happy. Matter of fact, the Hebrew word here expresses a sadness, a depression, an aversion. Friends, these are not contented cows.

These cows are mooing in pain. They don't particularly like what they're doing. They don't want to be on that road.

They don't want to be pulling a new cart. They don't want to be going to places they've never been. They don't want to be leaving their calves behind.

But you know what? They're still doing the will of God. Now, this is great. God could overcome the natural instincts of a cow and make them do his will.

You know why I think that's great? Because I know the natural instincts I have in me. See, I'm a descendant of Adam. And Adam did something bad to the whole human race.

He infected us with a natural instinct that wants to rebel against God. And I know that's in me. I know that that has influenced me.

And when I read this, I say, you know what? God can do it. That doesn't mean that we always have fun doing God's will. These cows weren't having fun.

And sometimes I'm kind of lowing before the Lord like these cows. I don't know. Maybe a painful moo-moo.

I don't know exactly what it was. But friends, these cows, even though they weren't entirely enthusiastic about doing it, they were being guided by the hand of God. God was able to overpower the instinctive

nature of these cows.

And he can overpower our instinctive nature too. Who we are in Jesus has more power than who we are in Adam. And that's a glorious message.

But friends, do you notice this? How all of this shows us the incredible power of God. He leaves nothing to chance. That's what the Philistines were saying.

Chance or the God who lives in heaven. Chance or the God who lives in heaven. And God made it loud and clear.

It's me. It's not chance. God's saying, this is my world.

And even the cows fulfill my plan. I know the question that some of you might be asking right now. And they say, wait a minute, David.

If everything in this world is fulfilling God's plan, if God is even guiding the cows just like he likes them, then why is my life so tough? Then why did they have such a terrible tragedy over there? Why am I having such a tragedy? David, with the pain or the bitterness that I've gone through in my life, are you telling me that God's working out everything just like he pleases? Friends, those are good questions, aren't they? Those are questions the Bible themselves asks. Friends, I think when we think of those questions, we're misunderstanding a few things. And let me shed a little light.

First of all, when we take that kind of attitude before the Lord, the first thing it shows is that we don't really understand God's goal for our life. You know, if you think God's goal for your life is to make you comfortable, then anything that disrupts your comfort, you're going to think, how could a loving God allow this? But friends, God's goal for your life is not primarily to make you or me comfortable. It's to make us godly.

Now, God's goal for our life is not to make us miserable either. He's not up in heaven saying, oh, they're a little too happy. Let me make them miserable because that's my will.

No, it's just that comfort or misery or happiness, those are completely secondary issues. God's great plan for our life is to transform us into the image of his son. Sometimes that's going to entail some pain.

Most of the time, it's going to mean a thrilling life of just following after Jesus Christ. But friends, God's great goal for our life isn't to be comfortable. It's to make us godly.

Secondly, friends, when we're thinking that way, it often means that we're looking too short and we're not looking to eternity. You know, there's a lot of things that we experience in this life that if this life is all there is, they don't make any sense. But in light of eternity, it can make sense.

Friends, God never asked us to live as if this life were all they were. You know, you go through the book of Ecclesiastes and the book of Ecclesiastes teaches us that if this life is all there is, then it is all vain. It is all futile.

But if there is a world beyond where God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, where God sets all things right, then it makes sense. So we can be looking at the wrong goal. We can be looking too short, but we can also be looking too narrow.

You know what I mean by looking too narrow? We can think that what we see in the situation is all there is. Think of the Israelites in this very situation. All they could do is look at the tabernacle and know that the Ark of the Covenant was gone and all they could do is cry, Oh, the Ark of the Covenant's gone, the glory has departed.

Because that's all they could see. And based on all they could see, you don't blame them for being depressed. They could not see that right at that moment, the Ark of the Covenant was on its way back and God was mightily glorifying himself.

Friends, maybe your circumstance is in and of itself. You just take that one little slice, that one little picture. Maybe it is pretty bad.

Maybe it's even worse than you think. But can I say that there's a lot outside of your frame of reference that you can't even see? And that may be where God's doing the big work. So let God do it.

So we can look at the wrong goal. We can look too short. We can look too narrow.

Or you know what else we can do? We can just be looking to ourselves. And basically be too proud. Friends, some of us come before the Lord and we sort of demand an explanation from him.

God, you owe me an explanation. How many times have you heard people say this? Yeah, you know, when I stand before the man upstairs on that day, I'm going to have a few questions for him. No, you won't, my friends.

No, you won't. You'll see God more clearly than you ever have before on that day. And you'll realize that he's God.

You're not. And he doesn't owe you a single explanation. Friends, we just have to accept that there's going to be some things that we can't figure out.

And we need to leave it to God to figure those things out. But I'm here to tell you that our text this morning tells us that there is a God who sits in heaven and he's watching over things. And he leaves nothing to chance.

Nothing. Nothing is left to chance. And even though the Israelites messed things up in a big way by taking that ark into battle in the first place, God was watching over it and God was going to use it for his glory.

And I don't know what kind of mess you put yourself in or somebody else has put you in. But God is right here to say, I can work it for my glory. Just like Joseph said to his brothers, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

Friends, God can do that work in your life. But if you don't believe it, man, then where are you? If you don't believe it, if you don't believe that this morning, I don't blame you for being afraid. Matter of fact, you should be more afraid than you are if you don't believe that.

If you don't believe that there's a God in heaven who's watching over you and who loves you and cares for you and who's all-powerful, yet has a loving plan for your life, you should leave this room petrified because you're at the mercy of fate or circumstances or anything that might happen to you. Friends, we're not at the mercy of any of those things. If you don't believe that, I don't blame you for being proud.

You know, we need to know that God is greater than us and that we can humble ourselves before him and that he's God and we're not. And we're just going to be satisfied with not knowing all the answers or demanding an explanation. But God is God and we can be at peace with that.

Friends, if you don't believe that there's a God in heaven who sits on a throne, has a great plan for your life, I don't blame you for being miserable. Matter of fact, I wonder why you're ever happy. But when you know who God is and submit yourself to him, what reason do you have to be miserable? Friends, matter of fact, what reason do any of us have to be afraid or to be proud or to be miserable? We've got a God who sits in heaven on a throne.

He sovereignly works things out. We live in his world. We're his children or we can be his children if we'll come to him.

And friends, he's watching out over us. Who could ask for anything more? We don't have to be afraid. We don't have to be proud and we don't have to be miserable.

There's a God doing things and he leaves nothing to chance. Let's pray. Father, we need you to do this work in our lives and to persuade us that you leave nothing to chance.

It's a big work, God, because sometimes we get in the flesh and we get blind and we get proud before you. But we don't want to be like that, God. We want to receive who you are and what you do in our lives.

So, Father, help us now just to humble our hearts before you, to recognize you for who you are. Lord, the Philistines wouldn't humble themselves. The Israelites wouldn't humble themselves.

Lord, you found a couple cows. I pray that you'd find us ready and able to show forth your glory. Do it, Lord, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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