

(The Path of the Ark #4) Christ Preeminent

by Ed Miller

The sermon explores the spiritual significance of the Ark's journey to rest in Solomon's temple, illustrating the path God takes to rest in His temple in His people and the importance of letting go of the Philistine part of our life.

Duration: 1:12:15

Scripture: 1 Samuel 6:13-16, 1 Samuel 7:3-4, 1 Samuel 7:6

Topics: "Spiritual Obedience", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of the Ark of the Covenant and the Philistines' defeat of Israel. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the spiritual significance behind the physical events in the Bible. The preacher highlights the enthusiasm and zeal of the Israelites, but also their lack of understanding of God's ways. Despite their efforts to please God, they suffered defeat at the hands of the Philistines, losing thousands of men. The sermon encourages listeners to learn from this story and recognize that God rejects any attempts to please Him through the flesh or by following rituals without true understanding and obedience.

Transcript

O Father, we do thank you this evening that, once again, you have privileged us to come together, to gather in your name, to trust as a corporate body, thy Holy Spirit, to unveil the Lord Jesus to our hearts. We thank you for every part of the Bible, but in a special way, tonight we thank you for 1 Samuel, and we would ask you to open our hearts to your revelation in that book. We acknowledge right up front our inadequacy, and we would just thank you in advance that you delight to show us the Lord Jesus.

Deliver us from flesh and blood and human wisdom and reasoning and all possibilities of futility for this time together. Set us free, and we pray that it might be a good time in union with thee. Enable us to be detached from all of the cares and the pressures of life, and in these moments we would ask for your Holy Spirit to capture our attention and enable us to appropriate Christ.

Thank you in advance, we pray in the all-pervading name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. Okay, I'll ask you to open please to 1 Samuel.

Eventually we'll get to chapters 6 and 7, but let's begin at the beginning. Welcome again to our study on God coming to rest in His temple. This is just a short little series of 6 lessons, and we're only, well this is

lesson 4. And so I'll try to, for those that have not been here, I'll try to give a little review, and I think every lesson stands by itself and we'll be able to see the Lord.

In this devotional study, we're tracing the Ark of the Covenant and the path of the Ark of the Covenant until it finally comes to rest in Solomon's temple. And what I'm trying to show, what I'm trying to illustrate is this, that the path the Ark took before it finally came to rest in Solomon's temple is exactly the path the Lord takes before He finally rests in His temple in His people. It's exactly the same path.

And in our study, we've sort of picked up at the end of God's revelation on the Ark. In other words, the Ark has already been around for about 400 years when we pick up our story. And after so long a time, the Ark begins to move again.

For 350 years of that 400 years, nothing happened. The Ark was just there, and it wasn't moving, it wasn't doing anything. And all of a sudden, something happened, and the Ark began to move.

And the Ark didn't stop moving until it went to Jerusalem, the city of Peace, until it went to the temple, until it went to the heart of the temple, which is the Holy of Holies. And once it reached the heart of the temple, the Holy of Holies, it filled the entire temple with the glory. And there, according to Chronicles, the Ark rested, and from there the Ark reigned, and from there the glory of God governed.

And so we're trying to follow that path because we're the temple, we have the Holy of Holies, God wants to rest in us, God wants to reign from us, God wants the glory of God to fill us and to govern our lives. And so the parallels are just tremendous. Now, what we're trying to do, and I believe if we carefully hone in on the record as the Holy Spirit gives it, and if we follow the path of the Ark, we'll be able to trace out exactly what God is doing as he moves in our life.

There are actually discernible revelations that are illustrated by the Ark, and we can see them in our own experience. In other words, we're studying the Christian life, and how God moves in the Christian life. Following the Ark is very much like a testimony, it's like reading your own autobiography.

And I'll tell you, as I go through this again and again, I have to marvel at the patience of the Lord. Of all the revelations of God, I think patience has been the one that has transformed me the most. As he moves toward his resting place, he shows an unbelievable patience.

Is it possible that we give the Lord Jesus the same kind of bumpy ride that ancient Israel gave the Ark? And I think it's exactly so. And when we see how patient God was, and how he instructed them and taught them how to handle the Ark, sometimes they forgot the Ark. Sometimes they neglected the Ark.

Sometimes they irreverently handled the Ark. Sometimes they superstitiously handled the Ark. Sometimes they just turned it over to their enemies, and so on.

And we see how we treat the Lord Jesus. So far, we've looked at, I don't know what to call them. You can call them steps or stages or plateaus, or the first thing God chose, or the second thing, or whatever you want to call them.

But there are clear, I'll call them steps, clear steps, and they're given in the right order. This is not only the order of the history, but it's the order of the spiritual history. It's the order by which we will experience God's work in our life.

After 350 years, what got the Ark moving again? The story begins with Hannah. 1 Samuel chapter 1-3. The story begins with a barren womb.

The story begins with a cry. The story begins with a barren womb crying out to God for fruit. And not only fruit from God that Hannah pays, fruit from God that I can turn around and give back to God.

Fruit from God, for God. And the whole story begins with that cry of a barren womb yearning to produce. Yearning for fruit.

Yearning for issue. Yearning for life. Then a barren womb, and I'm talking spiritually, then a barren womb cries out to God and says, Lord, I'm tired of playing games.

I'm tired of faking it. I'm tired of imitation fruit. That's fruit.

I yearn for life. For fruit. Fruit from God, for God.

God has to move. And He always does. And that's how the story begins.

And after 350 years, that is the thing. That got God moving again. And now the Ark begins to move in response to this cry for production, this cry for life.

Let me remind you of one of the keys to understanding this entire history, and that is that the physical illustrates the spiritual all the way through. You know, when you trace this, sometimes it's just like so much history. You know, and you see the Ark is all over the lot.

And the Ark is all from this place to that place, north, south, east, and west. And sometimes your mind swims when you read all that physical geography. But if you read it as we're reading it, realizing that physical geography illustrates spiritual geography, that there is in your heart not only a Jerusalem and a temple, but there's also a land of the Philistines.

You have somewhere in that life of yours an ash god. You have a Gath. You have an Ekron.

There's a Beth Shemesh in your heart. There's a house of Abed-Edom. There's a Kerek-Jerim.

And it's all in there. So as the Ark moves on the level of earth in his geography on the map, it's the Lord moving in your life. And we'll see that as we go along.

I hope by now you've at least seen the Philistine part of your life, part of your heart. Because so much revolves around the Philistine. In summary, let me just nail it down for you.

The Philistine part of your life is that which we call, there's many names for it, but the natural man, the flesh, self, ego, the old man, the old Adam. It's me, Ed Muller. My abilities, my resources, my works, my strength.

That's the Philistine part of me. And as the story opens, Israel for a long time had been enslaved to the Philistines. God's redeemed people are captives.

They're being ruled over. There's an enemy ruling over them. They're under the dominion of the Philistines.

And with Hannah's cry for life, and with God's beginning to move, the windows of heaven become open for the first time. Glance, if you would, at chapter 3, verse 1. This is how the story begins. A word from the Lord was rare in those days, precious in those days.

There was no word from God. Heaven was closed and God wasn't speaking. But then Hannah cried out and God began to answer.

And Samuel was the first part of that answer. And then look at chapter 3 at the end, verse 20. And all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord.

And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel by Shiloh, by the word of the Lord. Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel. And now for the first time, the word of God was rare.

There was no word, no revelation, no vision, no dream, no prophecy, no verse. God wasn't speaking. And now all of a sudden, with Samuel, God begins to talk again.

And God begins to communicate. And God begins to give light and revelation. And there's an enthusiasm that goes through the camp of Israel.

And they're thrilled. All they know at this point, God is moving toward His rest, but we don't know that. All they know at this point is God wasn't talking, and now He is talking.

And they felt so spiritual because God had turned the light on in a few things. And so they did the most spiritual thing they could think of. Chapter 4, verse 1. Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle.

And they thought, wow, now that God is speaking and God's on my side, let's get rid of those Philistines. They considered the Philistines public enemy number one. And they said, I will not be a slave any longer to my flesh.

I'm not going to be a slave any longer to the old Adam. Well, that would use a whole story, but you know the heart of it. My, they suffered a tremendous defeat at the hand of the Philistines.

Their hearts were right, but they didn't know God yet. They didn't know the ways of God yet. At this point, they didn't understand, number one, how mighty the Philistines were.

They didn't understand, number two, how God would finally give victory over the Philistines. They were zealous. They were enthusiastic.

They even had some natural courage. At verse 2 of chapter 4, Israel was defeated before the Philistines. And that first attack, they lost 4,000 men.

Then they attacked again. They thought they'd get it right. They put the ark out in the front.

Said, this time we'll keep our eyes on the ark. Keep our eyes on Jesus. Chapter 4, verse 10 and 11, this time they lost 30,000 men.

The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were killed. Eli was killed. The chapter ends with Ichabod being born.

And that was sort of written over the whole battle, the whole testimony. Ichabod, the glory of the Lord, has departed. Now, don't get lost in that physical history.

Israel was the same as you are, the same as I am. This is the path God always takes. And at the beginning, the first thing we know is, God wasn't talking, now he's talking.

And then we go after the Philistines. And we go after that physical part. We're tired of sinning.

We're tired of responding to sin. We're tired of not being able to control our sin. And so we go after it, and we go and attack it.

Israel thought the Philistines were enemy number one. But the reality is, the corrupt priesthood was enemy number one. And so they prayed, Lord deliver us from our enemies.

But they fought the Philistines. And God began to answer their prayer. And he camouflaged his victory in defeat.

And he fought. They thought he was going to go after the Philistines, but instead he went after the priesthood. God always begins in the spiritual, in the heart.

And he had to get rid of that old corrupt priesthood first. And he was actually doing the most for them when they thought he was doing the least. So that's the path so far.

God begins when we hunger. God moves first against the corrupt priesthood in our life. And as soon as we experience his moving, his light, and we think we can go to war against the Philistines, we begin to experience defeat.

Then we get frustrated. And we don't know what to do. And God is faithful and patient, and he continues to teach us his ways.

Last week we looked at step three. Step one is hunger. Step two is dealing with the corrupt priesthood.

Last time we looked at step three, illustrated in 1 Samuel 5, 1 to 6, 18. As I said, there's a Philistine part of me. And quite honestly, and everybody's different, but it takes a long, long, long, long time for that Philistine part of me to realize that God will never be happy in the land of the Philistines.

He just won't be happy there. There's no place that can be called his home in the Philistine part of me. God has rejected the flesh, and every attempt the flesh makes to make God happy.

And you almost have to laugh, you know, when you read the Bible record, because the Philistines kept trying to make God comfortable. And they put the ark up here, and he wasn't happy, and they knocked over it, they got it, and then they put it in another place. And every time they turned around, hemorrhoids and mice, hemorrhoids and mice.

We'll go over that last time. And you have to almost smile at the Bible record, but you don't smile too much when you look in the mirror. You don't smile too much when you see the spiritual counterpart.

You don't smile when you remember the Philistine part of you trying to make God happy, and trying to give him a place. And everything was devastated, and he sent his mice in, and just undercut everything. And you don't know what's happening.

And you don't know what's going on, and God is just never happy. And every time you try to make him happy, they gave him a place of honor right next to their big one. He rejected that.

They gave him a place of popularity in the city of the giants. He rejected that. They brought him up to the hill, and put him in a private place all by himself, and just keep him there.

And he rejected that. And he blasted every attempt the Philistines made. And finally, after seven months of devastation, they decided to let the Lord choose his own path.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you know, sometimes we read some of these histories, la, la, la. Try to get into the reasonings of these frustrated Philistines. According to the record, they didn't want to let the ark go.

See, the ark, every time you see the word ark, you can think of the word Jesus. It's a picture of Christ, and especially King Jesus. And to the Philistines, according to the record, they understood that the ark represented God.

And they actually prized it. And they respected it, and they tried to give it a home. 1 Samuel 6, 1 to 12, shows that it took a mighty miracle of God to finally convince the Philistines that God had rejected every part of them.

That part of me, that part of you, just doesn't want to let it go. Somehow we think, somehow, someday, I'll figure out a way to make God happy. And I'll figure out a way to make God glad.

But of course, it's frustrating and it's painful. But the flesh finally learns, let him go. And so supernaturally, we won't go through it again, but through the miracle of the milk cows, God convinced them that he'd never be satisfied.

Those are the steps we saw so far. Starts with hunger. God deals with the corrupt priesthood first.

And then the next lesson is that God has totally rejected the Philistine part of me in every attempt to make him glad, to make him happy. There's no place, nothing I can do that will make him happy. When we left off our study, God was continuing his path toward his resting place.

And from the land of the Philistines, by a mighty miracle of God, he made his way to Beth Shemesh. That's where we left off, the city of Priz. So let's begin in chapter 6, please.

Follow along as I read from verse 13. And now the people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. They raised their eyes, saw the ark, and were glad to see it.

The cart came into the field of Joshua the Bethshemite, and stood there where there was a large stone. And they split the wood of the cart, and they offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the box that was with it, and which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone.

The men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices that day to the Lord. When the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned to Akron that day. Now again, brothers and sisters in Christ, this is our response in the day God teaches us it's not by works.

In the day God teaches us, he's rejected the Philistine part of us. We respond as they did in 1 Samuel 6, 13-16. Unspeakable joy.

Now remember, they still don't know what to do with the ark. They don't know what to do with Jesus. But they sigh a sigh of great relief to find out it's not the flesh.

I remember so well in my own life when God began to dawn this dumb heart of mine that it wasn't by works. I didn't know grace yet. I just knew that it wasn't by all my works.

Circumcision involves nothing neither uncircumcision. The absence of legalism is not victory. And I thought just by quitting everything I was involved in that I had victory.

But that's where they were at that time. Then verse 13, glad to see it. They're filled with joy.

There's an act of consecration. An end to the old ways. They burned up the cart representing the whole Philistine means of transporting the ark.

They burned up the cart. They sacrificed the animals. And they almost had that idea that that's over with never again.

Or so we suppose. Never again will I try to make God happy. The Philistine pardon me.

That part's over. Verse 15, they offered blood offerings and sacrifice sacrifices that day to the Lord. It was a time of singing and dancing and rejoicing and worship.

Not that they knew what to do but they knew what not to do. They hadn't figured out yet what to do with the ark. They just knew it's my works.

I'm done with that. And all that stuff I was involved in, I'm finished. It's not that way.

God will never be pleased with the Philistine pardon me. And they were glad. They were happy.

The ark thinks at that point, now I've got it. Now I've arrived. I'm really spiritual now.

The ark is still a long way from Solomon's temple. And a long way from the Holy of Holies. There are many lessons yet to be learned.

They've learned a lot. But God is about to teach them the next truth. Up until this point, the story has revolved around the Philistines.

And actually tonight, our lesson will continue with the backdrop of the Philistine. You see, when they saw the miracle, they laughed. The Bible says in verse 16 that they departed.

They went back to Akron. To the land of the Philistine. They laughed all right, but they're still there.

They laughed, but they're still in the picture. They're still the king. They're still the boss.

And Israel's still the slave. Up until this point, Israel is hung in. They want real food.

Up until this point, Israel, now God has dealt with the corrupt priesthood, but they have nothing to replace it. He's dealt with that which was wrong. He showed them that it's not by works.

Now they have to learn something else. And let me leave the Philistines for a moment and pick up the new record. Verse 19.

Chapter 6. And he struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck down of all the people 50,070 men. And the people mourned, because the Lord struck the people with a great slaughter.

And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up from us? And so they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirit-Jerim, saying, The Philistines have brought back the ark of the Lord. Come down and take it up to you. Now before we look at the spiritual side, let me answer two little problems in connection with this passage.

The first has to do with the number in verse 19. I don't know which translation you have there, but the one I'm using says, 50,070 men died. Some manuscripts don't have that large number.

In fact, some manuscripts just have the number 70. Not 50,070, just 70. If you're using the NIV, it says 70.

So does the RSV, the New English Bible, and the paraphrases also. The Living Bible and Amplified Bible and so on. The Schofield Bible, of course in its very old English, 50,000, 3 square and 10.

But then in the margin, it gives an explanation that there is a problem with the text, and it's not 100% sure. As far as the principle is concerned, the Bible principle is not affected whether there's 50,000, 5,000, 50 or 5. The principle remains the same. So nothing's lost.

Firstly, I go with the margin number for a couple of reasons. Number one is, it's called a great slaughter. In the first battle, they had 4,000 men died, and it wasn't called a great slaughter.

So I just say a great slaughter is a great slaughter. I lean toward the higher number. And also, I believe God providentially watched over the canon of the scriptures.

And I think the best text would say it's 50,000. But I'm not going to argue about that. But that's the first problem, the number.

But don't worry about that. Sometime a copyist may be messed up or something. That's not important.

The second problem has to do with verse 19. Because they looked into the ark of God. At first glance, you get the idea either that the ark of the covenant was open.

There was no cover on it, no seat. And they glanced inside. Or else, there is a cover, but it's not mentioned.

And they opened it, and then looked inside. Of course, one wonders how an ark 3 1/2 feet long, 2 feet wide, and as high as it is wide, how such a small box, how 50,000 people, if you take the larger number, could look inside, unless they filed past it. And if they filed past it, you get the idea someone would catch on with thousands of dead bodies to climb over before they look inside.

I don't know. Some have suggested that it wasn't even a judgment. That it was an effect.

In other words, when you see war, you die. It's because he's so glorious. Not because he's mad.

Not because he's angry. It's just that he's so glorious. And anybody who looks at the Lord will be alive.

I personally lean toward the fact that it was a judgment because of verse 19. And it says the Lord struck the people with a great slayer. And I don't think they were just killed because of the brightness of his glory.

Though, of course, that's a possibility. But the question comes, what happened? Did they touch it? Did they open it? Did they look inside? You know, actually, the Hebrew language, according to the scholars, doesn't give the idea that they looked inside at all. Literally, the Hebrew word means to look upon.

To gaze. To stare. Again, the Bible principle is really not affected whether they stared on it, or stared toward it, or stared into it.

You're going to get the same Bible principle. We know this. Whatever that object was, it called down the displeasure of God.

He didn't like it. Whatever it was, whether they looked at it, or toward it, or in it. Now, before I go about what I believe is the heart of the Lord in this passage, try to enter into it.

Try to get into the shoes of these dear folks at Beth Shemesh. Their day sure ended on a solemn note. You've got to try to think of this.

In the morning, they're all weeping. They lay on the field. And they're surprised by the Lord's return.

It was a happy occasion. They get all excited. The weeping stops.

The rejoicing begins. Every day, the news spreads everywhere. And by mid-afternoon, there are 50,000 people that have gathered.

This is big news. This is a tremendous thing, a big day. And they have a consecration service and a worship service.

And they make an altar out of the wood. And they offer these cows unto the Lord. They're singing and rejoicing.

And all of a sudden, the Lord visits them with a tremendous judgment. In one minute, it's all over. Thousands are dead.

What happened? And why? One thing the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh concluded was, God is too holy to be happy anywhere. He can't be happy. He's just too holy.

And glance, if you would, at verse 20. They said, Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? The Lord's back. He may as well not be.

He may as well not be for all of this. From their point of view, at this point, with the right they had, He's no friend to them. In fact, He's quite a stranger.

Just when they thought they finally had it right, as all along the way, the whole world came down. And God is displeased again. Now, what happened? Where was their crime? Where was their guilt? What did they do according to the record? Don't read in between the lines.

What did they do according to the record that so displeased God? Now, for the answer to the question, you must not only read the end of chapter 6, but you must also read chapter 7. It's unfortunate that that breaks right there, between chapter 6 and 7. There are several passages I wish didn't break where they

did. I wish John 14 didn't break where it broke. John 13 didn't break where it broke.

And I wish this chapter didn't break where it broke. They're tied together. Chapter 7, 20 years later, explains what happened at Beth Shemesh.

And if you don't understand chapter 7, you're not going to know exactly what happened here. Let me try to set it up for you as it happened. However you interpret verse 19, they looked into the ark, or at it, or toward it.

They gazed, they stared. According to the record, their crime was looking. That was their crime.

Gazing. Staring. Now, let me put it in the language of the new covenant.

I like to do this because then you may not agree with me, but you know exactly what I'm saying. I want to be simple as pie. I'm not that concerned whether we agree, but I want you to understand when we're done, exactly what we said.

I told you when we introduced this series, that the ark was a picture of the Lord Jesus. Especially King Jesus, because he was in the shape of a throne. And every time you see the word ark, you can substitute the name Jesus and not lose the sense.

In fact, it will help you with the spiritual sense. And so he's saying, their sin was, they looked at the ark. Okay, translated into the new covenant.

They looked at Jesus. Now, don't get too theological. I'm not talking about what God told Moses in Exodus 33 verse 20.

You cannot see my face. No man can see my face and live. I'm not talking about that.

I'm not talking about what frightened Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 6 verse 5. Where is me? I'm ruined, for my eyes have seen the king, the one host. I'm not talking about what Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6 verse 16. He dwells in unapproachable light where no man has seen or can see.

I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the term that we use all the time, looking unto Jesus. That's what they did.

And that's what displeased God. It didn't please Him. They looked to Christ and were judged.

They looked unto Jesus and God was displeased with that. Hebrews 12 verse 2. Fixing your eyes on Jesus. You say, I thought looking to Jesus was the great gospel duty.

I thought that's what we were supposed to do. Why did looking unto Jesus cause them such displeasure and bring such judgment? They need to understand what it means to look to Jesus and what it means not to look to Jesus. There's a possibility of looking to Jesus in such a way that God is not pleased at all.

In fact, He's very displeased. Obviously, I think they were on the right track looking unto Jesus. Obviously, again, something was missing.

Something's left out because God surely came down hard on these people. Well, let me tell their story as it happened and then I believe the next step will become very clear as we see God move toward His temple, toward the heart of that temple, the Holy of Holies. You see, they didn't know at this point what they had

done wrong.

Just as you, as you're going on in the Lord and you don't realize it either. You go after the Philistine. That sounds so right.

That sounds so spiritual. Then you get a bloody nose and it doesn't work and you're defeated and you come back and try again. You go out after the Philistines and you keep trying to make God happy.

You go through all that. You don't know what's happening. And all the time, God's moving.

He's heard the cry of Hannah's womb. He's heard the cry of the fruit. And God teaches and moves and God's moving in their life.

And at this point, they had to conclude He's too holy to be happy. And there's no way I can make God happy. They had said no to the Philistine part of them.

Now they thought they were doing the right thing, looking to Jesus, gazing at Him. But this is actually a little bit worse. I think I'd rather have mice and hemorrhoids than what these poor fellows received because they looked to Jesus.

Now I know a lot of people try to tone up their sin by reading in between their lines and saying, oh, there was irreverence there. There was presumption there. Carelessness.

Treating the Holy Lord as if it were a piece of common furniture. And what right did these people have to go up to the Holy Lord? I understand where you're coming from when you read that, but I'm not sure the Bible text says that. At this point, now we're going to hit irreverence a little later, but at this point, I don't think there was irreverence.

I think their heart was right with the night they had. And they were just trying to gaze. They were happy.

God's back. And they just looked. And they saw the ark and said, there it is.

There's the Lord. After all this time, seven months, He's come back. And God judged them.

As the Philistine part of them became so frustrated, in chapter 6, verse 2, they finally said, what shall we do with the ark and the Lord? I don't know if you can go back in your Christian history and trace out the steps, but do you remember in your earlier Christian life and the struggles where you had to say, Christ is in my life. Christ has come in. And at first, it's all so glorious and grand, but after a while, you say, what do I do with Him? Where do I put Him? Why is He happy? And you're sort of, and I don't mean to be irrelevant, but you're sort of stuck with Jesus.

And you don't know where He goes. And you don't know how to make Him happy. And every time you try, He blasts it.

And everything you seem to do seems to fall apart. Hemorrhoids and mice, and so you say, I got it. Look at Jesus.

And now you're going in. And you're so confused and frustrated. And so once again, they said, there's no way.

God is too holy. And all through your Christian life, you're going to keep giving up. And then God will come through and say, alright, must be about trying it.

And then something else comes in and says, oh forget it. It's not going to work. And then God encourages, alright, alright.

One more time. You're good to go. And so on.

That's how God does it. And so they did the only thing they could think of, verse 21. So He sent messengers to the inhabitants of Caithe, Jerom, saying, the Philistines have brought back the ark of the Lord.

Come down and take it up to you. Caithe, Jerom. The word just means the woods.

Woodland. Some think it was actually a small forest sitting on a hill surrounded by trees. And at that point in their life, this is very suggestive, that's about where they were.

And that's what Christ was in their understanding. He was just in the woods. And so He said, let's just put them in the woods.

Caithe, Jerom. And we'll put them on this hill in His own private place. Did they choose Caithe, Jerom because it was the largest town close in the path of Shiloh where they were going? It's not clear.

We know Caithe, Jerom, unlike Beth Shemesh, was not a city of priests. According to chapter 7, verse 1, they appointed the son of Abinadad. Evidently, he was a Levite.

We don't know that from the Bible. The Bible doesn't tell us that. But it's hard to imagine that they would appoint anyone but a Levite.

And they appointed the son of Abinadad, Eliezer, to be the guardian of the ark. And then the ark was put on the hill and Caithe, Jerom, up in the woods. And there the ark stayed.

Now, if you read chapter 7, verse 2, it looks like the ark stayed there for 20 years. Listen. It came to Caithe, Jerom, that the time was wrong for it was 20 years.

But actually, it was not 20 years. Now, I'm not saying the Bible is wrong. Listen to me.

It was about 70 or 80 years. You see, it stayed there all through the 40 or 50 years of Samuel and Saul's reign. And when David finally moved it from Caithe, Jerom, we're about 10 years deep into his reign.

It's there for a long time. So why does 7.2 mention 20 years? And the answer is, because in the 20th year, they learned what went wrong at Beth Shemesh. In the 20th year, there was a crisis.

In the 20th year, there was a turning point. In the 20th year, there was a revelation of God. In the 20th year, God showed them the next step.

And that's why God stopped after 20 years. For 20 years, the Philistines were still murdering and looting them. There's going to be more time after the 20 years that something happened in the 20th year.

And the Holy Spirit, as you read it, He says, Stop. I want you to see this. And God then begins to shed light on what happened at Caithe, Jerom.

The key, I believe, is in verse 2. Chapter 7, verse 2, All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. And the Hebrew word for lamented there is just the word sighed. All the house of Israel sighed after the Lord, breathed after the Lord.

There are a couple of reasons why they sighed after the Lord. The first is our old friends, the Philistines. For the last 20 years, the Philistines have oppressed Israel.

We can see that by the reference in chapter 7, 3. At the end there, He'll deliver you from the hand of the Philistines. See, they weren't delivered yet. They're the people of God.

They're redeemed. They've known a lot of God. But they're still under the dominion of the Philistines.

They're not living free. They didn't know how to live free. They tried to go to war with the Philistines.

That didn't work. They tried to look to Jesus. That didn't work either.

Years and years and years of dominion to the flesh. Anybody who has experienced it, you know what I'm talking about. Years of dominion in the flesh will make any man sigh.

And after 20 years, they sighed after the Lord. Never to have victory. I don't know how it was in your life, but I remember trying, you know, temper and the tongue and lust of the flesh and jealousy and pride and bitterness and an unforgiving spirit and everything the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit.

Discontent, the spirit of fear. And then you're constantly struggling with these things. And after years and years and years of that, you sigh.

You sigh. But there's another reason they sighed after the Lord. Listen.

They sighed after the Lord because they wanted Him. And somehow in their life, the more they, their barren world, don't forget that's underneath all of this, the more they cried for real fruit. The more they tried to put their Christian life together and figure that out.

And what is God doing and where is God doing that? Somehow they knew God is holy and they try to make Him happy and can't make Him happy. Somehow down inside, they had this desire. I need Him.

I love Him. And they sighed after the Lord. And there was this push from within.

This impulse, this drive from within. This cry. A homesickness for the living God.

A panting. An ardent moving, a desire for God. A pressure born from the regained nature.

Saying, I know I've messed up. I know it hasn't worked. I know I don't understand.

I know it's darkness. I know I'm confused. But somehow my deep, deep heart says, I want God.

I want fellowship with Him. I want to know. I want to make Him happy.

I want to please Him. And after 20 years, because of the oppression of the Philistines, because of bondage, because of no victory, because of an absolute slavery, because of an inner longing, there must be a way in the Lord. I want you.

I need you. And so they began to pine after God and thirst after God and sigh after God and bleed after God. And the heart was so of saying, Lord, my womb is stillborn.

I still long for fruit from God for God. You've taught me a lot in my life. You've taught me the old spiritual ideas I had wrong and you removed the old corrupt priesthood.

And you taught me that you're not happy with anything I try to do to please you. And I tried to look to Jesus and you answered in judgment. I don't understand that.

And so now you've got to come through again. And so the 20th year then becomes a turning point because now they're sighing, lamenting, moaning, pining after God and praise God for Samuel. Praise God for this man who understood the heart of God and the ways of God.

Look at chapter 7 please, verse 3. Let me read the text and then I'll isolate the principle. Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel saying, If you return to the Lord with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the asaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the Lord and serve Him alone, He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines. And so the sons of Israel removed the bells and the asaroth and served the Lord alone.

And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpah and I will pray to the Lord for you. And they gathered to Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted on that day and said, We have sinned against the Lord.

And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah. Glance please at verse 3 and 4. There's an expression that I think gives light to this passage. Verse 3, Serve Him alone.

Verse 4, And served the Lord alone. May I suggest, it's not just looking unto Jesus, but looking unto Jesus alone. That becomes the key.

It's the message of Christ preeminent. They hadn't had that yet. Christ alone.

Christ as a one and only. You see, Samuel pointed out that their lives were filled with other things. Verse 3, Foreign gods.

Astronaut. Verse 4, Bills. When you say, Look to Jesus.

And your life is filled with foreign gods and astronauts and bills. You can say all you want, look to Jesus. He's not pleased.

He's got to judge that. But at Beth Shemesh, you see, Christ was preeminent, but He wasn't preeminent. There's a difference.

A preeminent is one among many. Preeminent is one and only. You can have many prominent things in your life.

Family. Church. Missions.

Friends. Sports. Stewardship.

Ministry. Christ. Those who make Christ prominent.

Putting Him on a priority list with other things. And even if He's first on that list, He can't be happy. Because He wants to be one and only.

The preeminent Christ. He's not going to be first on a list where there's a second and a third. There can be no second to Jesus.

There can be no third to Jesus. He's Alpha and Omega. He's the first and the last.

He's number one, number two, number three. He's on a list all by Himself. Samuel called on Israel not just to look to Jesus, but to look to Jesus only.

To look to Jesus alone. To look to Jesus in such a way that they looked away from all the other things unto Him alone. You see, this is nothing more than Hebrews 12, 2. Looking unto Jesus.

Realizing the Greek language, it's actually off-looking unto Jesus. That's the Greek. There's two Greek words there.

Apo and Ais. Apo means away from. Ais, unto.

And it's off-looking unto Jesus. You can't look unto Jesus unless you off-look. Israel was called upon to look away from their gods.

As for Abel, and then unto the Lord Jesus. Unto Christ alone. The problem at Beth Shemesh, they looked unto, but they didn't off-look.

And God is calling attention to that now. They were willing to have Christ prominent, but not Christ preeminent. It's not that God was too holy to be happy.

He was too generous to be happy with a divided heart. Among others, 20 years of sighing, burden from the oppression of the Philistines, 20 years of mourning for God finally made them willing. Verse 3, look at it.

If you return to the Lord, with all your heart, remove the foreign gods, direct your heart toward the Lord, serve only Him, something will happen. It will happen. Verse 3, He will deliver you from the hands of the Philistines.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is the first record of that. This is the first promise now. And God now says, look, we're at this point where we need to understand how to have victory over the Philistine part of you.

We've been so beaten up by the Philistines, so mocked, so frustrated, so oppressed. Is it possible if Christ is preeminent in my life, on one and only, that God will give me victory over the Philistines? If I return unto Him with all my heart, if I off-look and on-look, if I look away from and unto Jesus alone, will that guarantee victory? Well, sounds too easy. Sounds too simple.

Too good to be true. But to them that was so inviting. To them that was so enticing.

The possibility that if I just have God alone, He's going to take care of the Philistines? Verse 7. Or rather, verse 4. Chapter 7. And so the sons of Israel removed the bales and the ashtoreth and served them all. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you. They gathered to Mizpah

and drew water and poured it out before the Lord.

They fasted on that day, and they said, We've sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah. Only that went through Israel's heart when Samuel said, verse 5, Gather all Israel to Mizpah.

Now Mizpah may not register anything to you, but it registered something to them. Perhaps you recognize it by its symbolic name. Look please at chapter 7.12. Samuel took a stone, set it between Mizpah and Shem, and named it Ebenezer.

Now what's Ebenezer? I'm not talking about what does it mean spiritually, the rock of hope and all that. But what did it register in their mind? Now don't forget, Samuel was written after the fact. And so actually, chapter 7 happened before this book was written.

So when you read in chapter 4, verse 1. Go ahead and look at chapter 4. Israel went out to meet the Philistines, that's when they were doing it in the rainstorm, in battle, and camped beside Ebenezer. That's the same place. So when I said, I wonder what went through their mind when Samuel said, Gather at Mizpah.

See that's the same place that Israel had been defeated by the Philistines before. That's exactly the same battlefield. And to them, that was just a place of former defeat.

I don't want to go there. That's a place of awful memories. That's where in the zeal of the moment, when Israel thought they were so spiritual, they attacked the Philistines.

34,000 of their comrades laid dead in that field. It was an awful place. And now Samuel says, Let's go back to that battlefield.

Let's go back to the same place where you were defeated so terribly, and you tried it on your own. But don't bring any weapons, because you're not going there to fight. You're not going there to war.

You're not going there to battle. You're going there to know the Lord. And he gathered all Israel to the same battlefield to surrender unto the Lord.

And so they did. And they gathered out there. There were six.

They drew water. And they poured it out before the Lord. What did that symbolize? Well, Lamentations 2.19 tells you exactly.

Lamentations 2.19 says, Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord. That's what it symbolized. They were pouring out their heart like water.

And I love that in connection with 1 Samuel 14.14. 1 Samuel 14.14 says, Water spilled upon the ground cannot be gathered up again. And they just took their hearts like water and spilled it upon the ground never to take it up again like a once-for-all surrender. And then according to verse 6, they fasted that day.

It's just another picture. And they're not involved in the physical. Praying is laying hold of God.

Fasting is letting go. It's just a picture of detachment, release, self-denial, letting everyone go. And they just came to this place and they said, Alright, Lord, You want to be pre-eminent? You want to be the Lord

and only? I'm going to come with my whole heart.

And they poured out their heart never to be gathered again. And they fasted and said, I'm going to let go of all these asteroids and boulders. And they were just symbolized by fasting.

What a wonderful day. Verse 6, Confessing we've sinned against the Lord. I say the 20 years was a turning point.

They learned what it means to look to the Lord, off-looking unto Jesus, pouring out your heart, letting go of everything, confessing to the Lord. And now may God help us and grant you this, la, la, la. While they were doing that, while they were worshiping, while they were pouring out their hearts, while they were surrendering, while they were crowning Christ as pre-eminent.

Verse 7, When the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered to miss Paul, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the sons of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. They had no weapons, folks.

They were on the same battlefield where they'd known defeat after defeat. And now the Philistines decide, what a wonderful time to attack. Right in the place of prayer.

Now remember, their whole history with the Philistines at this point was one of slavery. And they had learned the power of the Philistines. And they learned they couldn't deal with the Philistines.

And to these eyes, I'll tell you, they couldn't have been in a worse position. Unarmed, unprepared, as vulnerable as a sheep in a den of wolves. And their hearts, understandably, were full of fear.

Well, in this place, let's see if they meant that poured out water. Let's see if they meant that fasting. Let's see if they meant that desire of sin.

We want Christ as pre-eminent, never reduced to the only resource. Blessed place. Blessed place.

When God reduces us to this only resource, mercy, when the sons of Israel said to Samuel, do not cease to cry to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines. You see, before, they said, oh, they're spiritual. We can handle the Philistines.

Attack! And now the Philistines are attacking them. And they have no weapons. And so, they just pray.

They call upon the Lord. I love the way Samuel prepares for war. He doesn't frantically go around looking for weapons.

He doesn't hold his hand fretting, what are we going to do now? He doesn't try to figure out some great strategy. Verse 9. Samuel took a succulent lamb, and he offered it for a whole burnt offering to the Lord. Samuel cried to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him.

Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines and confused them, so that they were routed before Israel. Samuel just offers a succulent lamb, to try to get you.

Here comes the army! Oh, let's take this seven-day lamb, eight-day lamb. Let's offer this little lamb. He is so spiritual here.

He is so, he's taking this, you know little pictures, he's taking this substitute. And he's saying, Lord, we deserve what this lamb is going to get. We're not coming to you because we deserve anything.

And they just offer this lamb before God. And while they worship, and while they pray, and while they seek the Lord, verse 10. The Lord thundered with a great thunder against the Philistines and confused them.

Now, what was included in that thunder, I guess we'll never know. Dr. John Gill, in his commentary, suggests that the Hebrew word there includes earthquake. I don't know how he gets that out of thunder.

But he said there was a great earthquake and lightning and a storm and I don't know how that happened. But I know this. I know I don't defeat the Philistines by fighting the Philistines.

I know when Christ is preeminent and I go after Him, He takes care of the Philistines. And I'm a very battle-ready. I've suffered defeat after defeat.

On that same field, I'll experience this victory. And brothers and sisters in Christ, we're touching some very precious things. Who would ever guess? Who would dream? The way to defeat the enemy is to ignore the enemy.

And look, that's exactly what the Bible teaches. All this idea about feeding out Satan's ploys and all of that. All that stuff is dangerous.

You stay away from that stuff. Go after Christ. Go after the Lord.

It was when they were going after Him. There's so much self-examination today and all of this introspection and figure this out and go after this sin and that sin. And I'll tell you, there's nothing sweeter than experiencing God's victory on the very battlefield where you have an ominous defeat time after time.

And watch Him go. Go after Christ, you'll get victory. Go after the enemy, you're going to lose.

Every time. Every time. God begins His quest for rest, His move to the temple, begins with a hungry heart.

He deals with the corrupt priesthood. He teaches us it's not by the Philistines, not a place that we can ever please Him, not by that part of us. He tries to teach us what it means to look to Jesus.

Off-look to Jesus. Making Him preeminent and one and only. And then He brings this great victory.

Well, to celebrate the victory, victory through worship, victory through knowing God, victory through seeing the Lord, victory through sighing, through breathing after Him, they set up a monument, this town. Samuel took a stone, set it between Nisbeth and Shannon, named it Ebenezer, saying, thus far has the Lord helped us. I love that.

That King James said, hitherto hath the Lord helped us. In other words, they were saying, we made it this far. And it's by the help of God.

It's sort of like, grace has brought me safe thus far, and there's a future in God's hitherto. And it's not only in the past. Hitherto has He helped us, but there's hope in that.

And it's almost saying like, God has helped me, therefore God will help me. You can't always apply that to men, but you can always apply that to God. God has, therefore God will.

Hitherto God has helped me. And I expect these men to keep on helping me. All the way.

We have a little thing on our refrigerator. I think it's still on there. Yesterday, God helped me.

Today, He did the same. How long will this continue? Forever. Praise His name.

Well, that's Ebenezer, see. God can't rest, they learned in a corrupt priesthood. God can't rest, in aid and offer by the flesh.

And now they learn, God can't rest in a divided heart. That's what they learned. There must be Him, and Him alone.

The preeminent Christ. And now for the first time, Israel experiences what they longed for from the beginning. Deliverance from those Philistines.

This, when Christ becomes preeminent, is the Christians' first taste now. Of an actual, real, literal victory over sin. Verse 13.

So the Philistines were subdued. They did not come anymore into the border of Israel. The hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel from Ekron even to Gath. Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. Verse 13 says they had constant victory.

Verse 14 says that they actually regained everything that had been lost. This is Joel's idea. The Lord restoring the ears that the locusts had eaten.

God turning the curse into a blessing. What a great step for the child of God. When he sees Christ as everything.

The one and only. Not only looking undue, but off-looking undue. Where Christ becomes preeminent, then he begins to experience this victory in his life.

Now, as I wrap this up, let me just state, I've already stated it several times, but just sort of as closing idea, make sure you understand these great truths of God. Number one, God can never rest in a divided heart. He doesn't want to be preeminent in your life.

He wants to be preeminent in your life. Number two, the way to have victory against the Philistines in your life is to go after Jesus, not after Philistines. That's a clear teaching of the Word of God.

In fact, ignore the Philistines. Don't worry about it. The principle we can get from this, and I won't develop it, but I think you'll be able to take it from here.

When I read the record, I see that they finally Israel did pursue the Philistines. After God gave them victory, they actually went after the Philistines. And from that, may I suggest this principle, it's okay to pursue the Philistines after God thunders against them.

Don't let some other Christian point out some Philistine in your life and say, go after this, and there's a sin, and that's a sin, and you ought to do this. Wait till God thunders against those Philistines, then you'll have victory. He taught this to David in another, he said, you wait in the bushes, and don't you dare go after the enemy till you hear my army in the tops of the trees.

When you hear me going after them, then you go after them. But until then, you stay put. And I think Christians get on sin hunts, and they try to go after this sin and that sin.

And not only in their own lives, but in other people's lives. Wait till God deals with it, and then it's dealt with. And so that's just another suggestion.

Number four, when Christ is preeminent, I not only have a present victory, and he turns all the curse into a blessing, and he turns the past around, but he also gives hope for the future. Praise God for the victories in the past, and may that be an incentive to future victory. Well, I'd love to be able to tell you now, with the discovery of Christ's preeminent, that they've arrived.

There's another lesson they've got to learn. The ark is still quite a ways from the temple. Do you think after seeing these great truths, after seeing these tremendous things that God deals with the corrupt priesthood, that he's not going to be satisfied with anything I do, that I must look unto Christ, and Christ alone is preeminent, that now I'm pretty much into the man? Not yet.

Not yet. And so we'll pick up the next step next time. I hope you're able to see how these great truths are reflected in your own experience.

This is the path to God's resting place. It's the path He always takes. And we have to learn one way or another.

Mice, or hemorrhoids, or the motherland of God. We've got to learn these things, if God's ever going to rest. But then, after it's all over, and we've been bloodied by the Philistines enough times, and we've finally learned some of these things, there is a temple in your heart, and there's a holy of holies in that temple, and there's the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ to rest there, and to fill your temple with His glory, and to govern your life by the glory of God.

He's not going to give up on you. He's patient. He's going to teach you these things, and we'll follow the ark all the way to that place where He does that.

So may God help us in these things. Comments or questions? We do pray, Lord, as you move in our lives toward that place where you'll rest, or even if you've arrived there already and are filling us with your glory, that we thank you for your path in our lives, and your great hand and your footsteps, and you're so faithful to teach us these great truths, these great principles, that we need to know. And so, Lord, we pray that you put this sigh in our heart, that we would lament after thee and long for thee, and then, Lord, that you would be preeminent in our life, that it would be Christ as a one and only, and that we would look away from and unto you alone.

Lord, as we look forward and see all these other lessons that we have to learn, prepare our hearts, and we pray that we would just give you the unhindered right of way to move toward that place that would bring you rest and from which you can reign. Now, Lord, guide our fellowship together, and we thank you for everyone here, and may we enjoy each other, may we enjoy Christ, may we enjoy the provision that has been provided by your children. We thank you for it all, and we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.

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