

Ark of the Covenant - Part 1

by Major Ian Thomas

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's voice and the consequences of spiritual decline, as seen in the story of Eli and the Israelites.

Duration: 1:07:41

Scripture: Exodus 20:3, Leviticus 24:1, Deuteronomy 6:5, 1 Chronicles 13:1, Matthew 6:33, John 14:15, Romans 12:1

Topics: "Ark Of The Covenant"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Samuel and the Israelites' battle against the Philistines. The Israelites were defeated, and the elders of Israel questioned why the Lord had allowed this to happen. They decided to bring the ark of the covenant to the battlefield, believing it would save them. However, the preacher highlights the importance of a personal relationship with God and obedience to His commands, rather than relying on token obedience or external rituals. The sermon encourages listeners to reflect on their own relationship with God and their practice of the Christian faith.

Transcript

Thank you very much. Good to see you folks again tonight. I hope you've got your bibles and your fingers well lit.

The form of scripture is the word of God. The character of the word of God is gospel. And the content of the gospel is Jesus Christ.

So, no matter where we turn in the bible from Genesis to the Revelation, we may anticipate that the Holy Spirit, whose gracious ministry it is to be our teacher, will focus our attention upon the person of the Lord Jesus. This is what makes the Old Testament, in particular, so wonderfully fascinating. If we don't recognize the principle, of course, that no matter where you turn in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit will want to introduce you to Jesus Christ, then the Old Testament can become intolerably boring.

And, for many, it is, because they've never learned to understand the language of the Holy Spirit. In this part of God's word that foreshadowed the birth and life and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit has been at great pains to give us some magnificent illustrations, charged with spiritual significance. And so, in the evening session, parallel in Christ in many ways to our morning session, we're going to turn, particularly, to the Old Testament.

Though, inevitably, of course, we shall, from the Old Testament, be referring quite often to the New Testament, because they are inseparable, the one from the other. But, by way of introduction tonight, would you turn with me to the first book of Chronicles, and the 13th chapter? 1 Chronicles, and chapter 13. Now, very often, in order to understand what God has to say to us through the pages of the Old Testament, we need to do quite a bit of research, quite a bit of donkey work.

And, it isn't always, initially, obvious what God is getting at, especially for those who are unfamiliar with the pages of the Old Testament, and unfamiliar with the way in which the Holy Spirit unfolds spiritual truth. And, if you are unfamiliar a bit with the Old Testament Scriptures, then just keep listening. And, although at first you may be a little bit confused, I'm quite accustomed to that.

Just come again, and I'll confuse you more. But, then, as you begin to accumulate facts, as you begin to sort of take a good, long look, and see it panoramically laid out before you, it'll suddenly perk, it'll suddenly click. And, I believe that the Old Testament will become as exciting to you as it may already be, as it is to me.

In the 13th chapter, 1 Chronicles, and the first verse, David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. And, David said unto all the congregation of Israel, if it seem good unto you, and that it be of the Lord our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren everywhere that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests, and to the Levites which are in their cities, and their suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us, and let us bring again the ark of our God to you. For we inquired not at it in the days of Saul, and all the congregation said that they would do so.

For the thing was right in the eyes of all the people. So, David gathered all Israel together from Shihor of Egypt, even unto the entering of Hemath, to bring the ark of God from Kerjah, Jerusalem. Now, that's the introduction to our studies for these evening services.

David summons all the captains of thousands, and the captains of hundreds, and the leaders, all the congregation of the people, with the priests and the Levites, and he puts forth a proposition. He says, let us bring again the ark of our God to you, and all the congregation said we'll do it. For the thing was right in the eyes of all the people.

So, the theme is going to be how to get the ark back to where it belongs. Now, of course, there wouldn't be any particular purpose in doing that if there weren't some spiritual significance one in the ark, and two in where it ought to be. And I trust that we shall discover the significance as we explore it again.

Quite obviously, we shan't cover the whole progressive enterprise in this one evening. We'll just get as far as we can each night, and pick up the thread on the succeeding session. Getting the ark back to where it belongs.

In other words, into its right context. We'll need to discover what the ark was all about, what the ark contained, and where the ark ought to have been, and why. We've also got to discover why it wasn't where it ought to have been.

Why was it necessary to get it back? What had happened to it? Well, let's have a look and find out. And in order to discover that, you need now to go back a few pages to the first book of Samuel. The first book of Samuel.

And here we have recorded for us certain events that took place during the latter days of a pathetic old man by the name of Eli, one of the last of the judges and the priests, before the new era was introduced, with the establishment, contrary to God's will and purpose, of a monarchy in Israel. For Saul became the first king of Israel because they wanted to be like their neighbors. Now, this was quite contrary to God's purpose for them, for Israel's king was God himself.

But, like so many today, they didn't like to be different. They were slaves to conformity, and so they said, let's have a king like everybody else. And, ultimately, God granted them their request to the considerable impoverishment of their national life.

But, before that took place, and Saul became king, there was this man called Eli, and it was at a time of deep spiritual depression. The whole spiritual life of the land was in a state of pathetic decline. That's why, in many ways, this particular story is very relevant to your day and mine, in our generation, because, without a shadow of a doubt, worldwide, the Church of Jesus Christ, in spite of all its real estate, and its hierarchies, and its organizational institutions, is in a state of pathetic decline.

For one thing, when the Church ceases to be a brutal, dynamic force bursting with the light of God himself, when the Church has become institutionalized and everything has become respected, you'll always discover that the Church copies the world. In a state of spiritual decline, the Church always hates the world. It's only in times of great spiritual awakening that the world starts copying the Church, and we're in such a state of spiritual decline now where every kind of device is adopted by the Church, which is characteristic of the world, in order to capture the world's attention.

And that's always a very, very, very bad thing, and we'll see that this also was characteristic of this particular day and generation which we shall be discussing together as recorded here in these pages. In the third chapter of the first book of Samuel, it says that the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli, and the word of the Lord was precious in those days. There was no open vision.

Now, don't misunderstand what's being said there. It doesn't mean to say that they had a very high regard for the Bible, and they treasured it greatly. It doesn't mean that at all.

You might imagine that means that, you know, the word of the Lord was precious. No, it simply means that the word of the Lord was so seldom heard that it was a rarity. That's what it means.

It was a rarity. To hear the word of God expounded was a very infrequent occasion. The word of the Lord was precious.

The Bible, by and large, was a thoroughly neglected book. There was religion, but there was almost no revelation. The word of the Lord was precious in those days, and there was no open vision.

And Samuel was brought up in this particular context. He was only a youngster. I suppose he might have been about 12 years of age, perhaps, at this particular time, and he was quite unconverted.

It says in the seventh verse of this particular chapter, Now Samuel did not yet know the law, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him. In spite of the fact that he ministered to Eli, that he helped him in the service of the temple, he wasn't converted. And it would appear that Eli couldn't have cared less, whether he was or whether he wasn't.

Because, you see, the situation, spiritually, was in such a state of decline and bankruptcy that, so long as everybody went through the motions, nobody really cared whether there was any vital relationship between the individual and God himself. The whole thing has been rigidified. The whole thing has been reduced to a process, to a procedure, to a religious externalistic practice.

That's all. There was no spiritual content. Whatever.

It came to part at the time when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see, and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, ere the lamp of God went out. And, point of fact, the lamp of God should never have gone out. But, you see, total obedience to God had been set aside, now, simply for token obedience to God.

And so it had become the practice simply to light the lamp in the temple for so many hours a day, then stuff it out. Saved expense. You didn't need so much oil.

And this is another symptom, you see, of spiritual decline when reality is reduced to ritual. Now, there is a place for ritual if it reminds you of reality. After all, the sacrament of baptism, if you like, is a ritual, but it's designed to remind us of reality.

That a true believer has been buried with Christ, and raised with him too. Of course, the moment the ritual takes the place of the reality, and has no real spiritual content, then it becomes just a piece of pagan idolatry. The Lord's Supper, the breaking of the bread, what we call the communion service, is a ritual.

The Lord Jesus said, do this in remembrance of me. Of course, it's a ritual, but it's a ritual that is designed always to bring us to the reality, the glorious fact that the Lord Jesus once laid down his life, a ransom for men, and that his precious blood was shed upon the cross, that we, through his precious blood, might have boldness of access into the holiest of all. But, the moment the breaking of the bread, the communion service, the Lord's Supper, simply becomes a ritualistic device that takes the place of the reality of a living, saving faith in the crucified, now risen, all-triumphant and soon-coming Lord, of course, it just becomes the object of our idolatry.

And, you see, where ritual takes the place of reality, you will either despise the ritual or deify it. And that, by and large, is what's happened in the world today. Religious processes have become so rigidified that the vast bulk of people aren't the slightest bit interested, and so they pass it by on the other side of the road because they've got things so much more interesting, and so much more attractive, and so much more fascinating.

But, those who are religiously inclined, you see, if there's no reality beyond the ritual, then they will fight for their ritual, because if you take away their ritual, they've neither ritual nor reality. So, from then on, they defend the system, because they don't know God. And this is what has happened in the days of this pathetic old man.

In the 27th chapter of the book of Exodus, you'll have to keep the place open there, and the 20th verse. God's instructions were very clear. Exodus 27, verse 20, Thou shalt command the children of Israel that they bring thee pure oil, olive, beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always.

It was a lamp that was never to go out. In the 24th chapter of the book of Leviticus, Leviticus 24, the Lord spake unto Moses, verse 1, saying, Command the children of Israel that they bring unto thee pure oil, olive, beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually. But, when your own personal relationship

to God and your obedience to his command has ceased to be a matter of any real importance, then token obedience will take the place of total obedience.

How would you characterize your personal relationship to the Lord Jesus tonight? How would you characterize your practice of what you may describe as the Christian faith? Token or total? If we really had courage enough to sit down and discover just how far we have rigidified our own religious practice, we'd be horrified. That's why we don't take time enough to sit down and do it. You see, the church has been reduced to a building.

Isn't that right? When you give somebody instructions and say, you go down the road and you'll see a church on the right. Pass the church and take the second on the left until you come to another church on the left. What a crazy idea! Is that a church? Is the church made of bricks and mortar? No, the Bible tells us very plainly that those who claim redemption through the blood of the Lord Jesus and are indwelt by his Holy Spirit are thereby baptized as individual members, in particular, of the body corporate of which he is the head, and his presence through the Holy Spirit is the life content, so that every boy, girl, man, or woman who is genuinely converted becomes a member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

So, the Church of Jesus Christ is not a building, it's not an institution. The Church of Jesus Christ is a fellowship of men and women, girls and girls, whose flesh and blood is that which today makes incarnate the living Son of God. That's the church.

How can you go to church? You can't go to church. You are the church. There are times, of course, when the church comes together to worship, and it is right and proper and convenient to have such a place as this.

I'm glad there's a building like this where we, as members of the church, can come and study God's word, and worship it, and pray. But this isn't the church. This is just a piece of real estate.

We're the church. That means the moment you're genuinely born again, you're never out of church. But, you see, we have reduced it to token acknowledgement of the fact that there is a church, and we say we go to church on Sunday.

That means one hour, or an hour and a quarter, or if you're on all-age Sunday school, perhaps two and a half hours, and you go into a building and you go to church. Token. Of course, if you want to spend the rest of Sunday fishing, you persuade the pastor to have an early morning service night.

That gets you away quicker, and you've already been to church, you see. Token. Anything but total.

And, if it isn't raining too hard on Wednesday prayer meetings, then, of course, you come for another hour. Token. Attendance at church.

And, long since, of course, prayer meeting has ceased to be a prayer meeting, hasn't it? People don't really come to prayer meeting on Wednesday to pray. Only last week, I was talking to a bunch of kids, and they said, on Wednesday night, we used to have about 10 people who prayed, but now the pastor just named somebody, and he just prays for everybody. Token.

I had dinner with a pastor of a church, a large church. He had about 3,000 on his Sunday morning service, and I said, supposing you were to get up next Sunday, and with all the enthusiasm, with all the urgency, all the seriousness that you could muster, you were to say to your people, who are members of your

congregation, there will be a meeting on Tuesday night of this church congregation, which is absolutely vital to its continuance, and to its spiritual well-being, and to its proper function. And, as your pastor, I plead with you, with all the urgency, in all the seriousness, that I can possibly muster, that every single one of you be there.

It is absolutely imperative to the future of this church community. I said, when you've done that, how many would you expect out of your 3,000? He said, two or three hundred. And I know he's right, because, you see, for the last 37 years, I've been traveling from one church to another, of every denomination, all parts of the world, in the five continents of the earth.

And I know, quite frankly, I know that when I preach to a congregation on Sunday, I can say goodbye to 90% of them, if I'm going to preach every night for the following week. Because, on Sunday, they're there as a token attendant. All they're doing is tipping their cap to God, and saying, nice to see you, see you next week.

Right? Now, has that anything to do with Bible Christianity? Absolutely nothing. Absolutely nothing. It has an awful lot to do with the kind of practice of religion that was being perpetrated by this pathetic old man, Eli.

But, you see, long since there had ceased to be any real spiritual content to the performance in which they were all engaged, his sons were in the ministry. Wicked men. Dishonest, heathen, immoral, and yet Eli, who was responsible for their ordination, tolerated their sin and their apostasy on the grounds of family experience.

He wanted his sons in the ministry. Now, the sons of Eli were sons of Belial, verse 12 of chapter 2. They knew not the law, and Eli knew perfectly well they didn't know the law. But, he allowed them to minister.

And, in times of great spiritual depression, you see, as to whether or not a man has a personal relationship to the Lord Jesus, as to whether he's genuinely converted, as to whether he's been cleansed in the shed blood of Christ, as to whether he's really regenerated, as to whether, really, the life of God has been imparted to his redeemed humanity, so that he can live day by day in the unction and power of God the Holy Spirit, whether or not he really believes the Bible, whether or not he's really going to proclaim its message with an authority that derives from an unshatterable conviction that it's that that's the law, is today a matter of total indifference, so long as we can keep the institution going. Now, this was the situation at this particular time. And, ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, Samuel was laid down to sleep.

And, the Lord called Samuel. And, Samuel said, here I am, and ran to Eli. You see, God spoke, but he answered Eli.

Why? Well, very simple. You see, nobody in the temple ever expected to hear anything but the voice of man. And, the preacher, quite frankly, never expected anybody to hear the voice of God.

So, Samuel, brought up in this apostate condition, hearing the voice of God, quite naturally thought it was the voice of man. He'd never been accustomed to hearing God speak. So, when God spoke to him, he jumped up, he ran to Eli, and said, here I am, you called me.

And, Eli said, I didn't call you, lie down, and don't eat cheese so late at night. So, he went and lay down. And, the Lord called, yet again, Samuel.

And, Samuel arose, and went to Eli, and said, here I am, you did call me. And, Eli said, I called you not, my son, lie down again, don't bother. Little wonder he never knew the Lord.

Do your Sunday school teachers, does it really bother you whether your kids know the Lord, or the men and the women to whom you minister? If you're a Sunday school teacher, how long does it take you to prepare your lesson? Or, quite frankly, have you learned that because the material is handed down to you from above, all you've got to be able to do, quite frankly, is to be able to read English reasonably well. And, you can scan it over during your breakfast, with your lesson in one hand, the piece of bacon in the other. Now, Samuel did not yet know the Lord.

Neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him. And, the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And, he arose, and he went to Eli, and he said, here I am, you did call me.

And, at last, this pathetic old man perceived, wonder of all wonders, that the Lord had called the child. What an extraordinary thing he thought. God has spoken.

Must be quite a surprise, mustn't it? Under these lamentable conditions. But, he had long since come to terms with a godless society, and he had long since, even in his own family circle, learned to live with sin. Therefore, Eli said to Samuel, go and lie down, and it shall be if he calls you that you will say, speak Lord, thy servant here.

So, Samuel went and lay down his place, and the Lord came and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then, Samuel answered, speak for thy servant here. And, of course, this is an amazing thing.

No matter how apostate may be the condition in which you and I live, no matter how bankrupt may be the institutionalized church to which we belong, as it was in the days of the Lord Jesus, where Judaism was simply an apostate, dead, ritualistic form of Christianity, where they preached the Messiah, and they preached the Lord, but never knew him when he came, but crucified him. In spite of all that, no matter how depressing may seem the environment, spiritually, in which you find yourself, again, and again, and again, God will speak, and a boy here, and a girl there, man somewhere else, will come alive. It's happened all down the centuries.

Quite incredible, because, you see, man is never indispensable to God, but God is always indispensable to man. It simply means that it is, as in the case of Judaism, an apostate form of Christianity. Those to whom had been entrusted the very oracles of God, if it becomes totally apostate, then God bypasses it.

That's all. God isn't limited, and if the Christian faith is rigidified into some institutionalized form, in such a way that God no longer has a place in it, he'll move right out of it. That's what happened at the time of Martin Luther and the great reformation that swept the world.

God simply walked out of the existent, then institutionalized, forms of religion, and the voice of God was heard again, clear and loud. No credit to Eli. Eli was so insensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, when Anna, the mother of Samuel, came because she had never born a son, and poured out her soul to God.

She was in bitterness of soul. Chapter 1 and verse 10. Prayed to the Lord, and wept sore, and vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but will give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto

the Lord all the days of his life.

There shall no razor come upon his head. But it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.

Therefore Eli thought she had been drunken, and Eli said to her, How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from. So insensitive that she thought a woman crying out from the bitterness of her soul to a living God. There's nothing more nor less than a drunken star.

Hannah answered and said, No more, Lord. I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I poured out my soul before the Lord.

Wherefore it came to pass, verse 20, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and she called his name Sam, saying, Behold I have asked him of the Lord. And in the discharge of her vow she brought him to the house of God. For this child I prayed, she said, verse 27, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of him.

Therefore also have I lent him to the Lord. As long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And God answered her prayer, and Samuel came to know the Lord.

Samuel grew, we're told, in verse 19 of chapter 3, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

So, you see, side by side with the appalling apostasy, and the degradation of the priesthood, and the scarcity of the word of God, and the indifference of those upon whom should have rested the spiritual responsibility for minister life, God was laying his hand upon a young boy, and preparing him for his service. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel, chapter 4 and verse 1. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and they pitched beside Ebenezer, and the Philistines pitched in Abeth. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel, and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines.

And they flew of the army in the field about four thousand men. And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us the day before the Philistines? Let us set the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. Thrashed by their foes upon the field of battle, at a last resort, like so many, they turned to religion, and they said, Let's go and get the ark.

Let's get it, and bring it, and it will help us. And so they went to Shiloh, to the temple, and they took the ark out of the temple, so that it might save us. So the ark was wrenched out of its content, and their confidence was vested not in him, but in it.

Now, we shall discover that the ark and its content represent the marvelous provision that God has made for you and for me in the person of the Lord Jesus. The ark is symbolic of our salvation. In a sense, comprehended in the contents of the ark are the doctrines of the Christian faith.

Now, in their need, they took it, and they hoped it detached from him, might help them. Now, that's what you do when you cherish Christian doctrines, until they become no more than evangelical traditions, but totally destitute of spiritual content, because they've been severed from Christ. You see, the moment you detach your Christianity from Christ, even though it is Bible-believing, evangelical Christianity, you've got nothing more nor less than a dead religion around your neck.

Because Christianity, severed from Christ, is bankrupt. The moment you've got a form of godliness but deny the power thereof, which is God himself, you've got a legalistic straitjacket that may have taboos and do's and don'ts, but it's spiritually terror. And the moment you've got a spirituality that is detached from the person of the Holy Spirit, you've got a nauseating fraud.

Christianity without Christ, a dead religion, godliness without God, a legalistic straitjacket, and spirituality apart from the Holy Spirit, is just a nauseating fraud. That's it. It is.

If you've got a theology, you see, which is less than a theocracy, then it won't be long before you're worshipping your theology, but you won't be worshipping God. When your dogma is less than deity, when your creed is less than Christ, when your religion is less than regeneration, then you've got it in the camp. And it will do as much for you today as it did for them day.

Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. If it were the Lord who had smitten them, it would have been far wiser to get back to the Lord than to try to get it. So, the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim and the two sons of Eli, those wicked evil men, Hosni and Sinehad, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. You see, their knowledge of God had been reduced to a pagan superstition, and there is nothing so sacred in the Christian life that cannot be used by Satan as the object of your idolatry. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, what meaneth the noise of the great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp.

And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, woe unto us, for there hath not been such a thing here before. The enemies of Israel, in their ignorance, knew more than the people of God.

They knew enough to identify it with him. The people of God had detached, detached it from him. Woe unto us, who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods.

These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong, quit you like men, you Philistines, that you be not servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Quit you yourselves like men, and fight! This, for the Philistines, was a crisis.

To them, it represents, represented him. It represented the one who had delivered them marvelously out of the hand of the Egyptians. It represented to them the one who had marvelously led them to the Red Sea.

It represented to them the one who had marvelously led them into the land of Canaan, and chased their enemies from before their face. But not to the children of Israel. All they had was it.

And God refuses to honor it detached from him. And I don't care how sacred it may be, the thing that has become the object of your idolatry. It may even be your bible, it may be soul winning, it may be missions, it may be your church, it may be your denomination.

Detached from Christ, it's bankrupt. And God will refuse to honor it because God has chosen only to honor his son, to whom he has given the name which is above every name. He has highly exalted him.

That's only at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue can say that Jesus Christ is Lord. And if, however unwittingly, you have substituted your churchmanship for whatever denomination it may be for Christ, God will not honor it. If, no matter how unwittingly, you have substituted your service to Jesus Christ, to Jesus Christ himself, God will not honor it.

He refuses to honor it when it has been detached from him, out of context. By and large, God isn't particularly interested nor impressed with our activity. He is very deeply concerned about our attitude.

It's not our religion that God is concerned about, but our relationship. What role does the Lord Jesus actually play in your life? Said the Pharisees one day to the Lord Jesus, when will the kingdom of God come? And they were thinking of it. He answered and said, the kingdom of God cometh not with observation.

It doesn't come without which show. It can't be defined in terms of a human organization, or an ecclesiastical hierarchy, or blocks of real estate. You won't determine by the vestments that men may wear, nor the professions in which they may take part.

The kingdom of God does not come with observation, neither shall they say, lo there it is, or here it is. Behold, the kingdom of God is within you. That is why you can never enter the kingdom of God without becoming part of it, because the kingdom of God is within you.

And if you have entered the kingdom by becoming part of it, then there is only one place for the king, and that is in his kingdom. And from that moment, there is only one role for the king to play, as the king in his kingdom, and that is to be king. Which means that your body, soul, spirit, your mind, your emotion, and will, the totality of your being as a man, every area of your personality, is yielded to him without reserve.

You present your body a living sacrifice, wholly unacceptable unto God. It's your reasonable service. You no longer ache the world in which you live.

You are not conformed to this world. You are transformed by the renewing of your mind, by adopting an entirely new attitude that bows yourself out, and bows him in, and gives him total jurisdiction. And you allow the Holy Spirit to re-establish the sovereignty of Jesus Christ in every area of your being, so that you step out in the dawn of every new day as a living member of his body corpora, in which he is the head and member of the kingdom.

Jesus is king. Anything less than that, God repudiates. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent, and there was a very great slaughter for their fellow Israel.

And the ark of God, it was so great, that God refused to honor in the midst of his own people, detached from him, with Satan, captured by the enemies of God, fell into the hands of the Philistines. And the two sons of Eli, Hosni and Sinihach, were slain. And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head.

And when he came low, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside, watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it all, the city cried out. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What means the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli.

Now Eli was ninety and eight years old, and his eyes were dim, and he could not see. And the man said to Eli, I am he that came out of the army. I fled today out of the army.

And he said, What is there? What is there done, my son? And the messenger answered and said, Israelites fled before the Philistines. And there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hosni and Sinihach, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. And this pathetic old man fell back, and died of a broken neck, just before he had time to die of a broken came to pass.

When he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate in his neck break, and he died. For he was an old man and heavy, and he had judged Israel forty years. And his daughter-in-law Sinihach's wife was his child, twenty-one, and she named the child Eshabon, which means the glory is departed from Israel.

Because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken. Eshabon, the glory is departed.

Now, we'll have to conclude in a few moments. Where should the ark of be? Just a quick glance. If you turn in the book of Exodus, and chapter 25, Exodus and chapter 25.

Twenty-first verse of the twenty-fifth chapter of the book of Exodus. And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark, and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. God gave specific instructions as to what was to be the content of the ark.

And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubs which are upon the ark of the testimony of all things which I will give thee, and command them unto the children of Israel. In the place where the ark was to be put, God said, I'll meet with thee, there I will commune with thee. Chapter 26, Exodus 26-33.

Thou shalt hang up the veil under the tashes, that thou mayest bring in thither within the veil the ark of the testament, and the veil shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy. And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place, the holiest of all, that was to be separated from the holy place by the veil. That veil which was never to be rent until the day that Jesus Christ shed his blood rose again from the dead, and the veil of the temple was rent from bottom to top, that there might be boldness of access into the very presence of the holy God, all who would come by the blood of Jesus.

The holiest of all that symbolized the very presence of the living God. That's where the ark is, and upon it the mercy seat, upon which the burnt offering was to be made, before which the burnt offering was to be made. This shall be a continual burnt offering, verse 42 of chapter 29, throughout your generation, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord, where I will meet with you to seek their answer.

There will I meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar. I will sanctify also both Aaron his son to minister to me in the priest's office, and I will dwell among the children of Israel, and I will be their God, and they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell

among them.

I am the Lord their God. That's where the ark is. It was to be in the place where the living God who delivered them out of Egypt would meet with them, commune with them, and dwell in his presence, and with his glory.

The holiest of all. Thou shalt put it before the veil, verse 6 of chapter 30. That is by the ark of the testimony before the mercy seat.

That is over the testimony where I will meet with you. You see, the place for the ark was to be inseparable from the place where God would meet with you. It was not the ark in itself that was important, but the one of whose mercy and whose provision for guilty sins it was to speak.

In the 16th chapter of the book of Leviticus, Leviticus in chapter 16, the next book in the Bible, the Lord spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they offered before the Lord and died. And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy seat which is upon the ark. That he die not.

For I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired.

These are holy garments. Therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on. And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goat for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself and for his house. He shall take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat.

And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself and for his house.

And he shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself, and he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense, sweet and small, and bring it within the veil. And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, the ark, that he die not. And he shall take of the blood of the bullock and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward.

And before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times. And then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people, and he shall bring his blood within the veil into the holiest of all, once a year and never more, on pain of death. And he will do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and he shall sprinkle it upon the mercy seat in the sanctuary.

And before the mercy seat he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins. And the ark was beneath the mercy seat that was to be sprinkled with blood, and within the ark were those symbols that God commanded Moses to place there, as being symbolic of the provision that God makes for a people who cleanse in the blood of Jesus, because they have been sprinkled at the mercy seat in the presence of a living God. For the ark in the camp, detached from its context, out of the holy place, no blood, no mercy seat.

And you can have all the religion in the world, you can have all the doctrine of the world, you can have all the bible verses in the world, until they're oozing out of your fingers. But if they are detached from the person of the Lord Jesus as the only one who is the living word, brings to finality the written word. There's no blood, and there's no mercy seat.

And the ark fell into the hands of the Philistines, and though God refused to honor it in the midst of his own people, the amazing thing is that God honored it in the midst of his enemies, because so far as they were concerned, it could not be detached from him. It says the Philistines, God did come to the camp. For the Philistines took the ark of God, and they brought it from Ebenezer into Ashdod, and when the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and they said it by Dagon, and their god Dagon had a pretty rough time.

It says in the fifth chapter, 1 Samuel, that they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, and behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took poor old Dagon, dusted him, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early in the morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord, and the head of Dagon, and both the palms of his hands were cut off from the threshold.

Only the stump of Dagon was left in him. He was a fish fly, just the fishy part of him was left. No head, no arm.

Poor old Dagon. He had a rough time, because the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them. He smote them with emeralds.

Even Ashdod and the coast said, they sent therefore gathered all the lords of the Philistines under them and said, what shall we do with the ark of the Lord of the God of Israel? And the answer is, let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about on the gap, and they carried the ark of God of Israel about to them. They sent the ark of God to Ekron, verse 10 of chapter 5, and it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying they brought about the ark of the God of Israel to ask to slay us and our people. To the end of verse 11, there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city, and the hand of God was very heavy.

And you know what happened. Finally, they took counsel, make a new cart, verse 7, chapter 6, take two milk cows, on which they have come no yoke, and tie the kind to the cart, and bring their cows home from it. And see, verse 9, if it goeth up the way of his own coast to Beth Shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil.

But if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote it. It was a charm that happened. So, they took this brand new cart, and they put the ark of God upon it, and a couple of cows with their young tied up in the stall, and any cow will go at once to the young.

But instead, those two cows took the straight way to the way of Beth Shemesh, verse 12, and they went along the highway lowing as they went, and they turned not aside to the right or to the left. And the cart came to the field of Joshua, Beth Shemesh. And the Levites took down the ark, verse 15, of the Lord, and the coffer that was within.

And they looked inside, and God smote the men of Beth Shemesh, verse 19, because they looked into the ark of the Lord. He smote of the people fifty thousand, and three scorned ten men, and the people lamented because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great loss. And the men of Beth Shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord, this God, and to whom shall he go up? And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirgis-jerim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the Lord, come you down and fetch it up.

And the men of Kirgis-jerim came and fetched up the ark of the Lord, and he brought it into the house of Abinadab. And it came to pass, verse 2 of chapter 7, while the ark abode in Kirgis-jerim, that the time was long, twenty years. And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

And during this period, King Saul ruled in Israel. Until failing to take his own life, he was murdered by an Amalekite. And David, the better neighbor than he, was placed upon the throne of Israel, who sought Israel's good, and that spiritual awakening that would get the ark back into its right place, and God back into the hearts of his people.

And that's why he convened that great assembly, which we read in the thirteenth verse of the first Leviticus. Let's get the ark back where it belongs. We've got our doctrines.

Within our evangelical constituencies, we profess to be defenders of the faith. We can talk about justification by faith. We can talk about the need for a spiritual new birth.

We can insist upon believers' baptism. We can repudiate the liberalism of those who have departed from the authority of Scripture, but I'll tell you something, that isn't really the problem. Above everything else, the Church of Jesus Christ in the 20th century needs to get the ark back where it belongs.

So that the doctrines that we cherish, and the religious practices of which we approach so very jealous, might once more be truly related to a person, Jesus Christ, given his rightful place as king and as his. So that we know this book not in terms of chapter and verse that we've memorized, not in terms of so much systematic theology that stands the test of fundamental evangelicalism, but that the Jesus of whom this book testifies may be given his rightful place, and that you and I may recognize afresh that there is nothing valid even in this very book itself that has not been woven by his Holy Spirit into the fabric of our being and clothed with our humanity. We've got a place where God himself meets his people, and whose presence fills the temple with his glory.

And know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the living God? And to get the ark back where it belongs simply means to get Jesus Christ back where he belongs. Sanctify us, Lord, in your heart and mine, so that we can say to me to live is Christ, because the form of scripture is the word of God, and the character of the word of God is God. But the only legitimate content of that gospel is Jesus Christ.

So to me to live is Christ. Let's have a word of prayer.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/21/SID21882.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/major-ian-thomas/ark-of-the-covenant-part-1/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net