

Ritual or Reality

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas explores the significance of the Ark of the Covenant and the need for spiritual revival in the face of ritualism in the church.

Duration: 58:07

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 13:1

Topics: "Authentic Faith", "Spiritual Awakening"

Description

Major Ian Thomas emphasizes the contrast between ritual and reality in the relationship with God, using King David's desire to return the Ark of the Covenant as a pivotal moment for spiritual awakening in Israel. He highlights the significance of the Ark as a symbol of God's redemptive purpose through Jesus Christ, illustrating how the Old Testament foreshadows the New Testament's fulfillment in Christ's sacrifice. Thomas warns against the dangers of ritualistic practices that replace genuine faith and relationship with God, urging believers to seek a deeper, more authentic connection with the divine. He encourages the congregation to recognize the importance of the Holy Spirit in their lives, enabling them to embody Christ's ministry in a world that often mirrors spiritual decline. The sermon calls for a return to total dedication and obedience to God, rather than settling for token gestures of faith.

Transcript

First book of Chronicles, and the 13th chapter, and just the first four verses initially, and 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 Levites, which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us, and let us bring again the ark of our God to it. 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. And in those four verses, we stand on the threshold of a spiritual awakening.

A time in the history of a decadent people, plagued with moral corruption, a permissive society, that had long since lost reality in terms of their relationship to God, but there arises on the throne a King, King David, who is described for us earlier in the first book of Samuel as a better neighbor than King Saul. And it's been laid upon the heart of this King David to lead this people back to where they belong. And the way he does it is to issue this proclamation.

Let us bring again the ark of our God to it. For we inquired not at it in the days of Saul. We are going to look for a little while in a moment at the background of this desire that was born in the heart of King David, but suffice it for the moment to say that the ark of the covenant is one of those fantastic, magnificent Old Testament pictures of God's redemptive and regenerative purpose towards us in the person of his son Jesus Christ.

It's called the ark of the covenant. And let me underline the fact that God has given us in the Old Testament an amazing picture book. Authored of the Holy Spirit, that in the stories that are recorded for us, there might be given to us lucid clear illustrations of the spiritual principles and truths that are so clearly enunciated in the New Testament.

And what makes the Old Testament so amazingly exciting is to discover the language of the Holy Spirit and what he is at in seeking through these marvelous illustrations in the Old Testament to tell us about the person of God's son Jesus Christ and what he came to accomplish when as the word of God incarnate, God who made himself flesh, assumed our humanity, died upon the cross, rose again from the dead to reconcile guilty sinners to himself, not just simply that they might go to heaven, which is quite incidental to the gospel, gloriously true, but quite incidental, but who died upon the cross and rose again from the dead, not just that we might go to heaven, but that he as God might come out of heaven into us. So that 24 hours every day you and I might clothe his divine activity with our humanity and have the amazing privilege of being that flesh and blood with which Jesus Christ today, still in 1974, continues to accomplish his gracious ministry of seeking and saving that which is lost. Now all this is marvelously comprehended for us in the Old Testament scriptures and the desire born in the heart of David to get the ark back where it belonged is charged with spiritual significance.

The ark of the covenant represents that purpose of God in Christ towards you and towards me. It's his pledge in Jesus Christ, a covenant, a promise that he made reiterated of course again and again and again throughout the Old Testament scriptures, foreshadowed right at the very outset as you may remember in the third chapter of the book of Genesis to which you do not need to turn, where side by side with the record of man's fall into sin, God planted the first seed, as it were, of his redemptive purpose that was to flourish and find its ultimate consummation in the person of the Lord Jesus, turning to Satan whom he described as that old serpent. He said, I will put enmity between you and the woman, your seed and her seed.

It, the seed of the woman, will bruise your head. You and your seed will bruise his head. There in the 15th verse of the third chapter of the first book in the Bible, the book of Genesis, there's planted that seed of redemption that finds its full consummation in the first death, resurrection and glorious ascension of Jesus Christ and his coming in the person of the Holy Spirit to invest his life in redeemed sinners.

The seed of the woman? Jesus Christ. The woman? Mary. The seed of the serpent? The Pharisee.

Do you remember how in the eighth chapter of John's gospel the Lord Jesus turned to them and said, you are of your father the death. You're the seed of the serpent. And the lusts of your father you will do.

He was a liar from the beginning, that's why you reject the truth. He was a murderer from the beginning, that's why you want to kill me. And there was to be enmity between the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus, born as God promised to Abraham that in his seed all the fans of the earth might be blessed, of the tribe of Judah, of the house of David, born at Bethlehem.

Enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, who bruised his heel as he hung upon the cross. But through the bruising of his heel, the cross, he bruised Satan's head and destroyed him that had the power of death, even the devil, that he might deliver them who through all their lifetime were in bondage through the fear of death, for he set men free. That promise we iterated by God's covenant to faithful Abraham, that in his family all the earth should be blessed.

And the birth of our Lord Jesus on that first Christmas morning, nearly 2000 years ago. Now the ark of the covenant represents in beautiful symbolic language that pledge that God gave to a fallen race of fallen men, though they never ever deserved it. That he would provide the means whereby they could get back to their maker.

There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin, there's a door that is open and you may go in. At Calvary's cross is where you begin, when you come as a sinner to Jesus. That's God's covenant, his pledge.

But there's substance to the pledge, there's a content to all that God has provided for you and for me in the person of the Lord Jesus. And what we want to discover in these days that we spend together is what that solid content is. So if you do have your Bibles, glance would you for a moment with me to the epistle to the Hebrews.

Hebrews and chapter 9. Hebrews and chapter 9. And here reference is made to the covenant. That which represents God's pledge to guilty men that there's a way back for all who want to find their way home. Verily, verse 1 of the 9th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews.

Verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service in a worldly sanctuary. He's speaking of the tabernacle. For, verse 2, there was a tabernacle made.

The first wherein was the candlestick and the table and the showbread which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the holiest of all. Now you will know I'm sure to what here the apostle is making reference.

He's talking about the tabernacle that God commanded Moses to build in the wilderness with meticulous instructions as to how it was to be built. And of course, in the instructions that God gave meticulously foreshadowing his redemptive and regenerative purpose in the person of his son. After the second veil, in verse 3, the tabernacle which is called the holiest of all.

For there was to be a veil, a sort of heavy curtain that shielded off that inner sanctuary, the holiest of all. That was to represent the very presence of God himself. That's why we are told later in the next chapter, now we have boldness of access into the holiest of all, the very presence of God himself by the blood of Jesus.

Though guilty, dirty, stained, sinful, rebels, we have now in his dear name who took our place upon the cross in fulfillment of God's pledge for our redemption. We have boldness of access into the holiest of all. There's not one boy, girl, man or woman in this building here tonight who cannot claim though undeservingly the right to enter into God's presence with absolute boldness.

By the blood of Jesus. For the blood of Jesus, God's son cleanses us from all sin. He died that we might be forgiven.

But there's better news still, he lives to make us good. In other words, to give us what it takes. The holiest of all, God's presence.

But between the outer and the inner sanctuary, the veil. That veil, which when the Lord Jesus rose again from the dead, was ripped from top to bottom. Through which none previously had ever dared to enter, save the high priest, once a year, on pain of death, in sacrificing blood for himself.

But now our high priest has offered one sacrifice for sins forever. And he'll never die again. His body will never be broken again.

His blood will never be shed again. He's led the way for all who will follow, cleansed in his blood, now sealed and indwelt by his spirit into the presence of a holy God. Alright, now what was inside that holiest of all? Just in passing, one thing that wasn't there.

There was no chair. No chair. Because the record tells us that year after year, year after year, the high priest would make that blood sacrifice that can never take away sin.

His work was never done. Never done. Every priest's stand-up, daily ministering and offering, often times the same sacrifices, can never, can never, can never take away sin.

Cover sin, temporally, yes, but can never take away sin. But this man, verse 12, this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down. A thing that the high priest never could do, for his work was never done.

But the Lord Jesus, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God. Christ is not entered into the holy places, verse 24 of chapter 9. Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, as in the tabernacle that Moses built in the wilderness at God's instruction, which are the figures only of the true, just a picture, a symbol, an illustration. But he, our Lord Jesus, has entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us, verse 25 of that ninth chapter.

Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest enters into the holy place every year with blood of others. For then must he, the Lord Jesus, often have suffered since the foundation of the world. But now, once in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.

And unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, alive, triumphant, vindicating his deity, without sin, unto salvation, once for all. That's why the Lord Jesus from the cross cried it is finished, it's all over. And the father said amen, and raised him from the dead.

No chair in the tabernacle, the holiest of all. But our high priest, the Lord Jesus, who brought the substance to that which in the Old Testament was but the shadow, sat down at his father's right hand, isn't it great to know the job's been done. To the father's timeless, eternal satisfaction.

Well, now we know what wasn't there, but what was there? It had the golden censer. And verse 4 of chapter 9 tells us this, in that holiest of all, representing the very presence of a holy God, the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant, overlaid around about with gold.

And over it, verse 5 tells us, over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat, of which the apostle here says we cannot now speak particularly. Now just get that picture first. In the holiest of all, representing the presence of God, the Ark of the Covenant.

Representing that pledge that God made from the very outset of man's fall, that there would be provided for guilty sinners a way back. But over that covenant, over the Ark, a mercy seat. And it was that mercy seat that once a year as the high priest came in, was sprinkled with blood of a bull oak.

That was a picture only, a picture only, of the blood that would be shed by our wonderful savior, God in Christ, who was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. So remember, the Ark was beneath a mercy seat, sprinkled with blood. Because the only thing that makes available to you and to me what God had in mind when he promised salvation, was the finished work of Christ upon the cross, the blood he shed.

Without the shedding of blood, no forgiveness. Now this is very important. The Ark therefore, representing God's pledge, God's covenant, is only in context, only in context, only in its rightful place, is only valid, is only legitimate, is only genuine, is only effectual, beneath the mercy seat, sprinkled with blood.

Because without that shedding of blood, no forgiveness, no salvation. So just bear that in mind, that's the context of the Ark, holiest of all beneath the mercy seat. What's the next thing? Well what was inside it? And this is what we're going to examine a little bit more particularly later on.

It says this in the verse 4, inside the holiest of all that was the golden censer and the Ark of the covenant, which we have seen was beneath the mercy seat, which was sprinkled with blood. But in the Ark itself, as it were the substance, the content of our salvation, symbolically represented a golden pot with manna, Aaron's rod that budded, Aaron's rod, the rod that budded, and in addition the tables of the Lord, penned by God with his finger on tables of stone. Three things.

And we're going to see in the course of our study tonight and tomorrow evening and Sunday afternoon, as an Old Testament background to what we shall examine more closely from the New Testament scriptures tomorrow afternoon, that each of these three things that were inside the Ark, representing the covenant in general, represent a threefold ministry of God the Holy Spirit. We shall discover that marvelously pictured for us in the golden pot with manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of stone rewritten by God for the first tables were broken. The fact that every forgiven sinner is sealed by the Holy Spirit, to be sent by the Holy Spirit, and to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

For it is the Holy Spirit who makes real in your experience and mine all the good of that for which his blood was shed. The mercy seat sprinkled with blood, God's redemptive act in the person of his son, that he might restore on the grounds of redemption to every boy, girl, man or woman who claims forgiveness, somebody who was lost in Adam when he fell, the Holy Spirit. That the Holy Spirit might credit to you and to me by his indwelling presence, clothed with our redeemed humanity, the resurrection life of God's Son, once crucified, risen from the dead and now ascended to be with the Father.

And by the Holy Spirit the sovereignty of Jesus Christ will be re-established within human personality to seal, send and sanctify. Now that's the picture, and you see there was aroused within the heart of David a deep concern to get that ark back where it belonged. Why? Well something had gone wrong, something had gone wrong.

You see in days of spiritual decline and we introduced in the 13th chapter of 1 Chronicles from which I read just now, to a country on the threshold out of utter abysmal spiritual destitution on the threshold of a spiritual awakening. But in days of deep spiritual decline, ritual takes the place of reality. Token obedience, token dedication takes the place of total obedience, total dedication.

In days of deep spiritual decline, the church representing God's people always copies the world in the way it dresses, in its style, in its music, in the kind of songs it sings. Always, without any, any exception, whatever, in days of deep spiritual decline when the church, God's people has departed from the centrality of God himself in damn it, the church will copy the world. It's only in times of spiritual awakening, genuine God imparted revival, that the world begins to copy the church.

Now in what condition would you say we were in today? Is the world copying the church today? Or is the church copying the world? God knows how deep we've sunk in debasing our gospel, in debasing our faith, in debasing the sheer adventure of living together with Christ on earth on the way to heaven, in our unholy panic to get on the world's bandwagon. We're in a day of deep spiritual decline. But that doesn't unduly depress me.

Because we've sunk so low, we can't get any lower. That's encouraging. The only way is up.

And as I travel around the world, and particularly as I minister to young men and women, and boys and girls in high school, many are becoming increasingly disillusioned and feeling themselves dirty by the very standards that are being imposed upon them by their political and their religious and their educational leadership. And I'm happy to see worldwide a genuine spiritual rebellion. And I believe that as then we're on the threshold of getting back to where we belong, before our savior comes.

And come he will, and soon. And that's exciting. Just hope he doesn't come till Monday.

Because I've got lots of interesting things to talk to you about between now and then. But it's marvelous to know that he's almost overdue, as most of you know. Because one of the bits of history written in advance in the Old Testament, about which I was talking to some folk in Epping last evening, is that the city of Jerusalem will be trodden underfoot of Gentile non-Jews only until the times of the Gentiles come to an end.

The return of Christ. And right now at this very moment, not Gentile non-Jews, but Israel is in the city of Jerusalem. We're living in exciting, marvelous days.

Dangerous, but marvelously exciting. Great. I believe that we're in the condition, spiritually, that Israel was in then.

But God always raises up those whose hearts are open, because you see his eyes, we're told, run to and fro throughout the whole earth, seeking a man that he might do exploits. That he might demonstrate his deity in terms of any man, woman, boy or girl who's prepared to yield their humanity at his disposal. I believe that there are young men and women, boys and girls right now here in this congregation, who in increasing measure have a holy ambition to yield their humanity to Jesus Christ so that he can demonstrate his deity in terms of their flesh and blood so that they, available to him, can let all God loose in the world in which we live.

But ritual had taken the place of reality. Token had taken the place of total. Limp had become a substitute for life.

A dead dogma had superseded deity, God himself. An impersonal creed had become a substitute for a personal living Christ. A humanistic man-made theology had become a substitute for divine theocracy.

God himself calling the shots. That's the background to 1 Chronicles 13. To glance at it for a moment, turn to the third chapter, if you have your bible, of the first book of Samuel.

Third chapter, first book of Samuel. And always bear in mind that the bible is a total revelation. It's not just so many books detached and irrelevant to each other.

And those books are not just so many chapters and verses. It's a total revelation. And the only way you'll really understand the bible is to let bible explain the bible.

It's the best commentary there is in the world on the bible. It's the cheapest because when you buy your bible, you buy your commentary. And you'll discover a bible, by and large, throws an immense amount of light on most commentaries.

Never be confused by the fact that it's divided into books, written incidentally over a period of some 1500, 1600 years, by some 40 different authors. This is the miracle of the book. Authored of the Holy Spirit through those who never knew each other, living in different centuries.

And yet, all the way through, the redemptive thread, the scarlet thread of God's work in Christ's atonement upon the cross, and the golden thread of the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, imparted by the Holy Ghost to the forgiven sinner. All in marvelous, unexceptional harmony. The chapters and the verses, of course, were never inspired in their subdivision.

It's been said that they were decided upon by a man who was riding a horse. Every time he jolted, it was a verse. And whenever he fell off, it was a chapter.

And reading the bible through, you might think so sometimes. This state of spiritual sterility and decline could never be more vividly presented to us than as is found in these early chapters of the book of Samuel. For Eli was historically the link between the judges, about whom you read in the book of Judges, and the kings, about whom, of course, you read in the book of the kings, and the chronicles, and later in the other prophecies.

Eli, that poor, miserable, decayed old man. Do you know what it says? In the first chapter, speaking of Hannah, who in God's purpose was destined to be the mother of Samuel, that mighty prophet of the Lord, but who for so long had been barren, whose heart broke because she had never born a child, and pleaded with God. Hannah rose up, it says verse 9 of chapter 1, Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk, and now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post to the temple of the Lord, and she, Hannah, was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept, saw how she longed that she might present her husband with a son, and she bowed about, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou will 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, and there shall no razor come upon his head, and she dedicated before he was ever born.

Samuel, whose birth at that time seemed utterly, humanly speaking, totally impossible, but she pleaded with the God of the impossible, and wept in her bitterness of soul. 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.

How many there are who only play with their, pray with their lips, but whose hearts are never moved? Isn't the way you pray? She prayed with her heart, only her lips moved. Or do you pray with your lips, and your heart is never moved? That's just saying prayers. You might just as well whistle up a drainpipe, or have a prayer wheel, add it to your morning exercises.

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 thee. Hannah answered, No my lord, I'm not drunk.

I'm a woman of a sorrowful spirit. I've drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. So spiritually decrepit, so bankrupt was he in his own heart, that this miserable old man, when a woman talked to God, thought she was drunk.

What else? Look in chapter 3. The child Samuel, for God answered Hannah's prayer, and gave her this boy. The child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. That is to say, he went through the motions.

He learned certain religious procedures. He conformed to certain requirements that were imposed upon him by the religious order of the day. Not insincerely, but in tragic ignorance.

For Samuel, verse 7 tells us, of chapter 3, did not yet know the Lord. Neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him. But he was there in the temple, and ministered to the Lord.

Said the right thing at the right time. Sang the right song at the right time. Lit this lamp and turned the other one out.

Went through all the mechanics of religious performance. It was an externalistic expression of religion, superimposed upon him by a dead system. He wasn't insincere, but blinded at that stage by the abysmal spiritual bankruptcy of a permissive society.

For this miserable man, Eli, out of family expediency, had ordained his two sons into the ministry, and they were adulterers, and they were liars, and they were thieves. Just think of that. The sons of Eli, verse 12 of chapter 2. The sons of Eli were sons of Belial.

They knew not the Lord. And in spite of the fact that they didn't know God, out of family expediency, this wicked old man, Eli, was prepared to ordain them into the ministry. He rebuked them.

Why do you such evil things? Because they committed adultery with the women at the entrance to the temple. Said their father, why do you such things? Verse 23. I hear of your evil dealings by all these people.

Nay, my sons, it is no good report that I hear you make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him. But if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding, they, his sons, hearken not unto the voice of their father.

They treated him with the contempt that he deserved, and perpetuated their own wickedness until God judged and slew him. If Eli was prepared to ordain into the ministry wicked, lying, adulterous, thieving sons of his, simply because they were his sons, he could never expect any respect from them. They laughed at him for the silly old man he was, and lived it up in a permissive age.

And the whole service of God was turned into a hollow mockery. An empty, tragic, travesty of the real thing. And this young boy, Samuel, was right in the middle of it.

Well, you might say there's no hope for a kid like that. No hope for him. It'll rub off.

He'll grow up to be as double-dyed a hypocrite as the rest. But you know the amazing thing is that all down the century, all down the century, out of the most unpromising situations, God has been pleased to touch the life of some boy, some girl, some man, some woman, and out of degradation, lift them up and make them mighty men of God. Think of those whom he's used.

St. Augustine, who was first used to bring the gospel to our own country, the British Isles. A debauched, wicked, evil, drunken sod. And God saved his soul.

What's the next best-selling book to the Bible in all the world today? And there's no greater than the Bible. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. I preached in the church in Bedford where he was converted.

St. Mary's Bedford. No, St. John's Bedford. As a cussing, lying, godless tinker, he fell, not among thieves, something infinitely worse and more dangerous for a man in that condition.

He fell in the midst of godly women. That's really dangerous. And he got marvellously saved.

Marvellously saved. And the Pilgrim's Progress was penned by that man in jail where he served 14 years imprisonment for the sheer privilege of preaching Christ when it was forbidden in the open air in my country. God delights to do it.

Delights to do it. Richard Weaver, that drunken coal miner from the Yorkshire collieries would fight until his knuckles were red and come home drunken and wild and drag his mother round and round the kitchen floor because she dared to pray for him until one day he broke in tears before God and capitulated and God saved his soul and Richard Weaver went up and down the mining districts of Yorkshire and big wicked evil men dropped on their knees and teeth and were transformed by the grace of God. He's always doing it.

Always. Man is never indispensable to God. God is always indispensable to man.

And there's no boy, there's no girl, there's no man or woman in this building here tonight who doesn't qualify. You can never be too weak. You can only be too strong.

He's chosen the weak, the base, the nothing, the things that are not to confound the flesh, glory and God's presence. So you'll never be too weak, you'll only be too strong. You'll never be too simple, you can only be too smart.

We'll never ever be too few. The Bible again and again teaches us we can only be too many. That's why God said to Gideon when he had 32,000 men on parade, all sticking their chests out, God said send them home.

Send them home. Send them home? I've got 32,000 men on parade. They're going to fight for you.

God said send them home. So 22,000 went home. And Gideon says well I've got 10,000 left, what about those? No, God said send them home.

And all he was left with was 300. 300. Now God said I can do something.

You see they couldn't do it anyway, they're just a mob. And if I helped them when there were 32,000 they'd never believe that I did it. They'd congratulate themselves.

Send them back where they belong. And with the 300 who mean business, I'll demonstrate that God is big enough for the job. And God's gracious hand was upon this boy to preserve him and to keep him clean in that dirty environment.

What evil habits he could have learned from those wicked sons of Eli. What evil habits boys and girls and men and women today can learn. Where government approval and religious approval and educational approval, theological approval, philosophical approval is given to all those things that debase society and reduces to a bunch of animals which isn't really fair to the animal kingdom.

Ever seen an alcoholic horse? Have you? No animals aren't that stupid. They may be that dumb but they're not that stupid. Ever seen a drug addicted dog that wasn't injected by some evil biped to make him fit for the race? It's only human beings behave that way.

Because having lost God they're neither protected by instinct nor governed by God so they can't behave like animals and don't have what it takes to behave like men. That's why they behave like maniacs. But God has called us for it's God who works in us.

Paul tells us in the epistle to the Philippians chapter 2, it's God who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. What for? That we might be blameless, be holy, be pure, be wholesome, be courageous. Where, where, where does he say in that second epistle to the Philippians? Wrapped up in evangelical cotton wool and tucked away behind insulation from a naughty wicked world? No, I'm glad.

I'm glad that in God's redemptive purpose there's to be imparted to you and to me in the person of the Holy Spirit somebody who can keep us clean in a dirty world. That you may be blameless, that you may be harmless, that you may be the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and a perverse nation among whom you will shine as lights in the world. That's God's program for you and for me.

Right he says in the middle of a nation of crooks and right in the middle of a nation of perverts. That's where you're going to be blameless. That's where you're going to be harmless.

That's where you're going to be the sons of God and that's precisely where you're going to shine as lights in the world. God's called you to it. Don't miss your appointment.

God's loving hand was upon this kid as I trust God's gracious hand is upon you to make you a man a woman of God. The child Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli and the word of the Lord was precious in those days. Don't be misled by that expression.

Doesn't mean that they treasured the word of God. They didn't. When it was precious it simply means it was rare.

It was so seldom heard that it was rare. That's the word. Rare not precious.

In the sense of valued. The word of God was at a discount. It has to be.

You can't live like that and expose yourself to the mirror. You can see you've got a dirty face and if you've got a dirty face and like it that way you don't look in mirror. The word of the Lord was rare.

There was no open vision. It came to pass at that time when Eli was laid down in his place and his eyes began to wax dim but he could not see. And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord a lamp that should have burned continually.

Continually if you'd like to look it up but it was just token now not total. Maybe there was an oil shortage. Ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord that should have been burning continually where the ark of God was and Samuel was laid down to sleep.

The Lord called Samuel and he answered here I am. Who did he answer? God? No. Because you see he was in a place where the people only ever expected to hear the voice of man and he was in a place where the preacher never ever expected them to hear the voice of God.

Do you go to a church like that? Do you go to church like that? Where nobody ever ever expects to hear the voice of God they only expect to hear the voice of man. And where the preacher only expects them to hear the voice of man and never for one moment imagines they'll ever hear the voice of God. So he ran to Eli.

God spoke to him. He answered Eli. Woke him up and said here I am you called me.

Eli said I called not lie down again. And he went and lay down and the Lord called yet again Samuel and Samuel arose and he went to Eli and said here I am you did call me. And Eli said I did not call you my son.

Lie down again don't eat cheese late at night. Get back to bed. Samuel did not yet know the law.

Neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him and the Lord called Samuel again the third time. Isn't God good? How many times he had to call you? He arose and went to Eli and said here I am thou didst call me and at last at last it penetrated his thick skull. God has spoken to the boy.

Wonder of all wonders. God has actually spoken to somebody in my church. Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child.

He said go lie down and it shall be if he called thee that thou shalt say speak Lord for thy servant heareth. Samuel went and lay down and the Lord came and stood and called as at other times. Other times.

How many in your life other times have there been? In which you've missed his message. Failed to recognize God's voice. Identified it may be just with somebody.

But God is good as at other times. And God revealed the judgment that was about to fall upon this wicked situation. And in conclusion for tonight we'll have to quit in a moment.

So we're in context for tomorrow evening. Samuel grew and the Lord was with him. And he let none of his words fall to the ground.

All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. There was the stamp of deity upon his life. There was the ring of reality.

And everybody sat up and took notice. When Samuel was around. Marvelous.

And the Lord revealed himself to Samuel. By the word of the Lord. The word of Samuel came to all Israel.

Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle and pitched beside Ebenezer. And the Philistines pitched in Aphek chapter four tells us in verse two. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel.

And when they joined battle Israel was smitten before the Philistines. And they slew the army in the field about four thousand men. And when the people were coming to the camp the elders of Israel said wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines.

Amazing isn't it? In their godless irreligion. In their permissive society. In their total rebellion and repudiation of all God's claims upon them.

The moment that judgment strikes. The moment that things go wrong. God it's your fault.

How did you let this happen to me? Sounds familiar. That sounds familiar. Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines.

Now notice what they said. Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord unto Shiloh unto us that when it cometh unto us it may save us. Out of the hand of our enemies.

They said let's go and get the ark of the covenant and bring it so that it can save us. It. It.

That ark that represented the covenant of an almighty God. It was only in context within the holiest of all God's presence beneath a mercy seat to be sprinkled with blood. But you see the moment you take that out of context and trust it orthodox as it was containing what it did.

Speaking of all God's gracious provision in the person of the Holy Spirit for those who would claim redemption through the finished work of his dear son. The moment you take it out of context trust it instead of him. It becomes the object of your idolatry.

There's nothing so sacred. Nothing so legitimate. The Bible itself the experience that God graciously gives to those who trust him.

The gifts of his spirit. The ministry of evangelism. The privilege that God gives to you and to me to go to the uttermost ends of the earth.

There is nothing so sacred. Nothing so legitimate. Nothing so God divinely authored.

But you take it and place it as a substitute for Christ himself and the very thing that God ordered for your enrichment will become the object of your idolatry and it will only mock it. The Philistines were afraid we're told in verse 7. They said God is coming to the camp. God.

God is coming to the camp. The Philistines recognized what the Israelites in their spiritual poverty and bankruptcy had long since forgotten. They called it into the camp.

The moment the Philistines saw the ark of the covenant they said God. They weren't as wise as she. Beads of perspiration.

God is coming to the camp. Woe unto us. There has not been such a thing here before.

Woe unto us. Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smoke the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong they said you Philistines.

Quit yourselves like men you Philistines that you be not servants to the Hebrews as they have been to you. Quit yourselves like men and fight. Their God smoked the Egyptians.

Their God brought the plagues. Their God brought them to the Red Sea. Their God.

Their God. The amazing thing is this. God wouldn't honor it as the object of their idolatry in the midst of a people who should have known better.

But we discover later that God honored it that the Philistines identified with. For the Israelites were thrashed. The Philistines fought.

Israel was smitten. They fled every man into his tent and the ark of God was taken and the two sons of Eli, Hosni and Phinehas were slain. The servant came into the presence of Eli and he said how did things go? He said your two sons are dead.

Israel fled in panic and the ark has been captured by the poor miserable old man fell backwards off his stool and died of a broken neck. Just before he had time to die of a broken heart. And for 20 years the ark of God was out of context in the house of the Benedict.

And under the tragic reign of King Saul. Lower and lower. Until one day God laid it upon the heart of David.

And the ark. And tomorrow evening we're going to look inside the ark. Discover the significance of the manna in the pot of gold.

Aaron's robe that budded. And the tables of stone rewritten with the finger of God. And how they got it back to where it belongs.

So that instead of it. That might know and love and serve and worship. Him.

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