

A Man After God's Own Heart – 1 Samuel

1 Samuel 4:1b-22

"Rabbit-Foot Theology" – May 14, 2017



Introduction

When Israel goes into battle with the neighboring Philistines, they suffer a devastating defeat (4,000 troops killed) and are left wondering what to do next. Their plan is to bring in the ark of God as a good luck charm. Surely God will act on their behalf if the symbol of His presence is brought to the battlefield, right? Such thinking revealed how God's people had drifted far from God. They had lost sight of who God is, what is important to Him and how those realities should shape the way we relate to Him. Chapter 4 serves as a lesson in *who* God is and how that shapes the way we live as the people of God.

Pray

Before you begin, take some time to ask God to help you understand His word, to reveal what needs to change in you, and for the grace to follow Him in response.

Sermon Outline

- I. God is beyond our control (4:1-11)
- II. God keeps His promises (4:12-18)
- III. God will not share His glory with another (4:19-22)

Read & Discuss

- 1) Read [1 Samuel 4:1b-11](#)

After their initial defeat on the battle field, Israel decides to bring the ark of God on the battlefield. Verse 4 highlights two details about the ark: it was the place God's presence dwelt among His people *and* the two scoundrel-priests (Hophni and Phinehas) served as its escorts. They didn't care about repentance or holiness – they were more interested in the right religious ingredients necessary to guarantee success. What are ways that you may be guilty of rabbit-foot theology? Ways that you're thinking, "I've done my part for God (gone to church, read Bible, tithed, etc.), now He needs to do *His* part"? The fact that Israel suffers an even greater defeat that day reminds us that God will not be bribed, coerced or controlled; God is free. Why is it good for us that God will not be domesticated? Why is it good for us that God is so powerful, wise, and transcendent, seeing Him can make our knees knock?

Additional reading: Deuteronomy 28:25, Daniel 4:35, Psalm 135:6, James 4:13-15

*A helpful resource on this is Orlando Saer's book [Big God](#). He explores how *who* God is shapes the way we think about suffering, decision making, evangelism and prayer.

2) Read [1 Samuel 4:12-18](#)

Knowing that God is free to do as He pleases leaves us with an important question: how can we know we can trust Him then? Israel's defeat may *appear* that God had lost but He was using Philistia to pour out the judgement He had promised against Eli and his sons back in 1 Samuel 2:34. God always keeps His promises, which means we can trust Him. Nearly a thousand years later, Christ's death on the cross would also seem like God has lost. But His resurrection three days later proved Christ the victor. In Ephesians 6:16 the shield God gives to the Christian in our spiritual battle is the shield of *faith*. The object of a Christian's faith is not religious practices, rituals, feelings, or superstitions. Rather it is in God's word and a God who keeps His word. What are ways you're tempted to put your faith in something else? How can we grow in our knowledge and trust in God's promises to fight for faith? How can we help others in our church family grow in this way?

Additional reading: Acts 2:23, 1 Peter 1:3-5

3) Read [1 Samuel 4:19-22](#)

Eli had died after hearing the tragic news of the ark being captured, now it induces labor for Phinehas's wife. She too dies in childbearing, but not before she names her son, 'Ichabod' which means, '*Where is the glory?*' In one sense, the ark was in Philistia – the symbol of God's presence was there. In another sense, Eli and his sons had tried to steal God's glory in their greedy, self-centered actions. Eli's being 'heavy' is a hint to this since the word for 'glory' comes from the same root for 'heavy' in Hebrew. They had dishonored God by trusting themselves and making themselves more important than God. How much weight does God carry in your schedule, job, family, friendships, money, thought life, or any area of your life? Knowing *who* God truly is, what does He deserve from us?

Additional reading: Isaiah 48:11, Romans 12:1-2

Prayer of Response

Spend time praying together in response to God's word for His help and greater faith to follow Him in the week to come.

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