1 Samuel 4:1-11: What Went Wrong?

Zanesville, OH | December 9, 2018 | Sermon Notes

**Foundational Scripture:** 1 Sam. 4:1-11

**Intro**:

* 1 Samuel 4 picks up on the confirmation and growth of Samuel as a prophet of the LORD (See: 1 Sam. 3:19-21). Everyone in Israel was aware that Samuel was a prophet from God. The Philistines are the primary enemy of the Israelites at this point in history.

**What Went Wrong?**

1. **Israel defeated in battle: 1 Sam. 4:1-2**
   1. We are not told the exact circumstances leading up to this particular battle with the Philistines. The Philistines were settled along the Mediterranean coast and posed a constant threat to Israel and surrounding nations as they sought to expand politically and economically (See: Judg. 10:11; 13:1; 15:11).
   2. Having camped near the hill country of Ephraim, the Philistines come up fully prepared to meet Israel in battle (v. 2). As the battle progressed Israel suffered defeat with a total of 4,000 men dying at the hands of their enemies.
   3. The elders of the people (See: Deut. 1:9-13) respond to this defeat by putting the blame on God since it was evident in their eyes that He did not help them (v. 3). This statement indicates an obvious expectation of victory and they are shocked they have lost.
2. **Confining an Infinite God: 1 Sam. 4:3-5**
   1. The elders, after casting blame on God, seek to resolve the issue by turning to their sacred religious object instead of seeking God’s word. They seek to resolve their problems according to their own “wisdom” (v. 3).
   2. The resolution is to bring the ark of God from Shiloh and into the camp so that it may deliver them from the Philistines. The ark is associated with the presence of God (See: Ex. 25:21-22) and the Day of Atonement (See: Lev. 16).
   3. The ark is also closely associated with victories and monumental events in Israel’s history:
      1. **The Jordan River Divided– Josh. 3:6-17**
      2. **The Conquest of Jericho– Josh. 6:6-20**
      3. **God’s destruction against Philistines– 1 Sam. 5**
   4. From that standpoint, the people consider that if the ark is in their midst, they are sure to win! The fact that it has helped them before surely means it will help them again right? While it is true that the ark signified God’s presence, it was never meant to supersede the seeking of God’s word.
   5. The problem with this idea is that they are trusting in the mere strength of an object rather than trusting in God Himself and His word through the prophet (v. 1). They seek to confine God and His presence merely to a box.
   6. The nature of sin is such that we seek to dethrone God and make Him like us. We seek to humanize a God whose thoughts and ways are far greater than ours (See: Isa. 55:8-9). We seek to limit God and bound Him by the same things we are limited to: **Space and Time.**
   7. The ark had a specific purpose and place and it was never intended to supersede God’s place in the hearts of His people (See: Jer. 3:16-17). Yet, as we so often do, it easier to trust in that we see than that which we don’t see.
3. **The Ark is Captured and the People Slaughtered: 1 Sam. 4:6-11**
   1. When the ark comes into the camp, the people rejoice as such that the earth shook (v. 5). They are confident and courageous because of an object they now have in their midst.
   2. The Philistines come to an understanding that this object has arrived in their midst and they become fearful because of the knowledge of what happened in Egypt (Ex. 7-12). However, they encourage one another to fight lest they themselves become slaves to the Hebrews.
   3. Israel suffers an even greater defeat now than it did in the beginning. It’s defeat with the ark of God was far greater than when they didn’t have it! God is proving a point to the people that they must trust in Him and His word!
   4. But why did they suffer to begin with? Why did God let them lose to the Philistines? After the Philistines capture the ark and they experience judgment, the ark is returned to Israel (See: 1 Sam. 6:1-12).
   5. When it is returned, once again the people suffer a great loss (See: 1 Sam. 6:19-21). The real reason why the people were being killed was because of their idolatry (See: 1 Sam. 7:3). The fact that this is the reason solidifies the point of confining God to an object.

**Three Important Lessons**

1. Do not blame God when things go wrong, or if our expectations are not met (Rom. 8:28).
2. Do not confine or limit God to our standards and our ways. He is far beyond us (Num. 23:19).
3. Trust God to do those things that are unseeable, unthinkable and impossible (Eph. 3:20).