

Welcome to our podcast today

as we continue in our readings from 1 Samuel

and today we are going to be reading to quite long passages from that book

## **Let us pray**

Jesus, you are light for the world.

Keep our hearts and minds turned always towards your light,

so that we may reflect your goodness and love in all that we do.

(pause)

Lord God, there are decisions I've made and things I've done that I'd like to change.

Of course, they're in the past and I can't change what I did but I'm sorry.

Help me to learn from my bad decisions, so that I will think harder next time and make good decisions.

(pause)

Forgive us, Lord God, when we make rash and impulsive promises because we want to be popular or act big.

Forgive us, and help us to be more truthful,  
more thoughtful,

and more responsible – even when it is hard.

(pause)

In Jesus name we pray who taught us to pray  
saying

Our Father

Who art in Heaven

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our  
debtors.

And lead us not into temptation.

But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the  
glory forever. **Amen.**

**Reading 1 Samuel 5.1- 12** After the Philistines captured the Covenant Box, they carried it from Ebenezer to their city of Ashdod, **2** took it into the temple of their god Dagon, and set it up beside his statue. **3** Early the next morning the people of Ashdod saw that the statue of Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground in front of the Lord's Covenant Box. So they lifted it up and put it back in its place. **4** Early the following morning they saw that the statue had again fallen down in front of the Covenant Box. This time its head and both its arms were broken off and were lying in the doorway; only the body was left. **5** (That is why even today the priests of Dagon and all his worshipers in Ashdod step over that place and do not walk on it.) **6** The Lord punished the people of Ashdod severely and terrified them. He punished them and the people in the surrounding territory by causing them to have tumors. **7** When they saw what was happening, they said, "The God of Israel is punishing us and our god Dagon. We can't let the Covenant Box stay here any longer." **8** So they sent messengers and called together all five of the Philistine kings and asked them, "What shall we do with the Covenant Box of the God of Israel?"

"Take it over to Gath," they answered; so they took it to Gath, another Philistine city. **9** But after it arrived there, the Lord punished that city too and caused a great panic. He punished them with tumors which developed in all the people of the city, young and old alike. **10** So they sent the Covenant Box to Ekron, another Philistine city; but when it arrived there, the people cried out, "They have brought the Covenant Box of the God of Israel here, in order to kill us all!" **11** So again they sent for all the Philistine kings and said, "Send the Covenant Box of Israel back to its own place, so that it won't kill us and our families." There was panic throughout the city because God was punishing them so severely. **12** Even those who did not die developed tumors and the people cried out to their gods for help.

**1 Samuel 7.1 - 17** - So the people of Kiriath Jearim got the Lord's Covenant Box and took it to the house of a man named Abinadab, who lived on a hill. They consecrated his son Eleazar to be in charge of it. **2** The Covenant Box of the Lord stayed in Kiriath Jearim a long time, some twenty years. During this time all the Israelites cried to the Lord for help. **3** Samuel said to the people of Israel, "If you are going to turn to the Lord with

all your hearts, you must get rid of all the foreign gods and the images of the goddess Astarte. Dedicate yourselves completely to the Lord and worship only him, and he will rescue you from the power of the Philistines." **4** So the Israelites got rid of their idols of Baal and Astarte, and worshiped only the Lord. **5** Then Samuel called for all the Israelites to meet at Mizpah, telling them, "I will pray to the Lord for you there." **6** So they all gathered at Mizpah. They drew some water and poured it out as an offering to the Lord and fasted that whole day. They said, "We have sinned against the Lord." (It was at Mizpah where Samuel settled disputes among the Israelites.) **7** When the Philistines heard that the Israelites had gathered at Mizpah, the five Philistine kings started out with their men to attack them. The Israelites heard about it and were afraid, **8** and said to Samuel, "Keep praying to the Lord our God to save us from the Philistines." **9** Samuel killed a young lamb and burned it whole as a sacrifice to the Lord. Then he prayed to the Lord to help Israel, and the Lord answered his prayer. **10** While Samuel was offering the sacrifice, the Philistines moved forward to attack; but just then the Lord thundered from heaven against them.

They became completely confused and fled in panic. **11** The Israelites marched out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines almost as far as Bethcar, killing them along the way. **12** Then Samuel took a stone, set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and said, "The Lord has helped us all the way" - and he named it "Stone of Help." **13** So the Philistines were defeated, and the Lord prevented them from invading Israel's territory as long as Samuel lived. **14** All the cities which the Philistines had captured between Ekron and Gath were returned to Israel, and so Israel got back all its territory. And there was peace also between the Israelites and the Canaanites. **15** Samuel ruled Israel as long as he lived. Every year he would go around to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and in these places he would settle disputes. **17** Then he would go back to his home in Ramah, where also he would serve as judge. In Ramah he built an altar to the Lord.

## **Sermon**

Today we've read two quite large sections from first Samuel.

Needed to read them to get a clear idea about what has been happening in the story.

We know from last week that the Philistines have captured the covenant box.

With the fear of the people of Israel that God has now abandoned them.

Has left them completely to their own devices.

Left them to be destroyed by the Philistine armies.

"God's glory has left Israel"

(pause)

At times in our lives we will have felt like that.

That God has completely abandoned us.

That God's glory has left us.

We may think like that when our own lives get into a mess and we see no way out.

We sometimes think like that as a church.

As a congregation,

When we look back and remember the good old days.

When many people came to worship.

And there seemed like lots of life around the church.

Where has God gone.

Has he abandoned us.

Left us alone to our own devices.

No longer with us,

No longer blessing us.

(pause)

And yet that is why we come to worship Sunday by Sunday,

To know that God has not abandoned us.



That is why we read the Bible daily,

And weekly,

To know what God is saying to us,

And how he wants us to live.

To help us to know where we are going wrong,

To help us to know how to go right.

(pause)

And we see in our second reading this morning what the people had to do to get right with God again.

"If you are going to turn to the Lord with all your hearts, you must get rid of all the foreign gods and the images of the goddess Astarte."

It's fairly shocking to read that they were worshipping other Gods.

Why did they have images of other Gods?

Why were they ignoring their own God and following these other Gods.

(pause)

“Dedicate yourselves completely to the Lord and worship only him, and he will rescue you from the power of the Philistines.”

As we read these passages we may think well we don't have the problem of those early Israelites.

We're not worshipping other Gods.

We've got the symbol of the cross in our church,

We don't have other symbols.

We're not getting distracted into worshipping

And serving other Gods.

No Astarte images for us.

(pause)

But is that really the case.

We may not be worshipping other Gods.

We may not have other symbols in our houses

Or our churches.

But have we really dedicated ourselves completely to the Lord.

And if we're not what do we need to change in our lives to do so.

Are we worshipping only the Lord or are we being sucked into worshipping other things than Jesus our Lord.

(pause)

In this age of the selfie,

In this image conscious age,

Are we drifting into worshipping the self,

Focused on ourselves instead of being focused on the Lord.

Are our ipads and smart phones so distracting us that we are losing sight of the Lord.

‘Dedicate yourselves completely to the Lord and worship only him,’

(pause)

But let’s get back to see what has happened when the covenant box was captured by the Philistines.

We know how devastated the Israelites were.

How they believed God’s glory had left them.

But how excited were the Philistines.

What did they believe was going to happen now that they had captured something that was so important for the worship of the Israelites.

(pause)

Like all victorious peoples when they captured something important they placed it in the place that was important to them.

They put it in their temple.

I'm sure with great ceremony

And great rejoicing

It was carried into the temple of their God  
Dagon.

Set up beside his statue to show the  
importance and power of their God,

Over the God of the Israelites.

Contrasting their Gods power

Over the lack of power of Yahweh.

He'd been defeated by Dagon's followers after  
all.

'After the Philistines captured the Covenant  
Box, they carried it from Ebenezer to their  
city of Ashdod, took it into the temple of  
their god Dagon, and set it up beside his  
statue.'

And the worship and celebrations would then have begun.

It's not every day you capture another nations God after all.

(pause)

But their celebrations didn't last for long.

The next day when the Dagon priests returned to the temple they found the statue of their God lying on the ground.

As if bowing in worship to the God of the Israelites.

'Early the next morning the people of Ashdod saw that the statue of Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground in front of the Lord's Covenant Box.'

And they day after that it was once again lying on the ground,

Head and arms broken of.

(pause)

Then things got bad for the people themselves.

‘The Lord punished the people of Ashdod severely and terrified them.

He punished them and the people in the surrounding territory by causing them to have tumors.’

Doesn’t sound good at all.

And the Philistines knew that it was the God of the Israelites that was doing this.

When they saw what was happening, they said,

"The God of Israel is punishing us and our god Dagon.

We can't let the Covenant Box stay here any longer."

(pause)

And so they sent it around various Philistine cities.

But the problems followed wherever the box went.

Until finally it was returned to the Israelites.

(Read chapter 6 to find out more about how this was done.)

But the Philistines wanted no more of this box.

They wanted it away from them so that the powerful Israelite God would stop punishing them.

(pause)

Even when the Israelites got it back they didn't have their freedom from the Philistine army.

They still needed to get back in a right relationship with God before they would be freed from their enemy.

And for the next 20 years they cried out to the Lord for help.



Still hoping and believing that God's blessing would come back to them.

Still hoping and believing that they would get back into a right relationship with God.

(pause)

I think we'd all give up long before that.

20 years crying out to the Lord for help.

20 years of praying and pleading with God to help them.

'During this time all the Israelites cried to the Lord for help.'

Can we keep asking God for help,

And keep asking God for help,

And keep asking God for help,

And can we keep believing that he will give it.

**(pause)**

And can we all in unity ask God for help.

Pray together that God will help us.

As we do need His help.

We need God to strengthen our faith

To help us in our discipleship.

We need God to strengthen our church  
fellowship.

To bring more people to worship with us  
Sunday by Sunday.

We need God to be at work in our lives and in  
the life of our communities.

‘During this time all the Israelites cried to  
the Lord for help.’

So let us all together keep asking God for help.

(pause)

If we are going to get God's help.

If we are going to see change take place,

we need to be like the people of Israel and have our hearts in the right place.

Turn to the Lord with all our hearts.

'Samuel said to the people of Israel,

"If you are going to turn to the Lord with all your hearts, you must get rid of all the foreign gods

and the images of the goddess Astarte.'

What in our lives is stopping us from turning to God with all our hearts.

Each of us knows the things in our lives that are blocking our relationship with God.

The things that we need to get rid of,

To chuck out.     **(pause)**

'Dedicate yourselves completely to the Lord and worship only him'

That's our goal.

To be dedicated completely to the Lord.

Not to be dedicated to being a better bowls player.

Or to win at whatever.

Not to be dedicated to our work,

Or to our families or friends.

But to be dedicated completely to the Lord and worship only Him.

(pause)

The people of Israel repented of their sin.

Have we.

Do we.

Do we acknowledge our sins in our prayers to God and seek his forgiveness.

(pause)

And by the sacrifice and prayers Samuel made the relationship with God was restored.

Remember it was 20 years in the making.

20 years in the praying for,

20 years of crying out to the Lord for help.

(pause)

The Philistines were at last defeated.  
Israel was free once more.

At peace now with their neighbours in Canaan.

All their captured cities returned to them.

(pause)

Then Samuel took a stone, set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and said,

"The Lord has helped us all the way" –  
and he named it "Stone of Help."

The Lord helps us on the way.

We should acknowledge that always.

Maybe with a symbol of some kind.

And remember,

And know in our hearts,

That the Lord is always helping us on our way.

**Amen**

**Prayer**

‘Dedicate yourselves completely to the Lord and  
worship only him’

Father we do want to dedicated totally to you.

We do want to serve only you.

We may not have images of other Gods in our houses but we have much that distract us and take us away from worshipping and serving you.

(pause)

Help us in our minds now see the things that you would have us get rid of.

See the things that we are worshipping that take us away from you.

May we pick them up and throw them out.

May we get rid of them from our lives so that we worship only you.

(pause)

We worship only you Lord.

We are dedicated only to you Father.

And we now recommit our lives in love and service of you.

(long pause)

Help us on our way Father as you helped the Israelites.

Give us the help that we need to live as your disciples,

And share your love and hope with others.

(pause)

Father we pray for our brothers and sisters who need to know you.

We pray for those who,

like the Philistines worship other Gods.

put other things first.

(long pause)

May they come to know the joy it is to be one of your disciples.

(pause)

We pray Father for those who are struggling to keep hold of their faith.



Many of our brothers and sisters have left your church.

Stopped worshipping you.

We pray that they might come back into the fold.

Might once again take up their faith and serve you faithfully.

(long pause)

Father we pray for our brothers and sisters all over the Borders.

We pray that you would bless them.

Strengthen them in their faith and may they see their fellowships growing.

(pause)

In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**

**Benediction**

Go into your week with your ears open  
to the sound of God's voice calling your name.  
Go into your week with your eyes open  
to see the face of Jesus in unexpected places.  
Go into your week with your heart open  
to receive the Spirit of God,  
the Spirit of Peace.