

welcome to our podcast

**as we continue in our study of 1 Samuel**

**Let us pray**

God of the past, present and future,

we praise you, we adore you,

we magnify your holy name.

(pause)

From the beginning of time, you have been an  
ever present God,

inspiring our worship and service;

bringing us hope and comfort in our times of  
distress;

bringing peace and joy following times of war  
and discord;

bringing love to us when no-one else cared;

bringing strength to us when we have been at our weakest;

bringing your mercy upon us when we have broken all your rules.

(pause)

You, O God, deserve our worship and praise.

You, O God, deserve our loyalty and faithfulness.

You, O God, deserve our trust and service.

(pause)

So, in our joy, and in our sorrow, we can come to you with our thoughts and prayers.

You will listen to us and answer our prayers,

(pause)

God of the past, the present and the future, we admit that we are far from perfect.

We admit that we have failed to keep your promises,

that we have distanced ourselves from your word,

that we have failed to admit to past errors,

overlooked present sins,

and will no doubt fail you at times in the future.

(pause)

So forgive us for the times we do not show the right attitude to holy living.

Forgive us for using language that has not been appropriate.

Forgive us for our temper tantrums and angry outbursts.

Forgive us for being ignorant and impatient when things do not go our way.

Forgive us for our holier-than-thou outlook and the belief that we are always right.

(pause)

God of the past, the present and the future,  
forgive us our sins,

bestow your mercy upon us,

pour out your love,

insert your joy in our daily living,

that we may be willing disciples and able to  
praise your holy name.

(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 4.1-22** At that time the Philistines gathered to go to war against Israel, so the Israelites set out to fight them. The Israelites set up their camp at Ebenezer and the Philistines at Aphek. **2** The Philistines attacked, and after fierce fighting they defeated the Israelites and killed about four thousand men on the battlefield. **3** When the survivors came back to camp, the leaders of Israel said, "Why did the Lord let the Philistines defeat us today? Let's go and bring the Lord's Covenant Box from Shiloh, so that he will go with us and save us from our enemies." **4** So they sent messengers to Shiloh and got the Covenant Box of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned above the winged creatures. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, came along with the Covenant Box. **5** When the Covenant Box arrived, the Israelites gave such a loud shout of joy that the earth shook. **6** The Philistines heard the shouting and said, "Listen to all that shouting in the Hebrew camp! What does it mean?"

When they found out that the Lord's Covenant Box had arrived in the Hebrew camp, **7** they were afraid, and said, "A god has come into their camp! We're lost! Nothing like this has ever happened to us before! **8** Who can save us from those powerful gods? They are the gods who slaughtered the Egyptians in the desert! **9** Be brave, Philistines! Fight like men, or we will become slaves to the Hebrews, just as they were our slaves. So fight like men!" **10** The Philistines fought hard and defeated the Israelites, who went running to their homes. There was a great slaughter: thirty thousand Israelite soldiers were killed. **11** God's Covenant Box was captured, and Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were both killed. **12** A man from the tribe of Benjamin ran all the way from the battlefield to Shiloh and arrived there the same day. To show his grief, he had torn his clothes and put dirt on his head. **13** Eli, who was very worried about the Covenant Box, was sitting in his seat beside the road, staring. The man spread the news throughout the town, and everyone cried out in fear. **14** Eli heard the noise and asked, "What is all this noise about?" The man hurried to Eli to tell him the news **15** (Eli was now ninety-eight years old and almost completely blind.)

**16** The man said, "I have escaped from the battle and have run all the way here today." Eli asked him, "What happened, my son?" **17** The messenger answered, "Israel ran away from the Philistines; it was a terrible defeat for us! Besides that, your sons Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and God's Covenant Box was captured!" **18** When the man mentioned the Covenant Box, Eli fell backward from his seat beside the gate. He was so old and fat that the fall broke his neck, and he died. He had been a leader in Israel for forty years. **19** Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, and it was almost time for her baby to be born. When she heard that God's Covenant Box had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she suddenly went into labor and gave birth. **20** As she was dying, the women helping her said to her, "Be brave! You have a son!" But she paid no attention and did not answer. **21** She named the boy Ichabod, explaining, "God's glory has left Israel" - referring to the capture of the Covenant Box and the death of her father-in-law and her husband. **22** "God's glory has left Israel," she said, "because God's Covenant Box has been captured."

# Sermon

I remember as a child hearing lots of stories about the Philistines.

About Samson killing them with the jaw-bone of a lion.

About him destroying the temple and killing thousands of Philistines.

Not particularly nice stories.

Very blood thirsty ones.

Ones where we see God behaving in ways we don't particularly like.

Calling on the destruction of whole people's and races.

Ethnic cleansing in today's terms

(pause)

Not sure if I heard all this at school or church.

Or even the occasional programme on TV.

We don't hear much of them now.

Ministers don't preach about them.

They don't come in the lectionary readings that we have.

(pause)

The term Philistine has come to be used for someone not cultured.

Or who doesn't have the right aesthetic tastes.

Or not the same tastes as you anyway.

They are a philistine for not liking football,

Or not agreeing that such and such a band are the best ever.

(pause)

But Philistines are the name of a people that the Jews often clashed with.

They clash here in 1 Samuel

In the story of Samson and the book of Judges.

In the story of David and Goliath, Goliath being a Philistine soldier.

(pause)

Here, in 1 Samuel 4,

we see the two peoples at war.

‘At that time the Philistines gathered to go to war against Israel, so the Israelites set out to fight them.’

(pause)

And the Philistines won.

They defeated the Israelites.

‘The Philistines attacked,

and after fierce fighting they defeated the Israelites

and killed about four thousand men on the battlefield.’

Shocking image of 4000 men lying dead on the battlefield.

And we need to have that image in our head.

It's a bloody battle, as all wars are.

We have to face the reality of 4,000 men lying dead on this battlefield.

See it as a shocking event.

The Israelites were greatly shocked to be defeated.

When the survivors came back to camp, the leaders of Israel said,

"Why did the Lord let the Philistines defeat us today?"

(pause)

As far as they were concerned God should

Or would always help them to defeat their enemies.

So if they've lost to their enemies now its because God has let them down.

"Why did the Lord let the Philistines defeat us today?"

But they don't look inwards and see it's to do with them.

They don't review the lives they've been living.

How far away they are from God.

No the problem is that they need God to have a physical presence with them.

They need the covenant box.

Then God will go into battle with them.

Then God will help them defeat their enemies.

'So they sent messengers to Shiloh and got the Covenant Box of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned above the winged creatures.'

That will solve it.

God will be with them now.

God will help them defeat their enemies,

Those dreadful Philistines.

(pause)

I wonder how we react when things go wrong  
in our lives.

Do we look to God and curse Him.

Do we say why are you doing this to me Lord?

What have I done to deserve this?

Why are you not here helping me?

(pause)

Instead of asking God to stand strong with us  
as we face whatever that hardship is.

Asking God to keep us strong in our faith,

To fill us with his peace

And surround us with his loving arms.

(pause)

To be with us,

To walk with us.

To help us get through whatever is happening,

And out the other side.

(pause)

The Israelite army were looking for the physical presence of God.

They wanted to see God standing with them.

They wanted to know God going with them into battle.

And so they brought the covenant box to the battlefield.

So that they would be sure God went with them.

'When the Covenant Box arrived, the Israelites gave such a loud shout of joy that the earth shook.'

(pause)

We may be asking what is this box.

Why is it so important?

What's the big deal about the covenant box.

For some people their knowledge of it comes from Indiana Jones.

The Nazis found the ark of the covenant

but were eventually destroyed by the power that came from it.

In Indiana Jones the Nazis thought of the box as having power in itself.

They thought of it as a potential weapon whose power they were going to use.

And it seemed like the Israelites had drifted into thinking of it a bit like that too.

Of it having power in itself to help them defeat their enemies.

They had begun to move from seeing it as a symbol, a sign of God's presence

To having power in itself.

Moving from the power of a symbol to direct them to God.

To worshipping the symbol itself.  
(pause)

And we can do that too with the symbol we use of God's love.

The sign that we have of God's presence with us,

The cross.  
(pause)

We can make the cross a thing of power,

Instead of a symbol reminding us of the love and sacrifice of Jesus.

A symbol reminding us that Jesus rose from the dead.

That he is alive now.

(pause)

Jesus is the living presence of the active power of God.

## **John 1.14**

‘The Word became a human being  
and full of grace and truth, lived among us.

We saw his glory,

the glory which he received as the Father's only Son.’

(pause)

For the Jew at this time the ark was a symbol of the living presence of God,

Of God's glory.

But it had come to be seen as the physical presence of God.

Hear the words of Phineas widow as she lay dying

"God's glory has left Israel"

A sense of despair that God had left them.

(pause)

We see God's glory in Jesus.

The risen alive Jesus.

The Israelites had got so caught up in God's glory,

Of God's presence being tied so completely with the covenant box.

That when they lost the ark it felt like they had lost God.

Certainly lost the power and protection of God.

**(pause)**

What though was the covenant box.

It was primarily a container

And it held the two tablets of stone.

The tablets that Moses had brought down from the mountain,

With God's Laws written on them.

It was placed in the innermost shrine of one Israelite sanctuary after another,

Including Shiloh

And subsequently the temple at Jerusalem once it was built.

To the Israelites it symbolized the presence of God.

And was incredibly important.

One concept for the Israelites was that it was the throne of God.

The golden cherubim were envisaged as His divine attendants.

## **We read of it in Exodus 25.8-22**

‘The people must make a sacred Tent for me, so that I may live among them.

Make it and all its furnishings according to the plan that I will show you.

"Make a Box out of acacia wood, 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high.

Cover it with pure gold inside and out and put a gold border all around it.

Make four carrying rings of gold for it and attach them to its four legs, with two rings on each side.

Make carrying poles of acacia wood and cover them with gold and put them through the rings on each side of the Box.

The poles are to be left in the rings and must not be taken out.

Then put in the Box the two stone tablets that I will give you, on which the commandments are written.

"Make a lid of pure gold, 45 inches long and 27 inches wide.

Make two winged creatures of hammered gold, one for each end of the lid.

Make them so that they form one piece with the lid.

The winged creatures are to face each other across the lid, and their outspread wings are to cover it.

Put the two stone tablets inside the Box and put the lid on top of it.

I will meet you there, and from above the lid

between the two winged creatures I will give you all my laws for the people of Israel.'

(pause)

The box was a thing of beauty in itself.

A powerful symbol.

By Samuel's time real danger that the box had become an object of worship.

An idol.

A physical representation of God.

And that's certainly how the army were treating it by taking it into battle with them.

(pause)

So the loss of the box,

The capture of the covenant box by the Philistines,

Was a huge loss.

As if it was God Himself who had been captured.

They had lost their God.

"God's glory has left Israel," she said, "because God's Covenant Box has been captured."

(pause)

So the covenant box was carried into the Israelite army camp.

Carried on the shoulders of two priests,

Hophni and Phineas.

Sons of Eli.

But they were corrupt and not worthy of carrying the box.

Is that in itself a sign of how things are going to go wrong.

The covenant box being carried by priests all ready condemned, by God, to die.

(pause)

And a cheer went up from all the Israelite army.

When the Covenant Box arrived, the Israelites gave such a loud shout of joy that the earth shook.

(pause)

And that surely frightened the Philistines.

they were afraid, and said, "A god has come into their camp! We're lost!

But they were not filled with total despair.

They resolved to fight as hard as they could,

Even if it was going to be for the last time.

Defeating a God was not going to be an easy task.

(pause)

'Be brave, Philistines!

Fight like men, or we will become slaves to the Hebrews, just as they were our slaves.

So fight like men!"

(pause)

And they did fight like men.

They fought hard

And they defeated the Israelite army,

Killing even more soldiers this time.

Thirty thousand in total.

‘There was a great slaughter: thirty thousand Israelite soldiers were killed.

And God's Covenant Box was captured.’

(pause)

That news when it was brought back to Shiloh devastated everyone.

The loss of the covenant box caused Eli to fall backwards.

‘He was so old and fat that the fall broke his neck, and he died.’

Fat from eating all the choice pieces of the sacrifice,

Fat,

the writer of Samuel is implying,

from his corruption as priest and leader.

(pause)

It caused the death of Eli's daughter-in-law,

Now widow of Phineas,

"God's glory has left Israel," she said,

"because God's Covenant Box has been captured."

She said as she took her final breath's.

(pause)

If God had indeed gone then there is no hope at all.

But as we continue in our readings from Samuel we will see that God has not gone.

The people themselves will come to understand that God has not gone.

But they will be challenged again to think about how they live their lives.

They will be challenged about how they understand their relationship with God.

And how they are meant to live their lives.

(pause)

And we are challenged in that way too.

Challenged to reflect on how we understand God

And what it means for us to be one of His people.

To live as one of His disciples

(pause)

We are challenged as we read 1 Samuel and see how the people were then.

Challenged to think about how we live now.

What our relationship with God means.

And in the next three weeks,

As we read bits from chapters 5 -12

we will see how the people sinned in their desire to have a King reign over them.

How they turned away from God in making that choice.

Instead of trusting in God and having Him reign over them.

(pause)

**Amen.**

**Prayer**

O God, our God, hear our prayers,

Enable us to become better disciples.

Help us to be more joyful in our daily lives,

to smile more often,

to see the positives in every situation,

to affirm others in the work they do.

(pause)

Help us to speak more kindly toward others,

to be welcoming to the stranger,

to praise people for what they do for us,

to say thank you for each act of service.

(pause)

Help us to show your love in the way we use  
our money,

in the way we treat other people,

in the way we offer ourselves for service.

(pause)

Hear our prayers for other people  
(long pause)

Lord hear us,

empower us to serve.

Encourage us to be faithful,

enthuse us for action.

(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.