

'The Rise of the Kings Series'

Sermons in the Book of 1 Samuel

Message 9 - 'Idols, Ignorance, and the Incomparable God' 1 Samuel 5:12 - 6:13



In this passage, we can see that the Ark had been taken from the Israelites and that the narrative followed its situation in the hands of the Philistines. Thinking that they had secured a significant spoil of war to underline their strength as a people, the Philistines are actually taught the lesson that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Once again the Scriptures underline the greatness and sovereignty of God who is dependent on nothing and nobody to be sustained and upheld. We can see the following:

1. Dagon Denounced - Their victory over the Israelites was a significant one in their eyes, and as a bonus they had also managed to capture the Israelite golden Ark. As a sign of their victory, and of their god's supremacy over the God of Israel, they placed the Ark before Dagon in his temple. This would be evidence to their people that Dagon was more powerful than the god of their enemies. In reality, their false god was going to be exposed as nothing more than a vain trinket, and the living God, Lord of all, alone is to be worshipped. The God of heaven would take this pathetic idol and subdue it before Him. As God subdued Dagon in a very clear way, it showed again that God does not need someone to support Him, to fight for Him, or to make excuses for Him. The point of this lesson for Israel, was not just that the Lord had asserted His authority over Dagon and exposed him as a dead idol, but it instructs His people that His supremacy is independent of His people. The great God of heaven does not need to be cuddled, protected, and sustained, like false gods like Dagon and his like. How is that relevant for you and I? We must be careful not to be so arrogant as to think that God needs us, and without us He is going to struggle. As one commentator states, *'the God of the Bible does not need us – and that is good news, but let us note, that I am not saying that he doesn't want us!'*

2. Philistine Folly - The judgements and sufferings had lasted for seven months and this was enough to convince the rulers they needed to jettison the Ark quickly. Whilst their pride and arrogance would not let them admit the superiority of the God of Israel, they sought to devise a plan that would maintain their illusions of grandeur. They devised a plan around the assumption that if Jehovah was powerful enough then He would take the Ark back to where it belonged. So, like so many men, even in this day and age, they devised a plan to test God, they were not prepared for what they would see. The test was naturally rigged, or that is what they thought, as the likelihood would be that the cows would return to their calves following their maternal instinct. In their foolishness they took the physical emblems of the suffering, rats (mice), and tumours, and made golden forms of them, and placed them in the cart. This plan is very clever and symbolises much of man's approach to religion even in this day and age. The plan sought to appease the Lord with a token gesture, but at the same time allowed the Philistine lords to avoid any embarrassment or seeming weakness. Men like religion that doesn't cost or cause them to face the reality of their sin, and their position before God. Tickle their ears with nice sentiments of God whilst at the same time avoiding exposing man's fundamental weakness and that will be popular.

3. Divine Display - The wise men and the Philistine lords would be exposed in their wrongful approach to the Lord. The cows went straight to the destination God had for them. The Philistines witnessed the working of the hand of God. The Lord had given them an insight into the reality of who He was, and the Philistines had responsibility to respond to the truth that He had graciously given to them. God in His mercy had stooped to show them that the god whom they worshipped was nothing more than a dead idol, He had destroyed their confidence in it, their land had suffered, they had suffered. In the light of such truth surely they should have turned to bow at the feet of this mighty God, to serve Him, to worship Him, the incomparable God! Yet, the reality was that as they were relieved that the time of difficulty was over, they returned to their own ways. It is an easy thing for sinners to respond to difficulty, and yet once the pain is gone, in their temporary relief, to miss the truth and reality of the situation. Fears have gone, but the will remains fast bound in sin, and the heart hard.



Penzance Baptist Church

'Upholding the Ordinary Means of Grace'

Pastor Jonathan Stobbs