

# The Presence of God

*Faithfulness of God*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Samuel 5:1-6:21  
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This morning I would encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Samuel 5 and 6. Now, if you're a guest or visitor with us this morning, I want to welcome you to a very strategic journey through one specific book of the Bible known as 1 Samuel. And now to be quite honest with you, when you come to 1 Samuel, there is kind of this knowledge that this is where the kings are called. You've got Saul and David. This is the part of the Bible in chapter 17, we have that famous story that we hear alluded to so many times of Goliath and David and all those different things, but one of the things that we've noticed as we've walked through 1 Samuel is that there's a bigger picture that's being painted. We're seeing what does it look like when a group of people move from the sacred to the secular? What does it look like when a community, when a culture goes from trusting in the way, the will and the word of God into wanting to look and act just like everybody else around them. We've discovered that even though the culture of the community may go wayward, that God is still faithful to those who hold true to who he is and should be in their life. Today, when we come to chapters 5 and 6, we come to a section of 1 Samuel where what is known as the presence of God, the ark of the covenant, is captured by the Philistines, the enemies of God. And it's a lesson for us what does it look like when rebellion stands in the presence of the holiness of God? Now remember last week in chapter 4, the Israelites lost 34,000 men in combat, that famous ark of the covenant is taken, and today we discover what happens when the holiness of God is in the midst of those who are contrary to who he is in their life, and eventually in chapter 6 we see the return of this famous ark of the covenant.

Beginning in chapter 5 of 1 Samuel, verse 1, it says,

1 And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod. 2 When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. 3 And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. 4 And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him. 5

Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day. 6 But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof. 7 And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god. 8 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither. 9 And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts. 10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron.

Now this is a very graphic and a very vivid story about those who were contrary to who God was and is in the midst of his presence, of their life, and what really needs to garner attention today is the "what" of the story and the "why." What is really happening and why is it important for our lives but kind of as a backstory, if you allow me, I want to walk through some other very critical questions that we need to address. And the first one is this: the "when" of the story, not just the fact that the Israelites had lost the battle, but look in chapter 5 verse 1, the Philistines have captured the ark. Now go to chapter 6, verse 1,

1 And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months.

Now go back and reread verse 9 of chapter 5 and ask yourself a very important question: do you really want what's happening there to stick around for seven months?

Now why is that important? Because humanity has this consistent struggle with thinking if you just give me enough time and enough resources, I can fix this problem. Just give me another opportunity to somehow come up with a different means. After all, the ark is going to go into five different cities. It's going to impact thousands of people. It took them seven months before they finally realize, you know, this no longer needs to be in our camp. Very reminiscent of Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus. The plagues are happening one after another and to me, even though not the most destructive but one of the most unique plagues was the plague of the frogs. Frogs inside the house, outside the house, everywhere they went. Moses comes to him and he says, "Pharaoh, you want rid of the frogs?" He said, "Sure, I'd love to be rid of them." He says, "When do you want me to tell him to go away?" Remember his answer? "Tomorrow." Seriously? You want one more night with these nasty creatures, thinking somehow it'll resolve itself? For seven months they tried anything and everything to rid themselves of what was happening from being in the presence of the Lord.

The second thing is the "who." Yes, the Philistines, the Israelites, that's kind of the big picture, we understand that, but go to chapter 6, verse 2. It says,

2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place.

Now it's interesting that they gather the holy men, they gather the spiritual ones, they gather those that supposedly are in touch with spiritual things to guide them in returning this ark. It's been seven months. We need to send the ark back. We can't do this anymore. So who do they get? They get the priests and the diviners and here's where you and I have an interesting discussion. Who are these priests? You say, "What do you mean, who are the priests?" We actually have two choices. You go back into chapter 5 and it says specifically the priest of Dagon were there. It doesn't say that in chapter 6. There is actually a possibility that these were the Jewish Israeli priests who they summons to assist them to return it unto themselves. We don't know for sure, but this thing we do know, that alongside the diviners, those that were into the occultic of the day, that they constructed a plan that fell short of how God originally prescribed.

So we have a time frame of seven months. We've got a group of people being solicited for instructions that are a compromise at best, and then we've got a location. Now I know when you read the Old Testament there's oftentimes these names and lists of places and geographical locations that, let's just be honest, they're hard to pronounce and what do we typically do? We just kind of skip over that and say, "Okay, the story is what's important, where it happens not that big a deal." Ah, but in this story it's a big deal. Where did it start? Ashdod. Where did it go? Gath, Ekron five different cities. Now again, it may not seem significant at first, but allow me to explore some layers here for a moment. You do realize that what we're experiencing here in chapter 5 and 6 and what we're going to later experience in chapter 17 potentially are problems that should have never arisen.

Allow me to illustrate. Back in the book of Joshua, we have the story of the Israelites. They've come out of Egypt. They've gone across the Red Sea. They've wandered in the wilderness. They are finally entering what you and I know as the Promised Land. They're going to that place flowing with milk and honey, the place that God promised them for so many years. You know the story. The Battle of Jericho, victory, AI victory, everywhere they turn around, they're victorious. I mean, they literally have an undefeated season. I mean, they win every battle they engage in. By the time you get to Joshua chapter 11, Joshua, who the Lord used as an instrument so powerfully in this story, says that there are a group of people whose patriarch is a man by the name of Anak, the Anakites, okay? And he says there that there were a few of them, there was a residue of them that were left in Ashdod and in Gath. You say, "Why is that significant?" You ever had one of those times in your life where you say, "Well Lord, I've done 99%, what's the big deal about 1%? I've done most of what you've asked me to do, why do I have to do all of it?" You know, back in Joshua's day, it didn't seem like a big deal. I mean, here's a small group of people on the backside of nowhere, what difference will they make? They didn't make a difference in his lifetime. They didn't make a difference in his kids' and his

grandkids' lifetime, but you give it enough time you know who descended from Gath? Goliath. Dagon, this temple, what we're seeing in 1 Samuel 5, this is what happens when you allow that little residue of your life to metastasize over generations.

So here we have the presence of the Lord in the Philistine camp. For seven months they try to find a solution. They gather anybody and everybody who might have something to offer, and we're actually dealing with an issue in a place that should have probably never occurred in the first place. It sounds a whole lot like the world you and I are navigating today, does it not? Oftentimes the issues, the struggles, the things that we're having to go contrary or up against didn't originate in our generation but happened years past. So what's happening and why is it important to understand it?

Let's begin with the process. Go back to verse 3 and 4 of chapter 5. The ark of the covenant of God is brought into Dagon's temple. This is a false god. This is an idol. He's actually, by definition, he's the fish god is exactly who he was. And it says, "when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD." Now push pause there just for a moment. This is their god. This is their idol. This is the one they worship, the one they sing to, the one they bring sacrifices to. They show up and he is face planted right in front of the ark of the covenant. So what did they do? Look at the end of verse 3, so they set him back up again. Isn't that exactly how humanity is? You know the definition of insanity, right? Doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results? They're like, "Hey, you know what? Let's try this again."

Fast forward verse 4, "they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut and there was only the stump left." Interesting that what we discover is the inanimate, the idols of the world, when in the presence of God, they fall down before him, even if we pick them back up. You might be surprised, the same thing happens with humanity. Look in verse 9. Now, before we read verse 9 again, those of you that were not here last week, just pause for a moment, can you imagine if Pastor Paul and I acted out verse 9 this week? It says, "And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts." Now think about that for a moment. Your Bible may read tumors, may read sores, may read emerods, can we just all come to a collective agreement this is not good? This is not fun. This is not pleasurable. This is painful. And where's it located? Don't you love how the Bible is so classy? In the secret parts which basically means the parts of your body that should be covered at all times.

You say, "Why is this a similarity?" Maybe this has or hasn't happened in your life. I'm sure you've heard of others. If you ever have in your body a sore, something described like here in verse 9 and it is in that part of your body, what do you naturally do? You bend over, right? You crouch. You writhe in anguish. Isn't it interesting Dagon bowed, the men didn't. So God said, "I can fix this. In the presence of a holy God, you will bow

before him." And God made sure that they understood there was only one position that they should get themselves in, and they lay prostrate before him.

Now I want to show you a picture that comes out of this, Fast forward to chapter 6. They discovered there's a problem, there's been seven months, they gather all the holy men together, they're going to return this famous ark of the covenant. They're like, "Enough of this. We're done." Verse 7,

7 Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them:

So basically they're going to take this famous ark of the covenant, they're going to return it to the Lord and his people, but they're a lot wiser than maybe you've given them credit for. They said, "You know what? We know what he's already done to us thus far. I think maybe we ought to just not risk our lives. How about the cattle? Let's try them." Now by the way, I mentioned earlier we don't know exactly who the priests are in verse 2, but let's just go with the fact that every single person that gave advice is just a pagan Philistine. Did you know that they knew what the ark of the covenant or how it was to be carried? Because, you see, remember back in chapter 4, Eli's sons Hophni, and Phineas, they carried the ark into battle. They knew that there were these staves or these sticks. They knew there was a man on the front, a man on the back. They knew how it was to be carried and they also knew what happened to those two if they carried it wrong. Those two were struck dead. They said, "That's not happening to us."

So what did they do? They built a new cart. Now, this isn't just a story in the Bible. In fact, this happened a couple hundred years ago and our own culture, many of us are familiar with this incredible architectural feat known as the Brooklyn Bridge. The Brooklyn Bridge if you've never seen it in pictures or walked across it, just an immense structure. This incredible suspension bridge of which at the time was just a marvel of technology. Well, those who wanted to build the Brooklyn Bridge, you know, they kind of struggled. Is this really going to work? I mean, after all, we've done suspension bridges before, but this is a really big one. So they got this really brilliant idea. Where can we build a prototype of this that's roughly the same size in a place that nobody is going to get hurt if things go bad? All right, Waco, TX. That's exactly what they did. In fact, if you've never been to Waco, let me describe to you what it looks like. It is flat. It is brown. It is hot. That's what it is. So they decide that there's a Brazos River there. They're going to build a prototype for what we know as the Brooklyn Bridge. The same company that built the Brooklyn Bridge supplied the supplies for the suspension bridge in Waco.

You say, "Well, what does this have to do with 1 Samuel 5?" They finished the project and I can only imagine the conversation, "Which one of you is going to walk across it first?" So do you know what they did? What a good group of Texans always do, they sent a herd of cattle. True story. I mean, what's the worst thing that can happen? Filet mignon for everybody, I mean, it's not that bad a problem. Because they knew this might not work. If it doesn't work, then death is the price. Even the Philistines knew you'd better be

careful when you handle God. You better be careful when you decide to move the presence of God.

You know, there's a prophetic element to this, the book of Philippians 2:10 says there's coming a day where every knee will bow and every tongue will confess. I've met people throughout the years, they say, "Oh, I know what the Bible says but I'm never bending my knee to Jesus." I've got a question for you: why did the Philistines, don't you think they thought the same thing? These pagan Dagon worshiping Philistines, I bet they thought, "I'll never bend to the Israelis' God." What happened? Emerods, secret parts. They bent immediately. God has a way of getting our attention. It is prophetic. You are going to bend your knee and you are going to open your mouth, the only thing that's up for question is the result or the consequence about the timing of which it takes place.

So let's talk about the "why." Why is this passage relevant for our lives? Well, let's begin with the process. Not just with Dagon, not just with these men in verse 9 of chapter 5 but what do we see in this passage? We see great physical destruction that comes upon these individuals, obviously so. Can you imagine the mental duress? You've all had illnesses, sicknesses or problems that you can't solve. It keeps you up at night. It gets you up early in the morning. You lose sleep because you're trying to figure out a solution to what's happening. So mentally they would have been taxed, emotionally. Can you imagine how this would have affected their whole life, their community life as everybody is somewhat garnered around the situation. And then spiritually. Dagon you've worshiped, you've sung to, you've given tithes and offerings to and all of a sudden, there's just a stump of him. That's it. In other words, their entire life was upended.

You know, one of the processes that you and I have got to reconcile in our life is there is the option that when we are in rebellion to God, when we have said, "God, I know what you've said, but you don't understand what I want to do," there is the option that physical, mental, emotional and spiritual abnormalities will supernaturally follow those decisions. Now I want you to hear me clearly: I did not say that if you rebel against God he will strike you with a physical ailment. What I did say was this, that when you decide to rebel against God, the Bible says the wages of sin is death. So if the wages of sin is death, could not the wages be pain? Could not the wages be misery? Could not the wages be despair? God did not have to inflict it, the sin produced a natural, should I say, natural byproduct thereof.

Oh, but there's a picture. Look in verse 14 and 18 of chapter 6. For the sake of time, I don't want to read the totality thereof but there's a fascinating picture where these Philistines finally decide to return the cart, they put it on the new cart, we've already discussed that, but then they do something odd. If you'll just kind of peruse through those verses for the sake of time, it says that they take these tumors, these emerods, and they make golden images of them and return them to the Lord. Then it says that they make these golden mice, one for each of the five cities, and they return them to the Lord. And you read this passage and you're kind of scratching your head going, "I don't get this. What is happening here?" Is it possible that even a bunch of pagan Philistines had a better understanding of the consequences of sin that some of you and I do? You know what they

understood? That which got them in the mess is what has to be given up to get them out of the mess.

Let me explore. "Back in the day," you know, there was a time where the hand of God touched this land and other lands, and we saw revivals and awakenings and we saw him move mightily, not just in small locales and among small communities but among a large swath of this and other lands. If you go back and you kind of read a history of these revival movements, awakening movements, you'll see that they happen in two phases. We typically talk about the millions of people who came to know Jesus as their Savior during these, which is wonderful, what you often don't know is what led to that where the millions of believers who were living in sin, who repented of their sin which then paved the road for those to be saved. And you go back and you read the accounts, the diaries of these individuals, you know what they discovered or we discover? That when convicted by the Spirit of God about what the problem in their life with God was, that oftentimes they would take whatever that was and they would bring it to the tent, they would bring it to the church, they would bring it to wherever these services were being held and they would put it on the altar, they would put it on the steps. In other words, if they were struggling with an addiction, whatever they were addicted with, they would take it out of their home and put it in the tent. If they were struggling with some other things, they would do the same thing. You say, "Why is that important?" Because they understood like it took seven months for the Philistines, they can't manage this at home. They can't kick it. It's too strong. "I've got to remove it from my life." Even the Philistines said, "We don't know how we got in this mess, but we're going to create a picture of it to show that we want out of it that badly." If a bunch of pagan Philistines can get it, then why can't we? We cannot manage our sin. We can't navigate our sin. How dare we think, "I got this"? No, if you say you got it, it has you.

And then it's prophetic. You get to verse 19. For the sake of time, we won't deal with all the details, but remember that famous scene in "Raiders of the Lost Ark" where everybody's faces melted off? You know the one I'm talking about. That comes from this verse. They looked on the ark of the covenant of God. Now there is some discussion on how many people actually died. Some of your Bibles will say 50,000 plus, others will say a number significantly less. We're dealing with the holiness of God, the presence of God. I think I would side with the larger number if I were you. Verse 20,

20 And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? and to whom shall he go up from us?

What a word, who is able to stand before a holy God. Do you know what the implied answer is? Nobody. And yet how many times and some of you have kind of heard this dialogue before from me, how many times have you heard a discussion or had a conversation with somebody and I think they're well-intentioned, don't get me wrong, I don't think there's any ill intended, but it just comes out so contrary to what we just read. How many of you have said this about your life or your loved one's life, saying you know, one day when I get to heaven, I want to sit down and ask God some questions? You're not going to. You say, "Oh, I got a list for him." You know what happens in the

book of Revelation 20? It says everything that is not him or you is burned up in a ball of fire. That list you wrote? Gone. You say, "Oh no, no. I tapped it in my tablet." I got news for you, that's gone too. It's all gone. I've heard people say to me, "Pastor, one day when I get to heaven, boy, I got something I've got to say to God." No, you don't. "I'm going to give God a piece of my mind." No, you won't. And I've got biblical proof, Revelation 20, we call it the Great White Throne Judgment. It says there is the throne of God, and he that sitteth thereon and all the dead, small and great, come before him. It says the books are opened up, those written in the Book of Life to everlasting life, those written in the book of works to the lake of fire and damnation. Do you know what's interesting about those verses is that not one single person opens their mouth. Not one single person says, "But God, I've got a question." Not one person says, "God, I've got to get this off my chest first."

What does he say, verse 20, "Who can stand in the presence of a holy God?" I've got news for you, do you know what Revelation 20 illustrates for us? There's coming a day where every person of the creative order small and great is going to look just like Dagon. We're going to fall on our knees and we're going to confess with our mouth and even those who descend into the lake of fire, their last words will be, "Jesus Christ is Lord." Folks, it's not about when or about if, it's about when. In other words, we're all going to fall before the Lord, we're all going to confess at the end of the day, or shall I say, at the end of eternity, what really is determined is where one's eternal destination is. If we declare that now, he promises everlasting life. If we're obstinate or stubborn, if we're that proverbial stick in the mud and saying, "I'm not doing this until I'm in his presence," oh, you will say your profession of faith but your destination will be the lake of fire.

You see, 1 Samuel 5 and 6 shows us very clearly that none of us can stand in the presence of God. None of us can speak our mind in the presence of God. It is what he has done on our behalf is why we call it mercy and grace. You're going to declare him, Lord. I suggest you follow 1 Corinthians 6:2 which says today is the day of salvation.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Whether on campus with us this morning, watching online or listening on the radio, maybe you're that individual that for the entirety of your life has said, "You know what? I'm an independent person. I do things my way. I see things my way." Well, maybe today the word of God through the Spirit of God showed you there is your way and then there is God's way and God has made it very clear that the result or the wages of our sin is death. But he's also said that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Today, maybe you're that individual saying, "You know what? It's time for a change. It's time to change the direction of my life, trying to change the direction of my eternity." The Bible says in the book of Romans 10 whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It doesn't say whoever joins a church, passes a course, passes a test, or checks off a box. It just says whoever calls on the name of the Lord. Maybe today's the day you say, "You know what? It is time to call on the name of the Lord." It's not about the specific words or phrases that you might or might not use. It's not about saying it out loud or keeping it silent. This is your heart's cry but maybe your heart's cry will go a little something like this. "God,



today, Lord, I'm finally doing like that prodigal son. I'm coming to my senses. God, I've got a sin problem. God, I've been places I should have never been. God, I've done things I should have never done. I've spoken words that should have never left my mouth. And God, you and you alone know I've had thoughts that should have never been between my ears. Lord, I realize the gravity of my sin, according to your word it's death. But God, I also realize your mercy and your grace, that Jesus Christ has satisfied the penalty for my sin. And so God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ alone is the answer. I believe God, that he loved me so much that he came on my behalf. He loved me so much he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe Jesus Christ, loved me so much he was willing to pay the price of my sin on his cross. God, I believe that his love for me was so incredible that three days after his death he raised from the grave so my sin could be forgiven and my soul could be saved. God, today I don't have the answers to all the problems and struggles of this world, but there's one thing I know for sure, that my sin problem can only be solved by Jesus Christ. The best way I know how I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today in house that cried out to God from your heart and your soul. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us. We're going to stand and sing. I just want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We have a team set aside, a room set aside to give you the time that you deserve. We want to hear your story. We want to pray with you. We want to pray for you. Maybe today you say, "Pastor, I've already got that taken care of but like those fourth graders I need to follow in obedience even at my stage and age of life." We'd love the opportunity to speak with you as well. Or maybe you're like others today who said this is where I want to plant my spiritual roots, this is where our family needs to belong. Or maybe you just need to be prayed with or prayed for. Whatever decision we're here for you.

*Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, God, if there was ever a passage that demonstrated your mercy and your grace, it's this one. And God, our lives, Lord, if I can be transparent, are really no different than those that we read about today and the very fact that you've given us the opportunity to believe, you've given us the opportunity to fall in obedience is your mercy and your grace. So God, today I pray we would not take it for granted, but we would simply answer the call you've placed on our life. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*