

There are days that you remember exactly where you were when you heard the news. When the text came, or the phone call, or the knock on the door. And there are times and things that happen that are not just personal tragedies, but national tragedies. The Kennedy Assassination, Pearl Harbor, Princess Diana's death, 9/11, the Challenger explosion and more.

This morning is one of these days in Israel's history. It is the worst day in their entire history, at least up until this point. And the worst thing that it is all actually their fault.

It is a tragic story. It is not normally something someone would preach on Mother's day, or on a day when we dedicate so many children to God. Yet we will, not just because it is the next chapter, but because we need to learn from this chapter. It will teach us something very important about who God is and how we are to treat Him.

Turn with me to 1 Samuel 4.

I. God cannot be rushed (v. 1-3).

This is a tragic story.

And it will all begin because they don't wait on God.

They experience failure and try to rush God.

They want answers.

And they want God's timing to be their timing.

But God will not and cannot be rushed.

Verse 1, ***"And the word of Samuel came to all Israel."***

Before we see the failure, it begins by reminding us of Samuel.

Samuel is now established as a prophet.

He is known through throughout all of Israel.

The vision of God is no longer rare.

But this is the only mention of Samuel in our story.

He will be absent completely until we get to chapter 7.

Even though everyone knows Samuel, they ignore him.

"Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek."

We see the nation goes out to battle against their enemies.

The Philistines have brought an army to conquer Israel.

They have been harrasing and troubling Israel for decades.

So, Israel goes to defend themselves in this war.

All the world would say their cause is just and they are being wise.

But there is a problem.

They have not asked Samuel what they should do.

No one is seeking the advice of the prophet.

No one wants to let politics or national security or war be affected by this man of the cloth.

Maybe they feel it's too important.

Maybe they feel the answer is too obvious.

But as the people of God, they should know the first thing you do is pray and then ask God what do you want us to do?

But they decide they want to do it on their own.

They are not willing to wait for God.

Verse 2, **"The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle."**

And so they go to war against the Philistines.

And the battle spreads and Israel loses.

It is not just a small loss.

It is an embarrassment and over 4,000 men of Israel are killed.

Verse 3, **"And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?"**

So they seek out the elders of Israel.

They asked their national leaders, "Why is this happened?"

They get something, but they don't get all of it.

Their question is the right question.

They rightly understand that God has defeated them.
This wasn't just bad planning or a coincidence.

And this is right because when Israel loses a battle in the Bible,
it always is because of their sin and so they need to repent.
Or they have lost as a judgment of God and they should repent.
Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 list this as a part of the covenant curses.
Losing battles is a consequence of disobedience.
And victory is a result of obedience.
So they are right to ask a question why has God defeated us?
But they asked the wrong people.
They do not seek out Samuel.
They do not go to the prophet of the Lord.
And more important they really are not seeking God.

They should've known if God has caused us to fail.
There must be sin that we need to repent of.
Or God has caused us to fail, He must not have wanted us to do this.

Failure should make us seek the Lord.
When we fail, we should ask God why?
Sometimes our failures are because we have sinned.
Sometimes our failures are because we have not waited for God.
Or because we have not sought wise counsel.
They are not always because we have sinned or done wrong, like Israel.
But we have to ask the question.
And we have to be willing to not rush God's answer.

The problem is we see the rest of the story is that they don't sit with the
question until God answers it.
They rush to fix it.
They come up with their own idea to win and succeed.
This is our problem.

There are times we need to sit in the discomfort and lament and just ask God why?
And keep asking God why until God answers.
They don't get to hear God speak because they don't really want God to speak.

And so we need to be willing to listen.
Our failure should make us seek God.
Our failure should make us listen to God.
Because of God has caused us to fail,
Then God must be trying to tell us something.
Or He is

And maybe He won't tell us.
Maybe we can never find it out.
But we still should not rush God.
We have to listen and slow down.
If Israel had been slow to speak and quick to listen, this wouldn't be a tragedy.

We follow their footsteps all the time because we make all sorts of decisions without seeking wisdom from God.
We do all sorts of things without asking God what He thinks.
We maybe pray but then we don't seek spiritual council for others.
We don't seek the wisdom of those that we know to be righteous or mature in their faith.
We don't seek out our elders or pastors or spiritual leaders to say here's here's what I'm thinking. Here's what I'm wrestling with. What do you think is wise? Do you see something I might not see?
Most of the time we keep things super close to the chest cause we don't wanna tell anybody until we've decided and then it's too late.
God's way is often slow, inefficient, and inconvenient.
And we try to rush Him at our peril.
We need to slow down and listen.

II. God cannot be manipulated (v. 3-11).

This is probably the thrust of the story I think.

God will not be manipulated.

You cannot trick God.

You cannot use God as a good luck, charm.

You cannot make God do what you want.

Just because you pray over your meal, doesn't make it blessed.

Just because you pray before you make a decision, doesn't make it the right one.

Just because you started a Christian business doesn't mean it will succeed.

Verse 3, **"Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies."**

But this is what Israel tries to do.

They don't sit and ask God what they should do they come up with another idea.

And so their idea is to bring the ark with them.

They decide that since God has opposed them, they can fix it.

Remember that the ark of the covenant was in the Tabernacle.

It is made of gold and sits in the holy of holies.

Inside the ark is manna from the wilderness, the tablets of the 10 Commandments, written by the finger of God and Aaron's rod which still has blooming flowers on it.

The ark is the symbol of God's presence.

The ark is where the glory of God is physically located in their camp.

The ark is the reminder that God lives and dwells with them.

The ark is where the blood is sprinkled on the mercy seat.

And so what they think is well for God to be with us let's take the ark with us and then God is with us and then we can't lose.

You even see how they say well that it may come and save us.

Their faith has moved from God to the box.

Their faith is not that Yahweh would save them, but that the ark would save them.

Their faith is that God can't let them lose.

Because God would never let this be taken by His enemies.

It is an attempt to manipulate God or force Him to act the way they want.

Verse 4, **"So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God."**

And so they are confident in this idea.

You can feel their pride and arrogance.

They bring the ark of the Lord of Angel armies.

The God enthroned in heaven.

And priests come with him.

Which this should be another warning though because what have we known about these sons of Eli.

They are not holy.

And their judgment is coming.

Verse 5, **"As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel agave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded."**

As soon as the ark comes all shouts.

They are filled with confidence now they can never lose. God is with them.

And they shout so much of the Earth booms.

There's some echoes to Joshua in the battle of Jericho, where they marched with the ark and they shouted now they have the ark and they shout again and the Earth is rumbling.

But this time it will be Israel who falls down.

Verse 6, **"And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?"**

We even see the Philistine's from far away hear the noise.

And they worry when they ask, why are they shouting?
This must mean something?

"And when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, 7 the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. 8 Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness."

And we get more of the Philistine's response.

They are filled with the fear.

It is not quite the fear of the Lord, but it is close.

They say a God has come.

And they're already pronouncing woe.

They're already saying this God will surely defeat us.

They remember the stories of what God has already done for His people.

They retell the stories of the Exodus and the plagues.

And they cry out saying who can deliver us?

They are acknowledging their gods are not strong enough to deliver them.

Verse 9, **"Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight."**

Even though they stand up and are willing to fight.

And it seems as if they're going to do a suicide mission.

They think they will lose, but they would rather die than be slave slaves.

I also think that because God opposed Israel before God supposing them again, and God is strengthening and encouraging the Philistines to continue as an instrument of his judgment.

Verse 10, **"So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell.11 And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died."**

God again causes Israel to lose.
And this time it is even worse than before.
Last time the army was defeated this time they are totally routed.
Every single soldier runs away.
And it's not just that they run away from the battle, but that they run all the way back to their homes to hide under their beds.
All of them desert, and abandon the army.

And there was a great slaughter where 30,000 die.
If you think you can manipulate God, you are wrong.
And if you think you can manipulate God into doing something, you will face terrible consequences.
Their defeat is even worse this time because of their pride and their refusal to repent.

They thought that they couldn't lose without the ark, but they forgot God doesn't live in an ark and God doesn't need them to protect it.
God allows the ark of His presence to be taken.

This passage is a strong warning to us that we cannot, and we should not ever dare attempt to manipulate God.
And yet we can do it all the time.
And we can do it in subtle ways.
We can do it in ways we justify and believe are good.
There are times we can pray, and then say, in the name of Jesus.
Because we hope if we say that, then God has to listen.
If we just pray the right words or use the right theology God has to say yes
Some believe if they just have enough faith.
If they believe hard enough, then God will have to do what they say.
That is trying to manipulate God.
We can try to manipulate God we pray before sporting events.
Believing our prayers will help us perform or win.
We could try to manipulate God, sometimes with our calls for fasting.

Say wow we really need God to do this so I'm gonna fast and not eat for a few days.

Just good we should do that.

It's bad if we think God answers all our prayers when we fast.

We manipulate God we dare to stand up and say, God told me to do this.

We cannot and we should not try to manipulate our God.

He will allow us to fail.

He cannot be strongarmed.

III. God's cannot lose glory (v. 12-22).

Well, we have to get in our minds is that God's glory is not our glory.

God's glory does not depend on us.

God will not be less glorified if we fail.

God will not be less glorified if we are embarrassed.

God's glory does not depend on our success.

It does not depend on our achievement.

It does not depend on our awesomeness.

When we try to manipulate God, it's often because we think God has to be glorified through us, but he doesn't need it.

God will get His glory.

Verse 12, **"A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head."**

So now the news of the battle comes.

A man of Benjamin runs back to the place where the ark should've been.

It is interesting that it mentions this messenger is from Benjamin.

I don't know why that detail is in there.

I think it's at least partially because King Saul will come from them.

His clothes are torn and dirt is on his head, not from the battle but for morning.

He is lamenting the tragedy that has happened

Verse 13, **"When he arrived, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out."**

And we see Eli is sitting in a seat.

But he is sitting close to the road watching and waiting.

And as hard as trembling for the orchid, seems that he has some idea of what is happening.

I think in his heart, he knows and worries that this is the day that God warned of.

That when God said, his judgment come, and his whole family would be killed because of their sin and their refusal to repent. This is the day he meant.

And so the news comes into the city and everyone cries.

The army was shouting before, and now the city shouts not with pride or arrogance, but in tears.

Because this is a national tragedy.

They've lost God.

They don't know what to do.

They don't know who they are.

How can they perform the sacrifices without the mercy seat?

How can they worship God or even have a tabernacle if there is nothing inside of it?

Verse 14, **"When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this uproar?" Then the man hurried and came and told Eli. 15 Now Eli was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set so that he could not see."**

And here's the sound and he's worried.

And he asks why.

Eli is even older than before

He is 98 which means he was at least 80 before when Samuel came.

And now he is blind physically as well as spiritually.

Verse 16, **"And the man said to Eli, "I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today." And he said, "How did it go, my son?"**

And the tension continues to build we know something bad will happen when he finds out.

Maybe part of him and is hoping that this messenger is one of his sons. But the day he is waiting for finally comes.

Verse 17, **"He who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured."**

He gets all the bad news at once

His country has suffered a national defeat.

They have run away and been slaughtered.

His children are dead, and the ark is in the hands of Philistine who will do who knows what with it.

Verse 18, **"As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years."**

Immediately, Eli falls backwards and dies.

Because God's judgment comes all at once.

For 40 years, he has been over Israel and this is where they have ended up under his spiritual care and leadership.

And we get this detail he breaks his neck because he's old and heavy.

Details in the Bible are always important and when we see ones that we are different or stand out, we should always pause and ask why.

It's not telling us just so that we can picture that he's old and overweight.

The Bible doesn't record everybody's weight and height for us if it does, it's significant.

It tells us that he is heavy because the Hebrew word for heaviness is also used to describe the glory of God.

His honor, his glory is described as being weight and heavy.
And so when it describes Eli as heavy, and we hear more about the heaviness of God later.
God is doing something.
Part of it is showing us that this is what the glory of man leads to.
And there is a difference between the weight of God and our weight.

Verse 19, **"Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth, for her pains came upon her."**

And the judgment continues now that Eli and his sons are dead. We hear from his daughter-in-law.

She is pregnant when she hears the news she immediately goes into labor.

Verse 20, **"And about the time of her death the women attending her said to her, "Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer or pay attention."**

And it's not going well, and she will die.

Even though the sun is born, they try to encourage her, but she can't listen. She can't look at her son. She can't pay attention. She can't be encouraged. She's dying.

Verse 21, **"And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. 22 And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."**

And her last words and naming her son is not great names.

She named him because she believes God's glory has left them forever.
Because the weight and the heaviness of God is gone.

She's wrong.

God's glory does not depend on the physical location of the Ark of the covenant.

To this day, we have lost the Ark of the covenant.
We have no idea where it is,
 though there are those who would tell you it is in Africa.
And yet, God's glory is not diminished one bit.
God's glory did not depend on Eli's faithfulness or a fancy box.

God is willing to let the whole world think his glory is over.
Because God doesn't need our adoration or our worship.
He is not dependent on it.
His glory does not need our acknowledgment.
It simply is.

God is willing to let people think he has failed to accomplish his purposes
and sometimes to bring his judgment.
We would be mistaken if we think because it's got people have been
embarrassed that God's glory has left or diminished.
God will let churches fail.
God will place sinful leaders over Christian organizations as a judgment.
God will reveal their evil in their wickedness and let them bring a reproach
upon the name of Jesus.
God will let so-called Christian nations, be judged and fail, and disappear.
God will let things done in his name and for his glory go poorly.

None of these mean that God's glory is gone or diminished.
The glory of God does not depend on our success. It does not depend on
us in any way shape or form.
We cannot deceive ourselves.

There's something here that should be comforting to us.
On one hand, this is a judgment, and this is a warning on another hand. It
is a promise.
The glory of God doesn't depend on us, and the gospel of God does not
depend on us either.

Our salvation that deliverance from God, the rescue of sinners and the wicked.

The fact that Jesus died for those who hated him and who spitted him and who killed him as a reminder that God's glory doesn't depend on us.

Our salvation did not depend on us in the following of Jesus in the completion of his mission, and the fulfilling of the great communion does not depend on us either.

We are just called to be faithful and to be a witness.

This is a heavy tragic passage.

It reminds us that God cannot be rushed, manipulated, or lose glory.

This is part of what makes our God great.

It also makes the gospel even more incredible.

God does not need us.

God has no reason to have to save us.

He does not have to choose us.

And yet, this God is the one who gives His life for us.

This is the God who dies on the cross in our place.

This is the God who gives up everything that we might find salvation and new life.

This is the God who says, let the little children come to me.

And the gospel means that Jesus' burden is easy and His yoke is light.

We do not have to have the answers.

We do not have to always succeed.

We do not have to figure out the right ways to make God do things.

We do not have to make sure God is glorified.

We just have to have faith.

We just have to do our best to follow Jesus.

And the good news of Christ, is that this is enough.

Don't be like Israel here.

We do not have to do it on our own.

We can just rest in the good news of who Jesus is.