

Remnant Life Church
August 25, 2019
Great God, puny god
I Samuel 5:1-12

As we observe our culture today there is obviously a great deal that is wrong, and it is getting worse

- Why? – what has brought this country from a time only 60 or 70 years ago when there were words you did not say, things you did not do, actions you did not take, lines you did not cross to today where there are no restraints on even the most vile and debase behavior?
- What were the factors that led to this?
 - Many elements of our society might be blamed such as divided and broken homes, the loss of moral guidelines, the filth spewing out of Hollywood, rise in drug and alcohol use, increased emotional and mental anxiety in the lives of so many people, etc...
 - But none of these are the source of the problem, they are merely the symptoms
- The reason for the continuing downward spiral all stems from one truth – people no longer fear God
- **Ps 111:10** - *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*
 - Today wisdom is not only dwindling but missing altogether
 - It cannot even begin, because God is no longer feared
 - We have successfully elevated ourselves, at least in our own minds, to a place above God
 - Therefore, we do not fear Him
- And yes, in the church this has also become true otherwise we would never compromise His Word to appease an amoral society

Context before we read:

- This is all taking place around 1050 B.C. – a little less than 10 years from when Saul will become the first king of Israel
- **Chapter 4** – the Israelites and Philistines are fighting each other in the Battle of Aphek fought in 2 parts
 - In the first battle the Philistines kill 4000 Israelite soldiers (4:2)
- The Ark of the Covenant was then brought out for the second battle
 - The Philistines were victorious again with 30,000 Israeli soldiers being lost (4:4-11)
- Why did they lose?
 - Because by this time Eli the priest was very old (98), and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, had become the priests
 - They were corrupt and wicked with no regard for the Lord – in other words no fear (2:12)
 - A prophet had come to Eli and told him God knew how wicked his sons were, but Eli had done very little in dealing with them – the sin remained (2:22-25)

- The prophet told Eli that as a sign of God’s anger, his two sons would die on the same day
- God’s hand of protection was removed from the Israelites because of the sin in God’s house of worship
- Not only did they lose the battle, but Eli’s two sons were killed
 - On the same day fulfilling the prophecy given to Eli
 - But even more devastating for the people, and it seems for Eli – the Ark of the Covenant was captured and taken by the Philistines back to their land
- When Eli heard about the Ark, the Bible says he fell off his chair at the gate of the city, broke his neck, and died (4:18)

READ: I Samuel 5:1-12

- The captured ark has been taken to Ashdod (5:1)
 - One of the 5 major cities of the Philistine nation
 - Forming a Pentapolis along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean

Ark of the Covenant

- Not a great deal of interest until 1981 when a movie...
- The description of the Ark is found in Ex 25
- Originally only the 2nd set of original stone tablets of the 10 commandments were placed inside (Ex 25:16)
- Then Aaron’s staff that budded and flowered in the wilderness as a sign from God of his authority as Priest (Heb 9:4), and a jar of manna (Ex 16:34) were added
- To the Philistines capturing the Ark of the Covenant represents a tremendous victory
 - They had heard the shouting of the Israelites when the Ark was first brought out and we read...
 - 4:7 –...the Philistines were afraid, “A god has come into the camp,” they said. “We’re in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us!”
- They now had the ark, the “God of Israel”, in their possession
 - They placed it in the temple of their god, Dagon in Ashdod
 - Note – why did they not take it to the temple of Dagon in Gaza (also one of the major cities)
 - Because that is the temple that Samson had torn down in his last act as an instrument of God
 - Judges 16:30
 - Half man, half fish - an ancient Mesopotamian and Canaanite deity
 - The name is derived from the ancient word for “grain”
 - Giving credence to it being the god of agriculture and fertility
 - Also, the Canaanite word for “fish” which is from its appearance
 - This is a demonic god
 - If it had any abilities or powers they were demonic in origin and not of the one, true God
 - Yet the Israelites were always being pulled into idol worship (Baal, Ashtheroth)
- Beware of the counterfeit
 - To be effective, the counterfeit must be enough like the original to fool you

- The enemies counterfeit will look a lot like the genuine
 - Check it against the Scripture
 - Pray
 - Wise counsel
- Most often seen in relationships

Look at what happened to the Philistines when their puny god encountered our Great God

1. **Vs 2** – they placed the ark in the same room as the idol
 - a. Ancient temples always placed the idol on an elevated platform
 - b. The reason for bringing the Ark into the temple was to make it appear subservient to the idol
 - c. But nothing can last when placed above God
 - i. **Ex 20:3** – the very first commandment – *you will have no other gods before me*
 - ii. That applies to our lives today – there can be nothing before God in your life
 1. You will be living out of balance
 2. You will be out of God’s will and favor of blessing
 3. You will still be loved but less than you should be
2. **5:3** - *When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place*
 - a. What they wanted to portray (God as inferior to their idol) had been completely turned around
 - b. Notice not toppled over, but fallen on its face – the posture of worship as well as total submission
3. **5:4** - *But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained.*
 - a. Same position of submission and worship
 - b. But now the head and hands were broken off as well
 - i. The head was the symbol of wisdom
 - ii. The hands the symbols of activity
 - iii. There is no wisdom or activity of man or satan that is greater than God
4. **5:5** - *That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon’s temple at Ashdod step on the threshold.*
 - a. The priests of Dagon are faced with a theological problem
 - b. Twice their idol fell prostrate before the symbol of God’s presence
 - c. Could this mean that Israel’s God is greater than our god?
 - d. Nahhh...we’ll just make up a new tradition to fit the situation
5. This tradition of not stepping on the threshold of a house when you entered began in a pagan temple
 - a. satan will use the slightest measure as a way to get into your life
 - b. God wants us to live a life of holiness meaning no compromise, not even a little
 - c. **Zeph 1:9** - *On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit.*

The Philistines were discovering very quickly what it meant to dishonor and have no fear of the one, true God

- Do you fear God this morning?
- Is your life being lived in a way that honors God?
- Or are you content with living a “good” life that you can still decide what and how you live?

Phil 2:5-11 - In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- In what way do you acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord of your life?
- Do those in your life know that He is – by how you act, what you do, how you respond to the challenges of life, what you say?

To fear God is to have no other gods before Him!

- What have you placed over God in your life?
- It will come crashing down, just like Dagon did, at some time in your life
- You must surrender your whole life to God so that He is in His rightful place, with all other things of your life in submission to Him

Most powerful prayer for a Christian to pray: Not my will, but Your will be done.