

Title: Where Is the Glory?
Text: 1 Samuel 4:12-22
Theme: God will not allow his glory to be mocked.
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmtnt: We need God; God doesn't need us.

We need God, but God doesn't need us. When we recognize that we need God and we humble ourselves before him, God responds with mercy and kindness. God's mercy and kindness is wonderful. God is generous with his mercy and kindness. In fact, God is way more generous with his mercy and kindness than we are. In 1 Timothy 1, Paul says, *"that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."* God was not generous to me because I was deserving of it. God was generous to me, in order to show how amazing, he is. He has "perfect patience." However, it is so easy to misinterpret God's kindness as being something that I deserve. When I do that, I begin feeding the ugly monster of entitlement and the sweet Spirit-given grace of humility shrivels.

We each have a heart that looks for something to be entitled about. We cringe when we see videos of government officials being incorrigible with police officers who pull them over for speeding. "Do you know who I am?" It doesn't look good, does it? But, it's in all of us. When we fail to have a proper view of ourselves, then our view of everything is distorted. And I mean – everything! *I have had a hard time; I am entitled to some ease. I am successful, I am entitled to some respect. I have been very sick; I am entitled to sympathy. I am a pastor; I deserve unquestionable trust. I am a missionary. I've made sacrifices, I deserve some margin. I _____* (the blank is filled in with "works-righteousness"). It is in all of us. There have been some big names in the conservative Christian arena who have been and, in some cases, continue to be a blight on the reputation of the gospel and (as Nathan said to David) give the enemies of God an occasion to blaspheme. Do they think that they are too big to fail, too good to fall or too valuable to flop? No one is too good to fall or too valuable to flop. But it doesn't have to be this way. Notice the pattern. Obscurity – God's call – God's blessing (success) – influence – power – entitlement (trust in self instead of God) – abuse – rejection of God and rejection by God – failure

This pattern is played out in 1 and 2 Samuel and in the rest of the OT. It reveals whether or not a person genuinely has a heart of faith. How do you respond to God's kindness in your life? People who respond with an attitude of entitlement and who abuse those around them (Saul) reveal the fact that they do not have a genuine heart of faith. People who use their authority in order to be a blessing to others reveal a heart of faith because this is what Christ did and does.

In spite of the hand of God being increasingly against Israel throughout the book of Judges, Israel still acted as if she was intrinsically superior to the other nations. She had completely misinterpreted God's kindness to her. Now, the unthinkable had happened. The ark of the covenant, the symbol of the glory and presence of God, had been captured by the Philistines

and for the first time ever, had been taken from the land. The glory was departed. Think of this. God has not only left Israel to be at the mercy of the merciless Philistines, but it looks as if God has left Israel and has been captured by the Philistines. Now the Philistines not only have their god, Dagon, but they have Israel's God. Israel has nothing. Her God is on the "other side." She is completely undone, which is exactly what she needs to understand.

Read Text: (4.10-22)

The last half of chapter 4 shows the consequences of rebelling against God on a personal level by focusing on a family in Israel. Israel's defeat by the Philistines was catastrophic militarily, politically, economically, and now personally. But, even in his justice, God remembers mercy. In fact, the justice of God is a thinly disguised mercy designed to drive us back to trusting in him. Therefore, this sermon is going to focus on those two features: the justice of God and the mercy of God. In this text, the justice of God is very plain, so two of the three points are about his just and righteous response to sin. The third point is about his mercy, because even in his wrath, God remembers mercy.

1. **Your sin always affects you.**

These events are dramatic and traumatic. But you need to see the entire picture. God does not wait, like a hunter in a blind for a poor sinner to accidentally wander into his line of sight so he can unleash his wrath at the earliest opportunity. Israel has been in the land now for well over 400 years and for most of that time has been stinking up the joint by idolatry, immorality and violence. She has been flipping God the bird for generations and after repeated warnings is finally feeling the results of her repeated rebellion. This text is dark because rebellion against God is dark. The response of God's judgment to sin has a large safety on it. God waits a long time before he acts. However, the response of God's mercy is a hair trigger.

Eli's failures led to the loss of the ark on his watch. Eli participated in some of the sins of his sons and then failed to hold his sons accountable for their other egregious sins. By failing to uphold the holiness of God, Eli gave his sons the impression that their sin was not that serious. To that degree, Eli misrepresented God. He was both a priest and a judge (18b). When Eli finally said something to his sons because their sins had become so public that he had to say something, it had no effect. His boys had no respect for him and no fear for God. The fact that Hophni and Phineas were with the Ark in the battle, may suggest that they supported this strategy and the fact that Eli trembled for the ark (v.13) likely suggests that he didn't. Therefore, I think that it is entirely possible that when the elders sent for the Ark to come to the battle that Eli did not support this, but was ignored because at this point, no one paid any attention to him anyway. The consequences of his failure to give careful attention to God's law and demand holiness from his sons put him into a place where he has no voice.

Your sin always affects you. Sin causes guilt and guilt causes anger, shame and more sin. A guilty conscience leads to all sorts of attempts to drown it and cover it. But, after you get sober, your sense of guilt not only returns but so does the consequences of your binge. It is so hard to

watch and so much harder to live with. What do you do with your sin? Your attempt at covering it will not cover it but the attempt will itself become another addiction. You can try to ignore your conscience and over time you'll discover that you have a really hard heart. Not only does your sin not affect you, but nothing affects you. Or, you can admit what God already knows. You are a sinner who needs forgiveness. Confess your sin. Agree with God about your sin. Turn from it. Call it what he calls it. Turn from it and turn to Christ.

Eli occupied the most powerful position in the country and sits at the gate of the city as just about the weakest one. He cannot see. He doesn't know what is going on. He is at the mercy of events that are now way beyond his control. It is on his watch that the Ark of the Covenant is taken from the Tabernacle and now it has been captured by the Philistines.

I will probably say this a hundred times in this series, but the writing, the literary style of these 2 books is fantastic. The writer tells us what we need to know by pointing out certain details and then expects the reader to fill in the blanks. For example, when we first meet Eli, he is sitting on a chair beside the doorpost of the Tabernacle and he is not aware of what is actually happening. Now, he is seated on a chair by the road and is unaware of what is happening until the messenger comes and tells him. When he hears that the Ark has been captured, he falls over, breaks his neck and dies. His death is pathetic. There is no glory and no honor. Lying on the side of the road, is the large, broken figure of a failed and broken life. The selective details tell us all that we need to know. This man was gluttonous, like his sons (2.29). This man was sedentary, and his physical and spiritual senses were compromised. If he was Israel's judge for 40 years, we could understand why the nation did not fear God, follow God, or have any ears to hear his Word. Like priest, like people and Eli was a reflection of the nation. In spite of her opportunities, she lived for herself and her sin betrayed her like it always does. Eli's sin affected himself. It always does.

But it also affected his line. The Levitical priests had to come from the tribe of Levi and the high priests came from the line of Aaron. Eli was in that line and for a time, his line would continue, but not for long. God was going to raise up another line of high priests from Aaron's line and it would not come from Eli. The man of God warned Eli of this in chapter 2 and God confirmed this to Samuel in chapter 4. Now, in one day, Hophni and Phineas died for their sins. The fulfillment had begun. How did it get to this point? There was a moment when it began, when one of the boys stole some of the sacrificial offering for himself and thought that he got away with it. After all, he wasn't struck dead. Nothing happened. So, he did it again. And pretty soon, the boys were doing it all the time and then got their dad involved. You could have told them that this was wrong, but it was pretty clear to them that they were getting away with it. Except that, they weren't. God may be patient, but he is never apathetic. I do not know what the last thoughts were of Hophni and Phineas. I wonder if they ever realized the magnitude of their sin as the enemy forces closed in around them and as their lives were poured out onto the ground. The wage of sin is death. Your sin always affects you.

This is really tragic. You have heard me preach long enough to know that I generally use humor or at least some sarcasm to make a point in the message. But, not today. Not with this text. This

entire text is hard to hear. It is hard to read. It is hard to feel and it is hard to preach. But we need to feel this grief. We need to know that this is what sin does. This is how evil, how damning, how destructive, how isolating, how hopeless, and how depressing sin is. Sin causes all of these things because sin is the opposite of God.

2. Your sin always affects others.

God held Eli accountable because Eli failed to draw the line with his boys. What exactly were the boys doing? When people would bring a meat offering to sacrifice, the priests were permitted to take a specific and limited portion of that for themselves. It was part of the means by which they were taken care of. But there were very specific parameters for that both in terms of when in the sacrificial process they could do it and how much. These boys would demand what they wanted and would just take it, which made the sacrificial system a joke to them (1 Samuel 2.12-17). They made a mockery of the means that God established for the Israelites to be able to have their sins forgiven. (Hebrews 5.1-4) Eli should have thrown them out of the Tabernacle area. They were disqualified. Instead, he ate with them. He worshiped his belly and his boys instead of God. His sons would worship their flesh even more. If God wasn't going to do anything about their taking food that didn't belong to them, then what would stop them from sleeping with women who didn't belong to them either? Immorality comes from false worship. Eli's sins affected his sons and the sins of his sons affected the nation.

If you lived in Israel then, would you be motivated to follow the law of God when the priests didn't? Would you be careful to observe the details of the sacrificial system if the priests were just going to take what you brought as a sacrifice and gorge themselves with it? After all, this was a sacrifice. Your family could use that meat. Besides, it was part of the job of the priests to teach God's law to the people. Do you think Eli, Hophni and Phineas were giving clear instructions about those parts of the law? Their sin contributed to a famine of God's Word in the land. And in the case of Phineas, his sins would be carried by his wife and his son.

In 2.28, Eli *"kept hearing all that his sons were doing TO ALL ISRAEL, and (in addition to that) how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting."* I think we can assume that if Eli knew what Hophni and Phineas were doing that Phineas' wife knew what he was doing. She was pregnant and was told that the Ark was captured, that her father-in-law had died, and that her husband had died. However, she is most grieved over the loss of the Ark, not her husband. His death may not have been a loss to her. She seems to have a much greater awareness of God than her husband ever did.

The birth of a baby is usually an event to celebrate, but the tragedy that has befallen Israel is so severe and the future now so dark, that this birth is seen as a curse. Any child growing up now has to be cursed. The ladies attending her (perhaps a mid-wife in the mix) attempt to encourage her with the fact that she is having a boy. But, her labor costs her life and she is not comforted at all. But, before her name is added to the long list of deceased on this day, she names her son. He is named Ichabod. His name means "no glory" or "where is the glory?" On the day of his birth his grandfather died, his dad and uncle died and now his mom dies. If any

kid had a reason to hate his birthday, Ichabod was it. Who would ever want to be around him? Through no fault of his own, this kid is born with an unbearable weight that hangs around his neck. He is born into and will live with the consequences of the choices of his grandfather and father.

Your life will fill out the definition of your name. What is the name you want to give your children? The wife of Phineas named their son Ichabod, because she had no hope. She died without hope for her, her nation and for her son. After all, without God, there really is no hope.

3. The mercy of God's justice.

The reality of God's justice can be a wonderful mercy, if you allow the weight of his justice to drive you to him. If God is faithful to keep his promise to judge, which he is reluctant to do, he will be faithful to forgive and bless which he loves to do. Again, the response of God's judgment has a large safety on it, while the response of God's mercy is a hair trigger.

Israel has to be emptied of her self-righteousness and self-reliance. If she is going to listen to God, then she has to admit the obvious and has to stop listening to herself and thinking that she can live however she wants. Israel needs God, no one else can save her. And you and I are no different. We have to give up our "right" to rule our own lives and yield ourselves completely to God. This is not only right, this is good. This is good for our souls.

By the way, God can take care of himself as we will see next week. But I want you to see how what happens here is directly related to what we are celebrating in Christmas. In fact, I will probably address this on Christmas Eve. This is not the last time that the glory of God leaves Israel. 4-500 years from this event, the Jews are completely overrun and the Temple is burned to the ground. Ezekiel tells us that before that happened, that God withdrew his Shekinah glory from the Holy of Holies and in fact, left the land altogether. After all, the Jews basically told God to leave them alone, so He did. And for almost another 600 years, there was no glory of God in the land of Israel. Then one night outside of the village of Bethlehem, the sky lit up with an army of angels who told some shepherds that God's glory had returned. But it wasn't in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, but in a baby in a manger. John described it this way, "The Word became flesh and dwelt (It. tabernacled) among us." The glory of God came back never to leave again, because this time, he stayed. He dwells in the lives of every single person to trusts in him, and through imperfect people like us, God makes the glory of his grace and gospel known.

There are two kinds of people displayed in this text. 1) Those who personally experience the consequences of their sin and 2) Those who experience the consequences (collateral damage) of someone else's sin. This is our world. When we sin, or when we experience the fallout from someone else, injustice has occurred. Someone has to pay. But the justice that we come up with, does not satisfy and only creates more injustice. The senseless killings of 4 other students does not satisfy justice. The killer is not at peace because he got what he wanted and now thousands of people are profoundly affected and many of them will respond in unhealthy ways. Both kinds of people need Christ. Someone has to pay for sin and injustice – and he did.