

Trusting God
1 Samuel 4:1b-22

1 Samuel 4:1b-22 [4:1b] Now Israel went out to **battle against the Philistines**. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. [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. [3] And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, **“Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? 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.”** [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.

[5] As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, **all Israel gave a mighty shout**, so that the earth resounded. [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?” 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.** [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.”

[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**.

[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. [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**. [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.** [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?”** [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.**” [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.

[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. [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. [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.”

This is an example of the Sovereignty of God. If you’ve been around church for very long you have heard this term. If you’ve studied the Bible much or been to some kind of Bible school or Seminary, this term brings up a lot of thoughts. But for sake of a common definition, I’d like to explain this theological truth a little bit.

The **Sovereignty of God** is the biblical teaching that all things are under God's rule and control, and that **nothing happens without His direction or permission**. God works not just some things **but all things** according to the counsel of **His own will**.

Ephesians 1:11 [11] In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

His purposes are all-inclusive and never thwarted , nothing takes Him by surprise.

The sovereignty of God is not merely that God has the power and right to govern all things, **but that He does so, always and without exception.** In other words, God is not merely sovereign in principle, but sovereign in practice

What do I mean by the sovereignty of God?

I mean, the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God.

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God. God is God and we are not.

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (Dan. 4:35).

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa. 115:3).

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is "The Governor among the nations" (Psa. 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best.

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the "Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible."

Now with all that being said, and I believe all of it to be true... I need to say this.

I don't have God figured out. And neither do you and neither does anyone else in this world.

There is much in God's word that gives us a simple Black or White answer to our questions. There are many things that we can see in scripture and know exactly what to do and even how to do it. How to love God, how to love others. What Not to do.

But there are also many mysteries of God that we will always struggle to understand. And here is the important part... **It is supposed to be this way.**

Remember that our ways are not His ways and our thoughts are not His thoughts. We cannot compare our intellect and understanding to the one that created us. The very fact that He created us gives Him authority over us. And when we decide in our own mind that we are going to "figure God out"... that we are going to know the great "truths" of God, we can be exalting ourselves, our knowledge above that of our God. I'm not saying we need to be dumb or stupid and revel in our ignorance, I'm saying that we need a healthy respect for the God that has given us life... that has given us everything. When we pursue knowledge of God, sometimes we leave behind the relationship with God that He is calling us to.

I've watched many a man seek knowledge and the knowledge of God. Seek to understand the secrets of the Bible and of God. Seek to understand... but in some cases, I've seen them forget that the reason for Jesus, the reason for the mysteries, the reason for His will is so that He would have a relationship with us.

If you are married, maybe at one time in the beginnings of your courtship you were seeking information about this person you were attracted to... but at some point you changed from seeking knowledge about this person to seeking a relationship with this person. Sure you continued to seek knowledge but you did so to further the relationship. If you would have continued to pursue knowledge without relationship, you go from courting this person, to stalking this person. We all know that stalking a person is not healthy... don't stalk people, build a relationship. Don't stalk God, seek a friendship.

And when it comes to the mysteries of God, there are many... there are many things that you are not supposed to figure out in this life.

How many times have we heard human beings discussing and arguing over Grace vs Responsibility and Mercy vs Obedience. How can a good God let bad things happen? There are many parts of God's will that have a tension that is reflected in our thoughts and emotions.

I wrestle with all of it as well.

This is what we are seeing in this passage of 1 Samuel. We are seeing the sovereign will of God himself.

This story sounds so familiar to me. Does it sound familiar to you? I don't mean in the sense that you've heard this story before... maybe... if you are like me.... you have lived part of this story.

Have you done the right thing? Oh maybe you made a mistake or two along the way but for the most part... you did the right thing or things... You prayed. You asked God.... What should I do? Then you did it. Whatever it was that you were wanting to do. In this case, it was Israel going to war. They wanted to do it. So they did it. Maybe they even prayed and "felt" God's leading.

And then, when things went sideways, when they were not "successful", when we are not successful... we take a look in hindsight and say. Oh... wait a minute, we messed up, we didn't do it right, we forgot the Ark of the Covenant. How could we be so stupid. That's it. That's the answer, lets go get it and we will win.

Now for us, in this life, we see that as Oops, I forgot to pray, or, I wasn't reading God's word daily so.... Or I've had this secret sin.... Pornography, drunkenness, weed, cocaine, arrogance, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony... if only I would get my act together, then God would bless me. Then God would heal me. Then I would be successful. Then I would win.

The Israelites are right here. In this spot. They are second guessing themselves, judging themselves... we did it wrong... we've got to change and do it right and then... God will bless, God will heal, God will fix it... we will win. But they are making a vital mistake... They are making decisions based on their knowledge of God and not their relationship with God.

See... if we win... we believe we are blessed by God. We are in His will. We are being obedient. We are being faithful. We are chosen and blessed.... And we are right.

It's easy to ascribe our cultural ideals to God. We like to think that we serve a God that rewards those that faithfully serve Him. And He does, he says He does. BUT, have we not also seen what seems to be bad things happen to good and faithful people? People who serve God? Can both of these concepts be right? This is part of the tension.

Look at Eli. He's old, he's fat and he's been lenient on his sons. He's allowed sin in his leadership. BUT... Eli still loves and fears God. And God has trusted Eli with the future of Israel. He's trusted Eli with Samuel.

Remember when He said... Let Him do what seems good to Him...?

Now we see that He is concerned about Israel. Concerned about the Ark. He sees that Israel has been vanquished by the Philistines on his watch,, under his leadership. How heartbreaking.

Has this happened to you? It has to me. I've been at the helm of my life. I was leading my family... business, money, trying for success. I prayed. I thought I heard God. God led me... He led me into disaster.

Look at the worst things that have ever happened in your life. Do you think that God led you there, or do you think you took yourself there?

This is tough. See, none of us want to think that God would cause or allow anything “bad” to happen in this world... and especially to one of His followers.

Do you believe that God is in control? Do you believe that God is good... all the time... and that all the time... God is Good? Sometimes that can sound trite...

What have you suffered? What are you suffering? How are you suffering?

There is a weird side of Christianity that believes that anything bad that happens to the believer is evil and from the devil himself... or is a result of our own sin. That anything bad that happens is because we have sinned and are going to be punished.

Sure, there are earthly and spiritual ramifications for our sin... BUT... God is God and we are not. And He will do that which pleases Him. and he'll do it whether you understand it or not.

Do I understand this whole sovereignty of God issue.... Absolutely not. There are also about a million other things about God that I don't understand.

The Bible is not the end all be all book of earthly and heavenly wisdom. What the bible is... it is a letter that tells us enough about God and enough about what He has done to cause us to be able to live a life of submission to and reverence for... Him.

This is obviously not the definitive sermon on the sovereignty of God. But I hope it's a picture that points to Jesus... not to the knowledge of Jesus (although that's not necessarily a bad thing). But knowledge about God does not necessarily include a relationship with God.

Yes His statutes are true. But He doesn't want us to know His statutes... unless it is because we know Him.

I know stuff about my friends. Deep stuff. Not because they have stuff going on.... But because they are my friends.

If we learn anything today about our relationship with God, I hope it is that God wants us to be friends with Him. He has extended Himself to us in the person of Jesus.