

**Date:** 26.04.2020

**Time:** 11am

**Service taken by:** Rev Gavino Fioretti

**Psalm:** Psalm 100 (Scottish Psalter)

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 4

**Outline:**

a) Introduction

1. Poor theology

2. Divine fulfilment

3. Holy concern

- **Introduction**

**A contrast with the previous chapter:** In chapter 3, we saw that God was quiet. His voice was not heard by His people. In chapter 4, we read that Samuel's word came to all of Israel. His words were not his own, but words given to him from God.

Through the coming of this boy, Samuel, there was a radical change for God's people – God was now speaking, intervening and guiding His people – this brought encouragement.

But despite God speaking, the people weren't responding. The people of Israel went into battle without seeking God's will or mind on this. They didn't seek Samuel's guidance. So there is a striking contrast with the previous chapter where God's voice wasn't heard, but some things haven't changed. This can be true of us too – God can challenge our consciences, but still we live life like there is no God whose guidance we need to seek.

**1) Poor theology**

Not all agree that Israel lost the battle due to poor theology. Some believe it was because Phineas and Hophni. But we believe it can be seen to be from their poor theology. Their theology was wrong.

**Worldly theology:** Israel's interpretation of the Ark of the Covenant is the same as the Philistines' interpretation – they both believed that if they had the ark with them, they'd be sure to win the battle. Both the Philistines and Israelites came to see this box as God.

God's people forgot the truth about God and thought of Him as the world did. This still happens – we can forget that the God of the Old Testament who judges and punishes sin is the same God we worship today. Our understanding of God and His will can become the same as the worlds. This leads

to compromise. This happened with David and Solomon when they took multiple wives for themselves. As God's people, we're to be salt and light in the world. But often, sadly, the church is changed by the world instead. This leads to sinful practices being accepted. We then water down the gospel.

As a church, how much of an impact does the world have on our theology?

**Superficial theology:** This refers to outward religion, that doesn't impact the heart. Fellowship with God is all about certain rituals rather than a relationship.

The Ark of the Covenant became God Himself to the people of Israel. The symbol God had given became God to them. But it wasn't. The ark was a revelation of God's law and His forgiveness, but they made the symbol God. The outward became the centre of their religion.

After the first defeat in battle, they didn't tremble before God. They didn't seek Him to ask if there was sin or lessons they needed to learn. They thought that God's power was limited to the presence of the ark. Their theology became superstitious.

**Superstitious:** Don't become superficial, as the next step is superstition. The people of Israel became superstitious in their theology and understanding.

Some can be superstitious in understanding today. They might use the sign of a cross as something that will bring God's blessing. In the days of Jeremiah it was the temple that people viewed superstitiously. But the church building is not the temple of God, we His people are. If we start to make too much of the building, our religion is outward.

**Disastrous:** The people's wrong theology brought disaster. Israel was defeated even with the ark's presence with them.

There was still no sin afterwards. They didn't come to God to see if there was sin. They didn't come to God in repentance. They still trusted the symbol.

Some who aren't professing Christians still want their child to be baptised – this brings false hope that leads to disaster.

We need a biblical and truthful knowledge of God. Misunderstanding leads to disaster. May God give us an understanding of who He is.

## 2) Divine fulfilment

**Detailed:** God's people fail, but God is still faithful. He keeps His promises and does what He says He will do. He is faithful. He is free in committing Himself (He doesn't need to), but when He makes a promise, because of His character, He is committed to keeping that promise.

God's faithfulness in doing what He says He will do brings encouragement to His people. When He says He will build His church, sanctify His people, never leave or forsake us, we can absolutely trust Him.

**Challenging:** God's faithfulness in doing what He says He will do gives encouragement. But sometimes it gives us a frightening warning. God judges the wicked. He will cast away those who don't trust Jesus. He will punish unforgiven sin with eternal death. When God says something, He will do it.

Eli and his family took lightly God's warning. But what God said would happen happened. Hophni, Phineas, Eli and Eli's daughter-in-law died at the one time.

God's faithfulness in doing what He says He will do gives encouragement to God's people. It brings a warning to those who don't trust God. He is always doing what He said He would do.

### 3) Holy concern

The people of Israel had thought the ark was God's presence. They had wrongly thought the ark was God. But they did show a holy concern about the ark; a concern for God's kingdom and worship. Their understanding was wrong, but they were right to be concerned.

Worship of God looked different between the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the worship was about ritual and ceremony. In the New Testament, it was less visible – it was spiritual. More than symbolic, it was in the heart.

The Ark of the Covenant was not God, but it was precious. It was a symbol intended to draw the people closer to God.

The people showed a concern about holy things, God's things. They are an example to us in that way.

We don't have symbols in the same way as God's people in the Old Testament, but we have symbols. Communion, baptism, the pulpit are special, but there's a distinction. The water of baptism doesn't remain holy, nor does the bread or wine. God's Name and worship are precious things. The Bible paper isn't holy. Appreciation for God's Word isn't shown in the treatment of the paper in the Bible, but in appreciation for the words it contains. The paper is not inspired, but the words are. We're not called to care for the paper, but for the words in the Bible.

At times, we give too much importance to the symbol rather than to the meaning. When the people of Israel considered the meaning behind the things of God, they provided us with an example.

We should be concerned for the people and the Word of God. We should set our hearts on God's things. We must give God the place He deserves, with a heart for the things of God.