**Faithful Regardless**

A study of 1st Samuel

*“Faithful to God, when all seems lost”*

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***Last Week:***

**10**The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Then Samuel said, **“Speak, for your servant is listening.”**

***Faithful Regardless***

Samuel was faithful to God, regardless of the surrounding circumstances. Because of Samuel’s faithfulness AND willingness, God blessed his life, the people respected him, and the Lord revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

In fact, he as both Judge and Prophet was the leader of Israel his entire life.

**1st Samuel 7:15“**Samuel continued as Israel’s leader all the days of his life.”

Why…

1. He was faithful to God, even though his immediate influences were NOT. (Eli’s sons).
2. He was faithful to God regardless of his lack of training and preparation. (**7**Now Samuel *did not yet know the Lord*: The *word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him*.)
3. **He was faithful to God, regardless of the difficulty of the task at hand.** *(Revealing the harsh judgment that God will execute upon Eli’s household).*

Eli was a High Priest. He was in charge of a very important responsibility, *overseeing the Tabernacle* which contained the *Ark of the Covenant*. The Ark was a gold-covered wooden chest containing the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod, and a gold pot of manna.

 With this extremely high level of responsibility, came an extremely high level of accountability, that when he abused his position, he was met with severe consequences.

 The sins committed by Hophni and Phinehas, and the fact that Eli ignored these sins, was met with harsh punishment from the Lord.

Back in chapter 2, a man of God came to Eli with this prophesy:

***1st Samuel 2:31-34* “**The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly house, so that no one in it will reach old age, **32**and you will see distress in my dwelling. Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your family line will ever reach old age. **33**Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.

**34**“‘And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day.

Even after hearing this prophecy, Eli did nothing to change the behavior of his sons.

Samuel grew up among these men and God called him and in spite of his influences, God raised him up as a new prophet in Israel. The first message he was asked to give as a new prophet, was not some wonderful news, or a prophecy of blessing, it was a stern judgment against Eli and his family.

Samuel woke up that day with the task of telling Eli, his mentor, teacher, and caretaker a harrowing prophecy of judgement toward him:

**1st Sam 3:13-14** “For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Samuel%203&version=NIV#fen-NIV-7290a)] and he failed to restrain them. **14**Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’”

***And then it happened…***

**1st Samuel 4:1-22**

And Samuel’s word came to all Israel. Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. **2**The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. **3**When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, “Why did the Lord bring defeat on us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the Lord’s covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.”

**4**So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

**5**When the ark of the Lord’s covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. **6**Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, “What’s all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?”

When they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, **7**the Philistines were afraid. “A god hascome into the camp,” they said. “Oh no! Nothing like this has happened before. **8**We’re doomed! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. **9**Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!”

*The reputation of the Israelites and their God, was renown. The Philistines had heard about how they defeated the mighty Egyptians through the miraculous powers of their God, and also every Canaanite army that came against them since reaching the promised land. Philistines attributed this to the power of the Ark of the Covenant.*

**10**So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. **11**The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

**12**That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dust on his head. **13**When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry.

**14**Eli heard the outcry and asked, “What is the meaning of this uproar?”

The man hurried over to Eli, **15**who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes had failed so that he could not see. **16**He told Eli, “I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day.”

Eli asked, “What happened, my son?”

**17**The man who brought the news replied, “Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.”

 *Eli was just told some horrific news from the battlefield. One was that his sons were killed, the other was that the Ark of the Covenant had been captured. One of those pieces of information was devastating to Eli.*

**18**When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an “old man”, and he was “heavy”. He had ledIsrael forty years.

**19**His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains. **20**As she was dying, the women attending her said, “Don’t despair; you have given birth to a son.” But she did not respond or pay any attention.

**21**She named the boy Ichabod, saying, “The Glory has departed from Israel”—because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. **22**She said, “The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”

What a devastating loss!:

* 34,000 Israelites were killed in battle
* Hophni and Phinehas were killed as well
* Eli fell over and broke his neck and was killed.
* His pregnant daughter-in-law died during childbirth announcing the name of his grandson as *Ichabod* (“inglorious” or “there is no glory”).

*[poor kid, terrible name, but he did grow up and become an uncle to a priest under King Saul in chapter 14] : )*

* Worst of all, The Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines!

All seemed lost and hopeless.

Not only did the glory of the Lord depart Israel, it seemed to take up residence in the camp of their enemies The Philistines. This is the dark and destructive ending to the period of the Judges, and the beginning of the period of the Kings which will happen in a few chapters.

Here we see the unthinkable. God who was always present with the Israelites since He lead them out of Egypt, seems to have forsaken them.

But did He?

God actually allowed calamity to come upon Israel throughout the Old Testament when their hearts were far from God and they allowed evil to prevail. He disciplined them so that they would repent and turn to Him.

*Samuel and a small remnant remained faithful to God regardless of this calamity. They understood why the Lord allowed this destruction on His own people.*

Nothing in their actions showed that their hearts had turned to God in repentance in this chapter. Even when they initially suffered the loss of the first 4000 men, they turned to “The Ark”, not God himself. The said “IT” will save us. They even let two known wicked priests be in charge of the ark and God responded by temporarily removing His hand of protection from them.

That seemed so severe! Does God do this to *us today*?

The better question is, *do we do that to God*?

Do we ever forsake him in our hearts and then wonder why we don’t see Him moving mightily in our lives?

Do we ever look to “relics” for help, instead of seeking His face humbly, personally with all our hearts? *(Relics can include “physical things” like church buildings, religious symbols, books, or even other people)* God wants us to seek Him, and have a relationship with HIM not the things that represent or are symbolic of Him.

In these days, we have something that the Israelites *did not* have,

“The outpouring of the Holy Spirit” ***- PENTECOST! : )***

When the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, one of the things that Peter spoke about it was that it was the fulfillment of a long-awaited prophecy from the prophet Joel.

**Acts 2:17-18**“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions,
    your old men will dream dreams. **18**Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days”

So nowadays we don’t have to have an ark of the covenant, a tabernacle or even a *temple*. We ARE the temple of the Holy Spirit.

**1 Cor. 6:19** “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own”

The Holy Spirit is poured out on us and is given to us when we believe upon Jesus and receive Him.

We don’t need an ark of the covenant because the Holy Spirit is with us,

He empowers us, guides us, comforts us, teaches us, and enables us to do more than we ever dreamed possible.

But just like the people of Israel under Eli’s watch grieved God and caused him to allow the Ark to be taken,

We can grieve the Holy Spirit and cause Him to be “quenched”

**Eph 4:29-31** “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.  And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.  Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”

**1st Thess 5:19** “Do not quench the Spirit”

What does this mean? He does not depart from us, but we depart from Him in our hearts.

Things like;

unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage and anger, brawling, slander, and malice,

may not seem like they are as serious as the sins of Hophni and Phineas, but according to this verse, they grieve the Holy Spirit.

If you feel like in your life, you are getting beaten up in battle by the enemy, and the ark of God, or His presence, seems missing from your life, it may be that you are quenching the Spirit.

Sometimes because of our own hurts and disappointments, or because of our fears and insecurities, we tend to not fully trust God. Sometimes we take back parts of our lives that we once committed to him, or are negligent in our devotion to Him.

*[ Personal story ]*

God is not a statue or an impersonal force, He is a father, and He cares.

And since He cares, he can be *grieved.*

This why we need to keep our hearts turned toward Jesus and be “Faithful Regardless”.

* We need to trust Him regardless of our disappointments.
* Run to him regardless of our fears
* And maintain genuine love for Him, regardless of what the *“emotional climate of our feelings”* might be.

We need to be *Faithful Regardless*, because He is faithful to us regardless of what we do, or don’t do.

We all have moments where we need to cry out to God for forgiveness and restoration. The good news is that God is always quick to forgive, restore and show compassion:

**Psalm 103:8** “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.”

Jesus says, “I will never leave you or forsake”, “I am with you always”,
“I give you eternal life, and you shall never perish; no one will snatch you out of my hand”.

God, he wants to forgive, he wants to redeem, He wants to restore.

No matter how far you may have drifted from God, or how distant you feel from His Holy Spirit, or even if you feel that the glory of the Lord has departed,

*God loves you as much as He ever did, and is eager to forgive and restore you.*

David understood God’s heart even when things got really bad for him, and he showed us how to pray to God for restoration;

Let’s close with this prayer on our hearts, asking Him to renew, restore and sustain us.

**Psalm 51:11,12**

**“Create in me a pure heart, O God,**

**and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11Do not cast me from your presence,**

**or take your Holy Spirit from me.
12Restore to me the joy of your salvation
    and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”**