

The Mighty Hand of the Lord

Text: 1 Samuel 5

Introduction: What is your favorite story in the Bible? Maybe for some of you it's the creation account in Genesis 1-2. Maybe for others of you it's the story of God's judgment through a worldwide flood and His salvation of Noah and his family by means of an ark. Maybe it's the Exodus from Egypt. Or the falling of the walls of Jericho. Or the defeat of the giant Goliath by the shepherd boy David.

Maybe you really love one of the miracles of Jesus. The turning of water into wine. The feeding of the 5,000. The calming of the storm. The raising of Lazarus. Maybe you like the account in Acts of the Apostle Paul being bitten by a venomous snake and shaking it off into the fire. Maybe some of you can relate to Eutychus sitting in the window listening to Paul preach. He falls asleep, falls out the window, and dies. Let that be a warning to you this morning. But of course, Paul raised him from the dead.

Well, our text for this morning's sermon contains one of my favorite stories in the Bible. I think that I must have first encountered this story when I was reading through the whole Bible as a teenager. They bring the ark of God into the temple of the idol Dagon, and when they come in the next morning, the idol Dagon is laying on its face before the ark of God. So, they set the idol up again. But when they come in the next morning, Dagon is again laying on the floor. But this time, the hands and head are cut off and laying there separately.

I remember, as a teenager, that struck me as funny. To be honest, it still does. The most basic message is undeniable. The Lord reigns. He will not share His glory with anyone. Not Dagon. Not you. And not me.

Friends, this is why you should read through the whole Bible. Because if you don't read through the Bible, you'll never encounter stories like what we find here in 1 Samuel 5. I heard a lot of Bible stories growing up as a child in church. But I don't recall ever hearing the story of Dagon falling on its face before the ark of God.

If you don't read the Bible yourself, you'll be forever at the mercy of those who teach the Bible to you. You can learn a lot from people teaching the Bible to you. I certainly hope so. That's one of the central aims of my life and ministry: to teach the Bible. But I'll never be able to teach you everything that you need to know about God and His Word.

I'm trying. That's why I preach through books of the Bible. If you've been a part of this church over the last 8 years, you've heard me preach through Ruth, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ecclesiastes, Amos, Jonah, Mark, Acts, Philippians, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Revelation, and now 1 Samuel. That means that over the last 8 years, 1 Samuel is the 15th whole book of the Bible that we've worked through together on Sunday mornings.

I don't believe that any of those individual sermons have been particularly lifechanging for you. But here's what I know: over time, the Lord has been using His Word to grow our knowledge and understanding of who He is. I love Jesus more today than I did 8 years ago when I came here to be your pastor. I trust you do as well. God has been using His Word to conform us more and more to the image of His Son. That's why we preach through books of the Bible.

We believe that this book is the Word of God. It is breathed out by God. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. And everything this book says is totally true and trustworthy. So, when I come to 1 Samuel 5, and I read that the Philistines took the ark of God and placed it in the temple of Dagon, and came back the next morning and discovered that the idol Dagon was laying on its face before the ark, I have 100% confidence that's exactly what happened.

See, Goshen family, we're not playing around here. These aren't Aesop's Fables. This is a true, historical account of what actually happened when the Philistines defeated the Israelites, captured the ark of God, and placed it in the temple of Dagon. This record of those events that happened 3,000 years ago has something to say to us this morning about who our God is.

So, if you haven't already, turn in your Bible to 1 Samuel 5. It's only 12 verses. We're going to read the whole chapter. And we're going to hear from God.

(Read 1 Samuel 5...Pray)

Here's the main idea of 1 Samuel 5: From Israel to Ashdod to Gath to Ekron, the Lord reigns in power.

We know this because we see very clearly in this text that...

I. You cannot manipulate the mighty hand of the Lord (1 Samuel 5:1-2).

A. That's what the Israelites tried to do in chapter 4. They tried to manipulate the mighty hand of the Lord.

1. They lost a battle against the Philistines, and they asked themselves, "What should we do?"
2. The answer they came up with was to bring the ark of the covenant into their camp.
3. "If we have the ark," they reasoned, "then God will be on our side, and we'll be able to defeat those evil Philistines."
4. If you were here last week or are familiar with the story, you know what happened.
5. You can see it there in verse 10 of chapter 4. The Philistines fought, Israel was defeated, 30,000 soldiers died, and the ark of God was captured by the Philistines.
6. The Israelites learned a very important lesson: You cannot manipulate the mighty hand of the Lord.

B. That didn't stop the Philistines from trying their hand at manipulating the mighty hand of the Lord (vs. 1-2). (Read vs. 1-2)

1. Look at the verbs used here in verses 1-2. Underline them in your Scripture journal. They CAPTURED the ark of God. They BROUGHT it to Ashdod. They TOOK the ark of God. They BROUGHT it into the house of Dagon. And they SET IT UP beside Dagon.
2. These are all words that can be used to describe something that can be DONE TO an OBJECT.

3. The Philistines are going to learn that these are not words that can be used to describe something that can be DONE TO GOD.
4. You cannot manipulate God to make Him do what you want Him to do.
5. As a parent, I know that I am susceptible to being manipulated by my children. One of my children is reading this series of books. The first book was given to our family as a gift. Then for this child's birthday, we gave them a few more books in the series. Well, a couple of days ago, this child said to me, "Dad, I'm almost done with the last book." This child went on to tell me how much they are enjoying the series and that there are more books in the series that they do not yet have. Ashley and I immediately recognized what was happening. This child was trying to manipulate me into buying more books in the series. Do you think it worked? Of course it did. I'm a sucker for books. And I'm a sucker for my kids. I'm easily manipulated.
6. But not God. He didn't allow Himself to be manipulated by the Israelites, His covenant people. And He certainly wasn't going to allow Himself to be manipulated by the evil Philistines.
7. He may have given the Philistines victory over His covenant people as a means of His judgment, but there was no sense in which He was actually on the side of the evil, pagan, idolatrous Philistines.

C. We're not going to spend a lot more time here because we talked about this last week. But Goshen family, you cannot manipulate the mighty hand of the Lord.

1. He is the one who is sovereign over all things. He is the one who knows you better than you know yourself. He is the one who knows what is good for you better than you could ever know.
2. You should pray and read your Bible. But you should not pray and read your Bible as a means of trying to impose your will on God. You should pray and read your Bible as a means of understanding and submitting to God's perfect will for you.

3. You cannot manipulate the mighty hand of the Lord.

II. You cannot overcome the mighty hand of the Lord (1 Samuel 5:3-5).

A. The Philistines THOUGHT they had overcome the mighty hand of the Lord.

1. You remember last week. When the Israelites brought the ark of the covenant into their camp, the Philistines were terrified. They knew the stories of Israel's triumph over the nations by the power of their God.
2. They asked, "Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods?"
3. But then, they took courage, and they fought like men. And they won! They defeated the Israelites. And in doing so, they thought they had defeated the Israelites' God.
4. This is why upon capturing the ark of the covenant, they took it and placed it in the house of Dagon.
5. They said, "Look at us! We did it! Our god is greater than their god! And we'll set their god right in front of our god to show everybody that our god is victorious."
6. The Philistines thought they had overcome the mighty hand of the Lord.

B. But they quickly learned that they had underestimated the mighty hand of the Lord.

1. Look at verse 3. (Read vs. 3a)
2. It's interesting. The text doesn't tell us what happened overnight. Just that when the people came in the next day, Dagon was on his face before the ark.
3. We're left to use our imaginations, aren't we? We know the Lord. We know the Lord's power. Annnnd we know the rest of the story.
4. But the Philistines didn't know. To this point they're probably still underestimating the Lord's power. They certainly don't yet know the rest of the story.

5. I kind of think they probably made all kinds of assumptions about what had happened. Surely it was a coincidence. Maybe it got knocked over by accident somehow. Maybe there was a strong wind. Maybe the floor was uneven. Who knows?

6. So, they set Dagon back up and go on about their business, not thinking too much about it.
7. But the next morning... Look at verse 4. (Read vs. 4)
8. The text doesn't tell us a whole lot about what the people were thinking at this point. But we do get a little bit of an idea in verse 5. (Read vs. 5)
9. It seems like their superstition is showing through, doesn't it? They don't know what's going on. They're not completely willing to give the Lord the credit. But they recognize that something weird is going on, and they don't want any part of it.

C. What's clear to us is that you cannot overcome the mighty hand of the Lord.

1. The Israelites couldn't overcome the mighty hand of the Lord. Remember, it was the Lord who defeated the Israelites by the hand of the Philistines.
2. But neither could the Philistines overcome the mighty hand of the Lord.
3. That's because no one can overcome the mighty hand of the Lord. Not you. Not me. Nor anyone else in all creation. He is God. And as God, He is omnipotent. He is all-powerful.
4. Have you ever tried to fight against God? How'd that work out for you?
5. My kids like for me to wrestle with them. And they're getting stronger. But they're not as strong as me. They cannot overcome the mighty hand of dad. But a day is coming, Lord willing, when they would, should we decide to wrestle again at that point, be able to overcome the feeble hand of dad.

6. That will never be true of God. No matter how strong you think you are. No matter how powerful you become. No matter how many people call you boss or chief, or Mr. President, you will never be able to overcome the mighty hand of the Lord.
7. So, what can you do? Stop fighting against Him. The all-powerful God of the universe wants a relationship with you. He wants to call you His child. He wants you to call Him your Father. Yes, He's all-powerful! But He's also good. He loves you. And He has good plans for you. If you'll stop fighting against Him.
8. How do you become His child? Through repentance and faith. You turn from your sin. You place your trust in Jesus. The one who died to pay for your sin. Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.
9. You cannot overcome the mighty hand of the Lord.

III. You cannot escape the mighty hand of the Lord (1 Samuel 5:6-12a).

A. Have you ever tried to run from God?

1. You know the story of Jonah. God told him to go to Ninevah. Preach to the people. Call them to turn away from their sin and turn to God in faith. But what did Jonah do? He ran. He went down to Joppa. He boarded a boat headed for Tarshish. But God sent a storm. Jonah eventually told the crew to throw him overboard. When they did, God sent a great fish to swallow Jonah and spit him out on dry land. And then what did Jonah do? He went to Ninevah. You can't run from God. You cannot escape the mighty hand of God.
2. Maybe you've tried. You knew what God wanted you to do. But you didn't want to do it. So, you didn't. And God had to use extreme measures to get your attention and show you that you cannot escape the mighty hand of the Lord.

B. The Philistines had to learn this lesson the hard way too.

1. The text says that the hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod. The Lord terrified and afflicted the people of Ashdod and its territory with tumors (vs. 6).
2. When they saw what was happening, the men of Ashdod said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god" (vs. 7).
3. So, what did they do? They decided to take the ark of God to the Philistine territory of Gath. I don't know why Gath. Maybe the rest of the Philistines didn't like the people of Gath too much. Maybe they thought the people of Gath could handle it. Maybe the leader of Gath was the weakest of the Philistine leaders and wasn't able to stand up to the rest when they suggested taking the ark to Gath. I don't know. But regardless, they took the ark to Gath (vs. 8).
4. Look what happened (vs. 9). (Read vs. 9)
5. Things didn't go so well in Gath. So, what did they do? They passed the ark off to another of the Philistine territories. This time it was Ekron (vs. 10a).
6. And look what happened (vs. 10)! (Read vs. 10)
7. The people of Ekron had heard what had happened in Ashdod and Gath, and they wanted nothing to do with the ark (vs. 11-12a). (Read vs. 11-12a)
8. The Philistines learned the hard way that you cannot escape the mighty hand of God.

C. But have you learned that very important lesson yet?

1. Or are you still trying to manage things in a way that would allow you to escape the mighty hand of the Lord?
2. Do you know that God knows what you do in secret? I don't know what you do in secret. The people around you this morning may not know what you do in secret. But God does. You cannot escape the mighty hand of the Lord.

3. **Disobedience to God, whether it's not doing the things that He tells us to do, or doing the things that He tells us not to do, always incurs the discipline and judgment of God.**
4. **You cannot escape the mighty hand of the Lord.**

We've seen that you cannot manipulate the mighty hand of the Lord. You cannot overcome the mighty hand of the Lord. You cannot escape the mighty hand of the Lord. And finally...

IV. You can only trust the mighty hand of the Lord (1 Samuel 5:12b).

A. The end of verse 12 says "the cry of the city went up to heaven."

1. **I'd like to think that this was a cry of repentance. When you've sinned against the Lord, the only thing you can do is to cry out to Him in repentance.**
2. **But there's not really any reason to believe that this was a cry of repentance. It was a cry of despair.**
3. **See, there's a difference between being sorry that you've sinned against God and being sorry that you got caught and had to face the consequences of your sin.**
4. **Consequences for sin are a good thing. That's why we discipline our children. We want to teach them that what they did was wrong. We want to motivate them to do what is right next time.**
5. **Consequences can be the instrument that God uses in our lives to produce heart change. But we have to start with true repentance.**

B. And when there is true repentance, rather than fearing the mighty hand of the Lord, we can trust the mighty hand of the Lord.

1. **You've heard me quote 1 John 1:9 many times: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."**

2. **You don't have to be afraid of God. I don't want you to be afraid of God. Yes, fear the Lord in a spirit of reverence and awe and wonder.**
3. **But if you're walking in repentance and faith before Him, you don't have to be afraid of Him. You can trust Him.**
4. **He gave His Son to die for you so that you could have a right relationship with Him. He knew you would sin and rebel against Him. But while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you (Rom. 5:8). He died in your place as your substitute. So that by turning from your sin and placing your trust in Jesus, you can have a right relationship with God.**
5. **The Israelites and Philistines had reason to fear the Lord. Because of their sin. Because of their rebellion against God. And if you're walking in sin and rebellion against God, you have reason to fear Him too.**
6. **But if you're walking in repentance and faith before Him, you can trust Him. You can trust in the mighty hand of the Lord. You can trust that He has good purposes and plans for you. Even when it doesn't seem like it. Even when everything about your circumstances says otherwise. You can trust the mighty hand of the Lord.**

Conclusion: Where are you this morning? Are you trying to manipulate Him? Are you trying to overcome Him? Are you trying to escape Him? Or are you trusting Him? Trust the mighty hand of the Lord.