

'The Rise of the Kings Series'

Sermons in the Book of 1 Samuel

Message 8 - 'Two Tales of Tragedy' 1 Samuel 4:12 - 22



As we can see here in 1 Samuel, the verses are filled with a sense of tragedy as the reality of the loss of the Ark filters back to the people, and to Eli, the High Priest. The event was truly tragic and significant in the life of Israel. These two tales of tragedy firstly see the death of a servant of God, who had judged Israel for forty years, and secondly sees the traumatic birth of a baby amidst the turmoil of defeat and devastation. The Israelites would have to come to terms with the loss, and also face a new era in the aftermath of Eli. Yet, sometimes it takes a tragedy to make us consider what things are really essential, and those that are not. This process of God's chastisement would bring the nation back to Him, seeking Him, confessing sin, and desiring to do His will. We can see:

1. The Death of Eli - Eli was aware that his sons had taken the Ark from the Holy of Holies to the battlefield. As he sat on the special seat by the tabernacle, it was not his sons that he was worried about, his heart was trembling for the Ark of God. Despite the sin and mistakes he had made with his sons, despite the severe judgement that he had invited from God upon Him because of his indulgence of his sons, Eli was still a good man who had sought to serve the Lord and he trembled to see the extent of the consequences. Men of substance have great concern for the things of God. For all Eli's failings, he was a man who had served the Lord, and in this situation recovers the sense of gravity and concern for the cause of God. His mistake which we are all capable of and susceptible to was that for a time he allowed the indulgence of his sons to come above concern for God's work. For us, we are in such a danger, that we allow the concerns of this world, even family and responsibility, come above Christ and His work. Christ must be our utmost concern; everything else must be kept back. For Eli, the news that the Ark was gone, was taken, was the fatal blow that ended his earthly life. His heart was broken before His neck.

2. The Declaration of Ichabod - The wife of Phineas displays a spiritual insight that was certainly not present in her husband. The emphasis of the burden within the wife of Phineas is for the glory of God. One thing that we can say is this, that as far as the wife of Phineas saw it, without God's presence, without His glory and provision and favour, then life was not worth living. From this episode we need to see that sometimes God deals with us in a way that makes us feel that He has departed and sometimes this is necessary so that we see our need to seek Him earnestly. On another level, we also need to consider what a tragedy it is when the presence of God is not manifest amongst his people. As one commentator asks, *'could Ichabod be justly written over many church sanctuaries?'* However, whatever they might have felt, the reality was that God's glory had not permanently gone. Dwelling upon the Word of God would have brought the right conclusion that Israel deserved her discipline, her chastisement after striving away from God and turning from His way. The Philistines may have won a victory, but God had allowed it in His sovereign purposes, and they were about to find out that it was a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. The great God of heaven was not finished, rather His work was ongoing, and His purposes were being brought to pass. He would not be defeated by an idolatrous nation, or indeed by the faltering devotion of His people. Even in the midst of the blackest moment, the darkest clouds, the sun still shines. The Lord can sometimes allow His children to experience difficult times that humble them, and sometimes bring shame before a watching world. Yet, such rebuke, such discipline, always has as its motivation the love of God and as its purpose a deeper relationship with the Lord. We cannot always see the way ahead, but God has it all in His hand.



Penzance Baptist Church

'Upholding the Ordinary Means of Grace'

Pastor Jonathan Stobbs