

Broomfield



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Our God Reigneth

Fear over Satan and His Dominion

As Christians, if we are honest we must admit to having had a fear of Satan and his dominion. As a child, I remember lying awake in bed convinced that this fallen angel was in the corner of my room just waiting to get me. And then years later, I heard the cry of many over the New Age movement, and its creeping seduction of the church. This, quite frankly, caused me to believe that there was little hope for the body of Christ and God's kingdom. After all Satan was running amuck! I looked out over Christianity and saw a weak, lethargic church. This caused me to think that it was just a matter of time before the end came.

However, I also had confidence that the United States would remain impervious to the destruction of Christianity. After all, we are a “Christian nation” — at least that's what I was taught. God was in charge of our land. And besides, we had technology and the bomb.

But then September 11, 2001 came. And many of us came to the shocking realization that the United States was indeed vulnerable. In fact get this, not only has Europe become greatly populated with Islamic people (it's being over-run) — Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the United States! And thus we need only look to Europe — with its riots, terrorist cells, and coldness toward Christ — to see where we will be in fifty years!

And so I say, that if we were honest with ourselves today most of us could admit to having had fear over what Satan and his dominion are doing in this world. After all, where is God? Why isn't Christianity growing like Islam? Why isn't Christianity the fastest growing religion in the world?

This is why our text is so important. It contains an account of a battle between God and the forces of this darkness. And it proclaims a strong message of God and His sovereignty over Satan. God ever and always remains the “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Our God reigneth!

Triumph over False Religion

To see this triumph over false religion we turn to verse 1 of 1 Samuel 5.

1 Samuel 5:1, “And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod.”

I dare say that never before or after were the Philistines in such a glorious situation. They believed that the God of Israel was defeated. And thus, not only had 30,000 Israelites lost their lives in the massacre of Ebenezer, but the Philistines had captured the religious icon Israel — the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, one can just imagine the glorious celebration that accompanied the Philistines as they transported the Ark into the capital city of Ashdod. When David transported the Ark years later¹ there was dancing, singing, and celebrating. There is no question in my mind that the Philistine procession back to Ashdod would have rivaled that of David's!

In fact, one only needs to think of the time when the Philistines defeated Samson.

Judges 16:23, “Then the lords of the Philistines [who were ‘high in spirit’ vs. 25] gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.”

Indeed we can just imagine the celebration here. What the Egyptians could not do, the Philistines did. They had conquered Israel and its God! Now when the parade arrived in Ashdod, we read these words:

1 Samuel 5:2, “When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.”

This is a very significant statement. In essence, the Philistines were presenting the conquered God of the Jews — Yahweh — unto Dagon with the implication that Dagon was omnipotent, almighty, and the great king over Yahweh.

This was a stinging declaration!

Dagon, the false deity, was the chief god of the Philistines. He was the father of Baal. Dagon was associated with the perverse fertility and grain rites of Canaan. And though Temples of Dagon were scattered throughout the land of the Philistines, nevertheless two elaborate temples had been built in Ashdod and Gaza where much evil was carried out in the name of “Dagon.”

And it was in 1104 BC, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord our God — this Holy article — was placed in subjection to an evil and perverse religion to be ridiculed, mocked, and scorned.

It is a foreshadowing of Christ being handed over to the Sanhedrin. Think of it. Because Jesus Christ is God He could have spoke a word and the Sanhedrin, the Temple guard, and the Romans would have been snuffed out of existence. And yet far from speaking a word, Christ willingly subjected Himself to the insults, ridicule, and mockery of man.

In much the same way, the Ark of the Covenant was God's dwelling place on earth. It contained the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod, a pot of manna, and the Mercy Seat which spoke of peace between God and man through the blood of the Lamb. And yet for a time in our passage God willingly allowed this holy vessel to be shamefully represented and treated as it was placed in subjection to nothing more than a rock which the Philistines called, “Dagon.”

Yet we know the “rest of the story,” don't we?

¹ Compare 2 Samuel 6

We know that Dagon actually was nothing and soon would be shown to be nothing. And thus, though it appeared for a time as though the “glory had departed”² this only was in appearance!

In the exile of the seventh century BC, God subjected His people unto slavery that they might be disciplined³ but soon delivered them as a demonstration of His sovereignty and power.⁴ And this is what God is doing here.

Apparent Triumph of False Religion

From this we see that the demonstration of God's glory brings with it the apparent triumph of false religion.

Yes, Assyria had its day in the sun. Babylon for a time looked so powerful. The Philistines for a day thought of Yahweh as a weak and defeated God. But, as we'll see, this was only to manifest the glory of God to a greater degree.

This is also happening in our day. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. And next to Islam is Mormonism. And we find “Christianity” often weak, anemic, and bound by superstition. And yet all of this, just like in our text, is only apparent.

There are only two religions in our world: that which is true — that which is of God — and false — that which is of Satan. In order for Satan's kingdom to grow, the number of lost people must grow — and the only way that can happen is through birth. But for growth in God's kingdom, the number of saved people must grow — and the only way that can happen is through the re-birth that comes through Christ.

Thus all statistics which indicate that Islam is the fastest growing religion are misleading. A growing Islam or Mormonism is simply a re-grouping of the numbers of lost people. It is not a real growth of Satan's dominion. In fact, listen to Christ's description of the Kingdom of God:

Matthew 16:18, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Here we find that after Peter recognized Jesus as both God and Messiah the Christ proclaims that the church will be built upon the profession of the person and work of Christ. As the body proclaims and teaches the deity of Christ, and His identity as Messiah and Savior God will build and extend His kingdom. In fact, so invincible is God's Kingdom that the gates of Satan's kingdom cannot withstand it.

Looks are deceiving. It may not appear that there is an assault against the gates of hell going on. Evil appears to be triumphing. And we the church just keep struggling and shrinking.

Elijah was deceived for a time. He was chased by Jezebel into the wilderness. He lamented that he alone was left.

1 Kings 19:14, “And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the

² Compare 1 Samuel 4:22

³ Compare Ezra 6

⁴ Compare Ezra 36

children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”

The Divine response was, “I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal” (Romans 11:4b). God’s kingdom is an everlasting kingdom which Jezebel, Baal, Satan, or any thing for that matter cannot withstand!

Don’t miss it. False religion has had and will have its day in the sun — our text is evidence of that. In fact, I would suggest to you that this passage pictures a type of exile that God’s people have had and occasionally will have until Christ returns. But let us not loose heart; these “mini-exiles” exist so that God’s authority as King can be made more manifest to the world.

The Exaltation

Notice the exaltation of God.

1 Samuel 5:3, “And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.”

The day before, they had been dancing, singing, and rejoicing over the greatness of Dagon. Today that god was found prostrate before the Lord! This was quite a shock.

Now brothers and sisters, the odds that there could have been an earthquake that would have toppled Dagon such that it lay prostrate before the Ark are astronomical. Nevertheless that’s how the Philistines must have interpreted the situation, and so we read that they upright their deity, fasten him tightly to the ground, and then go on with their day’s work.⁵ And they no doubt pondered about the significance of what had happened.

1 Samuel 4:4, “And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.”

The priests awoke with an urgency to find out if something else had happened to their deity. And they found the God is so amazing. In fact they couldn’t have been more shocked or traumatized by their discovery. They found their god executed.

In ancient days the head and hands were viewed as trophies of war.⁶ And thus in military executions the head and hands of the individual would be severed and displayed as a declaration of one’s dominance and sovereignty over the enemy. As people looked upon the remains, the implication was quite clear. Their enemy’s strength — that which wielded the sword — and their ability to think and function was conquered!

⁵ This is interesting. In order to protect their deities from being toppled, the ancients fastened them down tightly to the floor. In fact Isaiah picking up on this mocks the idolater in Isaiah 40:20; 41:7; 46:6-7. How could a deity who couldn’t protect himself from falling over, protect the worshipper?

⁶ Compare Judges 8:6; 1 Samuel 17:54; 31:9; and 2 Samuel 4:12

The god of the Philistines was executed in his own temple — his stronghold — by the God of Israel! Dagon's hands and head were not broken off, BUT CUT OFF AND PLACED ON THE THRESHOLD. They were in the place of dishonor because it is where people walked! Dr. Bergen explains:

“Dagon's head and hands had been... 'cut off'... in a manner reminiscent of grisly military executions... The Philistines' conquering divine hero had been humbled and then mercilessly executed in his own stronghold. Though 'in exile,' the Lord had proven his superiority to the regional supreme deity.”⁷

In other words, through this providence, God declared Himself to be the King of kings and Lord of lords! Indeed! Dagon is nothing; God is everything! Dagon ought not to be feared; fear God alone! Dagon is as Humpty Dumpty; God is unchangeable! Dagon is light (in weight); God is heavy! Dagon has been bound; God alone reigns!

I love how Walter Brueggemann put it:

“Dagon has been robbed of power to act and emptied of the dignity proper to a god. In a word, Dagon has been dethroned. The presumed power of Dagon, which seemed so real after the routing of Israel, is exposed as null... Yahweh has in fact preempted the alien temple of Dagon so that it now belongs to Yahweh and is an arena of Yahweh's sovereignty.”⁸

And so for a time, the god of the Philistines appeared to be something as God's people were slaughtered. The Ark was humiliated. God was mocked. Yet, the Lord used this very act of humiliation to enter into Dagon's lair and destroy him. Thus we see God's glory, honor, dominion, and power strongly and boldly proclaimed.

The message portrayed here is unmistakable — God is the King of kings and Lord of lords!!!

Family of God, the parallels between this event and Christ's first advent are unmistakable. Not only do we see the humiliation of Christ in the humiliation of the Ark, but we also see the exaltation of Christ.

The Resurrection

It looked like all had been lost. Christ came to this world and was received by only a few. Ah! But those who received Him knew Him to be Messiah, the Lamb of God, none other than God Himself. But then He was betrayed, arrested, tortured, and then crucified. Christ's disciples were left struggling.

Luke 24:21, “But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.”

Truly if there was any time in the history of this world where Satan scored the mother of all blows, it was here! At the cross, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord our God — Jesus Christ — became subject to Satan's domain. Christ died!

But in the morning those who had subjected Christ to such cruel treatment discovered that He had risen from the dead. This brought an incredible message!

⁷ 1, 2 Samuel, NAC, pages 97-98.

⁸ First and Second Samuel, page 36.

Matthew 12:28-29, “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.”

This is in reference to Christ and His triumph over Satan. Sometime during Christ's First Advent, Satan was bound through Christ’s death and resurrection.

Hebrews 2:14, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

At the cross, Satan's power over death was destroyed. And yet it just wasn't at the cross, it also was defeated three days later.

Romans 1:1-4, “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

Through His resurrection, Christ was declared to be nothing less than God! Truly, He alone is Lord. In fact we read as much in Philippians.

Philippians 2:9-11, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Brothers and sisters, I hope you see it! Our God reigneth!

God reigned at the cross. He reigned at the door of the empty tomb. He reigned in the temple of Dagon. The message is one and the same. The strong man is bound! Christ is King! His kingdom is coming in glory. The gates of hell will not prevail. The substance belongs to God.

At times it may appear that the church is held hostage with ITS gates attacked. It may appear that God is asleep and doesn’t hear our cries. It may appear that the kingdom of God is on the run. Yet, the truth is the kingdom of God is on the offensive. God has 7,000 others who have not bowed the knee to Baal!⁹ God has not fallen asleep, but has and will continue to prove victorious as a mighty warrior! In fact, listen to God's commentary on 1 Samuel 5 and the time when God devastated the false-religion of Dagon.

Psalm 78:65-66, “Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach.”

Don't miss it! This is not something that God just did in 1 Samuel 5. This is that which God continues to do throughout redemptive history — a humbling that will culminate at the Second coming of Christ when

⁹ Compare 1 Kings 19:18

God places all things under Christ's feet!

So brothers and sisters, let us rejoice. Our God reigneth!

The Witness of the Lord

And yet, we're not done with this text. There's more.

1 Samuel 5:5, “Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon’s house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.”

This is an amazing truth. In most religions even today, there is a line of demarcation between the secular and the sacred. A line is drawn — a symbol, or a spot which is revered — that serves as the boundary line into a holy place. This line was created in the religion of the Philistines BY GOD when He severed Dagon's appendages and strew them on the threshold. From this point in time on, as a testimony of the time when God humbled the religion of the Philistines, the priests of this false-religion were forbidden to step on the threshold as they entered into the house of Dagon.¹⁰

In other words, this religious practice would forever remind the Philistine officiate that God alone is great! And this same mark has been stamped onto every religion today! In every religion and in every place you look, the message is proclaimed, “God alone is great!”

Romans 1:18-20, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”

This passage is vivid. Paul pictures the testimony of God's greatness as a bright light shining within every person. In fact, no one can miss it because God Himself is shining the revelation of His glory into the eyes of every man. And He is proclaiming the message that “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

Truly, stamped on every religion, every person, every phenomenon of creation is this message: God Alone is Great!

Do you understand what this means?

Not only does God in His providence allow false religion to flourish in this state that He might prove Himself victorious. But in every false religion itself the message is loudly proclaimed — Our God reigneth!

Just as in the religion of Dagon if a priest inquired, he would discover that housed in his religion is a practice that proclaims the Superiority of God. So also if the false-worshipper today inquired, he would see that not only their religion but all of creation proclaims the deity and sovereignty of God.

¹⁰ It is believed by some that Zephaniah 1:9 references this practice in 1 Samuel 5:4.

What this means is that Satan is on the losing end today!

Terror Signifies a Losing Cause

Oh such a pitiful battle is Satan waging.

Shortly after September 11, 2001, I had a conversation with a person who had studied warfare. He made this bold statement: "Terrorism is the last-ditch attempts of a failed effort. Its adherents are unable to fight a conventional battle because they are weak, helpless, or afraid. So they resort to terrorism in the hopes of swaying the public opinion of the victorious people."

This is the tactic of Satan today. He knows he has been crushed by the cross and the empty tomb. And the devil is left to fight a losing battle of terror ****and**** redistribution. He can make no more gain than God allows. And in every apparent gain, there is the undeniable testimony of the power and glory of God. And the only anticipation that Satan can have is that with every so-called "victory," God is setting the stage for the vindication of Christ!

Brothers and sisters let us not fear. Rather let us rejoice for our God reigneth!

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About the Preacher

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