

“Sending God Away”
1 Samuel 6
(Preached at Trinity, July 31, 2016)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The Philistines defeated the Israelite army with a decisive victory. **Verse 10 of Chap. 4** says, “and the slaughter was very great.” Over 30,000 Israelites lost their lives and the Ark of the Covenant was captured. The Philistines must have been beside themselves in celebration. They knew the Hebrew God was a mighty God, and yet they were able to defeat Him. They proudly placed Him subservient before their god, Dagon. This terrible act of blasphemy kindled God’s fiery wrath.
2. The next morning they entered the temple of Dagon and found the image of Dagon bowing prostrate before the Ark. They began to sense all was not well. But their reaction was not to prostrate themselves before God. Instead they stood Dagon back up. There is something terribly deficient in a god when man needs to raise him up.
3. The following days were terrifying. The statue of Dagon was further defiled with only the torso remaining. And then terrible tumors broke out. This was followed by a terrible confusion among the city leading to death and mayhem.
4. Would they now bow before Yahweh? No, their solution was send the Ark away. They moved the Ark to Gath.
1 Samuel 5:8 NAU - "So they sent and gathered all the lords of the Philistines to them and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" And they said, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath."
5. But that didn’t end the plague in Ashdod and now Gath came under God’s wrath.
1 Samuel 5:9 NAU - "After they had brought it around, the hand of the LORD was against the city with very great confusion; and He smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them."
6. Surely now the Philistines had gotten the message. God was speaking loudly. Surely now they would bow before the Almighty God. But no, their solution was to send Him away. So they moved the Ark to Ekron and the people cried out:
Verse 10 - "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel around to us, to kill us and our people."
Verse 11 - "And the men who did not die were smitten with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven."
7. The Ark had been in their country for seven months. The suffering of the Philistines had been great. God’s wrath continued to burn against their idolatry. Surely they were prepared to before God Almighty. Their cries rose up to heaven. Surely they were prepared to declare Yahweh the one true God.
NO! Instead they made the wretched choice lost humanity makes – send the Ark away. Send God far away.
1 Samuel 6:2 NAU - "And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we shall send it to its place."

8. The Philistines understood they had offended God. But they were not willing to repent and serve Him. Their solution was to offer up an empty religious sacrifice and send Him on His way.
- I. They didn't understand God's right to worship
- A. The primary duty of all mankind is to worship God
1. God's command is basic: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me"
 2. God has no equals. He is independent, self-existent, self-sufficient. He alone is our Creator. He alone is infinite.
 3. God's demand is that He be worshipped in all His majesty and excellence; that all men bow before Him in holy reverence.
 4. We owe Him our love and obedience. This is the sum of the duty of man towards God.
Deuteronomy 6:4-6 NAS - "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart"
Matthew 22:37-38 NAS - "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ "This is the great and foremost commandment."
- B. God is jealous of His worship
 "For I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God"
1. Many in our generation have a problem with this. It makes God seem self-absorbed and insecure.
 2. Indeed, jealousy is a sinful act for a man. It denotes a self-centeredness. It is motivated by resentment and envy.
 3. But God is not a man. He exists in infinite perfection. He is God. He is supreme. When God says He is jealous of His worship He is saying He is jealous of His essential being; of His Divine perfections. He is jealous of His infinite glory.
Isaiah 42:8 NAS - "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images."
 4. To rob God of that which is rightfully His is great wickedness
- C. God has revealed this to all men
1. The natural revelation of creation shines forth the glory of God
Psalm 19:1 NAS - "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands."
Psalm 97:6-7 NAS - "The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples have seen His glory. ⁷ Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, Who boast themselves of idols; Worship Him, all you gods."
Romans 1:20 NAU - "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."
 2. God also reveals Himself though His acts of Providence upon the earth. God is not silent.

3. God revealed Himself clearly to the Philistines
 - a. They should have understood as they found Dagon bowing before God. If this wasn't enough, the severing of Dagon's hands and head should have spoken loudly.
 - b. The plague of tumors upon their land made God's presence unmistakable. And they understood.
And yet, they refused to worship God. Instead they sent Him away
- D. How clearly this speaks to the lost of our generation?
1. Not only do they refuse to worship Him, they actively seek to send Him away. They declare within their heart, "What right does God have to tell me what to do?"
 2. They will not have God in their homes, at their workplace, in our schools. Our media and entertainment have no place for God. Our political process has no place for God.
 3. Their heart is exactly the same as Pharaoh's
Exodus 5:2 NAS - "But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice"
 4. All of this in spite of the fact that God is continuing to speak clearly. We have the advantage of God's Word, His full revelation of Himself and His promise of salvation through the Gospel. But they will not have Him.
- II. They didn't understand the extent of their dependence upon God
- A. God is the source of all life
1. Paul said to the Athenian philosophers:
Acts 17:28 NAS - "for in Him we live and move and exist"
And to the Colossian Church:
Colossians 1:16-17 NAS - "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."
 2. If He lifted His hand of grace for just a moment we would cease to live. The earth has a fragile balance that must be maintained in order to support life. The hydrological cycle or water cycle must continue to supply us with drinking water. The atmosphere must continue to filter out the radiation from the sun. The right balance of air must continue. And the growing seasons must remain constant.
God is the sustainer of all these things.
 3. The Philistines were worshipping Dagon, the grain god, trusting him to give them success in harvest. And yet, he was so impotent, when they found him on his face before Yahweh they had to physically stand him back up.
 4. God demonstrated His almighty power before them and they still trusted Dagon.

- B. God is also the only power to deal with our sin
1. The Philistines did not see the great sin of their idolatry. They didn't see the sinfulness of their hearts when they thought they had captured God.
 2. And they did not see the great wickedness of their heart in sending Him away. And they didn't see the futility of religious works without a heart to obey God.
 3. What can explain such an unreasonable response to God's goodness and His almighty power. The problem rested in their sinful heart. Sin has left humanity with a total blindness to the spiritual realities of life. They have no ability to rightly turn to God. They cannot comprehend Him. Sending God away was the natural response of their sinful heart.
 4. This was the same reaction men had to Jesus during His life
Matthew 8:33-34 NAU - "The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. ³⁴ And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region."
John 19:15 NAU - "So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!"
 5. Salvation demands a change of heart that only God can produce
 Our hearts are naturally shut up against God. They are naturally closed to the Gospel
 After Isaiah asks the question, "Who hath believed our message" he proceeds to describe the universal hatred of humanity towards Christ.
Isaiah 53:1-3 NAS - "Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. ³ He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him."
 6. Left to ourselves we will never seek to follow God – we are set against Him. God has to do something supernatural or else we will continue to send Him away.

III. They didn't understand the consequences of sending God away

- A. The Philistines saw their scheme as a great success
1. They first determined to bribe God with their religious offering of gold tumors and gold mice. God doesn't desire offerings of gold as much as hearts of love.
 2. Then they put the Ark on a cart and sent the cows marching.
 But didn't God supernaturally lead the cows away? Yes, but only when the Philistines decided to continue in their idolatry. They had already decided to send Him away.
1 Samuel 6:2 NAU - "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we shall send it to its place."

3. What they failed to see is life without God will never bring peace. God's grand purpose for all men is for them to embrace their Creator and worship Him. Man is at his highest end when he is worshipping and truly enjoying God.
Spurgeon's Catechism:
Question 1: What is the chief end of man?
Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
The Philistines had forsaken the true meaning and joy of life.
- B. Much more serious, the Philistines would continue under the wrath of God.
1. It may not have appeared that way immediately
After sending the Ark away they returned satisfied to continue their lives
1 Samuel 6:16 NAU - "When the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned to Ekron that day."
 2. But God's wrath and judgment often comes slowly and subtly in this life. Like the fall of Dagon in the middle of the night. They didn't know this was a great display of God's condemnation
 3. The Philistines continued under the judgment of God. They woke up each day unaware that judgment was upon them. They were unaffected by God's chastisement and went away unchanged. They were like the wicked men described by Job:
Job 21:14 NAU - "They say to God, 'Depart from us! We do not even desire the knowledge of Your ways.'"
 4. There was a temporal aspect of their doom.
The Philistines lost their independence to the Assyria and were subsequently absorbed by the Babylonian Empire. By the late 5th Century BC they had disappeared as an ethnic group. God destroyed their entire nation.
 5. Most dreadful of all was the eternal consequence of their actions. They sent God away and were done. The Lord's returned to Ekron and forgot about the whole ordeal. They continued to live their lives and died only fall into the torment of Hell's fires.
Hebrews 10:31 NAU - "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."
- C. How this must speak to our generation
1. We have sent God away and continue merrily as if we have successfully defeated God. But God will not be denied His proper honor.
 2. As proud Americans we believe we have a right to the blessings we have enjoyed. We've failed to see that every blessing comes from the hand of God. When we send God away and embrace our idols His wrath will surely be displayed. Our steady decline from our former greatness should speak loudly, but few can see the unmistakable signs of God's displeasure.

Conclusion:

1. What have you done with Christ? Have you lived each day seeking to send Him away far from your life? Or have you placed Him at the very core of your life?
2. The only way of life is Christ.
John 1:4 NAU - "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men."