

The Price of Taking God as a Souvenir

1 Sam. 5-6

(preached 4/8/15; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

Many people have felt what is often described as “buyer’s remorse.”

The internet describes it as “the sense of regret after having made a purchase.”

“It is often associated with the purchase of an expensive item like a car or house, but it is often common with less expensive items as well.”

Supposed it is related to fear, guilt, or shame.

Now, there’s no need to talk about it too much but most people have a little experience with it.

We make a purchase, but then we get it home, it doesn’t feel the same.

Most of the time we look at our account balance after the purchase and we wonder if it was a good idea.

Sometimes, it is the reaction of others to our purchase that causes us to question whether we made a good decision.

Other times, we simply realize that we just didn't need what we bought.

We had another one; we just simply realize that we were caught up in the adrenaline of making a purchase.

And then there are a couple of options...

Option 1 is we can return the purchase for a refund, if that is even possible...

Option 2 is to tough it out through the remorse and move on..

Tonight, we are going to see something like buyer's remorse in 1 Samuel...

Only its not buyer's remorse, but more like winner's remorse...

If you remember from last week, the Philistines defeated Israel twice in battle.

And after the second defeat, they took the ark of the covenant with them back to their land.

Then almost as soon as the ark gets there, the Philistines try to return it.

They seem to have buyer's remorse, but why?

Well, we will find out why in chapters 5 and 6 tonight...

I've entitled this message....

The Price of Taking God as a Souvenir

Last week, we saw the danger of trying to see God as a good luck charm....

Israel thought that if they confined God to the box of the ark and carried him into battle that they would be assured of victory.

Wrong.

And they paid a price for doing that.

It cost them 1000s of lives on the battlefield, along with the death of Eli the priest and His sons.

Well tonight, the Philistines are going to treat God like a souvenir and take the ark back to their land.

But seeing God as a souvenir is also going to come at a high price.

We are going to be ambitious tonight and try to get through 2 chapters....

And these two chapters, -chapters 5 and 6, are going to be opportunities for God to teach us more about..

Himself as he goes to Philistia and then back to Israel...

Let's look at the first 5 verses of chapter 5 as we see how....

I. God Proves His Superiority (5:1-5)

5 Now the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.² Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon

Now to get our minds back on track...

The big idea of the opening chapters of 1 Samuel is the plan of God to bring good leadership to Israel.

The people have disobeyed, but so has the leadership.

God is working out his plan to install Samuel over Israel.

The first 3 chapters were all about Samuel...

His birth, his childhood, and his job at the tabernacle even at such a young age...

But we took a detour in chapter 4 to look at how God is going to clear the way for Samuel's to assume the leadership of the nation...

First, Eli and his sons must be removed from their roles as priests at the tabernacle...

And we saw that in chapter 4, but we also have another problem to solve as well...

Because in the process of removing Eli and his sons from power, God allowed the defeat of Israel and the capture of the ark of the covenant.

We talked about the ark a little bit last week...

The ark was a box overlaid with gold as it was a symbol of God's presence with Israel...

The picture on the outline is a drawing of what it looked like...

Inside the ark was the 10 Commandments...

Above the ark was the mercy seat, where blood was offered once a year to cover the sins of Israel.

The ark went before Israel as they travelled.

It represented God's presence with the nation, but it had been taken by the Philistines in chapter 4...

And now, it needed to come back to Israel before we can move on with the story of Samuel...

And so, we set out to see how this happened in chapters 5 & 6..

The first thing we notice is what the Philistines did with the ark when they brought it back...

The brought it to Ashdod to the house of Dagon...

Now, the town is Ashdod, which is a coastal city about 30 miles west of Jerusalem.

Here is a map of the area...

You can see Ashdod there..

And then they place the ark before their false god,
Dagon.

Here is a picture of Dagon.

He was half man and half fish.

That shouldn't be a surprise, as the Philistines were
a sea-faring people.

So, they place the ark before the statue of Dagon.

Why would they do this?

It was their way of saying that the God of Israel was
inferior to their god...

This is the trophy room of the Philistines.

This is the shrine to Dagon.

Let's see how this goes..

Verse 3...

³ When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord.

Overnight while the people slept, God had caused
Dagon to fall down before the ark.

And then it what may be the greatest lesson in this
chapter, we read....

So they took Dagon and set him in his place again.

I will simply say this...

What kind of god is a god who needs his people to pick him up and set him back where he goes?

What kind of god is that?

Well, he isn't any kind of god at all...

He is simply a piece of wood or rock or metal...

But anyway, the Philistines set him back upright and then it gets worse..

Verse 4..

⁴ But when they arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on 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 on the threshold; ^[a]only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. ⁵ Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

This time, Dagon falls before the ark and breaks into pieces...

His head falls off...

His hands falls off...

Here is a picture of what someone thinks it may have looked like....

Here is a clear picture given to the Philistines of the supremacy of the LORD.

IT is also a clear picture to us of the supremacy of God.

God can remove any gods that you put above him just as easily.

He is not a God that will be placed in a position lower than He deserves.

He will not bow to an idols that we may place above Him.

Yes, he is a patient God.

But do not mistake patience for powerlessness.

God can get your attention when you attempt to worship anything or anyone more than Him.

He is a jealous God that will not let idolatry go unpunished.

And here even in the land of the Philistines, God is shown to be superior to all man made gods and images.

How do the people of Ashdod react to this powerful act of God...

Look at verses 6-7...

As we see how.....

II. God Delivers His Judgment (5:6-6:12)

⁶ Now the hand of the Lord was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories.

⁷ When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god."

Couple things to take note of here...

First, God judgment doesn't end with his destruction of their idol...

His judgment also extends to the people of the land...

The people are stricken with tumors, and so the people of Ashdod say...

We need to get rid of this ark.

The ones who carried the ark into the land in their own hands...

Have now come under the hand of judgment in their city.

We are going to see in a few verses that mice also played a part in this judgment of God...

Many people think that these tumors were the result of a plague that swept the land that was carried by rodents...

Similar to the bubonic plague that struck Europe, killing over 25 million people in the Middle Ages..

One of the symptoms of the plague is the swelling of the lymph nodes and other parts of the body that look like tumors..

Regardless of what these tumors were, it was surely a judgment of God on the people of Ashdod.

But second, notice how the people refer to Dagon here...

“Dagon our hand”

You would think that this would be enough for them to see that Dagon was no god at all...

He is now in pieces and he is powerless to save them from these tumors...

Yet instead of turning to trust in the true God, they simply keep Dagon as “their god” and simply look to get rid of God..

That is really a good picture of the unbelievers dilemma..

To see the power of God puts you at a crossroad...

Either repent and trust in the Lord..

Or hold on to your life and simply send God packing...

The Ashdodites choose to send the ark of out their midst....

And so we go on this journey with the ark throughout the land of the Philistines..

Verse 8...

⁸ 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." And they brought the ark of the God of Israel around. ⁹ 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.

Stop # 2 is the city of Gath...

The ark is taken to another Philistine city, -the city of Gath..

You can look at our map here...

Gath would have been about 15 miles east of Ashdod...

Yet, when the ark arrives in Gath, there is another outbreak of tumors there...

Now, we get to stop #3 in verse 10...

¹⁰ So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And as the ark of God came to Ekron the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the

God of Israel around to ^[b]us, to kill ^[c]us and ^[d]our people.”

This time the ark is heads to Ekron, and the chamber of commerce meets the mon the outskirts of town..

The reputation of the ark has spread throughout the land, and the people of Ekron don't want it...

It is like the fight over where to bury toxic waste or to build the next maximum security prison...

Nobody wants either of those in their backyard or neighborhood...

And nobody in the land of the Philistines wants the ark of the covenant in their town...

And so in verse 11, they finally decide it may be a good idea to send the ark back to where it came from...

¹¹ They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, “Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, so that it will not kill ^[e]us and ^[f]our people.” For there was a deadly confusion throughout the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. ¹² And the men who did not die were smitten with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

The only problem is how do we get it back to Israel?

Who is going to volunteer to pick it up and carry it back?

Well, no one wants that job either...

If the mere presence of the ark causes tumors in the land, I'm sure no one was interested in touching it.

My brother in law works as a radiation exposure specialist at a nuclear plant in Seneca SC..

The stories he tells of the procedures that they use to prevent radiation exposure are incredible...

Gloves, hats, footies, suits are all disposed of daily and buried so many feet in the ground after use..

It is incredible what they do to protect people from the reactor core...

That is the place inside the reactor that produces all the energy for the people and the power to light your house...

And the core is a place that could lead to immediate death if you stand near it without protection...

Though you would experience no pain initially, it would kill you fairly quickly...

That is the closest analogy of what it would be like to be near the ark of God...

And so when it comes to the job of carrying the ark back to Israel, no one is volunteering..

So, in chapter 6, the Philistines turn to their magicians for a solution...

1 Samuel 6:1...

6 Now the ark of the Lord had been in the ^[a]country of the Philistines seven months. ² And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, "What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us ^[b]how we shall send it to its place." ³ They said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but you shall surely return to Him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you." ⁴ Then they said, "What shall be the guilt offering which we shall return to Him?" And they said, "Five golden tumors and five golden mice according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one plague was on all of ^[c]you and on your lords. ⁵ So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods, and your land. ⁶ Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had severely dealt with them, did they not allow ^[d]the people to go, and they departed?

The priests and diviners come up with a plan..

Make golden mice and tumors and send them back to Israel with the ark as a sort of guilt offering to God...

Regardless of their false religion, they understood the idea of sin against God and the concept of guilt before him...

So, their plan is almost in place...

Send back the ark with golden mice and tumors...

That is almost hilarious...

Whose tumor would you use to build a golden model?

Anyway, that was the advice of the priests and diviners...

So, that is what they did...

Now, they just simply need to transport it back to the land...

And so, we get the instruction of how to do that in the next set of verses...

But before we look at that, notice what the priest told them in verse 6....

Don't harden your hearts and refuse to return the ark...

Even the Egyptians eventually let go of Israel and eventually sent them away...

The Philistines were aware of what happened in Egypt...

Plagues, boils, frogs....

And now that the Lord had sent judgment on them...

Tumors and mice...

It is time to come to your senses and send the ark of the land...

So, how were they supposed to get it out of their land...

Verse 7...

⁷ Now therefore, take and prepare a new cart and two milch cows on which there has never been a yoke; and hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves home, away from them. ⁸ Take the ark of the Lord and place it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you return to Him as a guilt offering in a box by its side. Then send it away that it may go. ⁹ Watch, if it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we will know that it was not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance."

I will admit that I am a city boy.

Though I grew up in a small town, I haven't learned the ways of farm life...

One time, a friend and I were going to fish a farm pond...

We had to drive through some fields of cows to get there and then walk through the cows to get to the pond...

We went to get the fence key from the man who owned the cows...

And all he told us was...

Have a good time, don't litter and don't walk between a mama cow and her babies...

We asked why.

He gave a big grin....

And said "Just because."

So, even a city boy knows not to separate a mama cow from her calves...

Yet, that is the plan that the diviners and priests came up with to return the ark to Israel...

Get two milch, which means two cows with little calves...

Take those cows that have never been hitched to anything and hitch them to a cart..

Then take their little calves back home...

Place the ark of the Lord on their cart and send them in the direction opposite of where their calves go...

Looking back at our map...

The cows would be facing the direction of Beth-Shemesh..

While the calves would be taken in an opposite direction...

Then let the mama cows alone.

If they go in the direction opposite of their calves, you will know that it is a supernatural event of God...

And if God is the one who can send mama cows away from their calves...

He is also the One who send tumors upon the land...

If the cows turn home to their calves, it was just a coincidence that the tumors came while the ark was in their possession...

So, everything is ready and then verse 10..

¹⁰ Then the men did so, and took two milch cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. ¹¹ They put the ark of the Lord on the cart, and the box with the golden mice and the likenesses of their tumors. ¹² And the cows took the straight way in the ^[e]direction of Beth-shemesh; they went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. And the lords of the Philistines followed them to the border of Beth-shemesh.

Clearly, God's hand was upon those cows that day.

He led them to do something they had never done...

They pulled a cart...

But he also caused them to do something that they would not want to do...

They left their young calves behind to do it...

Now before we leave the land of the Philistines, I want us to think about the people who watched this happen..

Not only had they seen their false god Dagon's statue supernaturally fall before the ark...

Not only did they see widespread disease in every town where the ark went...

Now, they have also witnessed God make two cows do something almost impossible...

Tow a cart and leave behind their young'uns...

Yet notice that none of the Philistines leave behind their life to follow the true God of the universe.

They return to land of disease and a broken helpless god.

Further proof, that God must move in the heart to believe....

What did Jesus say in Luke 16:31?

³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Once again, we see the power of unbelief...

Even in the face of incredible miracles, the Philistines just walk to the border and then turn back to their land..

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink...

God has graciously revealed Himself to the Philistines even if it involved some pain and suffering...

But the Philistines have closed their eyes, ears and hearts...

And so we move to judgment of the Philistines, now to some judgment of Israel...

As we are going to see how.....

III. God Protects His Holiness (6:13-21)

Verse 13...

¹³ Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, and they raised their eyes and saw the ark and were glad to see it.

¹⁴ The cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite and stood there where there was a large stone; and they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord.

¹⁵ The Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the box that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone; and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices that day to the Lord. ¹⁶ When the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned to Ekron that day.

The Israelites have been taught of the sacredness of the ark.

And they immediately offer sacrifices to God on its return to the land.

The cart became the source of the fire that was used to burn the cows that carried it...

The ark was taken down carefully and the golden tumors and mice were also removed...

In verse 15, it just so happened that the ark came into the hands of some Levites..

They were the priests for Israel and they only ones allowed to handle the ark of the covenant.

So, the ark is back in the land and the Philistines head back home....

And even the tumors and the mice were kept by the priests...

Verse 17....

¹⁷ These are the golden tumors which the Philistines returned for a guilt offering to the Lord: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron; ¹⁸ and the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fortified cities and of country villages. The large ¹⁹stone on which they set the ark of the Lord is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite.

Five golden tumors were offered as representing the 5 major cities of Philistia....

Even the mice and the stone on which the ark rested were saved...

But then we run into a problem beginning in verse 19...

¹⁹ He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck down of all the people, 50,070 men, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter. ²⁰ The men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to

whom shall He go up from us?”²¹ So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, “The Philistines have brought back the ark of the Lord; come down and take it up to you.”

The point of these verses is very clear....

God’s holiness does not discriminate..

Both the Philistines and now the Israelites have experienced the judgment of God for improper treatment of the ark.

God does not give His people a break when it comes to His holiness....

He is a Holy God for both the believer and the unbeliever...

Yes, we are reconciled to God if we are Christian...

God’s wrath is no longer on us because of our sin...

We are now children of God in the truest sense...

God is no longer our enemy but our friend...

But don’t mistake that a personal relationship with God as knowing everything about him.

Yes, God is merciful and you can talk to Him, and you should talk to Him...

But HE is also a Holy God...

We call him Abba Father, but we tremble while we do it.

God's people need to be careful that we don't lose sight of His holiness.

I remember in 4th grade, a close friend of our family came to substitute at our school.

I had been around her at family gatherings and knew her and her family well...

So I made the mistake of trying to get away with talking...

And boy was that a mistake.

She didn't let me get away with it at all, and I lost recess as a result.

I think being familiar with her would make her less likely to punish me.

And I was very wrong.

Israel may have had that same thought.

The ark is back home.

We can treat it however we want to treat it now.

But boy they were wrong...

And there needs to always be a healthy respect for God's holiness among his people.

I cringe when I hear Christians make Jesus out to be a pal or a buddy..

Or to call God simply "the man upstairs.."

Or to show disrespect to Him in other ways...

Fear of God doesn't go away at salvation...

The fear of having to pay sin's payment is gone, but my fear of God still survives...

And so God disciplines Israel here in these verses...

Now, there is an issue here that I will address briefly..

IF you have more questions, we can talk later...

But some of your Bible may say that God killed 70 people instead of 50,070 men in verse 19...

The NASB and the KJV say 50,070, but the NIV, the NLT and the ESV all say 70 here.

Why?

Well, the short answer is this...

The traditional Hebrew text reads seventy men, fifty thousand men and so some translations make it 50,700....

That would be true for my translation and the KJV...

However, in some copies of the the Hebrew text, the words "fifty thousand men" is missing..

And on top of that, since it was not likely that Beth Shemesh could not have had that many people, some translations simply read 70 men...

Personally, I believe it probably was the smaller number in the original text...

But if you like the 50,700, we are still friends...

Either way, the point is the same, God judges some Israelites for their irreverence for the ark here...

And the lesson is clear.

God is holy and the ark that represents him is holy and will be treated as such...

Or judgment will fall on the people regardless of whether they are God's people or not....

Conclusion

To wrap up these chapters, I would say this...

Chapter 4, 5 and 6 have been the a detour of sorts...

God is preparing Samuel in the background of these chapters....

He preparing him personally...

He is preparing a way for him to lead now that Eli and his sons are gone.....

But God is also preparing the nation as well..

The nation of Israel needs revival...

The need to repentance of their sinfulness...

They need to leave the leadership of evil priests and they need to be led by a righteous man....

And a great catalyst of revival is to be reminded of the holiness of God...

People change when they consider the holiness of God.

And God has used these chapters, (4,5,6) as a reminder to the people that He is a holy God...

And that they need to recognize his holiness and respond to it...

The same can be said of all of us..

God is holy.

Yes, we are reconciled to Him through the blood of Jesus Christ.

But may we never lose sight of God's holiness and may that holiness of God drive us to a personal holiness as well..

Let us pray.