

Sermon Feb. 26, 2023 – Who Won?

Scripture: 1 Samuel 5:1-5 Responsive Reading: Psalm 68: 1-3,19-20,32-35

Introduction

How many of you believe we are living in what's popularly called "The End Times"? It's a fairly widespread belief among Christians. Certainly many of the signs listed in Matthew 24-25 and in Isaiah have been witnessed in our current day: wars, plagues, famines, earthquakes and floods have all occurred with disturbing frequency. Many people are in a state of confusion about what's truth and what isn't, so they turn to science, seeking objective truth and finding a morass of theories and half-truths woven to obscure God's touch. Satan has finally succeeded in undermining the Judeo-Christian ethics that are the foundation necessary for a free society in which all citizens are created equal. The Christian work ethic is being replaced by redistribution of your earnings for the sake of equity. Meanwhile the majority of their students cannot read or do math at grade level. I learned last week from the Christian Post that the Wash.DC schools are changing their social studies curricula. In 3rd grade they will teach children about alternative family structures and the gay lifestyle, while 8th graders will be taught about racism & class structures in Western society and the 10th graders will be taught the value of social activism to advance equity. Education has been co-opted by woke indoctrination. Surely Satan has upped the ante, knowing his time is short. And because of all the depressing news, many Christians are fearful. Even though Satan is a defeated foe, they are wringing their hands, closing ranks against the infidels, and praying that the Rapture will come before it gets too much worse. Take courage. Take heart from the message in our scripture reading!

When times get tough, God is about to show up and show off. Consider the Philistines here in 1 Samuel. They've had many battles with the Israelites, and far too often the Israelites had been victorious, even when they were grossly outnumbered - because their fearsome God was with them. Lately however, Israel has been losing, gradually ceding territory to the Philistines, who were fierce warriors. In the most recent clash, the Israelites had carried the Ark of the Covenant with them into battle in a last ditch effort to turn their fortunes around. As you know, the Ark of the Covenant contained the stone tablets on which the 10 Commandments were written as well as the staff Moses used to work miracles in the wilderness. It was Israel's most holy possession. It was the glory of God in a box. To the amazement of everyone, even the Philistines, the priests carrying the box were killed and the Ark was captured and brought to the Philistine city of Ashdod to be displayed in the temple of Dagon with the other spoils of war. All Israel went into mourning. What would happen to the ark? What would happen to Israel? Those were the wrong questions!! What should they be asking?? How are the Philistines going to survive an encounter with the one true God??

The Fall of Dagon

As we heard, it didn't go well. Dagon was the Philistines' god of the sea and god of grain. He was reputed to be the father of Baal. The Philistines were thanking him for their victory by placing the most valuable trophies of war before him. So it was hard for them to explain the fact that when they entered the temple early the next morning, Dagon was lying flat on his face, before the Ark of the Lord. You can picture that posture – the same position used to indicate reverence for God, or honor to a

king, total submission. But they couldn't accept the obvious message that God was sending. They ascribed Dagon's fall to other possible causes – earth tremor, whatever. Many people today are like those Philistines. They won't acknowledge the authority of God. They won't humble themselves before Him or bow down in His sovereign presence. They worship at other altars, bowing to money or science or public opinion, and discounting God as a factor in their affairs. So the second time God humbled Dagon, he broke off his head and his hands, and prostrated his torso before the ark. Well you can see the symbolism there, can't you? The torso houses the heart, the wellspring of your soul, which in its inner sanctum recognizes the presence of something more powerful than you, some force greater than man. The broken head, casting aside the intellect, our feeble reasoning that tries to rationalize God away with various humanistic theories and philosophies, which reject the concept of a higher authority, and the hands, which carry out the orders of the head, which do evil when ruled by anyone other than God. Even in "captivity" the ark was more powerful than any false god. The power of God cannot be locked down or subjugated by anyone or anything. The ark was the manifest presence of God. Dagon was utterly defeated.

What does YOUR Dagon look like?

Never doubt that God is able to conquer YOUR Dagon, your illness, your depression, your addiction, your financial problem, your family problem, your fear and your phobias. These are the weapons Satan uses to try and take you out of the fight. If he can take you out now, you won't become a threat in the future; but God cannot be intimidated and neither should you be. The Philistines thought that capturing Israel's 'God in a box' was the secret to defeating them, but when the devil declares victory, watch God show up!

2 Timothy tells us God has not given you a spirit of fear. God is able to do more than we can imagine, and he has given YOU this power through the Holy Spirit when you accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

The Power of God in You!

In Matthew 9:28 a blind man has asked Jesus to heal him, and Jesus asked him, "Do you believe I can do this?" He's asking YOU the same thing, Do you believe, REALLY believe, Jesus can cure you, break your addiction, rout your depression and so on? If you believe it, declare it! Don't ask Jesus to heal you, then two hours later sit over coffee complaining about your fear of dying from cancer. Guard your heart, guard your thoughts! Satan will send you his demon of fear to shake you down, to shake your belief. Put on that helmet of salvation to protect your mind and the breastplate of righteousness to guard your heart. Immerse yourself in scripture and declare God's power and glory every morning until the worship soaks into your soul. Romans 8:36 says, in all tribulations, we are more than conquerors. Jesus won the victory. He is God IN us. Don't try it on your own. We cannot do this without God. We cannot have victory over the darkness in today's world without the manifest glory of God working in us and for us. Trust in Romans 12:21 which tells us, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." YOU carry the glory of the living God within you. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit you can tap into this power to change YOUR life and the lives of those around you. When times get tough, spend more time praising God, cuddling up to Jesus. Worship connects you and amplifies the presence of the Holy Spirit

Toppling the Idols in your life

YOU carry God's anointing. It's a powerful protection so don't jeopardize it with foolish living. Habakkuk 2:4 says, "The righteous one will live by faith". It means doing what you know God wants YOU to do and trusting in Him to do what he promised and what only He can do. Habakkuk then goes on to warn those who act dishonestly, shed innocent blood, or put their faith in idols, saying, " you will be filled with disgrace instead of glory." Check that you have not set up ANYthing in your life that is equal to or above God in your thoughts or in your heart. Whether it's money, power, status, family, pride, or possessions, you have to be willing to set it aside if God asks you to. To tap into the manifest power of God, you have to live by God's standards. When you want God's anointing, you acknowledge that HE is the source of every blessing in your life. You consult God before you try to solve ANY problem in your own strength. As proven with the demonstration in Dagon's temple, God will NOT settle for second place!! Neither will He leave a believer without resources.

Living in Victory

Watching the news can make us feel like the Philistines have captured the Ark, but remember God's glory cannot be extinguished. When life looks the darkest is when you can expect God to show up! Be firm in declaring it, day in & day out, forcefully and with conviction. "I don't hope, I don't feel, I don't think, I KNOW God will show up! He always keeps his promises, and He has promised never to leave us or forsake us! He will break all opposition into little pieces that I can then sweep out of my life!

So, yes, we seem to be in the last days, with people abandoning sound reasoning and perverting natural desires, But hold the Phone! There is one more sign of the End that has to play out before you can count on Jesus to beam you up. In Joel 2:28 and In Acts 2:17 "God said, in the last days I will pour out my spirit on all flesh..." indicating a worldwide revival that will take place among people of all ages, races and nationalities. We may be seeing part of this at Asbury University in KY, where students have been in the chapel worshipping and praising God for many consecutive days The world watches as the Holy Spirit draws new converts, healing people and responding to seekers from all over the country. 1 Chronicles 16:24 tells us to "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!" Dagon's going to come down! This world is your battlefield. You are a powerful child of the almighty God; every prejudice, every doubt, every fear, every selfish thought, every sinful desire will fall before the manifest glory of the Lord as you praise His name and declare his promises over your life, every day and every hour.

Joel 2:32 provides a clear reassurance for those who live in the turbulence of the last days: "I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth;... Then everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved." Glory be to God! And God's people said, AMEN.