

GARY'S BIRTHDAY

INTRODUCE

Well, good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here.

If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to 1 Samuel chapter 4. 1 Samuel 4. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to 1 Samuel 4.

INTRODUCTION: BOX

I told you last year, but when my daughter was four, I was gonna take her to Target to buy a toy.

- She had received \$20 from grandma for Christmas,
- and so, she had some cash she could spend on a Lego
- or a princess dress or something.

So, I talked to her that morning, and I'm like,

- *"Alright sweetie,*
- *what do you want to spend your money on?*
- *What toy do you want to buy?"*
- And I'm just praying that I don't have to talk her off the edge
- of wanting a \$100 life-sized Frozen doll or something.

But without wavering, she said, *"I want a box."*

You see, we had just moved houses,

- And I bought some boxes from Home Depot,
- and she took one and colored on it,
- and made it into a car,
- and then a house,
- and then a fort,
- and when it got too broken down
- to fix with duct tape anymore,
- I threw it out.

So, I say to her,

- *“You want a box?”*
 - *“Yes, I want a box.”*
- *“You don't want a Lego?”*
 - *“No, I want a box.”*
- *“You don't want a princess dress?”*
 - *“No, I want a box.”*
- *“You don't even want that \$100 dollar Frozen doll?”*
 - *“No, I want a box.”*

So, I bought her a \$2 box...and pocketed the rest of the cash.

CONTEXT

Now listen, a box can be fun. Alright, we had some fun with that box, but how many of you know that a box pales in comparison to what comes inside a box.

So, I'm calling this sermon **SLIDE GET OUT OF THE BOX**

Cause today, we're gonna start talking about a box. Ok?

- 1 Samuel chapter 4 begins a lengthy sequence
- that we'll be in for the next 4 weeks,
- known to scholars as the "ark narrative."

And having started this book with the birth, growth, and call of Samuel,

- Israel's new prophet,
- he now disappears from the story for a few chapters
- as the writer focuses in on the story of the ark.

So, let's dig in: 1 Samuel 4:1

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1 SAMUEL 4:1

[1] And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek.

EXPLAIN: THE PHILISTINES

Now, the Philistines are likely a familiar people to you if you've spent any time in your Old Testament, especially due to the famous Goliath.

- The Philistines first show up in the Bible in the book of Judges,
- and by Samuel's time,
- they are the main force of threat to Israel.

1 SAMUEL 4:2

[2] The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle.

EXPLAIN: BAROMETER

Now, here's a little trick I learned in Seminary:

- the Philistines were the scourge of God's people
- and we can look at the relationship
- between Israel and the Philistines
- as something of a barometer
- for how God's people were doing
- in their relationship with the Lord.

If they had the upper-hand over the Philistines, that was a sign that they were walking faithfully with the Lord.

But if they were defeated, the Bible portrays it as a sign of divine rebuke.

Now, here comes an example of this. Verse 3:

1 SAMUEL 4:3a

[3] And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?"

EXPLAIN: CORRECT

Now, the elders of Israel are correct in their assertion when they say,

“Why has the Lord defeated us today?”

- They correctly link the battle being lost,
- not due to the Philistines,
- but due to the Lord.

You see,

- under the terms of the Old Covenant,
- Israel’s success or failure in battle
- was a direct sign of God’s favor or displeasure with them.

Because...

- their success or failure
- would be a direct result
- of their obedience to God.

So, Israel correctly recognizes that God is the active agent in their militaristic defeat...

- But instead of considering where they had been disobedient...
- they quickly move to the wrong conclusion of what to do next.

Look at the rest of verse 3:

1 SAMUEL 4:3b-4

Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.” [4] So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of

the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

EXPLAIN: THE ARK

- Instead of reflecting on where they'd been disobedient,
- and repenting of their sin.
- Instead...they devise a plan of their own making.
- They decide to bring the ark of the covenant from Shiloh.

Now, let's talk about the ark of the covenant for a minute.

- The ark was a box of wood, covered in gold,
- in which the stone tablets of the 10 commandments were kept.
 - And the ark represented the presence of God,
 - and all his glory.

Now, the ark of the covenant has widespread popular intrigue as something of a religious talisman to access divine power or magic.

Take this example: **SLIDE VIDEO CLIP BLANK SLIDE**

Man, I've been on a bit of an 80s kick the last few weeks!

So, the elders of Israel think: *we get the ark...we get the victory!*

And, there is precedence for this move.

- Perhaps they remembered how central the ark had been at the Jordan river-stopping in Joshua 3 & 4.
- Or at the destruction of Jericho
 - when all they had to do was strike up the band
 - and march the ark around
 - and the walls came a' tumbling down.

POINT 1: MANUPULATED

But here is my first point:

SLIDE GOD WILL NOT BE MANIPULATED

Don't you see the thinking of the elders of Israel?

- I think the assumption is:
 - *"If we bring the ark to battle,*
 - *God will have to deliver us.*
 - *The only reason we didn't win the first time,*
 - *is cause we didn't have the box."*

This is what is proposed to us in Indiana Jones.

- I think this is why they don't reflect and repent,
- but instead, go back to Shiloh, grab the ark,
- and also bring Hophni and Phinehas, the sketchy priests,
- to back up their decision.
- To have God's box is to have God's power.

But they need to GET OUT OF THE BOX!

This is not faith, but superstition.

Commentator Dale Ralph Davis puts it like this:

- *"When we operate this way,*
- *our concern is not to seek God,*
 - *but to control him.*
- *Not to submit to him,*
 - *but to use him.*
- *So, we prefer religious magic to spiritual holiness;*
- *we are interested in success, not repentance."*

Instead of dealing with the nation's disobedience in following God's ways, they try to manipulate the situation and get God to do their bidding.

But listen to me: GOD WILL NOT BE MANIPULATED.

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APPLICATION: IT

And the key, for me, is in verse 3. **Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord...that IT may come and save us.**

- *“Go get the ark so that IT might save us.”*
- They were trusting in IT...the ark...the box.

Let me ask you:

- is there an IT that you're trusting in the place of God?
- Is there an IT...
- is there a thing...
- that you are relying on...
- so that you won't have to deal with God?

Oh church, these ITs come in many shapes and sizes.

A discipline can be an IT. And I'm all about the disciplines.

- But are you trusting in your Bible reading
- or prayer life
- or fasting
- or church attendance?

You can trust in the IT

- of your baptism,
- or your family heritage,
- or your church membership.

You are desirous of God blessing you in whatever way:

- maybe it's a better marriage,
- or a better business,
- or better-behaved kids,
- or even just a clearer conscience.

But you are avoiding a confrontation with the God who demands that you be changed completely into his likeness.

- You want what God can DO FOR YOU...
- but you don't want the mess of dealing with GOD.

You see, we are never saved by an IT...by a thing...not even good things!

We are never saved by an IT...we are only saved by HIM.

TRANSITION

Oh church, this is a relevant passage.

GOD WILL NOT BE MANIPULATED.

On to the result: verse 5.

1 SAMUEL 4:5-9

[5] As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. [6] And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does

this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?” And when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, [7] the Philistines were afraid, for they said, “A god has come into the camp.” And they said, “Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. [8] Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. [9] Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight.”

EXPLAIN: RESPONSE

Now, the Philistines had heard of the ark.

- In verse 8 they mention the story of the Exodus...
- when the God of the Israelites sent plagues on Egypt!

So, they're worried!

- They know of this God.
- They know of his reputation.
- They are afraid.
- This God of Israel has a good reputation as a deliverer...
- so, they undoubtedly enter this battle with some trepidations.

What happens? Verse 10:

1 SAMUEL 4:10-11

[10] So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty

thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. [11] And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

EXPLAIN: RESULTS

Well, the ploy of the elders of Israel did not go as planned.

- Not only were they defeated in battle...AGAIN.
- But the very priests who they brought to help were killed,
- and worst of all,
- the ark of God was captured by Israel's greatest enemy.

And did you notice the numbers?

- Back in verse 2 the number defeated was 4,000 men.
- But this time 30,000 soldiers of Israel are slaughtered.

All the fear...all the trepidation...all the stories...all the respect that the Philistines must have had for the God of Israel were now shattered.

- And as we'll see in a couple more weeks,
- they have lost all reverence and respect for this God.

POINT 2: SHAME

GOD WILL NOT BE MANIPUTLATED...but it goes even further, and it's my next point:

- **SLIDE GOD WILL SUFFER SHAME**
- **rather than allow you to carry on a false relationship with him.**

Oh, church...

- in our hope that an IT will save us,
- we put our very witness at risk!

ILLUSTRATION: HEALTH & WEALTH

You may have heard the story of a prosperity Gospel preacher

- who preached the message
- that if you just have enough faith,
- you will be blessed with health and wealth...
- you will be cured of your ailments...
- if you just have enough faith...
- and of course, make a generous donation to his ministry.

But that same preacher, when his wife comes down with stage 4 cancer...

- he not only has to reckon with his theology...
- but also with the fact that he
 - not only made a fool of himself...
 - but of God as well.
- People are not only offended by his actions...
- but they mock his God as well.

ILLUSTRATION

And it's not just in that circumstance.

- It's when you are a Christian,
 - and you treat your coworker poorly...
- It's when you are a Christian,
 - and you drink too much with your neighbors...
- It's when you are a Christian...
 - and you cut that guy off in traffic....
 - maybe with a Fathom sticker on your car...don't do that!

You are putting God to shame in those moments!

But often, GOD WILL SUFFER SHAME rather than allow you to carry on a false relationship with him.

We've gotta GET OUT OF THE BOX.

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QUESTION: STILL?

Now, let me make a final point by asking a question:

- Does God still do this?
- Does God still work this way?

Because this seems like a very Old Testament thing for God to do...

- But we are under the New Covenant.
- We've got Jesus.
- We're saved by grace.
- So, does God really do this kind of thing anymore?
- Does God still judge his people like this?

Well, in some ways, no...but in some ways, yes.

EXPLAIN: SINS COVERED

So, the New Testament teaches us that for followers of Jesus, the punishment for sin has already been dealt out.

- If you are in Christ,
- your sins IS covered.
- Your sins HAVE been pardoned,
- because of the work of Jesus on the cross.

Now, if you are not a Christian...that is not true for you.

- To quote the Apostle Paul,
- **You are still in your sins.**
- And to you I'd say, today is the day!
 - Repent of your sins,
 - trust in Christ,
 - be made right with him,
 - and you too can have your sins covered.

But, Christian, your sins have been judged. You have been made right with God!

EXPLAIN: DISCIPLINE

So, in THAT way, it's a little different.

But in another way, yes, God still does work like this.

- You see, the New Testament also teaches
- that there is a present judgment for those who are in Christ.
 - You see, at the cross,
 - Jesus saves us from hell,
 - from eternal separation from God,
 - but we still sin,
 - and there are still consequences for our sin,
 - AND God still judges us as we sin.

We saw that last year in 1 Corinthians 11

SLIDE 1 CORINTHIANS 11:32

[32] But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

God presently judges us by disciplining us.

And to whom does God discipline? Look at Hebrews 12:5-7:

SLIDE HEBREWS 12:5-6

[5] And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

[6] For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives."

POINT 3: DISCIPLINE

GOD WILL NOT BE MANIPULATED.

GOD WILL SUFFER SHAME.

And my final point:

- **SLIDE GOD WILL DISCIPLINE YOU**
- if it will awaken you to the sort of God he really is.
 - God will allow for,
 - and even at times, provide you with
 - storms in your life to WAKE YOU UP!

GOD WILL DISCIPLINE YOU.

ILLUSTRATION: STORM

The storm illustration came to mind as I wrote this week. And the thing that came to mind was a hurricane.

SLIDE So, here's a picture of Hurricane Harvey from 2017 as taken from the International Space Station. Is that not a horrifying image?

- It was a category 4 storm.

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And the reason a hurricane like Harvey can do so much damage is that during its peak, a hurricane can have winds around its edge that sustain at 150-175 miles-per-hour.

Now, that's kinda hard for us to get our heads around. 175 miles-per-hour. Just to give you a mental image of that.

- Imagine you're leaving here today,
- and you jump into your Prius,
- and when you hit 470
- you get that stealth little thing up to 90 miles-per-hour.

Now, don't do that...ok? Get pulled over, "My pastor told me to..." NO!

But just imagine if you were going 90.

- And as you hit 90 in the Prius
- that thing is just gonna start shaking a bit, right?
 - I mean, it can handle it...
 - but it's gonna be kinda sketchy.
 - You'd be aware that you're going pretty fast.

Well, double that...and stick your head out the window.

That's a hurricane!

APPLICATION

And I don't know about you,

- but my experience,
- and the testimony of the scriptures,
- is that when God disciplines me...
 - his way, most often...
 - isn't to save me FROM the storm...
 - but to deliver me THROUGH the storm.

God's way, most often,

- isn't like a helicopter dad,
 - just [chick-chick-chick-chick]
 - plucking people out of storms...
- most often he does not save us FROM the storm,
- but he delivers us THROUGH the storm.

That's been my experience with Jesus thus far:

When I'm in whatever storm...

- I raise my hand for help...
 - and listen, it's not like I'm in some awesome place
 - of trust and courage in that moment all like,
 - "I believe that God is able
 - and we are more than conquerors..."
- NO! It's usually like, "help!!"
 - That's usually my prayer.

- But I raise my hand,
 - *“Father, help me!*
 - *This wind is just beating the snot out of me.”*

And it’s like my heavenly father, more often than not,

- takes me by the hand and says,
- *“I love you, my son.”*

And then, he doesn't lift me out of the storm...

- but drags me through it.

And I'm like, *“I can't see.”*

And he’s like, *“Yeah, I know. That’s part of it.”*

And I’m like, *“Father, some of this isn’t even my fault!”*

And he’s like, *“I know...I’m with you.”*

And I’m like, *“Why, Lord? Why don’t you save me FROM this?”*

And he’s like, *“No, I’m going to deliver you THROUGH this.”*

APPLICATION

Maybe the reason God allows for us to face these storms,

- is that he wants to blow away every part of our lives
- that don't look like Jesus...so that he's all we have left.

Maybe the reason he allows for us to go through the storms

- is because we go in with bondage in our life...
- we are bound up...
- and it’s only by the winds of the storm
- that those bindings can be loosened and blown away.

I mean, I don't know about you, but when do you learn the most?

- When everything's going awesome?
- Or when you're so desperate for God
- that if he doesn't show up
- then you know that you're done for?

Oh, this still happens church.

- GOD WILL DISCIPLINE YOU.
- To GET you OUT OF THE BOX.

CONCLUSION

So, this is a warning passage, church. But I want to note one more thing:

- did you notice in verse 11
- that it clearly said that the two sons of Eli,
- Hophni and Phinehas, died.
- This is a direct fulfillment of what God said he was going to do.

Back in chapter 2, verse 34 God said, **And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day.**

This is surely a sign that God is behind this.

- No, GOD WILL NOT BE MANIPULATED...
 - but even in Israel's attempt to use God...
 - his purposes are fulfilled.

- Yes, GOD WILL SUFFER SHAME
 - rather than allow you to carry on
 - a false relationship with him.
 - But in his perceived shame,
 - he is establishing his word.
- And yes, GOD WILL DISCIPLINE YOU...
 - but it is always with a purpose of
 - awakening you to the sort of God he really is.

APPLICATION

So, where does this hit for you?

- Are you trying to get the blessing of God
 - without submitting to him?
- Are you trying to coerce or manipulate God
 - with your religiosity or behavior?

Now, you'd never say that out loud...

- but just between you and your motives right now...
- do you really want God?
- Or do you just want what he can give you?

The call is to repent.

To turn away from this.

This is a warning passage, church...to GET OUT OF THE BOX.

Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

[6] For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives."

Let's pray. **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES USED:

- Davis, Dale Ralph. 1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart.
- Davis, Dale Ralph. *Smashing Your Images*.
- Phillips, Richard. *Power Religion*.
- Tsumura, David Toshio. The First Book of Samuel.