

WHY THE ARK WON'T WORK

TEXT: 1 Samuel 4:1-11

THESIS: To show reasons for the loss of God's power on a person or church.

INTRO.: A. The Ark of the Covenant was symbolic of the presence and power of God. (Much like the Holy Spirit today in believers and the Church.) In this O.T. account, Israel loses the Ark of God, and also the blessing & power of God. What went wrong?

B. Israel had lost 4000 men in a battle (v.2). Their remedy? Move the Ark from the Tabernacle & take it into battle with them (v.3a).

C. Besides moving the Ark, they were trusting in the Ark (v.3a), instead of the Lord. (Superstition is no substitute for power [v.5-8]). The result? The Ark is captured, Israel flees in defeat & humiliation, there was a great slaughter of many lives, Hophni & Phineas are killed, Eli dies. (v.17.18) What went wrong? The power & blessing of God departed Israel (v.19-22). As they say on the evening news, *"those are the headlines, here is the story..."*

TRANS.: Today we want to examine reasons **"WHY THE ARK WON'T WORK..."** (We no longer have the Ark of God, but we DO have the Spirit of God indwelling us...)

I. BECAUSE OF SIN IN THE CAMP: 3:13

A. Eli Failed To Deal With His Son's Sins:

1. No doubt the fact that Israel was trusting in the Ark instead of the God of the Ark brought about their failure in part.
2. But as usual there are underlying causes for the removal of God's power & blessing, and sin is always the reason.

- a. In this case, the failure of the leadership, caused the elders to be carnal & they in turn caused the people to fail. 4:3,4a (chain of command)
- b. Eli was charged with the spiritual oversight of his people – when he failed, they failed.

B. We Need To Deal With Our Sins:

ILLUS.: We have the mentality that if we do certain things, God will wink at our sin. "Well, I am a teacher, bus worker, musician, asst. pastor, deacon, preacher...so God understands my sin." NO HE DOESN'T! Somebody says, "I am a soul-winner, so God understands my sin." Soul-winners must stay clean just like everyone else. ***Your Christian service does not excuse your sin.***

I heard a preacher tell about a man who was a good soul-winner in his church, but his wife walked around with a bad spirit all the time. Finally one day she went to the preacher & said: "I hate to tell you this preacher, but my husband has been beating me." This man had over 100 on his bus regularly, but he was a low-down, dirty, sorry wife-beater! And GOD DOESN'T UNDERSTAND!

Could it be that the reason there is no power & no blessing in your life, in your ministry, or in this church, is because there is unconfessed, unjudged sin in your life?! We need to deal with our sins!

II. BECAUSE OF A LACK OF FAITHFULNESS: 2:27 -32

A. Eli Failed in Faithfulness:

1. A prophet came to remind Eli of the responsibilities of the priesthood.
2. He said his primary responsibility was to be faithful to the Lord, and not put anything or anyone above Him. V.29
 - a. Eli placed his sons above the Lord.
 - b. Eli placed his personal comfort and desires above the Lord.

ILLUS.: Note in v.29 the emphasis on his physical stature ("fat"), and also again in 4:18, where it says he was not only ***"an old man"*** but also ***"heavy."*** This man liked to eat & his weakness led to a lack of faithfulness and untrustworthiness to the work of the Lord.

3. He prophesied that because of his failure to be faithful, Israel would suffer. v.31,32

B. We Must Not Fail To Be Faithful:

ILLUS.: Jim Vinyard said that the one thing we can give God today that He will bless is our faithfulness. We need a resurrection of faithfulness in this church! Faithfulness in Sunday School, in the services, on the bus routes, in soul-winning, in giving! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all your might. If you are going to work on buses, do your best (Mr. Ferguson). If you are going to clean, do your best. If you are going to sing, do your best. If you are going to play, do your best (Jon Guy). If you are going to lead the choir, do your best. If you are going to usher, do your best. If you are going to give, do your best (all).

1. Eli failed to discipline his sons, instead he just lightly rebuked them.
2. Eli judged the nation for 40 years, but he wasn't faithful to the task God had assigned him, beginning at home.

ILLUS.: Eli should have wailed the tails of his 2 sinful sons! He should have made them do right. If Eli had disciplined them, God would not have had to kill them. If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged! Don't let things slide till God has to handle the problem. Bring your sins to the altar in old-fashioned repentance & confession and enjoy God's forgiveness and restoration! Don't wait till it's too late.

III. BECAUSE OF IGNORING HIS WORD: Ex. 40:36-38

A. Eli & the Elders Ignored God's Word:

NOTE: Over the Ark was the Shekinah glory, or visible presence of the Lord, which moved when God wanted the Ark moved. This presumptuous act of moving the Ark w/out God's presence indicating a move would prove disastrous.

1. Eli knew better, the elders knew better, the people knew better.
2. God held them all accountable for ignoring His plain commands in His Word.

ILLUS.: Our problem is not that we don't understand the Scripture, it is that we don't obey the Scripture.

B. We Must Not Ignore the Word of God:

1. We do so at great peril to ourselves, our family and our church.
2. We do so at great cost to ourselves, our family and our church.
 - a. We can't rob God & expect God to bless us financially.
 - b. We can't expect God's blessings if we don't pay our bills.
 - c. We can't expect Him to save souls through us if we don't obey Him.
 - d. We can't expect God to bless our home if we don't have a devotional life.
 - e. We can't expect God to answer our prayers if we neglect His Word.

Proverbs 28:9 *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.*

IV. BECAUSE OF LOST COMMITMENT: 2:35,36

A. Eli Lost His Heart for God:

ILLUS.: No doubt when Eli was young, & before he had children or when they were small, he had a great commitment to the Lord & His work. After all, he was the High Priest! He was surely zealous, ambitious, faithful, and a blessing to the people. But because he refused to discipline his sons, he was no longer the example to the people, and in pleasing his sons (who were not even believers!), he no longer pleased the One he was called to serve. His lost heart caused him to lose everything else dear to him & dear to God.

1. Familiarity breeds contempt.
 - a. Perhaps Eli just became "used to" the blessings of God.
 - b. Maybe Eli just lost the excitement of serving the Lord.

ILLUS.: No doubt when he first entered the Holy Place dressed in his high priestly garments of "lights and perfections" and when he first ascended the stairs to the top of the brazen altar & offered there the first lamb, he was filled with excitement & anticipation. But the novelty wore off; the excitement diminished. Along came his new sons, Hophni & Phineas and his old enthusiasm returned, but in the wrong direction.

There is nothing wrong with enjoying the blessings of God as long as they don't replace your fellowship with God! There is nothing wrong with enjoying the gifts of God as long as they don't replace the Giver.

B. We Must Not Lose Our Heart for God:

1. The excitement of salvation & sins forgiven must stay w/us throughout our life.
2. The joy of our salvation must be a constant source of rejoicing to us.
3. The commitment we made when God saved us & set us apart must never be abated.

CONCL.: God's blessing & power was manifest in the presence of the Ark in the O.T. His blessing & power is manifest in the presence of the Holy Spirit in the N.T. It is what we want & need, but **"THE ARK WON'T WORK" ... BECAUSE OF SIN IN OUR LIVES (we must deal with our sins), BECAUSE OF A LACK OF FAITHFULNESS (we must not fail to be faithful), BECAUSE WE IGNORE HIS WORD (we must not ignore the Word of God) or BECAUSE WE LOSE OUR COMMITMENT (we must not lose our heart for God and His work). Don't let it happen to YOU!**

