

ICHABOD

The Glory is Departed—1Samuel 4.19-20

Theme: When the glory has departed from the people of God, the people of God need to repent and return!

“Ichabod”: (1Sam 4.19-20) It was the name given to the child of Phinehas, one of the priests, one of Eli's sons.

- The name was given to this child on a very momentous day. It was a day that God's people suffered utter defeat and death at the hand of their enemies, the Philistines.
- (1Sam 4.1-2) All Israel went to the battle against the Philistines, and they were *smitten* by their enemies.
- (1Sam 4.10-11) Israel suffered utter defeat before the Philistines...
 - ✓ They fled and died.
 - ✓ The ark of God was taken by the Philistines.
 - ✓ The priests (the two sons of Eli) were killed.
- (1Sam 4.12-18) When the news of the defeat reached the priest Eli, it caused his death, also.

(1Sam 4.19-20) It was in this context that the son of the slain priest, Phinehas, was named “Ichabod.”

- The name means “the glory is departed.”
- Israel, God's people, were left alone... hollow, empty, no glory... *no presence of God* in their midst; no power, no victory.

My question is this: How in the world did God's people get into this mess?

- God turned His people over to the world for judgment.
- His people still existed. They were still “there” in the land. They could still go through the motions of their religion as God's people. But God was not with them: *the glory had departed*.
- They were alone, left to their own devices, *defeated* by their enemies.
- ***How did we get here... to “Ichabod”?*** And more more importantly... ***How do we fix it?***

Let's take a step back and see some of the people, events, and decisions that let up to this child named Ichabod...

I. God's People Failed to Follow God and God Only (the story of Hannah)

A. The story of Ichabod begins with the story of Hannah in 1Samuel 1 and 2.

1. (1Sam 1.1-3) Hannah was the wife of Elkanah and they were dutifully faithful in “going to church.”
 - a) Every year they made the pilgrimage to worship in Shiloh.
 - b) Like us: Every Sunday we dutifully gather in our churches to “worship.”
2. (1Sam 1.9-11) Hannah, however, wants more. She longs for a child (fruit!) and prays for him.
 - a) This is a good thing.
 - b) Her desire is good (she wants children, like us wanting spiritual children).
 - c) Her response to her desire is good (she goes to God in prayer).

B. (1Sam 9.11b) But here's the problem (and don't miss this!)

1. Hannah has *good* intentions: "I will give him unto the LORD..."
 - a) (Num 6.1-8) God, in His Word, made provision for this type of voluntary dedication and sanctification to His service: The Nazarite Vow.
 - b) So, Hannah has good intentions and good ideas (even biblical ideas).
2. **But**, her *action* (what she *does*; her *execution*) is *not* good, *not* biblical, and *not* right.
 - a) (1Sam 1.19-20) God answers her prayer (and everything is good up to here).
 - b) (1Sam 1.21-22) WRONG! "...and there abide for ever."
 - WHAT?! Where did she get that idea? Was that something in the Nazarite vow? Was that something in Scripture? NO!
 - c) (1Sam 1.23) Elkanah knows where the idea came from: "...Do what seemeth thee good..."
 - (1) Remember that in 1Samuel we are still reading about the time of the Judges.
 - (2) What's the key verse that captures the key problem in the Book of Judges?

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was **right in his own eyes**. [Jud 21.25]
 - (3) That's exactly what Hannah did: that which was right in her own eyes. ***Welcome to the modern church and today's Christianity!***
 - d) (1Sam 1.24-28) She takes her just weened child (two years old? younger?) and *leaves* him *alone* to be raised by the priests!
 - (1) Question: Where is *that* in Scripture?
 - (2) Answer: It's not!
 - (3) It just seemed like the right thing to do to Hannah. So, rather than following what the Scripture said (parents: train up your own children in the way they should go! etc.), she makes it up as she goes along!
 - (4) Hannah, like so many "dedicated" Christians today, has just enough Bible to want to do good.
 - (5) But, like our "dedicated" Christians today, she has *no commitment* or *submission to* the final authority of God's Word.
 - (6) So, she comes up with good ideas (dedicate her son to the Lord) but when it comes to the execution of that idea (actually *doing* something), it's "*whatever*" (whatever she thinks is the right thing to do).
 - e) (1Sam 2.11, 19) She dumps off her just weened child with a man she barely knows and visits her child once a year. (And, yes, she wins the "Parent of the Year" award...)

C. Hannah is a picture for us of "dedicated Christians" today.

1. They have good intentions. They have a desire for God. They have a little bit of the Bible.
2. But they *serve God* according to that which is right in their own eyes rather than following Scripture (Scripture alone! Scripture only!).
3. I think this happens, in part, because "there is no king in Israel"..
 - a) There is no established authority (final authority).
 - b) So few pastors will actually lead their people with final authority and so their congregations lack that solid leadership behind a clear direction.

4. But I think, too, this happens simply because people today want to “do church” the way *they* want to do church rather than looking to the *Bible* and the *Bible only* to define how we “execute” the biblical desires we have.
5. I think the Bible is clear and simple on many aspects of our mission...
 - a) The Bible tells us clearly *what* God wants us to do: be and make disciples.
 - b) The Bible tells us clearly *how* God wants that done and *by whom*.
 - c) And yet... we execute this mission *according to our own desires* rather than simply allowing the Bible to define our ministries and our actions.
 - d) If the Bible is the final authority, then it's the final authority. Period.
 - e) If we say we're “Bible believers,” then let's believe Bible! Let's *do* what it *says*, and not what seemeth right to us in our own eyes...

D. Hannah shows us our first step toward “Ichabod”: God's people in general have failed to follow God and God only!

II. God's Leaders Failed (the story of Eli and his sons)

A. (1Sam 1.9 cf. 1.3) Eli is the priest and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are priests under him.

1. We could say (using the picture and type) that Eli is the “senior pastor,” the older generation.
2. And his sons are the “associate pastors,” the new generation of young leaders being “raised up” by Eli (the older generation).

B. Eli: Let's talk about Eli first...

1. (1Sam 2.12) Eli is different than his sons: God draws a distinction between Eli and his sons.
 - a) His sons knew not the Lord. Eli apparently did know the Lord.
 - b) And this highlights the *failure* we see in Eli (in the older generation)...
2. The generation that *had* the Word of God (the knowledge of God; Eli) *failed* to follow God and God only (do you see a recurring theme here?).
 - a) (1Sam 2.27) This failure is made uncomfortably clear when God sends Eli a messenger...
 - (1) Just as a side note: Look at the first words out of the “man of God's” mouth: “Thus saith the Lord...!” ***What else would a “man of God” say?!***
 - (2) Whether the people *want* to hear it or not... Whether their feelings will be hurt or not... Whether they get all upset or not... The *man of God* will always say, “*Thus saith the Lord...!*” Because that's all that matters.
 - b) (1Sam 2.27-34, esp. vv29-30) God charges Eli with two specific sins:
 - (1) ***Eli despised God by not taking God and His Word seriously.***
 - (a) (v29) “Wherefore *kick ye at* my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I commanded...”
 - (b) (v30) “...they that *despise me* shall be lightly esteemed.”
 - (2) ***Eli honored men above God***—men who wanted to serve themselves and their own desires.
 - (a) (v29) “...honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people...”
 - (b) (v30) “...them that honour me I will honour...” (but Eli did *not*).

For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and ***he restrained them not.***
[1Sam 3.13]

3. In churches today we see existing leadership (the older generation) *continually* despising God and His Word with their man-made, carnal, worldly programs and services.
 - a) These leaders, like Eli, honor the next generation of leaders who are *worse than they are*.
 - b) They overlook gross sin. They overlook gross character flaws.
 - c) They turn a blind eye to sin and just sweep it under the carpet hoping it will just go away...
 - d) They honor these new leaders (ministers, pastors, missionaries) in the name of “ministry.”
 - (1) These are the new leaders of the new generation that will carry on the work...
 - (2) And yet... in Eli's sons we see just what kind of leaders we have in the new generation...

C. Hophni and Phinehas: The New Generation of Leaders

1. (1Sam 2.12) They don't know God (the God of the Bible!).
2. (1Sam 2.13-14) They're selfish and self-serving (they take what they want from God's people).
 - a) Ministry is no longer something sacred. It's now a career path.
 - b) If you want to go into ministry, you go to seminary and get a “professional” degree (just like others to go a university to be a professional in any other area).
 - c) You get your degree and send out resumes to places you might want to work.
 - d) You take a youth pastor job (because that's entry-level ministry). You do your two years or so, and then you start looking for a small congregation and “trade up.”
 - e) After you pastor that small congregation and you have a bit more content in your resume, you can really start looking for that successful job in a big church of 500-plus.
 - f) It's selfish. It's self-serving. It's pathetic. It's powerless. And it's offensive.
3. (1Sam 2.15) The new generation of ministers today are their own authority. Who cares what God would have for them... “*he will not have sodden flesh...*” He'll have it his way!
4. (1Sam 2.16) They end up controlling their congregation “...*by force...*” rather than leading their congregations by example (and a clear, biblical vision of where God wants His people to go).

D. The Result: (1Sam 2.17) Don't miss this!

1. God's people hated “going to church.” It's a drag! It's drudgery! It's “duty” rather than a joy!
2. God lays the blame at the feet of *carnal leadership*.
 - a) Eli, the old generation, failed to follow God and God only. And because of that he was not a godly leader and therefore could not reproduce godly leadership.
 - b) Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were the result of Eli's failure: lost, self-serving leaders.
 - c) And who suffered the most? God's people.

III. God's Desire is Clear (the story of Samuel)

A. Here is what God wants amidst all this apostasy...

1. Here's what God wants for His people who had the truth in God's Word but chose to reject that truth for what seemed right in their own eyes.
2. The older generation simply does not care to invest the time and effort into raising up the next generation *right*...
 - a) They don't want to call sin sin. They don't want to deal with it.
 - b) Rather, they just sweep the sins of the new generation under the carpet and say, “Let's just forget about it for the sake of the work... for the sake of the ministry...”
 - c) Sweep your filth under the carpet and you may not see it... but the stink won't ever go away!

3. The new generation of leaders is carnal, worldly, and self-serving. “Ministry” is just a job for them and they'll make sure they get the most out of it for themselves!
4. The people of God have good intentions (like Hannah) but they *fail* in putting those intentions into practice because they want to do “their way.”
5. And so the vast majority who “go to worship” hate doing so.
 - a) The current leadership... The status quo... They just find the whole mess irritating.
 - b) They “abhor the offering of the Lord” (they hate going to church).
6. Okay... so... What's God want in the middle of all this mess?

B. (1Sam 2.35) God wants *one* man—one *faithful* man.

1. ONE: Just one! One will do!

And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. [Ezeq 22.30]
2. FAITHFUL: One man who will simply *do what* God wants him to do *how* God wants him to do it.
3. Samuel is that man that God raised up in these times of apostasy...

C. Samuel is Different

1. (1Sam 3.1-3) Samuel lived in a time much like ours...
 - a) (1Sam 3.1) There is a famine in the land, a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. [Amos 8.11]
 - b) (1Sam 3.2-3) Current leadership is sorely lacking...
 - (1) We see Eli “laid down”: he's *lazy* (like so many of God's leaders today).
 - (2) We see Eli's “eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see”: he's *blind* (like so many of God's leaders today: they lack a solid, clear, biblical vision of where God wants His people to be!).
 - (3) We see that the “lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord”: Eli is *negligent* in his duties as God's chosen leader of His people.
 - c) (1Sam 3.4) Samuel is the faithful man God raised up in these times of apostasy.
2. Understand This: (1Sam 2.35 cf. 3.4) God did as He said he would!
 - a) Even in times of apostasy, you *can* find men who are faithful to God and His Word! YOU CAN!
 - God Himself raises them up! They may be *few*, but they are *there*!
 - b) But you can be sure of this: These faithful men whom God raises up during times of apostasy, they *will be different*.
 - (1) They are *not* like the other leaders. They are *not* part of the status quo. They *rock the boat*.
 - (2) There is one thing that will set them apart from all the mess: **(1Sam 3.19-4.1) The Word of God**.
 - (a) (1Sam 3.19) These men (these faithful leaders), like Samuel, will take Scripture *seriously* in their own personal lives (down to the very *words*).
 - (b) (1Sam 3.20-4.1a) These men will preach that Word!
 - i) (1Sam 3.20) All Israel *knew* Samuel was a prophet. How did they know that?
 - ii) (1Sam 4.1a) Because prophets *preach*! And Samuel preached to *all Israel*.

- c) Are you tired of the status quo? Are you tired of faithless, blind, negligent, lazy leadership? Are you tired of not hearing from the Lord?
 - (1) Either *be* the faithful man like Samuel (take God's words seriously! study them! know them! do them! and then preach them!).
 - (2) Or *find* the faithful man like Samuel and follow him!
 - (3) But, we're getting ahead of ourselves... First we need ask a question...
 - (a) Where are God's people now that we have this faithful man, Samuel?
 - (b) What are God's people doing?
 - (c) (1Sam 4.1) We got the preacher! We got vision! We got a fresh word! *All Israel* knew Samuel *had* God's Word because he was out among the people *preaching* God's Word.
 - (d) What do God's people do with this new leader, this new leadership...? Nothing.

IV. God's People are Powerless (the story of “it”)

A. (1Sam 4.1-2) God's people are smitten before their enemies.

1. It's like us. We are always fighting against our ever-present enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil.
2. And more often than not we're just not able to gain and keep the victory. We're smitten like Israel.
 - a) We have no victory over the sins that so easily (and so frequently) beset us.
 - b) We have no victory in expanding the Kingdom (in actually accomplishing the work and mission God gave us to do!).
 - c) We just sit and soak in the status quo of a stagnant faith that goes nowhere. We're defeated. We're beaten down. We're controlled by our enemies instead of taking control of them!
3. Key Question: WHY IS THAT?

B. (1Sam 4.3) “IT” is the Problem!

1. “Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us...?”
 - a) First, notice that God's people are just *clueless* about why they're suffering defeat!
 - b) They blame it on God!
 - We do the same thing: “Why doesn't GOD bring revival?”
 - c) Hey! It's not GOD'S fault! REMEMBER???

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes. [Jud 21.25]
2. Here is their problem: “... *IT* may save us...”
 - a) Their hope of salvation and victory is in a THING (“...IT...”) and not in a PERSON (“...HE...”).
 - b) We do the same thing today! Don't kid yourself...
 - (1) “I'll go to church... then I'll be okay with God... then I'll get the victory over my sin...”
 - (2) “I'll get baptized... then I'll be okay with God... then I'll get the victory over my sin...”
 - (3) “If we just had a building (a bigger building, a better building), our church would grow.”
 - (4) “If we just relocated our church to a better, more visible location, we'd see more fruit.”
 - (5) “If we just had better music, drama, more comfortable chairs, a black ceiling and stage lighting... then we'd see victory!”
 - c) Do you think any of those things have anything to do with pleasing God or victory over sin?

3. Gimmicks

- a) When the people of God are not following God (“Him”) they put their hope in gimmicks (“it”).
 - (1) Whatever “it” is (the thing), God's people think “it” will save them and give them the victory they desire.
 - (2) And it could be an “it” that is very important, like the ark of the covenant.
 - (a) I don't know if there would a thing on earth at that time of Samuel that was more holy and more sacred than the ark of the covenant (just ask Uzzah; 2Sam 6.6-7).
 - (b) It might be like so many who follow the Bible (“it,” a thing) without knowing the Person who gave them that Bible (GOD!). What more sacred “thing” on this earth is there outside of the Bible? And yet, it is not God.
 - (3) When God's people have their trust and hope in some thing (“it”) rather than in the Person of God (“Him”), there will never be victory.
- b) (1Sam 4.4) Note this: Gimmicks go hand-in-hand with carnal leaders.
 - (1) Who brings the “it” to God's people? Hophni and Phinehas.
 - (2) Whenever you see a church or a ministry that is all wrapped up in programs; carnal, worldly ideas; things; and stuff... rest assured the leaders are not following God.
 - (3) And whenever you see leaders who are not following God, what can you expect? Gimmicks: programs; carnal, worldly ideas; things; and stuff... (“it” rather than “God”).
 - (4) One brings the other.

C. (1Sam 4.5-7) “It” brings revival among God's people!

1. (v7) So much so that even the Philistines saw it!
2. However, don't make the mistake of equating some emotional response to some new thing to GOD BEING PRESENT.
 - a) This is not revival. Revival is not about you feeling good or being positive about the outcome.
 - b) This is heightened emotion among God's people in apostasy because they have some new gimmick they think is going to bring them victory.
 - c) Does it work...?

D. (1Sam 4.10-11) Israel was SMITTEN: Just like the vast majority of churches today...

1. Smitten by the enemy: the world, the flesh, the devil.
2. Churches today look more like the nations around them (the world) than they do the people of God.
3. Churches today look more like theaters and concert halls than they do godly, separated places of worship.
4. Churches today are organized and run more like Home Depot and Burger King than what God said in the New Testament.
5. God wants a peculiar people! He wants a different kind of people! He wants people who are faithful and zealous in all He wants us to do!

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a **peculiar** people, **zealous** of good works. [Titus 2.14]
6. (v11) But we're defeated.
 - a) The ark of God is taken.
 - b) The leaders of God's people are removed (even Eli; v18).

E. (1Sam 4.19-22) And God pronounces ICHABOD over His people.

1. The glory is departed. God is not there! He left His people to their own devices.
2. Oh, they're still there! Israel is still in the land (churches are abundant in the United States!).
3. But it's all empty ritual and religion. There's no power. There's no victory. The world runs most churches, not God.
4. (v22) Is this how you want to live? Is this how you want to finish your days on this earth?

Conclusion:

(1Sam 7.1-8) There is a way out... There is a way to victory... There is a way to a different life... to victory...

- (v1) God brings the ark back to Israel.
- (v2) And then 20 years pass...!
 - ✓ Twenty years! Twenty years of languishing under the hand and direction of the world! Twenty years!
 - ✓ And the Bible says that “Israel lamented after the Lord”! Yeah, I bet...! Me, too!
 - ✓ So, what needs to be done? How do we fix this situation?
- (v3) Repent and Return!
 1. Put away your idols! Everything that you “worship” that is not God, put it away! Get rid of it!
 2. Prepare your heart unto the Lord! Set your eyes, your affection, and your ambition on God!
 3. Then serve God and serve Him only!
- (v4-6; esp. v6) This requires that you recognize you have sinned against the Lord. It's your fault. Repent!
- (v7-8, esp. v8) And then this requires that you place your faith and trust in HIM, the Person—God (“...he will save us...”).
 - ✓ Not gimmicks. Not programs. Not things. Not “it,” whatever “it” may be.
 - ✓ God will save us. HE will win the victory. It's about HIM, not IT.
- (v9-10) If we will do that (simply that!), then our enemies will be smitten before us. God will save us.

Ichabod has a twin in the New Testament: (Rev 2.1-7) The Church of Ephesus.

- (v5a) God is still in the business of removing candlesticks (writing “Ichabod” over the door of a church).
 - ✓ He leaves churches to their own devices (to the “things” they trust and hope in).
 - ✓ (v1-3) Even “good” churches!
 - ✓ These are the institutionalized churches that just go through the motions of an empty religion.
 - They're there. They're still in the land. They have their buildings and their programs.
 - But they're powerless. They're dead. They're hollow. They're lifeless.
 - God has long since left them to their devices.
 - The glory has departed: Ichabod, the candlestick has been removed out of his place.
- (v5b cf. v4) If you, like Israel, are lamenting after the Lord... if you're tired of the dead, status quo...
 - ✓ Repent and return to the Lord.
 - ✓ Return to your first love: the Person of God.
 - ✓ Know God by learning your Bible and doing what it says.
 - ✓ Reject apostasy... gimmicks... the status quo... the carnal, worldly, self-serving contemporary leadership...
 - ✓ BE a disciple and MAKE disciples. Know God and make Him known!

We need to return to God and that means we need to return to Scripture, and to Scripture alone.

- And then we need to find the man of God who is preaching the words of God and follow him.
- He will be different! But, rest assured, he is there. God has his faithful men even in times of apostasy.
- Be faithful. Be zealous for God. Trust in Him. Hope in Him. ...not “it.” HIM.

Or... stay put in your apathetic indifference... wallowing in the carnal, worldly activities of a powerless, defeated, stagnant, institutionalized “Church-ianity” that God has named...

“ICHABOD”