

Why we run away from God

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Preacher: Robin Silson

[0:00] So this is God's word. After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, but the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord.

His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold. Only his body remained. That is why to this day, neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who entered Dagon's temple at Ashtod step on the threshold.

The Lord's hand was heavy on the people of Ashtod and its vicinity. He brought devastation on them and afflicted them with tumours. When the people of Ashtod saw what was happening, they said, the ark of the God of Israel must not stay here with us because his hand is heavy on us and on Dagon, our God.

So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, what shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? They answered, let the ark of the God of Israel be moved to Gath.

So they moved the ark of the God of Israel. But after they had moved it, the Lord's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumours.

[1:42] So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, they have brought the ark of the God of Israel round to us to kill us and our people.

So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, send the ark of the God of Israel away. Let it go back to its own place or it will kill us and our people.

For death had filled the city with panic. God's hand was very heavy on it. Those who did not die were afflicted with tumours and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

Let me pray. Almighty God, we thank you for your word, the Bible. We just pray, sometimes we come up to passages in your word and they feel quite heavy.

we pray. But we know that every part of your word is for us to build us up, to encourage us, to teach us about yourself and about our own hearts.

[2:46] And so we pray that you'd help us to learn from the truth from this of what you want to teach us about so that we might be built up. So that we might be taught and rebuked and corrected and trained in righteousness.

That we, your servants, might be equipped for every good work. And so we pray that blessing upon us as a people in Jesus' name. Amen. Now I think for anyone who drives, which I think is most of us adults, maybe we've all had that experience.

You have to have had this. When the warning light comes on your dashboard, maybe it's just me, but I don't know where. All the cars I've been in, I've always felt there's far too many warning lights. It's a warning light for every single thing in your car. And I don't know, truth be told, I don't know what any of, what the majority of those symbols actually mean. I just know that when they're on, that I've got to do something about it.

So the thing is, whenever, you kind of don't, I always think you don't really need to know. You just know that when, whatever the symbol means, if it comes on, it means it's wise to check out what it means.

[3:56] I'll get somebody who knows and then get whatever the problem is to be sorted. And for me, I know when they come on, it's kind of, when it flashes on when you're driving, it's kind of irritating when the warning comes on.

Maybe it's perhaps worrying, especially if you're in long distance. You think, what's the problem? Am I going to have to pull into a garage? Like, what's the problem? I hope it's not too serious. I hope it's not going to cost me a lot of money.

But there is one thing that you don't do when the warning light comes on, isn't there? This is what you don't do. Because this could solve the problem of the worrying light. You could, just like, get a bit of tape and cover it up.

Then you don't see the warning light and you don't have to worry because you can't see the warning light anymore. It's all right. Don't worry. Cover it with a bit of tape. That's one way to get rid of the annoying light, isn't it?

Cover it up. And, if when the light comes on, if you, you know, if you start hearing a grinding noise coming from the engine, you know, you could, oh no, grinding noise and the light, the light's covered up and I've got the grinding noise.

[5:01] I should definitely take it somewhere. Well, you could just turn up the radio louder so you don't, can't hear a grinding noise anymore. You could do that. And then, you're not worried because you can't hear a grinding noise, don't have the light.

And then, if smoke starts billowing out of the bonnet, you know, well, I think by that point you probably just realise you actually do have to take it to the garage. You know, you can't really ignore it at that point because you're going to get pulled over.

You have to pay attention at some point. And yeah, silly example. But yeah, it's a story really that kind of sometimes we have lots of warning signs before us from the living God and yet naturally we can ignore the thing that's right in front of us.

today as we look at this story in 1 Samuel 5 we see an entire nation's engine light has come on and we see exactly what they did and how the Philistines react to the engine light from the hand of Almighty God.

What this passage is is really going to show us as we see the Philistines' choices is that actually it's really going to show us sin in a new light, I think. And I hope this kind of in some ways it's good to get like different vocabulary for sin because it helps us think about what's really going on in the midst of it all.

[6:23] And here what I want us to see is that sin is in fact in some senses it is spiritual madness what we see here. It is illogical to do what happened what we see in the Philistines here.

It is spiritual insanity. When tempted when we see when we have a sinful choice before us that is not how we see the choice before us.

It's attractive and tempting and desirable. The opportunity this morning that I hope we grasp is that actually we get a clear understanding of sin and temptation and what it is and in doing so as we see it as kind of illogical actually it will help us to resist it.

if we have a clearer picture of the spiritual madness the kind of insanity of running away from God as we understand that we'll be empowered by grace to stop running and to say no.

Empowered by grace to do that. That is the opportunity this morning. Now to understand kind of this kind of madness of sin I want to start with kind of what is the anchor of this whole passage and the anchor really is the reality of who God is here because you think you can imagine what the the Philistine army you know you can imagine what they're thinking they're carrying the ark of God in triumph they've just beat the Israelites totally wiped the floor with them you can imagine can't you they're off back on their way home songs of victory that accompany the march back to Ashdod the victory comprehensive but more than that you remember this is there was a history to the God of the Bible here you know this was the God who brought plagues on Egypt the God feared across the whole of the ancient world and here the Philistines are you know he's thinking we've got him in our pocket it proves doesn't it it proves to them well at least to them you know our gods our the Philistine gods the ones we worship they trump the God of Israel our gods must be the highest in the land they go to

[8:45] Ashdod they could have gone to other Philistine cities but the city of Ashdod is not a city that is chosen at random the reason they choose that is because for the Philistines Ashdod is the centre of their religious pagan worship because this is more than just a physical conquering for them it is a spiritual victory and the God of the Israelites what they decide to do is that he must be humiliated just like their army have been the biggest insult where do they place the ark of Yahweh the ark of the God of the Bible they place it in the temple of Dagon in essence to show that Dagon is supreme he's the one the ultimate provider for them of finance of survival of grain of agriculture it is Dagon that has wiped the floor with Yahweh they believe and the Lord God cannot sit back at that you look how things develop verse 3 when the people of

Ashdod rose early the next day behold Dagon fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord it's helpful here to know just to get an idea picture how big this Dagon statue was this isn't a small figurine that could have been knocked over in the night by accident it is a statue of a pagan god were designed to be imposing larger than life to convey power it would have been carved from heavy materials and plated with silver or gold often ten feet tall or more these statues could not be moved with human hands you think of the size of that you think of the noise when it crashed to the floor in the middle of the night that heavy weight hitting the deck when the Philistines find this what do they do well they put it back in its place but that's not you know just one old guy finding it and then lifting it up and thinking

I'll lift it up I won't tell anyone so nobody knows it's taking a whole team of men straining and sweating to get this statue back in place but the next morning what do they find the following morning verse 4 following morning when they rose the day after it's already fallen down once behold Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord his head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold only his body remained only the trunk of Dagon was left this time well perhaps they would have known this before but they must know something's amiss definitely now because Dagon is face downwards again but this time I mean it says they've been broken off let's make no mistake he's been decapitated and his hands have been severed in a military battle proof of victory over a nation would be getting to the leader the king in a military battle and cutting off his head in his hands that's what they would do and if you've seen gruesome war movies

I don't have to go any further God isn't just tipping over a statue this is the public execution of an idol that tells everyone Yahweh is the God who conquers Yahweh is the one who reigns supreme he's telling the Philistines you see your God Dagon he has no ears to hear your prayers no eyes to see your suffering and no authority to lead you he has no hands to bribe grain or finance or protection and they land on the threshold you see you see what that means that means every time the priests went in their temple they would have to step over the head and hands of their powerless God and to cap it off the posture he's face down Dagon is in submission prostrate bowing to the true God the living God of the Bible

Yahweh the almighty true Lord God will not be humiliated he won't be put at the feet of something he created a ten foot metal plated piece of stone the glory of God cannot be tamed it cannot be tamed by anyone or anything and that the hand of the Lord is heavy against idols and false paganism it is heavy now we get a picture here this is the reality of what it means for God to reign supreme but in the rest of the passage what we get is the real problem is the Philistines response to all of this and what I mentioned the response is it's the insanity madness of sin they try to push God's heavy hand away look at me verse 6 the Lord's hand was heavy on the people of [14:20] Ashdod and its vicinity brought for devastation and afflicted them the hand of the Lord was heavy terrified afflicted them not only is there you know God decapitated and in the dust but there's afflictions and you see how their response changes with Dagon face down you know it's interesting isn't it that actually they don't care about Dagon there's no real like woe or sorrow about they don't have a relationship with Dagon they don't care actually there's no real concern for this God and there's no change in them initially the reason is that Dagon is important to them because of what they think he gives them not because of who he is as long as they get the harvest as long as they get grain and food and protection you know Dagon's great but when the tumors arrive when the comfort is threatened then they panic verse 7 when the people of

Ashdod saw what was happening they said the ark of the God of Israel must not stay here with us because his hand is heavy on us and on Dagon our God you see the ark is actually the real problem for them the Lord God the living God is not the problem it is them but they blame the ark and they lump Dagon in with them his hardest hand against us and against Dagon in other words if it wasn't for this ark that we brought it would be all alright he has triumphs over their religious centre so what do they do let's get rid of the ark Gath isn't chosen and what we where does it go it goes to the next city goes to Gath well Gath isn't chosen by accident either if

Ashdod was the centre of their religious kind of centre Gath is the military centre it's the centre of Philistine strength it would be the future home of Goliath and maybe they think human strength can overpower the heavy hand of God but human strength fails as well verse 9 we have the heavy hand of the Lord is against the city causes a great panic he afflicts the men of the city both young and old again when humans so we've had religious centre veils military centre veils when that all fails what

do they resort to well it just ends up desperate avoidance they just want to get rid of it now so it goes to Ekron in desperation Ekron is on the outskirts it's a nothing town attempt in panic to push God out the picture and in Ekron it's full on panic mode verse 11 they cry out they're all together why have you sent it here to kill us you know they're crying out they're in great panic the hand of the Lord is very heavy there cries go up to heaven but there's no response from God you see all the way along they keep driving down the same road the warning lights are on but they're taping over the warning light they're afflicted but they avoid it they choose suffering over submitting trying to push God away trying to escape his hand trying to ignore him the nation is breaking down at the road in panic steam's billing out of their spiritual engine panic is in place but they will not submit to the good of the Bible it is madness and they try to avoid the consequences of sin by sinning more it's madness seeing the power of almighty God that all other gods fall down at his feet and that he conquers all other gods and responding to that by running away and sinning more it is madness now we don't worship ten foot gold plated statues but actually neither did they really what do I mean by that well what they worshipped was the comfort and prosperity they thought Dagon gave them our modern idols function in exactly the same way that theirs did you know we don't actually worship Korea's bank accounts reputation health or our children's happiness we don't worship those what we worship is the illusion of control of safety of approval we think they give us and when they are disrupted we panic panic those disruptions those disruptions in our lives when when the things when it doesn't hold out when the bank account isn't what you want it to be when your reputation is lower in somebody else's eyes when your children's happiness is not what you want and you think must fix it must fix it must fix it when those things are disrupted it is a warning light to you the panic is a sign we've covered it up with sticky tape and that our souls are the broken engines that need repairing when we're tempted to push and what do we do we're tempted to push [20 : 21] God away escape him hide we need someone or someone we try to look for something to fix us but actually we just need someone to come and find us look at in this passage you think where is the hope doesn't seem like there's much does it you have to dig deep this this text it demands a cross doesn't it it's not there it demands a cross because hope for us can only come from knowing that Jesus came to take the heavy hand of the Lord on his own shoulders the only hope can come from knowing that Jesus takes the heavy hand of God so that his heavy hand is not on us because everything that happens to the Philistines everything that happens to them becomes a foretaste of the judgment that Jesus receives the heavy hand of the Lord on the Philistines Dagon's hands are cut off the hands of a leader

I've mentioned they represent the power they wield Dagon's hands are cut off but at the cross Jesus' hands are out of action as they're nailed to a cross the hands that used power to touch lepers and bless children are powerless Because God's heavy hand of judgment is on him where we might be tempted to escape his heavy hand by running away Jesus doesn't run away but he takes the full weight of God's crushing heavy hand of condemnation God's glory and power they are on display against Dagon but the bigger display of his glory and power is seen when Christ himself is disfigured at his crucifixion God's heavy hand means that in verse 12 in a state of panic the Philistines cry out it goes up to heaven and nothing happens there is no rescue because they won't turn to the living

God they won't repent that's what happens when Jesus cries out on the cross you expect Jesus to be heard but his cries get the same treatment as the Philistines hear Jesus cries fall on deaf ears and you know the reason they're not heard the reason Jesus cries on the cross are not heard is so that when we call out the almighty God of supreme power and glory will hang on our every word the good news here is not explicit we have to dig deep to find hope but it's there in seeing that what happens to the Philistines happens to Jesus but with greater intensity God's heavy hand of justice pushes Jesus away so that we who naturally run away can be brought near temptation temptation will never lead us this side of heaven but the gospel is the means by which we respond to it differently the good news is news is that Jesus paid for all our sin but not only is it the payment it's the fuel by which we can resist temptation grace pays for sin but empowers you to say no it's the fuel we need to pay the fuel we really need to pay attention to the warning light and to take our broken spiritual engines to him because he will repair us so that we move from spiritual madness of ignoring him to being spiritually sane of going to him so how do we respond well the truth in this passage is that the you know the truth when we look at this the

Philistines don't realise the opportunity that they had they didn't have to run away they didn't have to get him as far away from them as possible there was another option before them there was a logical spiritually rational choice they could make if the god of the bible was more powerful than their god Dagon the logical choice get rid of Dagon kick Dagon in the torch Dagon is nothing more than a piece of wood who can't protect us why are we following Dagon and worshipping him the god of the bible the god of is more powerful they could have said why don't we follow him instead why don't we ask him to have mercy on us because of the insults we've put on him warning lights make you take your car to the garage to get repaired it means something isn't right decapitated statues and afflictions mean that something isn't right if they had run to him instead of run away if they'd fallen down they'd asked him to be their god as well as the god of the israelites there was a way out how the philistines should have responded is how we get to respond we get to respond to temptation to sin how the philistines what they should have said because at the cross because Jesus has loved us because he's put his spirit in us because by faith we're united to him he gives us his spirit that moves our hearts so that we can truly see ourselves as we really are and it's because we have that true picture that the spirit of God equips us to say no to temptation it equips us to turn to the one who repairs our broken spiritual engine on our own we are incapable of fixing ourselves now I know nothing about cars at the best of time mind what's under my spiritual bonnet but when we've made a mess when we've lost our temper raised our voice spoken and kind words to the people we love when we when we've done that and we're embarrassed and we want to run away and hide and pretend we haven't done it in front of others and make like when we keep being tempted to turn to those selfish desires the spirit of

[27 : 39] God at work in us makes it so that we get to come back to the master spiritual mechanic with our broken engine and say forgive me and fix me forgive me and fix me we don't need to escape from God's heavy hand but we get to run to his open arms we don't need to escape from God's heavy hand we get to run to his open arms now I don't know where each of you are at individually today and maybe you've been a Christian for years or maybe it seems like just five minutes now maybe you know each of us a call to pray and turn to good regularly but even though we might do that sometimes we go through stages in life where turning to him and admitting and repenting can feel hard in the season now if that is you today you know you you could right now you could start with a prayer that goes

I'm going to say it and it goes something like this maybe even as I say you might even want to pray it with me and it's a prayer that you can say every day it's three simple words to remember how it goes sorry thank you please this is a prayer feel free to pray along with me as I say it we start with sorry Lord God I'm sorry for running away from you and the madness of my sin thank you Jesus for paying for all of it on the cross please repair my broken heart so that I can say yes to you and no to when I'm tempted if you prayed that maybe afresh today after a long time of running or maybe even for the first time

I just want to encourage you and remind you that Jesus is more than just someone who fixes your broken engine he is and will be forever the most glorious beautiful person in your life and every time you go to him his response to you is always the same his hand will never be heavy his arms will always be open and as you and increasingly as you go to him daily the old dagons in your life in time will melt away in comparison to the beauty of your saviour God's heavy hand of judgment is no longer heavy because Jesus absorbed every ounce the hands of God take a different posture they are open wide ready for you to run to the reality of when we confront our hearts can be difficult to accept but it's good to come to that realisation because it is

God's means of bringing hope and forgiveness and if the warning light today is flashing on your soul why not run back to it let me pray