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The Struggle of the Cross: God's Blessing and the Test of Reality

1 Samuel 4

4:6 When the Philistines heard the sound of the shouting, they said, "What is the reason for the loud shouting in the Hebrew camp? Then it became known that the covenant of Jehovah had been put into camp.

4:10 The Philistines fought with the Israelites . The Israelites were defeated and fled every man to his house . Many were slain, and the Israelite infantry fell 30,000.

4:17 The reply of the report is that the Israelites fled before the Philistines and that many of the people were killed. Your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are also dead, and God's ark of the covenant has been taken captive.

A detailed summary of chapter 4

At that time, the Israelites were at war with the Philistines, and the Israelites were defeated and 4,000 were killed. They returned to the camp and said, "Why have we been defeated? Let us bring the ark of God to us so that God may be with us and deliver us from the hands of our enemies." "

When the Israelites brought the ark of God to battle, the Philistines were terrified when they heard the news. They had heard of God's marvelous works and knew that if God was with the ark of the covenant, the Israelites would be invincible.

They intended to fight to the death and not allow the Israelis to win.

Thus, the Philistines engaged in a fierce battle with the Israelites. The Israelites were defeated, 30,000 soldiers were killed, and the Philistines took the ark of God's covenant captive. In the journey of life, there are those who carry the cross on their backs, hoping that God's blessing will guide them to a bright future. However, we also cannot ignore the fact that carrying the cross does not necessarily mean that God will grant special protection, because the trials of reality can lead us into the abyss and challenge the tenacity of faith.

The cross is a symbol of faith, a manifestation of devotion and patience to God. Sometimes, however, people find that even with the cross, life is still full of difficulties and trials. At such times, faith is pushed to the limit, and people wonder if God really blesses them.

Life's hardships and frustrations can make us question the existence of God and make it more difficult to build faith. Perhaps, while carrying the cross, we need to consider a deeper question: Is faith merely an act of asking God for protection, or should it be more of an inner strength that makes us more resilient in the face of adversity?

The test of reality often comes from various uncertainties in life, which may be economic difficulties, health challenges, interpersonal entanglements, etc. These dilemmas do not get special treatment just because we carry the cross. Rather, it is the time when faith is tested, and we need to face it and decide whether or not to hold fast to it, even when God doesn't seem to respond immediately.

Those who carry the cross may need to find a balance not only in their faith but also in the realities of life's challenges. Faith should be a force that keeps us calm and resilient in the face of adversity, not just a means of craving divine intervention.

Overall, the journey with the cross was a path full of trials. God's blessings may not always be obvious, but the power of faith can help us through life's ups and downs. Therefore, regardless of the difficult situation, we should remain faithful and look for true resilience and light on the path with the cross.

The New Testament of the Bible, 1 Corinthians, verse 18:

"For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who perish, but to us who are saved is the power of God. "

This passage emphasizes that the word of the cross may seem foolish in the eyes of man, but it is the power of God to those who are saved. In other words, the wonder of faith is expressed here, and in God's plan, the cross has a miraculous power that transcends human wisdom.

But the overall picture emphasizes that believers should see the deeper meaning of the cross and find the power of God in it. It is also an expression of looking up to the cross in faith, even in the face of difficulties, to receive God's revelation and strength.

We pray together

Dear Heavenly Father,

We humbly come to You and ask You for Your grace and guidance. We thank You for giving us life and walking with us on our journey. Today, we want You to give us the strength and wisdom to find You from the cross from time to time.

Heavenly Father, we live in a world of challenges and trials. We often feel helpless and lost, but we are convinced that Your love and grace are our solid rock. When we face hardship, please give us the faith that will be found in the revelation of the cross.

Open our hearts to a deep appreciation of the value of sacrifice and love. Help us to be generous and loving to one another in our lives, because You have given us the greatest love on the cross.

Heavenly Father, when we feel lost and frustrated, ask You to trust us in Your plan. Let us understand that Your wisdom is higher than our wisdom, and Your ways are greater than our ways. Give us a strong faith so that we can look to You in the midst of our troubles, knowing that Your plan must be for our good.

Heavenly Father, when we feel hopeless, ask You to let us find true hope on the cross. Let us deeply appreciate the eternal hope that Jesus' resurrection brings to us. In every difficult moment, please give us peace and comfort and know that You are our strength and refuge.

Thank you for hearing our prayers, and we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

1 SAMUEL

CHAPTER 4

1Sa. 4:1 And Samuel's word came to all Israel. Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek.

1Sa. 4:2 The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield.

1Sa. 4:3 When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD's

covenant from Shiloh, so that it [Or he] may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.”

1Sa. 4:4 So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

1Sa. 4:5 When the ark of the LORD’s covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook.

1Sa. 4:6 Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, “What’s all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?” When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp,

1Sa. 4:7 the Philistines were afraid. “A god has come into the camp,” they said. “We’re in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before.

1Sa. 4:8 Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert.

1Sa. 4:9 Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!”

1Sa. 4:10 So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers.

1Sa. 4:11 The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

1Sa. 4:12 That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh, his clothes torn and dust on his head.

1Sa. 4:13 When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry.

1Sa. 4:14 Eli heard the outcry and asked, “What is the meaning of this uproar?” The man hurried over to Eli,

1Sa. 4:15 who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes were set so that he could not see.

1Sa. 4:16 He told Eli, “I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day.” Eli asked, “What happened, my son?”

1Sa. 4:17 The man who brought the news replied, “Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.”

1Sa. 4:18 When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backwards off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led

[Traditionally judged] Israel for forty years.

1Sa. 4:19 His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labour and gave birth, but was overcome by her labour pains.

1Sa. 4:20 As she was dying, the women attending her said, "Don't despair; you have given birth to a son." But she did not respond or pay any attention.

1Sa. 4:21 She named the boy Ichabod, [Ichabod means no glory.] saying, "The glory has departed from Israel" — because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband.

1Sa. 4:22 She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

Chapter 4 begins with the Israelites going to war against the Philistines. They bring the Ark of the Covenant, which represents the presence of God, with them to the battlefield, hoping that it will bring them victory. However, the Philistines defeat them in battle, killing 4,000 Israelites. The Israelites are confused and distraught, and they decide to bring the Ark of the Covenant into the battle in the hopes that it will help them win. When the Philistines see that the Israelites have brought the Ark, they become afraid and fight even harder. The Israelites are once again defeated, and the Philistines capture the Ark and kill Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. When Eli hears the news, he falls over and dies. His daughter-in-law, who was pregnant and about to give birth, hears the news and goes into labor. She gives birth to a son and names him Ichabod, meaning "the glory has departed," because she believes that the Lord has left Israel. Chapter 4 is a tragic chapter in Israel's history, as the Ark of the Covenant is captured and Eli's family is punished for their sins. It also serves as a warning about the dangers of taking God's presence for granted and trying to manipulate his power for our own purposes. The chapter sets the stage for the rise of Samuel as Israel's new prophet and leader, as the nation begins to look for a way to return to the Lord and regain his favor.

Here are some important verses in chapter 4 of the book of 1 Samuel in the Bible:

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." (1 Samuel 4:1)
 2. "When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, 'Why did the Lord bring defeat on us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.'" (1 Samuel 4:3)
 3. "So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell." (1 Samuel 4:10)
- These verses describe the Israelites' defeat at the hands of the Philistines and their decision to bring the ark of the covenant into battle, believing that it would guarantee their victory. However, their actions were based on superstition rather than genuine faith in God, and as a result, they suffered a devastating defeat. The chapter highlights the consequences of treating

God's presence as a good luck charm rather than recognizing the need for genuine repentance and faith in Him. Additionally, it sets the stage for the subsequent chapters, which detail the consequences of the Israelites' disobedience and the rise of Samuel as a prophet and judge.

1 Samuel chapter 4 recounts the events surrounding the Israelites' defeat at the hands of the Philistines and the capture of the Ark of the Covenant. This chapter serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of misplaced faith, presumption, and the consequences of disobedience.

One of the key themes that emerges from this chapter is the importance of genuine devotion and obedience to God. The Israelites, after suffering a defeat in battle against the Philistines, decide to bring the Ark of the Covenant—a symbol of God's presence—into the battle, presuming that it would guarantee victory. However, they approach the situation with a superstitious mindset, treating the Ark as a good luck charm rather than acknowledging the need for true repentance and submission to God's will.

The defeat that follows serves as a reminder that genuine devotion to God goes beyond external rituals and symbols. It requires a sincere heart, a life that aligns with His commands, and a willingness to seek His guidance and wisdom. The chapter challenges us to examine our own faith and ensure that it is grounded in a genuine relationship with God, rather than relying on empty religious practices or outward displays.

Furthermore, 1 Samuel chapter 4 highlights the consequences of disobedience and the danger of presuming upon God's favor. The Israelites assumed that the presence of the Ark would guarantee victory, even though they had not sought God's counsel or addressed the sins in their midst. As a result, they suffered a severe defeat, and the Ark was captured by the Philistines.

This chapter serves as a warning against presuming upon God's grace or taking His presence and favor for granted. It reminds us that obedience and reverence for God's commands are essential components of our relationship with Him. When we ignore His instructions or live in rebellion, we risk experiencing the consequences of our actions. It calls us to examine our own lives and ensure that we are actively pursuing obedience to God's Word and seeking His guidance in all that we do.

Additionally, 1 Samuel chapter 4 teaches us about God's sovereignty and His ability to bring about justice and redemption even in the face of defeat. Despite the capture of the Ark and the apparent triumph of the Philistines, God ultimately reveals His power and authority by afflicting the Philistine cities with plagues. He brings humiliation upon the false gods of the Philistines and restores the Ark to His people in due time.

This chapter encourages us to trust in God's sovereignty and to remember that He is in control, even in the midst of difficult and seemingly hopeless situations. It reminds us that God can use even our failures and defeats to bring about His purposes and to display His glory. It calls us to place our faith and trust in Him, knowing that He is the ultimate victor over all powers and principalities.

In conclusion, 1 Samuel chapter 4 serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of misplaced faith, presumption, and disobedience. It reminds us of the importance of genuine devotion and obedience to God, the consequences of taking His presence for granted, and the assurance of His sovereignty and redemptive power. May we seek to cultivate hearts that are truly devoted to God, rooted in obedience to His Word, and fully reliant on His guidance and grace.