

**MESSAGE - Part 06 - Seeking God's Kingdom - 12/14/25**  
**“When God Is Still King”**

This sermon series is called ***Seeking God's Kingdom***. I got the title from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said, “*seek first His kingdom.*” (Matthew 6:33)

If we're honest, seeking God's kingdom isn't always easy. Whether in ancient Israel or in our world today...

**[SLIDE 1] The biggest danger God's people face is losing sight of God's Kingdom.**

We've already seen in the early chapters of Samuel how God's people were led astray by the influences of the world. Other nations that worshiped real spiritual evils had a huge impact on God's people. And much of Israel had become spiritually numb because they lost their Kingdom-perspective.

**But what about us?**

**[SLIDE 1.1] How does a Kingdom mindset help us view today's world?**

To answer that, we're going to do a few things this morning...

**First**, I want to talk about some questions one of you asked me that has to do with the nation of Israel and how a Kingdom mindset can help us think about what's going on in the world today.

**Second**, we'll see a clear picture of what a kingdom mindset looks like in 1 Samuel 5.

**And lastly**, we'll bring it all home with how our Advent *joy* is amplified through our Kingdom mindset.

So after last week's sermon, I got some questions that I'm sure many of us have wrestled with as we hear about what's been happening in Israel and Palestine.

Their questions were essentially this:

**[SLIDE 2] Is the nation of Israel still God's “chosen” people today?  
 And how does that connect to everything that's happening over there?**

I thought it'd be good to address these now because the heart of these questions really applies to the text we'll be studying today.

### **So, is the nation of Israel still God's people?**

The short answer is: **Not in the same way.**

And as just said, this has to do with our Kingdom mindset.

**[SLIDE 3] Modern Israel is not the covenant community in the same way as Ancient Israel.**

Here's the difference...

The Israel we're reading about in 1 Samuel was a nation, but not the kind of nation we might assume.

They had land, boundaries, a shared identity, and were recognized by the surrounding nations as a distinct people group.

But they had no human king, no capital city, no centralized government, no organized army...

Instead, their life together was ordered around God's laws and God's presence. Their leadership consisted of prophets and priests. They worshiped at the tabernacle. And their entire identity was shaped around the presence and holiness of Yahweh God.

Yahweh God was their King, their lawgiver, their military defender, and their national identity. That's pretty different from today's modern nation-state of Israel.

Today's "Israel" is defined more politically than spiritually. That's why modern Israel is not the same covenant community we see in Scripture. Not because God has abandoned His promises, but because **those promises are now fulfilled and expanded in Christ.**

To be fair, there are different views on this. And so I do want to pause and say something important here...

When we talk about the difference between modern Israel and biblical Israel, this is *not* about antisemitism. Diminishing Jewish people by denying their value is evil and has no place in the Kingdom of God.

God loves the Jewish people. The Gospel came through them. Jesus Himself was Jewish. The question here isn't about ethnicity or even national borders.

**The core of our question today comes down to how Scripture defines belonging to God's covenant family.**

When we look at the whole story of Scripture, we see a consistent truth...

**[SLIDE 4] God's "chosen" people have always been defined by their heart. (ex: Deuteronomy 10:16; 1 Samuel 16:7; Jeremiah 31; Romans 2)**

And today, the people of God are *everyone* who belongs to Jesus. That means the family of God is defined as anyone who puts their believing loyalty in Jesus. This is the beauty of the gospel. It's for *everyone* - not just certain groups of people!

And so, when we look at this from a kingdom perspective, we find that...

**[SLIDE 5] Through Jesus, God's family today is a multi-ethnic Kingdom community. (Isaiah 49:6; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 2:14-18; Galatians 3:26-29; Revelation 5:9-10)**

**But we might look at the war happening over there today and wonder: *How is God involved in this? Do the leaders of Israel have God's approval for everything they're doing today?***

To answer that biblically, we need to have a Kingdom mindset...

**[SLIDE 6] How does God work today? He primarily works through His Church.**

Modern wars don't function the same way as the divinely commanded battles we sometimes see in the Old Testament. Judging from Scripture, God's desire isn't for His people to go to war against other people.

However, we do live in a broken world, and because of that, many have served and sacrificed for their country. And in His sovereignty, God can use those situations to restrain evil.

**But Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that the real battle isn't against flesh and blood. The battle we're called to fight is spiritual.**

God calls His *Church* to push back the powers of darkness in the world. That happens through the Great Commandment: **Love God and love others.**

Again, the Kingdom of God is made up of people from every nation and tribe. Jesus is the King of kings. **His Kingdom doesn't depend on borders or human rulers.** And that's a beautiful thing! Because God breaks through the darkness in this world by calling His people to follow Him.

So if you want to know how God is working in the world today, look at His people. And if you're unsure whether someone is being led by God, look at the fruit of their life. Are they modeling the love Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount?

And maybe more importantly: Are we modeling His love? Because we might not be world leaders, but through Jesus, we are world changers.

But again, it all comes back to our perspective. Are we truly seeking God's Kingdom in *everything*?

And so today's passage confronts us with two questions:

**Whose side is God on? And whose side are we on?**

Scripture shows us that...

**[SLIDE 7] God is not on the side of nations. God is always on the side of His Kingdom. He works through His people all over the world, not just one nation. And we're on His side when our loyalty belongs to Jesus and His Kingdom.<sup>1</sup>**

Our heritage doesn't guarantee God's favor. Again, it's all about our heart. Whether Jew or Gentile, those that belong to God are those that have given their life to Jesus.

**Jesus chose us through the cross. The question now is how we respond. Where will our allegiance lie? In the kingdoms of this world, or the Kingdom of God?**

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<sup>1</sup> **Summary Note:** God's covenant people are defined by allegiance to Jesus. God works through His Kingdom, not nation-states. Ethnicity never guaranteed faithfulness. Salvation has always been by grace through faith.

But as we saw last week, during Samuel's time, most people weren't seeking God's kingdom. They were making up their own rules. They were choosing to follow the kingdoms of the world. And ultimately, their hearts were far from God.

Last week we saw God's glory depart from Israel because they abandoned the way of His Kingdom. But that's not the end of the story!

Today, in 1 Samuel 5, God steps into enemy territory to show that no idol, no nation, no actual force of evil in the unseen realm...

**NOTHING, can stand against Him.**

We'll see that God is not controlled, contained, or claimed by any nation.

Because He is King over *all* people and *all* spiritual powers.

Even when His people lose sight of His Kingdom...

He never stops being King of kings.

Let's look at the first couple verses and talk about what's going on...

**[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 5:1-2 - After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon.**

Right away we're hit with names and places we might be unfamiliar with...

We talked about the Philistines last week. But where is Ebenezer and Ashdod, and who is Dagon?

**[SLIDE 9] MAP Illustration**

Back in the days of 1 Samuel, Israel wasn't yet an organized nation with a well trained and well equipped army. However, their neighbors, the Philistines, were a nation bent on conquest. They were far superior warriors than most of the nations around them, especially Israel.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Although the Philistines once lived in roughly the same coastal region as modern Gaza, they disappeared by around 600 BC. Modern Palestinians, as a national people group, emerged in the late 19th–early 20th centuries. The two groups share a similar name but are historically and ethnically unrelated.

And so last week we saw that Israel went to battle because the Philistines were most likely trying to expand their territory. Israel's army was defeated, their head priests died, and the Philistines took the Ark of God with them.

You can see on the map that they took it from the battle site (called Ebenezer) to a city called Ashdod. The city of Ashdod was well within the Philistine territory (it was along the Mediterranean Sea)...

**[SLIDE 10] Here's a picture of Ashdod Today (ancient and modern)**

So, in ancient Ashdod, there was a temple dedicated to Dagon. Dagon was a high-ranking god that the Philistines adopted when they moved into this territory. In some cultures Dagon was even thought to be more powerful than Baal, the Canaanite storm god.

**[SLIDE 11] Dagon's Temple Image**

And as crazy as this sounds, we have to remember that Dagon was considered a *real* spiritual power... he's not imaginary. When we read about idols in the Bible, the idols themselves are nothing. They're just wood or stone statues.

**However, the spiritual powers they represent are *very real*.**

And so, people believed that Dagon's temple was where he manifested himself. Honestly, that shouldn't be too hard for us to believe because that's like what we see with Yahweh God and His Temple.

**[SLIDE 12] (don't read) 1 Samuel 5:1-2 - After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon.**

**But why would the Philistines put the Ark of the LORD in the Temple of Dagon? Why not just destroy the Ark on the battlefield?**

Well, in the ancient world, battles were seen as battles between gods. People believed that if your nation won a battle, then your god had defeated the other nation's god.

So for the Philistines to take the Ark, this wasn't them saying: *We beat Israel*.  
**In their eyes, this was a victory for Dagon.**

And so, to take the Ark and place it in Dagon's Temple, that was a symbolic way of saying: *"Our god now rules over your god."* In their minds, this was proof that Yahweh God had been defeated.

**But watch what happens next...**

### **[SLIDE 13] Dagon Falls Image**

**1 Samuel 5:3** - When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place.

Think about this moment for a second...

Imagine what the temple workers must have thought when they walked in that morning. They expected everything to be normal... Incense burning, lamps lit, Dagon standing proudly... But instead...

The god they celebrated last night...  
 The god they *thought* defeated Yahweh God...  
 is now lying on the ground in front of the Ark!

**I have to imagine that this is probably something that's *never* happened before! They must have been shocked! The temple would have been secured... the statue itself is super heavy... So how could this happen?**

Maybe they had their reasons to explain it away.  
 Regardless of how they thought it happened, the symbolism was clear:  
 Dagon's image looked like it was bowing in the presence of Yahweh God.

They can't let that go! I imagine them saying, *"You know what, nobody has to know about this. Let's just stand him back up before anyone else comes in!"*

**Problem solved, right? Wrong...**

Watch what happened when they came back the next day...

### **[SLIDE 14] Dagon Destroyed Image**

**1 Samuel 5:4** - 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 might seem weird at first, but do you remember the story of David and Goliath? Do you remember what David did after he defeated Goliath?

He cut off Goliath's head! I always wondered why...

Honestly, it feels out of character for David. Here's a young, faithful guy that's showing heroic courage in the LORD.

Talk about facing impossible odds! Young David... a *shepherd*... took down the ultimate Philistine warrior with a sling and a stone!

This is the classic zero to hero story we love. But then David had to go and make it "R" rated by cutting off the head of Goliath and taking it all the way back to Jerusalem!

I always thought that was weird. But in the ancient world, the head represented authority and leadership. Hands represented power and strength. After a battle, cutting off the head and hands of an enemy symbolized total defeat.

So when Dagon's statue was found with his head and hands severed from the body, the message was unmistakable.

Yahweh was declaring that Dagon had been completely defeated. His authority was gone. His power was gone. He could not stand in the presence of the all-powerful Creator God.

**This was public humiliation for Dagon and his followers.  
And 1 Samuel 5:5 says...**



**[SLIDE 15] 1 Samuel 5:5 - That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold.**

The threshold in a temple was the thin space between the spiritual and physical world. It was like a sacred boundary where the god would meet people and give instructions.

So now, seeing Dagon's head and hands lying on the threshold, you'd think the Philistines would repent and begin worshiping Yahweh.

But instead of surrendering to Yahweh, notice what they did...

**They adjusted their worship of Dagon so they didn't have to step on the threshold anymore.**

Isn't that the same thing Israel was doing with their worship of Yahweh? They adjusted by making up their own rules... They adjusted in ways that benefited their own desires... And they adjusted by adopting the gods of the other nations.

They lost sight of God's Kingdom.

**They didn't stop being "spiritual." But they did shift their allegiance.**

And that ultimately led to God lifting His hand of protection from them, allowing His judgment to come through the Philistines because of Israel's misplaced allegiance.

And if we're honest, the Church today faces the same danger. If we lose our Kingdom mindset, all that's left is to view things through the kingdoms of the world. Once that happens, we become more and more numb to God's will.

But here's the good news...

**[SLIDE 16] God may lift His hand of protection, but He never stops being faithful to His people.**

In 1 Samuel 5, He doesn't wait for Israel to get it right. He steps into enemy territory and shows who the true King is.

This is where the joy of Advent gets amplified with a Kingdom mindset.

**Think about Who we worship:**

- Our God is the Almighty Creator...
- There's no power in existence that comes close to Him.
- He proved His power over all the Egyptian gods with the Exodus...
- He publicly humiliated Baal on Mount Carmel...
- He gave a decisive victory over the gods of Canaan at Jericho...
- He defeated Dagon without Israel even lifting a finger...
- Two of the most powerful nations, Assyria and Babylon, didn't stand a chance against Yahweh God.

And here's the knockout punch...

The spiritual forces of evil finally thought they had the upper hand as Jesus was being led to the cross. But look at what Paul says...

**[SLIDE 17] Colossians 2:15 - [Jesus] disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.**

Paul's talking about the total, public *humiliation* of the little-g gods. These are the spiritual forces of evil that permeate our world. They once held the keys of death.

But when Jesus died, He went down into the realm of the dead. Peter says He made proclamation to the spiritual powers that were there. Then He took the keys of Death itself and burst through the gates of Hades, conquering Death itself through the power of the resurrection!

**This is why Paul can loudly proclaim...**

**[SLIDE 18] 1 Corinthians 15:55 - Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?**

This verse isn't just a nice morning devotional...

This is our battlecry!

**[SLIDE 19] To be Kingdom minded means we live every day in allegiance to the King who has already defeated the enemy.**

This isn't just some abstract idea.

Our victory in Jesus refuses to let the powers of darkness have the final word over our reality.

### **This is the real joy we have in Jesus...**

He holds our grief. He sustains our hope.

He gives us His peace that's beyond our understanding.

And through His strength, we remain standing when the enemy attacks.

### **This is why I love 1 Samuel 5...**

It magnifies the reality that spiritual forces are at work in this world. This isn't something they only did in biblical times. Real forces of evil *are* trying to divide and destroy us today. And if that doesn't work, they try to spiritually sedate us.

But 1 Samuel 5 reminds us that they don't even stand a chance.

And as Paul said, we might be struck down, but we're not destroyed. How can we have that kind of confidence? Because our confidence is rooted in God's uncontested reign.

Scripture clearly teaches that all power and authority belong to Jesus, our King.

### **But so what?**

None of this matters if it falls on deaf ears.

None of this matters if we say Jesus is King but live as if He isn't.

None of this matters if the world is still shaping how we think and live.

The passage today ought to compel us to be honest enough with ourselves and ask: *Who's side am I really on? Who has my allegiance? Does my life actually reflect what I say I believe?*

**[SLIDE 20] Seeking God's Kingdom means re-aligning our daily allegiance to the reign of Jesus instead of the kingdoms of the world.**

This is where real joy comes from.

It comes from knowing and living as if Jesus is actually our King.

And when we live under His reign, we don't just survive the dark valleys that life brings our way... **through Jesus, we press on in victory, even as we walk through them.**

**Let's Pray**