**Week Five – September 20/21 – I Samuel 5-6 (and 7:1-2)**

**Introduction** - It is a beautiful thing when God gives us assurance about something in life, when he moves us from “I think this might be true” to “I am rooted in this belief.” **Can you think of a time in life when God moved you from “this might be true” to “my belief here has solid roots?” Any of the following examples match an experience of this for you? Moving from “I think I might be good at…” to “God has designed and wired me to…”? Moving from “Maybe I can trust God with my future” to “even at the darkest points (and especially at those points) I can trust Him”? Or can you think of other examples of God growing you or moving you in assurance?”** Please share with the group.

Despite all of the rebellion and manipulation that Israel had embraced, God gives them amazing displays of His power and His care filled with opportunities to root themselves in who he really is. In chapter 5 he reminds them that He is above any power that they are tempted to pursue or trust. In chapter 6 He reminds them that He is a holy God who is providing a way in His mercy that enables those who are His to be able to stand in His presence.

**Read Chapter 5** - He is above any power that we are tempted to pursue or trust.

In a few weeks we will be studying the account of David and Goliath. David bursts onto the scene in a great moment of victory and deliverance, but he makes sure that everyone knows that this amazing moment is not about him, but has the purpose, “that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.” (17:46) What we read in chapter 5 is also amazingly sensational and amazingly clear that it is pointing only in one direction - a God who has no one above Him.

**As you read chapter 5, what is tragic about the account? What is humorous about the account?** In this story, there is an overlap of some of the humorous and the tragic. The humor behind Dagon stands out. He is a god who has fallen and can’t get up. He is a god who has to depend on people just to put him back in his place. He is a god whose head and hands fall off - powerless to see, hear, act. This overlaps with the tragic in that throughout time people keep following idols like Dagon. **What are some idols, addictions, and things people put their trust in today that in reality are as helpless as Dagon? Does anyone have a story of a time when you had the one true God open your eyes to an idol in your life and started growing you toward freedom from that idol?**

**What role did the Israelites play in the destruction of Dagon? What does this reveal about God’s supremacy and dependence on us? How can we strike a balance between two facts: that God is totally self-sufficient and that he graciously uses us in his service?**

**Chapter 6 (& 7:1-2)** - He is a holy God whose mercy can enable to stand in His presence.

(*Leaders, this section can open up a lot of gospel-centered questions. Be praying and watchful for God opening up hearts here. Whether it is a student understanding the gospel for the first time or the truth of the gospel coming more alive, staff has been praying for you as you lead!)*

**Read 6:1-12. As the hand of the LORD afflicted the Philistines, how did they respond?** Another point that some might find humorous is the offering they bring - gold rats and gold tumors. (Not a gift you see every day and not an appealing or useful gift.) **The Philistines are actually recognizing some truths about God even in preparing their odd offering - what are they recognizing about Him in the mere thought to give any kind of offering?** (*The Philistines are reluctantly worshipping Yahweh here - they recognize that He is powerful and they feel some need to try and appease Him*.) **The Philistines are also recognizing some truths about themselves with this offering - What did they call the offering?** (See verse 6 - *A guilt offering*.) **Why is it significant that they call it that?**

In the end, their only concern was to relieve their affliction and to get the ark as far away from them as possible rather than make peace with it. They were constrained to acknowledge that this was the hand of Yahweh, yet would not renounce Dagon and submit to God. **As God brings conviction of sin, do you find yourself wanting to just escape the consequences of sin, or do you actually hate the sin itself?**

**Read 6:13-21 and 7:1-2**. We often look at God as if He has a split personality - sometimes bringing judgment and sometimes bringing love. As we read Scripture and learn to patiently read the longer story, His acts of judgment are opening up avenues of hope, grace, and deliverance.

The great question that the people of Beth Shemesh ask in 6:20, “Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?” is a rhetorical question that the assumed answer is “no one.” The Old Testament is full of prophetic passages and the New Testament is full of explanatory passages that open up this question and the way our God answers it in His love displayed through Christ. **How do you read David’s question and answer? Do you respond with, “Sounds pretty simple, I can consistently do everything perfectly that he lists in verses 2-3” or “Wow - I’m gonna need some help” or other?**

**Read Psalm 15**, a Psalm of David. This is one of the O.T. passages that asks the same question but leaves the resolution hanging. It feels almost like a “wink” from God that He knows our needs and will answer at just the right time! David’s life, even down to His lineage and his own sins, would foreshadow both our needs and God’s developing “rescue plan” in Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. This is one of the many New Testament passages that answer the Beth Shemesh question through the lens of what Christ has done for us. **What words stand out to you that point to our need, God’s solution, and God’s invitation? Two callings are offered here - to be reconciled and then to be an ambassador to help others know about this God who invites people to Him - have you wrestled with these two callings and if so, which one are you wrestling with/have you wrestled with the most?**

**Conclusion** - (*Leaders, the following is a specific, step-by-step way to lead tonight’s closing. It is designed to give people intentional time to reflect, process to see what God is doing, and respond. It is a bit more scripted, but please give it a try!*) The question from the people of Beth Shemesh, “Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?” is timeless and is worth continuing focused thought. It should grab the attention of all of us, whether you are running from God, or you are in a period of apathy or inaction, or you are in a season of obedience, or you are running back to God.

We are going to have just a couple minutes of silence for you to reflect on tonight’s passage, consider where you are in your spiritual life right now, and listen for where God is leading you.

* **If you are running from God, what is He calling you to do right now?**
* **If you are in a period of apathy or inaction, what is He calling you to do right now?**
* **If you are in a season of walking in obedience to God, what is He calling you to do right now?**
* **If you are running back to God, what is He calling you to do right now?**

Then we will pause for those that want to share about where God has been speaking and moving and after that I will close us in prayer. (*Remind people of the four possible focus questions and begin the time of silence*.)