

## 1 Samuel 5:1-12: God's Grace Among the Nations

This morning as we look to 1 Samuel we are looking at God's common grace among the nations. Chapters 5-6 are a little bit of a detour from the story line of 1 Samuel because they give us a glimpse at what was going on among the Philistines. If you remember from a couple of weeks ago, the Israelites had been absolutely destroyed in battle. They lost 30,000 men in one day. Their religious leaders had all been killed, and the Ark of the Covenant was captured by their main enemy at the time: the coastal people called the Philistines.

But why spend 2 chapters on the Philistines? Why is this section here? What are we to do with these 2 chapters?

As we read through the Bible we need to ask ourselves why God included something in the Bible. Why is this here? It's not always obvious. It's not always clear because God doesn't always tell us.

But step back and think about the greater picture here. What we might be inclined to think is that because the Philistines routed the Israelites, God would lash out against the Philistines. You know when you have an older brother and a younger brother and the younger brother gets picked on by a bully? What's the older brother do? It's go time. You'd think God would be the same way: you mess with my people and I'm going to annihilate you.

And yet he doesn't do that. What I think we see here is that although God's hand of judgment is heavy against the Philistines, he's actually showing them an amazing amount of grace. He is certainly showing them that he is the one true and living God over their false god Dagon, but I think more than that he is showing them he is gracious.

A lot of times when we talk about the grace of God what we mean by that is God's saving grace toward us through Jesus Christ. That he redeemed us, saved us, purchased us, and gave us an inheritance kept in heaven. All of that work of God toward us in Christ is grace. Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve. We don't deserve salvation, we deserve damnation, and yet for those who believe in Christ God removes our sin, and imputes to us righteousness.

But there is another category of God's grace we don't often think about. Or if we think about it, we don't often appreciate it. And that's what scholars often refer to as common grace. And what we're going to see over the next 2 chapters here is God's common grace toward those who are not his people.

Common grace is grace - favor or blessing - that God gives to all people whether they will ever be saved or not. **Turn to Matt 5:43-48.**

So when we talk about grace of any kind, we have some basic starting points. First is that we are all sinful. You, me, everyone - by nature and by choice we are rebellious to God. That rebellion earns us the wrath of God. All we deserve is God's immediate and eternal judgment in hell forever. And we often talk about this in terms of the gospel. How we need a Savior from our sins, we can't work to rid ourselves of sin. It is only by trusting in the crucified and risen Jesus that God's grace will come to us.

But stepping back a little, we can say that any good thing that God gives to anyone - whether it has to do with salvation or not - is grace. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of heavenly lights with whom there is no shifting of shadow. So when God gives a good gift of any kind to anyone it is grace. It is a blessing that they don't deserve.

That's what Jesus touches on here. The context is that we need to love those who don't love us. But notice why we are to do that. **Read 43-48**

The reason we are to love those who don't love us is because that's exactly what God does. God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good. And he sends rain to water crops on the evil and the good. He doesn't have to. We could live in a world like when Israel was in Egypt and the Egyptians got the plagues but the Israelites didn't. But instead God shows his grace toward people.

Listen, as much as God shows special, saving grace toward his elect, those whom he has chosen for salvation, he does still show love to those who are not. He does care for them and bless them. After all, they are his creation. He has fashioned them, and formed them and has a greater love for people who will never love him than we do. One day he will judge and pour out wrath on them - but there is common grace nonetheless.

That exactly what Jesus says. **Read 44-45**

Love your enemies **so that** you might be like God. God already loves his enemies. He already pours out grace on them. He loves them more than we ever will. What Jesus is calling us to is to love them like God loves them.

Does God have a special and particular love for the church? Absolutely. Jesus loves his bride in a special, particular way. But Jesus also loves those who don't love him. Remember when he healed the lepers? How many did he heal? Ten. How many worshipped him for it? One. But they all got healed. Common grace.

And common grace is all around us. Most medical doctors are not believers. But they bless us and others, don't they? Most politicians are not believers, but most people live in a relatively safe and free society. It's not perfect, but it's not anarchy. Why? Because even unbelieving rulers are God's deacons to keep order in society.

God makes some people very wealthy. Jeff Bezos - Amazon's CEO - is worth \$152B. Whatever else we can say about that is that I doubt Jeff's own internal righteousness merits him \$152B. No, what he has is common grace from God.

**Psa. 145:9, 15-16:** The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made...The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Whenever any human takes a bite of food, it is because God feeds them. Whether they acknowledge that or not. Just think about that. We get irritated when we pay for someone's lunch and they don't even thank us. God in his grace feeds the entire planet non-stop and most people don't even acknowledge that it's him. And he keeps doing it. It's not because he's a pushover, it's because he is gracious. It's common grace.

**Acts 15:16-17:** In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

Not only does God give food, he gives gladness. I thought God was every day angry with the wicked. He is. But the wicked are also part of his creation. Not every unbeliever is miserable out there. Why not? Because God gives them good things.

In fact, sometimes God has blessed them with so many things that their hearts get filled up with the stuff rather than God. It's the kid at Christmas who cares more about the presents than the parents who gave them the presents. But God still gives.

What I want us to grab ahold of this morning is that God's common grace toward all people is something we should praise him for. Yes we should want others to be saved. Yes we should want the gospel proclaimed. But I want us to step back and go, "We serve such an amazing and gracious God that he lavishes kindness on unbelievers and believers the likes of which we can't even fathom."

That common grace begins toward all people the moment they are conceived in the womb. And continues until their last breath. And I think we see that in this chapter.

### 1) God Shows Common Grace To His Enemies.

This isn't from a specific verse, but more a look at the overall situation. These are the Philistines. These people hate God, hate God's people, persecute them, worship a false, satanic god, were involved in witchcraft, were

sexually immoral, and we get no hint of anyone from the Philistines ever turning to Yahweh in true faith. And yet God shows considerable restraint here. He doesn't wipe them out.

Why not? Again, the very real and very simple answer is grace. God does not give these people what they deserve. He does discipline them, but not unto death.

Think about that. The God that we worship, who has shown us amazing, eternal, Fatherly grace in Jesus Christ - is so gracious and kind and amazing he has sought fit to bless those who will never, ever love him. God is not threatening by them. He's not vindictive toward them. His justice is not in jeopardy because of them.

You remember when Moses asked to see God's glory? And God said he would pass by Moses and let him see the afterglow of his glory? Listen to what God says about who he is.

**Exo. 34:5-7:** The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

That's our God. This is the hard part: just like God shows grace toward his enemies, what does God call us to do toward our enemies? Show them grace.

**Rom. 12:14:** Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them.

**1 Pet. 3:9:** Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

God shows common grace to his enemies, we should as well.

## 2) God shows common grace in humiliating idols. Read 1-6

From time to time in the OT God would completely humiliate false gods. There are these showdowns, as it were, in the OT where God goes head to head with false gods. When God unleashed the 10 plagues in Egypt, many scholars have made a connection that each plague is Yahweh using a false god against Egypt. Egypt worships the sun? Fine - Yahweh makes it dark. Egypt worships the Nile? Fine - Yahweh makes it blood. So on.

Later in Israel's history you remember Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel? Where Elijah is making fun of the 400 prophets of Baal because Baal wasn't miraculously causing the sacrifice to catch fire. "Maybe he's asleep, maybe he's in the bathroom."

Here, the imagery is that Dagon has captured Yahweh. Dagon used to be thought of as a god of the sea. He was depicted as something of Mer-man, with a fish tail instead of legs and the upper body of a man. But more modern scholarship doubts that. We don't really know much about Dagon. But we do know it was the national god of the Philistines for quite some time. And the Philistines would have seen this as a victory of Dagon over Yahweh.

In ancient times to capture the enemies' god was to essentially have ultimate victory. If a country didn't have their god, what power did they have? The Philistines viewed the Ark itself as the god of Israel, even though it wasn't. God seems to honor that idea to some extent and wreaks havoc in Dagon's house. Day one - Dagon is face down before Yahweh. Dagon is lying prostrate before God's throne. The idea is Dagon is worshipping before Yahweh. No worries, we'll pick him up.

**Side:** Think about how crazy that is. Dagon wasn't standing precariously on some unstable surface. Imagine coming into your living room and seeing your couch flipped upside-down - what would you guess? Someone had been there. But no one had been in the Temple. That should have been there first clue.

Day 2: God kills Dagon. Dagon is lying face down but has no head and no hands. He's been decapitated.

What's God doing here? He's showing the Philistines in a very vivid way who it is that he is the one they should worship. Dagon is powerless before Yahweh. Dagon is defeated before Yahweh. And whatever the Philistines through they accomplished by capturing the Ark, God is not subservient to them.

God does this among the nations. There's a section in Isaiah where God is insulting those who go out and chop down a tree. One half of the tree they take to a craftsman who fashions it into an idol that they bow down to and worship. The other half of the tree they chop into firewood and warm themselves by their stove. The question is: which end is which? How do you know you didn't just burn up your god? How do you know whether or not you're bowing down to your firewood? It's absurd.

And although we laugh at these things, we have to understand that idolatry is not logical. We'd think that the Philistines would simply abandon Dagon. Hello - Yahweh beheaded him. Yahweh is supreme over all false gods. But the answer is not a logical one. The answer is an answer of the heart.

People worship the god who gives them what they want. People worship a god who demands no more or less than their own morality. People worship their own version of a god who says well-done good and faithful servant. People worship a god who gives them the desires of their heart without repentance.

People will often worship an inferior god of their own imagination even when God demonstrates the folly of doing so. That is God's grace.

3) God shows common grace in bringing affliction. I want you to notice how many times the phrase "hand was heavy" is mentioned. **Read 6-12**

So God's hand is heavy against these people. They had all kinds of tumors. Apparently, there was even a rat infestation. **Read 6:4-5**

So not only has God destroyed their idol, Dagon, he's also laying siege against the people themselves as well as their crops. This is a manifold attack by God on the Philistines.

In fact, most scholars believe that God actually afflicted the Philistines with the bubonic plague. And that the tumors were actually swollen lymph nodes all throughout their bodies. We don't know that for sure, but the symptoms seem to match to some extent. And it seems as though some of them had experienced death and the ark had only been in the land 7 months.

How is it that this is God's grace? It's God's grace because what God could have done is completely wipe out the Philistines in one fell swoop. Instead, although God's hand was heavy upon them, they made the connection that the Lord was doing this to them. And they sought to make it right. It won't be the last time the Philistines ever battle the Israelites. The famous David and Goliath battle is still to come. But through this affliction they recognize that the one true and living God is at work.

This is one of the ways that God often shows common grace: by getting peoples' attention through affliction. A lot of times when affliction comes our way, we want it out of our lives as quickly as possible. Or when we see it in other peoples' lives we go to the Lord and ask that he takes it away. And that's not necessarily a bad thing to do. It's okay to ask for healing or relief.

But we also need to remember that God uses affliction to bring people to himself. To awaken them from their spiritual apathy and slumber to love the Lord Jesus. If you remember David Robison talking about the tsunami in Japan and the nuclear fallout in the aftermath. God is using that disaster and massive loss of life to bring the gospel to Japan.

And he uses affliction simply to purge sinfulness from individuals as well as whole groups of people. I've known plenty of people who have hit rock bottom in life - and they had to hit rock bottom - before they got their lives

together. That doesn't necessarily mean they love Jesus, but it does mean sometimes affliction brings them to a point of realizing they need to be responsible.

And I know that that might seem a little underwhelming. Our desire and prayer as followers of Jesus is that others would turn to him in faith in the midst of their affliction. But we need to remember that just because someone doesn't turn to Jesus doesn't mean God has washed his hands of them. They are made in God's image, their lives are precious, God does desire them to be fully responsible and productive individuals in society. And he does love them with a glorious common grace love that far exceeds anything we will ever have for them. And he often shows it through affliction.

#### 4) God shows grace through civic leaders. Read 6-12

Now, on the one hand, it's easy to make fun of these guys. The ark is Ashdod and people are dying. What's the solution? Send it to a different Philistine town! Oh, that's a great idea.

And once it's killing people there, send it to another. And the people there aren't having any of it. "You're not bringing that thing here!" But there's tension. On the one hand, this is thing is killing them and they know it. They know immediately that this is the cause of all the problems.

On the other hand they can't not keep it because this is - in their eyes - Israel's God. They've captured the God of Israel, which basically means perpetual victory over them. To send it back to them would mean giving Israel a chance at future victory. But if they don't send it back they might all die. And so you've got these guys who are kind of bumbling around trying to figure out exactly what to do and what they come up with eventually is to send the Ark back to Israel on a cart. But they'll also send it with 5 golden tumors and 5 golden mice. The gold is an offering to Yahweh. The tumors and the mice are in response to the way in which God has afflicted them. That was the plan the leaders devised: have the goldsmith make golden tumors and golden mice.

What a weird thing to do. And what a weird thing to do after already shipping this thing around and causing all kinds of grief. But you know what? Eventually they do it and God apparently honors their efforts. He blesses the cattle to go the right direction back to Israel.

One of the ways that God shows common grace is through government leaders. There has never, ever in the history of the world been a perfect system of government. And there never will be until Jesus returns. But what God has given most all people in all generations is some form of government. Sometimes that's a monarchy, sometimes it's a representative democracy, sometimes it's a dictatorship. Some of those systems are more desirable than others. Some are more efficient than others. Dictatorships - for all their atrocities - are incredibly efficient. Very little red tape in dictatorships because if you don't do what the supreme leader wants, you die. Lots of poverty, but very efficient. Representative democracies are just the opposite - usually not efficient at all, but most people get a fair shake.

God knows this. This is common grace built into the world. **Look** over at **1 Pet. 2:13-17** for a minute. We know that God is sovereign over all things. And we ultimately know that God is working all around us. But there is a common grace among civic leaders I think we need to be reminded of from time to time.

Here, Peter has just got done talking about how Christians are a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people of God's own possession. So the temptation might be to say "See, we don't need to subject ourselves to the government - we're our own nation!" Peter says "not so fast." **Read 13-17**

So whether it's the emperor or governors, they were sent by God. Given by God. They are not God, and they aren't perfect. Rome was the government who put our Lord to death and it was the government who would later put Peter to death. Government is not perfect. Government often militates against Christians who do our very best to uphold it's legitimacy. But it's there from God nonetheless.

And God has given it for 2 things: punish those who do evil and praise those who do good. When you gel it all down, that's what God has designed government for. And we live under that authority structure so that we can silence ignorant people and show them the love of Jesus through us.

I was out going through the woods the other day and as I was going along enjoying myself the thought occurred to me: this is really cool. This is enjoyable. It's not sipping coffee reading my Bible or singing songs to God. But it is simply enjoying his creation and enjoying that he has given me enjoyment. And I was thinking: is it okay to enjoy these things? I give my own children things simply to enjoy. And God gives us things to enjoy and we can praise him for that.

There is no competition between common grace and saving grace and more than there is competition between a man who does good things for a stranger as well as for his children. The reality of having our sins forgiven is a sweet reality. But that doesn't negate the glory of God in his common grace. I think if we look around we might see more of his work all around us.

**Pray**