

# A Talisman Theology

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to take the entire chapter, chapter 4 of 1 Samuel, and I want to go ahead and read through that entire chapter.

1 begins with these words, and the word of Samuel came to all Israel, and really that's kind of the tail end of what took place in the chapter before, because as you get on into chapter 4, and really for the next three chapters, I think, you don't have a single word from Samuel.

And when you read the substance of these chapters, you realize why, and some very tragic and terrible things are happening here. So let me go ahead and read the passage, the entire chapter of chapter 4, 1 Samuel, and the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

Now, Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek.

And then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel, and when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about 4,000 men of the army of the field.

[ 1 : 31 ] And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?

Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us, it may save us from the hand of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?

Then they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp. So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God has come into the camp. And they said, Woe to us, for such a thing has never happened before.

Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong and conduct yourselves like men.

[ 2 : 52 ] So they have kind of a little pep rally here among the Philistines. You Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men and fight.

So the Philistines fought. And Israel was defeated. And every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter. And there fell the Israel of Israel, 30,000 foot soldiers.

Also the ark of God was captured. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. Then a man of Benjamin came from the battle line the same day and came to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dirt on his face.

Now when he came, there was Eli sitting on the seat by the wayside watching. For his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told it, all the city cried out. When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, What does the sound of this tumult mean? And the man came quickly and told Eli. Eli was 98 years old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see.

[ 4 : 06 ] Then the man said to Eli, I am he who came from the battle. And I fled today from the battle line. And he said, What happened, my son?

So the messenger answered and said, Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.

Then it happened when he made mention of the ark of God that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken, and he died. For the man was old and heavy, and he

had judged Israel 40 years.

Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, due to deliver. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her.

And about the time of her death, the women who stood by her said to her, Do not fear, for you have born a son. But she did not answer, nor did she regard it.

[ 5 : 21 ] Then she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory has departed from Israel, because the ark of God had been captured, and because of her father-in-law and her husband.

And she said, The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured. So there you have it. And perhaps, in fact, I'm quite certain that at least a couple of elements in this story you're familiar with, and I'm not talking about just the ark being captured.

We're familiar with that story, and we're going to carry on with that story as we go further from here next time. And perhaps you're familiar with Eli and his sons, and his sons being killed in battle, and Eli falling over and dying, and so forth.

So we're not totally unfamiliar with the story here. But there's a great deal, as is true of all Scripture, a great deal for us to learn.

And so I've entitled my message tonight, and this may sound like a strange title. I've entitled it a talisman theology. I don't know if you know what a talisman is.

[ 6 : 35 ] So I'm going to give you a quick definition. A talisman is any object which is believed to contain certain magical or sacramental properties which would provide good luck for the possessor or possibly offer protection from evil or harm.

Now, if you were listening as we read the story, and so you're thinking about the story, what happened in the story, I think you can see the connection here. A kind of talisman theology. And a talisman really can be about anything, about any kind of object.

Whatever a person thinks will bring good luck or bring success or bring health or blessing or whatever it is.

And I would say to you right here on the front end, by way of introduction to the text, I would say there are a lot of people who have a talisman theology. In fact, I would even say to you, suggest to you that there are many so-called Christians that have this kind of theology.

Sometimes it comes in the form of a cross hanging around your neck. And people have the idea that that cross is protecting them or that cross is bringing blessing to them just by virtue of the fact that there's a cross there.

[ 7 : 51 ] You understand what I'm saying? It has become kind of a talisman. It's a talisman theology. Or maybe even a Bible in your hand. There's some people who carry a Bible or keep a Bible in their car.

And not because they expect to read it or expect to have the opportunity to use it, but somehow there's just this feeling of security or this feeling of blessing because you've got a copy of the Word of God in your hands.

You understand what I'm saying? I hope I'm not stepping on anybody's toes here tonight. Or maybe I hope I am. It's kind of a talisman theology. Or we could think of some others, you know, perhaps, and I've known some people keep a picture of Jesus in their billfold or in their purse, you know.

And I even had somebody one time pull it out and say, see, I've got a picture of Jesus here. It just makes me feel a whole lot more secure. Well, it's ridiculous, isn't it? That's a talisman.

It's become that anyway. Or maybe some angel figurine. You know, I've talked about that before, about that certain county sheriff that I had in my church.

[ 8 : 57 ] I'm going to the local county prison to his office to visit with him and he's got a little figurine of an angel there. And he said, you see, Pastor, we have these all around the prison and so we're just doing our part.

And I didn't know what part that was. And I guess I wasn't so bold to ask him so. But it kind of served as, in his idea, something like a talisman or a verse of scripture, you know, on a plaque or over the doorway or on the front of your house.

And nothing wrong with having scriptures, you know, printed in placards or framed art or whatever. I've even seen scripture used as kind of wallpaper in a house.

Nothing wrong with that. So long as you're not thinking that somehow these things, whether it's a Bible in your hand or a cross around your neck or whatever it may be, as long as you're not thinking

that these things in and of themselves are somehow bringing you some benefit, some blessing, some power or some level of health or whatever it is you're trusting in. So long as you do not believe that somehow there is inherent power in that object, you know, power to protect or to bless or to bring success or to give health, whatever it is.

[10:17] It's a talisman theology. And so this was one of Israel's problems in our story. In fact, really, to an extent, the story and what happens in the story kind of centers on that.

They brought this bringing of the ark into the battlefield and that's what they did. Their talisman was a golden box, a chest, you know, and it had two cherubs positioned on the lid of it with outstretched wings over the lid.

And the lid of this chest or this golden box was called the mercy seat. You know what I'm talking about? It was called the mercy seat because on the Day of Atonement, each year the blood of the sacrificial lamb would be sprinkled upon that mercy seat because inside this gold box were the tablets of stone engraved with the Ten Commandments.

And because these Ten Commandments, all of them had been broken, then the blood of the sacrifice would be sprinkled on the mercy seat and become the atonement for the breaking of God's laws.

What am I talking about? I'm talking about the Ark of the Covenant. This had become their talisman. It was what they were trusting in. And so in our story, Israel is going to somehow think that there is inherent power in the Ark and it becomes then this type of talisman because they're at war.

[11:55] I mean, you remember, as I read the story, they're at war with who? Or whom? The Philistines. They're at war with the Philistines and according to the story, the Philistines, occupying probably west and even south of Shiloh in that area, and they are encamped, the Philistines are encamped in a place called Aphek, some 22 miles from Shiloh.

Shiloh was the center of worship in Israel at the time before it was later moved to Jerusalem. And the Israelites, their army is also encamped in a place very nearby there, a place the Bible calls Ebenezer.

And there is a battle between these two armies and it does not go well for the Israelites. It doesn't go well for them. Some 4,000 in this initial battle, some 4,000 Israelites are killed in battle.

That's bad. That's very bad. 4,000 men killed in battle. And so, you know, someone comes up with the harebrained idea or the bright idea.

Maybe we should say that. Hey, what if we go down to Shiloh and grab the ark and bring the ark out here? And someone else says, you know, that's a good idea.

[13:14] I hadn't thought of that. You know, bring the powerful ark out here. Actually, it says there in verse 3, and when the people had come into the camp, this is after the battle, after 4,000 men are killed in battle, the elders, that's the leaders of Israel, said, why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?

They couldn't figure it out. Let us bring the ark. Here's the harebrained idea. Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us.

Now, where was the ark of the covenant located? In the tabernacle. This was before the temple was built. In the tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies, behind the curtain, who got to see the ark?

The high priest and the high priest only. It's very conceivable that most of the people, if not all of these people here, had never seen the ark before. And it's inside there.

It's hidden. It's hidden from view. It's inside the Holy of Holies. So let's just bring it out of there and bring it to the battlefield, they said, the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us. And then get this, that when it comes among us, when this ark comes among us, it, you notice that in the text?

[14:33] It may serve us from, or save us from the hand of our enemies. It will. I mean, it's glaring, isn't it? Not God.

Not Yahweh God. Not our God. But it. That is this gold box. Will save us from the hand of our enemies. You see? It.

The ark. A talisman theology. Well, how did things work out? Well, we've read the story, so you already know. Things didn't work out so good, did they?

Not at all. In fact, the loss of 4,000 men initially in that first battle, nothing compared to what's about to happen. And so that kind of sets up the first point here that I want to give you.

I want to give you three points out of this passage. And so here's point number one. God revokes His protection. God revokes His protection.

[15:32] He takes His protection away from God's people. I wonder, have you ever learned this lesson? That God will not be used? But, so God will not be used, will He?

Have you ever tried to? Well, you don't have to admit it or have a confession time, but I think we all have or thought somehow that we could use Him. And verse 4 says, So the people sent to Shiloh. So this was their idea, and so now they're going to go through with it. They might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, the Lord of His army, literally, who dwells, that is His presence in a sense, kind of a manifest presence, symbolic presence if nothing else, dwells or is enthroned between the cherubim, that's on top of the ark of the covenant.

And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. Who were they? They're priests.

All right, we'll get back to them in a minute. Well, let's just get to them right now. Think about this picture or picture this in your minds.

[16:44] Here come these two rascals, Hophni and Phinehas. And they're leading the way, and they're coming with the ark.

Now, I know we've had several interruptions in our study of 1 Samuel, but you do remember, right, about Hophni and Phinehas. Remember what God said about them?

You can go back to chapter 2 and verse 12 where it says, Now the sons of Eli were corrupt. That's the first thing it says about them. They were corrupt. Corrupt. Corrupt.

Now they're priests. And that means that they had corrupted the priesthood. And you might remember what it said about them. You know, they were taking the choice meats that were intended to be given to the Lord for sacrifice.

Now they were allowed by law to take a certain amount, but they had abused that. And then if anybody objected, they'd take it by force. They didn't care anything about the priesthood.

[17:51] They didn't care anything about God. In fact, it says next in that very same verse in chapter 2, verse 12, they did not know the Lord. That's probably the worst in day. They didn't know Him.

They didn't know God. And then you can go forward a few verses still in chapter 2, in verse 22. And it says, They lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the meeting. Immoral. Terribly immoral. Using their office as an advantage to live immoral lives and so forth. All right, so now, these are the priests of the Lord.

Priests. These were the ones who were supposed to represent God before the people and the people before God. But they had made the priesthood a mockery and they had made the sacrifice an evil thing in the eyes of the people.

They were unbelieving. They were corrupt. They were immoral. And they're leading the ark into battle against the Philistines. These are the guys. I mean, this is obvious from our perspective as we read the story and look at this and we bring into play all that we know about these guys and what's going on in Israel and so forth.

[19:07] We know that this is doomed to disaster. And indeed, it was. But you see, the people of Israel are also complicit in this business because they think that they can use God.

They think they can use Him. They think that using the ark, which was symbolic of His presence, they could use the ark to manipulate God into serving them.

That's really the bottom line. That's what they thought. And verse 5 says, And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook.

I mean, this was the best thing in their thinking. Hooray, hooray! You know, we're now saved. Why? Because the gold box is here. You know, the ark is in the camp.

And so, what happened? Well, do you remember? I know you do. Look at it. Starting there with verse 6. Now, when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?

[20:19] And then they kind of go on and they're talking among themselves and they're fearful because of the, quote, gods that they had heard about who had sent those plagues in Egypt and so forth.

And yet they muster up a bunch of courage and said, Let's fight like men. All right? So that's what they did. The Philistines went out and fought. They fought. And Israel was defeated.

Now, they were defeated. Why? Because the Philistine army was a much better army. Because the Philistine army had mustered up their courage and they went out and they had more zeal. They had more at stake. Maybe they thought they didn't have anything to do with the Philistine. This is something God is doing. Israel was defeated, it says there. And what happened? Every man fled to his tent. Not every man, actually, really, right? There was a very great slaughter and there fell of Israel 30,000 foot soldiers.

[ 21 : 22 ] Now, that makes 4,000 seem almost insignificant. 30,000 foot soldiers die in this battle. That's not the worst of it, is it?

Also, the Ark of God was captured and then added to that the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. All right? So that's what happened.

So it didn't work out so well, did it? I mean, this idea of getting the Ark of the Covenant and, you know, somehow that just because we've got the Ark there that we're going to realize a great victory. You see, aside from the fact that Hophni and Phinehas were wicked priests, that's part of this. But the greater lesson here is that God just will not be used.

God will not be manipulated. God will not bless through some mere symbol of His presence, the Ark of the Covenant. And so this is serious business. And it carried with us a very serious consequence.

[ 22 : 27 ] And again, I go back to what I said. It is a talisman theology. And there were many people, there are many people, as I've said, and even some Christians who have this kind of thinking, this kind of theology.

Matter of fact, I remember a few weeks ago or a month ago, however long it was when I was in China and I was teaching that last week, the history of Christianity. And we got to the part about the Crusades, you know, the Holy Roman Crusades.

You know, they're going to go kick out the Muslims and liberate Jerusalem, the Holy City, and so forth. And so there were several, I think, as many as four, maybe more, four significant Crusades. And as I was studying that, you know, the Crusaders had woven into their uniforms, I guess you could call them, you know, they had what?

They had a couple of things. They had that big red cross. And it had become, really had become kind of a talisman. That the cross would assure them victory because this is a holy crusade.

[ 23 : 38 ] But they also had, on some of their uniforms, but also on their shield, they had imprinted the words Deus Volt. You ever heard of this? Deus Volt.

And it's Latin that means God wills it. God wills it. Now, did he? That's the question is. Did he will this?

Did he will the Crusades with all of its atrocities against innocent people and not just Muslims, Muslim children and women and many others, but also even Jews in that part of the world?

And without exception, really, though there were a few, you know, victories along the way, none of them were really very lasting. Ultimately, they all ended in defeat.

So, God willed it. And just having that big red cross on their uniforms and on their shields, Deus Volt, you know, God wills it. Did not make any difference, did it?

[ 24 : 37 ] Also, during World War II, this is rather interesting, the Nazis, they had inscribed on their belts the words Gott mit uns.

And it means God is with us. Did you know that? Isn't that unbelievable? God is with us. But was he? Was he? Was he with the Nazis?

Was God with the German Nazis in what they did? Absolutely not. See, God in history bears it out, doesn't it? God will not be used. And there are people, again, people today who are thinking, and this kind of takes this idea of a talisman to a whole different level.

There are people who are thinking that their church membership is somehow like a talisman will bring them blessing or get them in right with God. Or thinking that just simply attending church on Sunday is going to bring about some kind of blessing for them.

And thinking that tithing, you know, is the way to prosperity. And there are all kinds of talismans that well-meaning people will trust in.

[ 25 : 49 ] That is, trust in that one thing in and of itself, thinking that that is what brings the blessing. And it's really using God, in a sense. In fact, I think I've even, on occasion, been used as a talisman.

And somehow, my prayer is greater than anyone else. Sometimes I get the impression, and it's not always, obviously. And even after I say this, don't not call me to come to the hospital and pray for someone.

I'm willing to do that and want to do that. But there have been some situations where I've had this impression that no one else's prayer will work. It's just the pastor's prayer. regardless of what this particular person thinks about the pastor, whether they like him or don't like him, it's that prayer. And so, if for some reason something happens and you don't get to go, you're not there, and the person gets sick, you say, Pastor, you let us down. You didn't come pray for my mother or my father or whoever it was. It's just kind of like using me as a talisman. You know, it's just my prayer that is going to bring that certain blessing.

[ 27 : 03 ] Alright, so we see then how all of this went with Israel and they bring in the magic box, the ark, and they bring it in led by the two most notorious charlatans in all of Israel, Hophni and Phinehas, and Israel is defeated in battle and 30,000 soldiers are killed.

God will not be used. So he revoked his protection of Israel. The second thing, and really this gets to something else that's at play here that we need not overlook and forget, and that is what I want to call number two, God remembers his promise.

God remembers his promise, and in this instance, I'm not talking about one of those good kinds of promises that God makes, makes good from our perspective. Instead, it is a promise of judgment. It's a promise of death, really. And you do remember when God gave a certain promise to Eli, right, concerning his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, and not just his sons, but even his entire household, and the implication even is directed toward Eli himself. And, you know, we go back to the man who came. Remember this certain man back there in chapter two. And the Bible doesn't call him a prophet, but, I mean, he's kind of, he is a prophet.

[ 28 : 36 ] He says, this is what the Lord says. And he said to him, why do you kick at my sacrifice and my offering, which I have commanded in my dwelling place, and honor your sons?

This is God's judgment against Eli. Honor your sons more than me. To make yourselves fat, that's what they were doing. Eli himself was a large man, what the Bible says at his death. He was a large man, but his sons, too, were getting kind of fat because they were getting the best of the food. He said, making yourself fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel, my people. This is God's pronouncing judgment upon Eli and upon his household. Verse 31 of chapter 2, behold, the days are coming that I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house.

This is judgment. And you will see an enemy in my dwelling place despite all the good things which God does for Israel. And there shall not be an old man in your house.

[ 29 : 43 ] He said it again. Verse 33 of chapter 2, all the descendants of your house shall die in the flower of their age. This is direct reference to his two sons.

Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons on Hophni and Phinehas in one day they shall die, both of them. This is prophecy.

But a prophecy is the same as God's promise. God's promising this is what's going to happen. Eli, to you, to your household, to your sons. And we get on into chapter 3 and we studied this last time when young Samuel is in the temple and he's serving with Eli, being mentored by Eli.

And you remember that story. And ultimately in chapter 3 young Samuel is going to be given his very first prophecy to speak. And it's a word for one man.

And that one man is Eli. So he has this prophecy, a word from God to Eli. And you remember it. In fact, let's look back at it real quick. Chapter 3 and verse 11.

[ 30 : 54 ] And this is not all of it, but just the gist of it. And then the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.

That's an interesting image. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house from beginning to end. And he spoke it through that prophet back there in chapter 2.

For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows. This was not done in secret, Eli. Not ignorant of what his sons were doing.

You know it because his sons made themselves vile. And he, the father, did not restrain them. He was more the father, he was the high priest.

He didn't restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.

[ 31 : 56 ] That is, there's no revoking this. There's no second chance here. You can't pray your way out of this. You can't sacrifice yourself out of this. This is a promise, Eli, coming to you and to your household.

And so God remembers his promise. You see. Well, here's Hophni and Phinehas with their black hearts and they're leading the Ark of the Covenant, the Ark of God out into the battlefield. Heads are held high. They're very proud. They're just sure that this is going to bring them to great victory and their confidence is in that gold box and not in the Lord.

And so verse 10 says there, 10 says there was a very great slaughter and there fell of Israel 30,000 foot soldiers. Also, the Ark of God was captured and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas died. As you read on through the story, you have this man, unnamed man from the tribe of Benjamin. He runs from the battlefield. His clothes are all torn up. He's got dirt all over his face so he's been one of the soldiers but he survived and he fled from the battlefield and he comes to Shiloh to give news not just to Eli but probably to the entire community and so he's already telling the story of what has happened but Eli, you know, he can't see and he's sitting on that chair.

[ 33 : 22 ] He's too big to get up and get around and he hears all the commotion and so verse 17 says, so the messenger answered him because Eli inquires about what the report is and in verse 17, Israel, he says, Israel has fled before the Philistines.

That's the first bit of news. Israel has fled before the Philistines. That is, they lost the battle but it's worse than that. I can almost kind of imagine it going like that.

You know, the guy's out of breath. He's been running from the battlefield. He says, Eli, Israel has fled before the Philistines and Eli says, oh, that's bad, that's bad. Oh, it's worse than that, he says. There has been a great slaughter among the people and Eli says, that's terrible but Eli's worse than that. Your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas are dead and that is bad news, isn't it?

And yet, Eli should have expected and I think he did expect it and so Eli said, oh, no, that's terrible news and the guy says, it's worse than that. The ark of God has been captured.

[ 34 : 26 ] Then it happened, verse 18, when he made mention of the ark of God. Now, isn't that interesting? Not when he made mention of his two sons being killed on the battlefield, though I'm sure he grieved over that.

I'm not taking that away from him. The Bible specifically says that when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate and his neck was broken and he died for the man was old and heavy.

He's a big guy. God remembers his promise and he always, always does. And then one more. God removes his presence.

God removes his presence. All right, so Eli is dead now. He's dead. He's extremely overweight. He had a weak heart.

He was blind. He was, after all, 98 years old. All right, so he died. But Phinehas, one of his two sons, his dead son, had a wife.

[ 35 : 39 ] Had a wife and she was carrying his child. His son, actually. That is, she's pregnant. And as soon as she hears the news, she immediately goes into labor.

And so she gives birth to the son, son of Phinehas, her dead husband. And then she dies. But now before she dies, she gives her son a name.

Now you know about this part of the story. You remember. What does she name the lad? What does she name it? Ichabod. Ichabod Crane.

No, that's a different Ichabod. Ichabod. You ever know anybody to name their child Ichabod? I don't think I've ever come across that. Biblical name, but not one of those you want to name your son after.

Ichabod. And what does it mean? Ichabod means, well, we have it right in the text, right in the scripture. It means the glory has departed. That's what the name, the word Ichabod means.

[ 36 : 44 ] The glory has departed. But what does that mean? Well, you have to understand that in the Old Testament, the word glory is often synonymous with God.

So, essentially, literally, it means God has departed. God has departed. Yahweh God was Israel's glory.

and now God had departed from Shiloh. And, you know, they had taken, the ark has been taken. And the fact that it was taken is really just symbolic of God departing from Israel. Now, is it possible for God to depart from any place?

Not really. Not in the technical sense. He is omnipresent. He's everywhere present.

[ 37 : 44 ] Nowhere absent. He's omnipresent. So, God can't depart. And so, we're talking about God's blessing, God's manifest presence, God's glory, revealed, observable in the life of the nation.

He's taken His hand away. He has departed. And, you know, I was thinking in many big cities, or our big cities, there are churches, downtown churches, church buildings, anyway, that have become anything but houses of worship.

I mean, you can go downtown Tulsa, for example. A lot of big church buildings. Some of them are still occupied. I'm thinking more of my experience in Memphis, Tennessee.

Beautiful. Church buildings. Incredible edifices. Or is it edify? And they're empty, many of them.

In fact, some of them are museums, if they're not empty. And this is true in many big cities in our nation. churches that, at one time, were preaching the gospel and mighty churches for the Lord.

[ 39 : 12 ] Some of them are museums. Some are dinner theaters. Some are law offices. I saw one just the other day. I think it was in Oklahoma City.

We're driving somewhere, and I saw this church, kind of historic church. I think there was a museum as a part of it, but instead of the sign saying, you know, First Baptist Church, something like that, it said law offices of, you know, such and such and such.

And it was a church building. One time, it was a church. Some of them were just simply empty. And, you know, their windows are boarded up, doors boarded up, and so forth.

But, you know, here's the great tragedy, greater tragedy. There are, of course, many, many active churches. Active in some sense of the word.

Churches who have stopped believing and preaching the whole counsel of God's word. and they're preaching some social gospel or maybe they're not preaching at all, really.

[ 40 : 15 ] Principles for living or whatever. And they're churches who focus only on the form and ritual of religion. In a sense, using God.

Kind of name droppers, you know, for God. And, you know, they're using God and using forms of worship which, again, are just kind of like talismans.

And yet, they don't even know it. Many of them. They wouldn't admit it. Ichabod has been written over their churches. Over the doors of their churches.

The glory has departed. We could think of that in the sense of a nation. And I'm not going to argue tonight whether the Ichabod has been written over our great nation.

Glory has departed because America never was a, you know, in the sense of purely Christian nation. Christianized, but not purely Christian.

[ 41 : 16 ] And we're not in the same sense Israel. And I think we can think of it more in terms of the church. And God forbid, God forbid that this would ever happen to Highland Park Baptist Church.

That Ichabod would be written over the door. or pronounced upon it. That the glory has departed. God has departed. .