



## Dear Friends,

This week, I've been preparing a sermon from the book of 1 Samuel. It's been a fun read through the passage. 1 Samuel 5 narrates a hilarious story that takes place in the temple of Dagon. Dagon is a Philistine god. Dagon's temple is located in Ashdod, a Philistine city. The Philistines, who have just smashed the Israelite army, seize the ark of the covenant as war booty. They place the ark in the temple of Dagon. The visuals are obvious. The ark is sat before Dagon. It's clear to anyone looking on who is the superior god.

But the next morning, when the Philistine faithful go to worship Dagon at the temple, they find Dagon "fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD" (1 Samuel 5:3). The visuals are now completely different. It's Dagon who worships YHWH, Israel's God. The narrator, cheekily comments, "They took Dagon and put him back in his place." Israelites, hearing this story, would be roaring with laughter. What kind of god needs to propped up by its worshippers?!

The Philistines could be excused for thinking this was just a freak accident. A mere one-off. But then, when the faithful arrive for worship the following day, Dagon is on the floor again, facing the ark. Only this time, he is in pieces. He has no arms and head. It's hard to write this off as another freak accident. The invisible hand of Israel's God is powerfully at work to demonstrate who is truly the superior god. YHWH exposes the truth about Dagon. Dagon is a lifeless object. He cannot speak. He cannot act. That's because Dagon is just a figment of the Philistine imagination. There is only one true and living God who speaks and acts.

The point of this episode is to show how ridiculous it is to worship a false god. It's tempting to laugh at the Philistines and think they're stupid for their idolatry. The truth is, we are just as guilty as any other human being – ancient, medieval or modern – of the sin of idolatry, and therefore, just as stupid and ridiculous. John Calvin famously wrote, "the human heart is a perpetual idol factory."

We are all prone to go after gods other than the one and only true God who has revealed himself by his Son, Jesus Christ. We make **someone** or **something** a god in place of the true God when we place ultimate value on that person or object and demand that it give us what God alone can provide. Common gods are money, career, spouse, reputation, children, family, pleasure, people's approval, and academic success, just to name a few. Even Christian ministry can become an idol, when our self-worth is tied primarily to what we do for God rather than who we are in Christ.

The antidote to idolatry is the gospel. The goal of the gospel is worship. Jesus Christ died and rose again to forgive you for your idolatry, and has poured his Spirit into your hearts so that you love God above all others, and live for him above anything else. To help you to do this, I encourage you to regularly pray the prayer that the Apostle Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus (Ephesians 3:16-19):

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

God Bless  
Mark Adams