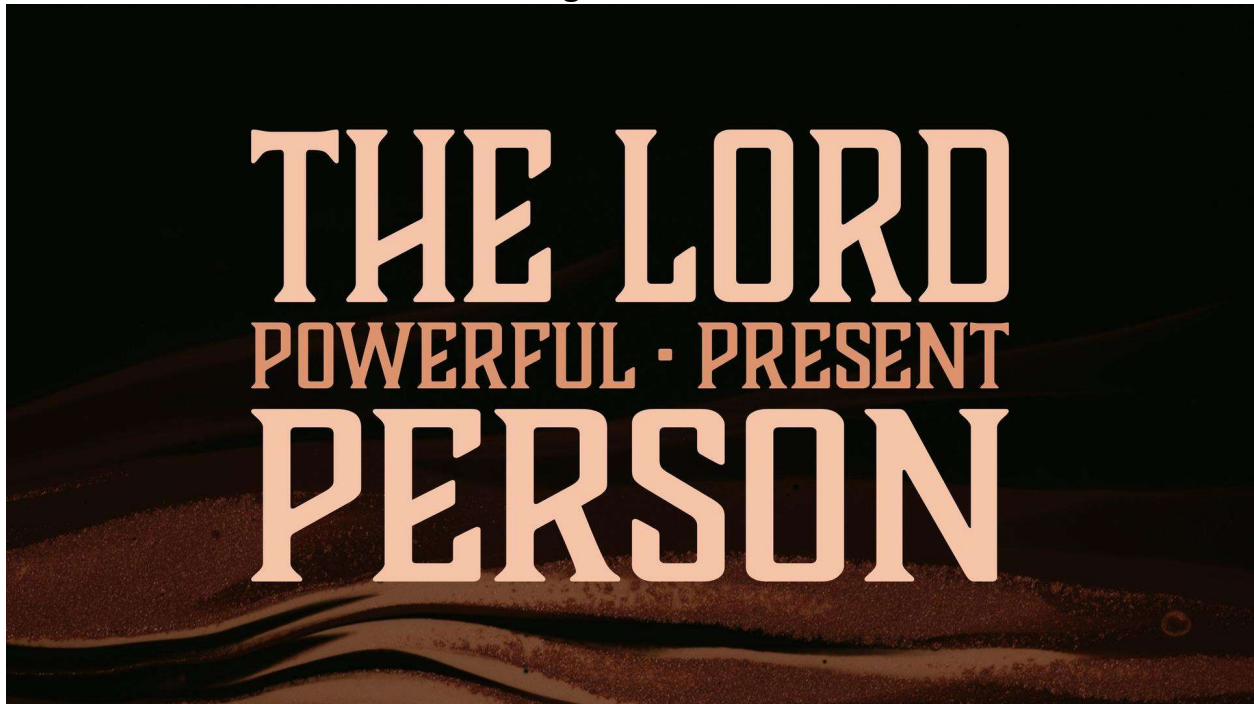


"God in the Second Person"

1 Samuel 4:1-11

Eugene Kwon



Background

"Knowing Jesus and making Him known" - this has been our unofficial motto here at PBCC. But what, exactly, do we mean by it? What do we mean when we say we want to "know God"? First Samuel 4-6 may not be the first part of the Bible that comes to mind when attempting to answer this question, but it turns out that knowing God is the central theme driving the narrative of these chapters. The story they tell may very well give us a new perspective on what it means to know God. Join us this Sunday as we begin our next miniseries in 1 Samuel, "The LORD: Powerful, Present, Person"!

Sermon Text 1 Samuel 4:1-11 (NIV)

Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. ² The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. ³ When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the Lord bring defeat on us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."

⁴ So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

⁵ When the ark of the Lord's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. ⁶ Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?"

When they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, ⁷ the Philistines were afraid. "A god has^[a] come into the camp," they said. "Oh no! Nothing like this has happened before. ⁸ We're doomed! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. ⁹ Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!"

¹⁰ So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. ¹¹ The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?
- What is the best thing you heard on Sunday?

2. Sunday Questions:

1. Knowing God as "You" vs. "It"

- In what ways do we sometimes reduce God to an **object**—a system, a doctrine, or a tool—rather than relating to Him as a **person**?
- How might our prayer life, worship, or daily decisions look different if we consistently addressed God as a **"You"** instead of an **"It"**?

2. The Temptation to Control God

- The elders of Israel tried to "take" the ark into battle as if they could guarantee God's presence and power on their terms.

- Where in our own lives do we risk treating God like a **means to an end** rather than surrendering to His will?
-

3. Wrestling with Defeat and Mystery

- The Israelites asked, “*Why did the LORD bring defeat on us today?*” but then rushed to their own solution without waiting for God’s answer.
 - How do we respond when God allows outcomes we don’t want or understand?
 - What practices help us sit with mystery instead of rushing to control it?
-

4. Trust vs. Objectification

- The sermon suggested that we sometimes objectify God because a **predictable “It”** feels safer than a **sovereign “You.”**
 - What fears or desires for control make it hard for us to trust God as a person with His own will?
 - How can we grow in the kind of trust that allows vulnerability before Him?
-

5. Encounter and Transformation

- Martin Buber wrote, “*All actual life is encounter.*” The sermon applied this to knowing God in the second person.
- Can you recall a time when you experienced God not as an idea but as a **living presence**?
- How did that encounter change the way you saw yourself, others, or Him?