A Stone Called Ebenezer

1 Samuel 7:2-12

2 And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

3 And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

4 Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only.

5 And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord.

6 And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

7 And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

8 And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.

9 And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him.

10 And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar.

12 Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.

The Time Was Long:
Our story tonight, really begins midway through the second verse.

- It begins with these words:
  - “the time was long; for it was twenty years.”

- It had been 20 years since that fateful day
  - when the Ark of the Covenant
  - was lost in battle to the Philistines.

- It had been 20 years since the wicked sons of Eli
  - had caused God to withdraw his hand from Israel.

- Twenty years since they carried the ark into battle
  - only to discover that God had not marched with them.

- It had been twenty years
  - since the favor of God has departed from the Israelites.

- Twenty years of being subject to their enemies the Philistines.
Twenty years of living with defeat.
Twenty years of having their harvests stolen,
Twenty years of seeing their sons and daughters carried away into slavery,
Twenty years of abject poverty
Twenty years of horrific oppression.

• Finally, after twenty years, “all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.”
  • I stand amazed tonight that it took twenty years to bring them to repentance.
• Twenty years
  • before they finally began to lament after the Lord.
• Twenty years
  • before they realized what a precious thing that they had lost!
• Think about it for a moment.
  • How long can a people who were once free live under bondage
    ▪ before they begin to realize that they need God?
  • How long can you go on having church like normal
    ▪ after the Glory of the Lord has departed?
  • How long can you keep going through the motions
    ▪ before you realize that God isn’t with you any more?
• It took them twenty years to finally begin to seek the Lord again!

• Samuel, though, heard the lament of the people.
  • It was what he had been waiting for,
    ▪ the sound that he had been listening for.
• The lamenting of a nation
  • may sound like sorrow to some
    ▪ but to the old man of God
    ▪ it was the sound of a revival being born.
  • It was the sound of a nation turning back to God.
  • It was the sound of a people finally recognizing
    ▪ that we cannot do this thing on our own.
      • We need God.
      • We need his help.
      • We need the blessings of heaven.
    ▪ We have lost a precious thing
      • and we long to have it back again.

Put Away The Strange Gods
• Samuel began to preach.
  • He began to tell everyone who would listen to him,
    ▪ “If you want to return to the Lord
      • then you have to put away
        o the strange gods from among you
• and prepare your hearts to serve the Lord and him only!”

• This was the same message
  o that Moses and Joshua preached to Israel

• The same message has been preached
  o many, many, times over the course of scripture.

• The way back to the Lord has never changed,
  o it always the same.

• When you realize what you have lost,
  o when you lament after the thing that has gone from you,
    ▪ the way of return is always the same.

• It starts with repentance and separation.
  o You have to put away the things
    ▪ that have taken you away from God
    ▪ and you have to separate yourself unto God.

• The first step on the road back
  o to the blessing of the presence
  o and anointing of God
    ▪ is always a step of repentance.

• It always begins with soul searching.
  o It always begins with separating yourself unto God.

• The Israelites put away their false Gods.
  o They turned their heart back towards heaven.

• So Samuel called them to come together at Mizpeh
  o so that he could offer a sacrifice for the nation
    ▪ and pray for the reconciliation of the people of God.

**Private repentance is always followed by public action.**

• At Mizpeh they drew water and poured it out before the Lord.
  o The water poured out on the ground
    ▪ signified their weakness and powerlessness.

• As a nation they were like water
  o that had been spilt on the ground
    ▪ and could not be gathered again.

• They were expressing their dependence on God.
  o They recognized that the work
    ▪ that needed to be done
    ▪ was bigger than they were.

• The offering was not about what they could bring,
  o it was not about a bullock,
    ▪ a ram,
    ▪ or a turtledove.
• It was about what they could not bring.
  o They were a nation that was broken and scattered.
    ▪ They could not revive themselves.
    ▪ They could not restore themselves.
    ▪ They could not bring unity to themselves.

• As the water from hundreds of pitchers
  o spread out upon the ground
    ▪ they were declaring their absolute
      • and utter dependence on God.

• We cannot save ourselves!
  o The bible says that,
    ▪ in addition to the offering of water,
  o they further expressed their repentance
    ▪ by fasting on that day
      • and by acknowledging verbally,
      • “We have sinned against the Lord!”

The Enemy Shows Up
• Meanwhile, while they were seeking the forgiveness of God,
  o the Philistines heard that they were gathered together,
    ▪ all in one place for one purpose,
  o and the enemy saw this new unity among the Israelites
    ▪ as a threat to their dominion and authority
  o so they gathered an army together
    ▪ to go to war against them.

• Isn’t that just like the devil?
  o When God started blessing,
    ▪ he wants to rare his ugly head.
  o When the people of God begin to reach out in faith,
    ▪ he begins to try to instill fear in them.
  o So he arrayed himself in mighty host and came up against them.

• The bible said it struck fear in their hearts.
  o The children of Israel were afraid.

• I want you to understand their plight.
  o They were the servants,
    ▪ little more than slaves.
  o The Philistines were the masters.

• The Israelites didn’t have a standing army
  o because they didn’t have any weapons.
    ▪ The oppressor had robbed them of their weapons.
      • They didn’t have any swords or shields.
      • They didn’t have any weapons of warfare.
The devil always strives to rob you of your weapons!

- Their situation was helpless.
  - Without a miracle from God they would be crushed!
    - But Samuel stepped up and said “Don’t stop now!”
    - Whatever you do, don’t stop crying out to God.

- What Samuel is doing is making them aware
  - of the weapon that the enemy
    - cannot take away from them!
  - The weapons of our warfare are not carnal
    - but they are mighty through God.

- When they cried out to God
  - they invoked a weapon of mass destruction
    - that their enemy could never take away from them.

- The old prophet said,
  - “Cry out to God and He will save you!”

When you cry out to God, he will always save you!

- So here’s the scene.
  - The enemy is arrayed against them
    - in all of their might and strength
  - and the defenseless Israelites
    - are crying out to God for salvation.

- He is their only hope.
  - Samuel took a sucking lamb
    - and began to offer it as a burnt offering unto God.

- The Bible said that, in that moment,
  - as the Israelites prayed,
  - and while Samuel was still offering the sacrifice,
    - the Philistines decided
    - that was a good time to launch their attack!

- While the lamb is still burning on the altar
  - and while Samuel and the people are still kneeling before it,
    - the Bible says that the Lord thundered
      - with a great thunder
      - and panic seized the Philistines.
  - All of a sudden the tables turned.
    - The mighty was made weak
      - and the weak were emboldened.
  - The Israelites overcame their enemy
    - and God brought about a wonderful victory.
A Stone of Help

• When the battle was over, Samuel did a peculiar thing.
  o After twenty years of living in defeat,
    ▪ after twenty years of living
    • without the presence of God in their midst,
  o after twenty years of brokenness and defeat,

• Samuel wanted to make sure that future generations
  o would always remember
    ▪ what God had done for them
    ▪ when they repented before him.

• Samuel wanted to make sure
  o that future generations were reminded
    ▪ that God hears the prayers of his people
  o and that he is faithful to deliver them
    ▪ from the hand of their foes!

• So the Bible says that Samuel
  o took a stone and set it up on the scene of the battle
    ▪ and called it Ebenezer
      • saying “Hitherto, the Lord has helped us.”

• In Hebrew the word Ebenezer means “a stone of help.”
  o The stone named Ebenezer was a stone of testimony.

• It was intended to be a continual reminder,
  o for generations to come
    ▪ that God has been our helper,
    ▪ that he has been our provider.

• He has made a way for us
  o when there seemed to be no way!
    ▪ He is the God who works miracles.
    ▪ He is the God who does the impossible.

• He is the God that thundered from heaven,
  o that shook the mountains,
    ▪ that brought our enemy to his knees!

• Every generation would look upon that Ebenezer Stone
  o and remember the mighty testimony
    ▪ of the provision of God.

• Every generation would see
  o that great Ebenezer Stone
    ▪ setting there in the field by itself.

• And when they enquired, what does this stone mean?
  o The story would be told,
    ▪ over and over and over again
      • Of twenty dark years of oppression
A Stone Called Ebenezer

- and of a day of complete and total victory.
  - That’s what the Ebenezer Stone stands for.

**Priority: Church**

- Our priority this month is the church.
  - I’m stirred up about the church today.
- I’ve come to tell someone
  - that there needs to be
    - an immovable stone in your life
    - called the church.
- An Ebenezer Stone
  - that stands as a testimony in your life
    - of what God has done for you.
- An Ebenezer Stone
  - that declares to your children
    - that we serve a mighty God.
- And Ebenezer Stone
  - that declares to this community
    - that there is a God
      - who still heals,
      - who still delivers,
      - who still save.
    - There is God who still answers prayer.
      - A God who still fights our battles for us.
    - A God that still goes before us
      - into every situation and circumstance.

- An Ebenezer stone is a place of memorial.
  - A place where we recall the blessings of God.
    - A place where we are reminded
      - that God has brought us this far.
- We didn’t get here on our own.
  - Every good gift,
  - every blessing,
  - every benefit in my life,
    - I owe it to him.
- The Ebenezer stone causes me to remember
  - That I owe him everything!
    - He made me what I am.
    - He gave me the blessings that I have.
      - I haven’t earned any of this!
      - I owe it all to him!

- The church needs to be an Ebenezer Stone in our lives.
It needs to be a constant memorial
  - of the testimony of what God has done for us.

It needs to be an everlasting testimony
  - that we share with the generations
    - that are coming behind us.

- Our kids need hear the stories
  - of the Ebenezer Stones in our lives.

- They need to see you worship in the presence of God.
  - They need to see those big tears roll down your cheeks
    - as the glory of God settles down upon you.

- They need to know that there is a God
  - who will always hear there prayer.

- They need to know
  - that you have an immovable rock in your life called the church.
  - That there is an Ebenezer Stone in your life!

- It was about more than just a monument.
  - It was about more than just another national memorial.
    - The Ebenezer Stone was about the next generation.

- It was the product of twenty years of defeat
  - and a heartfelt burden to insure
    - that the next generation would never forget
      - the blessings of God!

- Let me tell you why the church needs to be a priority in your life:
  - Because it is an Ebenezer Stone.
    - It is a continual reminder
      - of the goodness and blessings of God.

- That stone was there
  - to provide the testimony
    - that would keep the people of God
      - from sliding back into the state of apostasy
        - that they had been rescued from.

- You need the church,
  - you need to be faithful to the church,
    - because it is a constant remainder
      - of who you are,
      - of where you came from,
      - of what God is doing in your life.
  - It is an Ebenezer Stone.
    - It is a reminder of the many blessings of God.

Close
- A stone called Ebenezer was about remembering
o that God has helped us.

• Everybody has a testimony!
  o What has he done for you?
    ▪ Where is your testimony?
• He healed you when you were sick.
  o He delivered you when you were bound,
  o He worked the impossible miracle for you,
• I want you to remember tonight the blessings of God,
  o the provision of God,
    ▪ the mighty miracles that he has worked for you.
• This house is a place for testimonies.
  o It is a place to share the story.
  o It is an Ebenezer Stone.
• Let us purpose to make church a priority in our lives.
  o Let us purpose to make worship a priority in this church.
• Let us purpose to tell the story, over and over again.