

1st Samuel Ch 7

Vs1

“Then” seems to me to be a bit of an obscure word to start a ch with because its very implication suggests that it’s right in the middle of a situation or circumstance, and so why the translators decided to make a ch break right here, I’ll never know.

You remember the situation that had taken place, the Philistines had come against the children of Israel, and about 4,000 Israelites lost their lives, not to mention they lost the battle. So some genius had the idea that if they brought the Ark of the Covenant into the battle with them, then they’d surely win. And we discussed several implications that lie in that scenario, but suffice it to say it didn’t pan out for them like they’d hoped and now 30,000 additional men died and on top of that the Ark was captured.

But the Philistines came to realize that the Ark was to them more of a pain than a pleasure. Because not only did God bring their god to pieces and show him to be nothing more than a fishy superstition at best, but He began to plague them with tumors and boils and various infirmities. And rather than humbling themselves and falling on their faces in repentance and turning to the God of Israel and away from their idols they just said, “Man, this thing’s got to go.” And how tragic it is when the hardness of man’s heart is revealed and instead of allowing themselves to be broken through various things that God allows to come into their lives. When He’s seeking to get them to repent and turn to Him, that when push comes to shove and a decision has to be made, that rather than repenting of their sin and surrendering to God, they send Jesus down the road.

Well, they decided to send the ark back to Israel after 7 months of relentless pain and persecution, death and disease and when the people of Beth Shemesh saw it coming, man, they rejoiced. And what was to one the aroma of death, was to another the aroma of life, just as the presence of Christ is today among men, again you remember that Paul said, “*We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.*” 2 Cor 2:15-16 and As we stated last week it just all depends upon which side of the fence you’re standing, if Christ is your Savior He is the sweet savor of life leading to life. If you don’t know Christ, He’s the greatest witness against you regarding God’s judgment (death leading to death, that is the 2nd death).

So to the Philistines the presence of the Ark was the savor of death, but to Israel it was life leading to life. That is until one tragic event took place; because the men of Beth Shemesh took the lid off of the ark in order to look inside, in order to get a clear view of the situation, (so to speak) God struck 50,070 men dead.

And you recall again that the lid to that Ark which was the covering to the Law was known as the Mercy Seat. The place where Atonement took place, the place where God would meet with the people wasn't in the box, but over the box where the blood was poured out for their sins upon the Mercy Seat. There was always to be Mercy covering the Law, and anytime we remove mercy from a situation, we take away the covering of Mercy to look at things through the eyes of the Law; it brings death, primarily to ourselves. Because the Letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

It's so important that we let mercy abide over every circumstance, every situation, every state of affairs that we feel that we need to get to the bottom of, or that we need to look at circumspectly.

The men of Beth-Shemesh removed Mercy, and it killed them, Jesus taught this same principal in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matt 18, and you find as you read that parable that the only one that really wound up suffering in the long run was the servant who refused to forgive.

Who didn't exercise mercy, but demanded justice, it imprisoned him, and that's what unforgiveness does, it imprisons *you*, it hurts *you*, and inevitably it comes back to haunt you, because there's going to be a time that you need mercy, that you need forgiveness and you'll find that judgment is with out mercy to the one who shows no mercy, but mercy triumphs over judgment. Jesus said, "*Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*" Luke 6:37

And so the men responded (vs 20, read up to ?) Having been the recipients of the wrath of God's holiness, having received the just penalty for their sin according to the Law having removed the Mercy Seat, they said, "*Who is able to stand before this Holy Lord God?*" and The answer is no one, by the standards of the Law nobody can stand before God in His holiness, remember when God was giving what we refer to as the Mosaic law to Moses on Mt Sinai they had to partition off the entire Mt because if anyone touched the Mt that God was on they'd die, and if an animal transgressed the fence (so to speak) it was to be shot with an arrow. Because *nobody*, or *nothing* can stand before this holy Lord God.

There is no power above or even beside Him, nothing compares to our God, and His righteousness and His holiness, and we do well to remember that, again in America it seems like we almost get this buddy, buddy mentality with God. And don't get me wrong, He desires intimacy with you, He's a friend that will stick closer to you than a brother, but never forget your place before Him, He is your God, worthy of all honor and power, and blessing, worship, reverence, adoration, praise and glory because He's the Lord. The only way we're able to stand before Him is in the person of Jesus Christ God help us never to forget that, on our own we'd be toast just like these guys, remove the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ And we'd never stand.

So this brings us up to speed now, they sent messengers up to Kirjath Jearim (about 10 miles or so away) asking them to come down and get the ark, we can't handle this thing anymore.

So they came and got it and brought it into Abinidab's house, (which was more than likely of the priestly lineage seeing as how they just learned a harsh lesson regarding the law) and they consecrated Eleazar his son so that he might keep the ark, watch over it and care for it since Shiloh had been destroyed by the Philistines.

Vs2

Or they wailed before the Lord, the guys from Kirjath Jearim came and got it, but what are they going to do with it? 20 years have passed and everyone's still afraid of it, they heard what it did to the Philistines, they saw 1st hand what it did to the men of Beth Shemesh, and so they're sort of at a stalemate so to speak as to what to do with it, they're exercising extreme caution (And rightfully so) they're in the *fear* of the Lord, and that's a good thing.

And this is what I was getting at a minute ago, this is what I believe we've lost by and large today, we tend to let His attributes of love and mercy, tenderness and compassion and forgiveness blur the line with how awesome He is, and how we need to revere and respect Him deeply.

The bible says

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Prov 9:10

Prov 14:27 Says, *"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, To turn one away from the snares of death."*

And this is where these people are at; they're in the fear of the Lord.

Vs3

This is such a powerful vs, Samuel mentions 4 things to them and then the corresponding results if they follow these simple instructions.

Notice #1 Return to the Lord with all your heart, #2 put away idols (the foreign gods from among you) #3 prepare your heart for the Lord, and #4 serve Him only and the result will be that God will deliver you from the snares, or the hand of your enemies.

And this is so near to what we were just talking about Sunday morning, Paul writing to the Thessalonian believers demonstrating the work of Christ in their lives in how they turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from Heaven.

I pray that God give us ears to hear what His Spirit is saying to this church, and I can't know what's going on in each heart, and every individual life, but I implore you and receive the exhortation myself, return to the Lord with *all* your heart.

Not just a portion of your heart, may we not be such a people that would give God the corner closet of our hearts while even in that He's hard pressed to stay there because we're inadvertently squeezing Him out by the means of the foreign god's that we're sticking in there with Him.

The bible commands us to put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among us, I find it interesting the of all the gods he could've mentioned, Ashtoreth gets singled out, she was the multi-breasted goddess of fertility and sexual perversions. And the snare of pornography has gripped this nation and even the Christian community today in epidemic proportions. From the congregations to the Pastorate and everyone in between, it's ruined marriages, it's destroyed ministries, its broke apart families, and shattered lives. God says, "Put it away," return to the Lord with all your heart; prepare your hearts for Him.

We spend our lives planning ahead and preparing for the future and it's all in vain unless we've 1st prepared our hearts for Him. The point being that we're to circumcise the foreskins of our hearts, that we're to no longer lead our lives feeding on and lusting after the things of the flesh. 1 Chron 22:19 says, "*Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God.*" But God's not going to make you do it, that's why Samuel says, "Prepare your hearts for the Lord." That's your personal responsibility, God won't make you do that; Prov 16:1 says very plainly, "*The preparations of the heart belong to man.*"

So whether it be mammon, Ashtoreth, again the altar of anger, or envy and jealousy, tear down the high places in your heart, bust up the fallow ground of your heart, prepare your heart for the Lord, and serve Him only.

Underline that and circle the word "only" this of course takes us back to the original covenant, the 1st commandment was, "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*" Jesus echoed this same thing when He said, "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*" Matt 10:37 In other words He has to come as priority over that which is closest in terms of relationship regarding anything or anyone in your life. The closest relationships you have are those of your family (or at least they should be). And Jesus is saying that He comes before your family, you're to have nothing else in place before Him in your life, and if you do, you're guilty of idolatry, because He's God. And so to place someone, or something else in place before Him is to bow down to and serve that person or that career, or that object or whatever.

Prepare your hearts for the Lord and serve Him only.

And what's the net effect, or the corresponding results? God will deliver you from the hand of your enemies. In other words, if God is the priority of your life, He's going to take care of you, if you're seeking 1st the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, then everything else that you need, God will supply.

Now we've applied this on a personal level, but I believe it also applies (especially as the context supports it) on a national level.

Samuel is exhorting their nation to put away foreign gods and return to the Lord and God will deliver them from the terror of their enemies. Our forefathers founded this nation being committed to the god, not of Mohammed, not on the principals of Buddha, but committed to the God of Ab, Isaac, and Jacob, and I believe that if we're to be truly freed from the terror of our enemies, then we need to return to our roots, that God might fight for us.

I'm not saying that people shouldn't be free to worship whatever god (even though they aren't gods at all) that they should so choose, but what I am saying is that the God of this nation is not Ala, is not Buddha, Yahweh is the God of this nation, He is the God that this nation serves as a whole. And we've strayed from that clear-cut line, things have blurred tremendously, and we're reaping the results today.

Samuel called Israel to a decisive action, repentance. And repentance takes place 1st inwardly (return to the Lord with all your heart) and is then simultaneously demonstrated outwardly, (put away the foreign gods from among you).

And serve Him only, remember that Israel's sin wasn't so much that they rejected the Lord, they really didn't, but that they added other gods into the mix, "We're not turning our back on Jehovah" the Israelites might say, "We're just bringing Baal and Ashtoreth on board as well." "It's all good, let everyone do what seems right to them." If that's not a parallel to our nation today, I don't know what is. But no one can serve 2 masters, you'll wind up serving one at the expense of the other. This was Samuel's word to the people.

Vs4

Now Baal was primarily the god of weather, though he was a fertility god as well, (they all seemed to be fertility gods conveniently enough) but he made the earth fertile through rain and the sun and the various elements. But the people responded to Samuel's exhortation.

Vs5-6

Mizpah was a place that was remembered for separation and repentance, Jacob separated from Laban there, and there the nation repented in Judges ch 20. So Samuel calls them to this place and begins to pray for them, repentance and prayer go hand in hand, and there's a bit of a difference of opinion between commentators as to why they poured out water before the Lord. I personally feel that they were pouring it out in repentance in essence demonstrating the pouring out of their souls to the Lord in repentance and in brokenness as did Hannah in ch 1 of this book. And we read in Ps 22:14 where David said, "*I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me.*" There's just nothing left of him, he's poured out, and coupled with their confession of sin I believe that they're simply pouring themselves out in repentance before the Lord, showing their emptiness and need.

And take note of the fact that their confession wasn't vague, they didn't beat around the bush, they didn't say, "Lord *if* we've sinned we ask you to forgive us." They didn't seek to justify their behavior and blame it on the nations around them, or the people they went to church with or the people at work. They didn't say, "Well, God I know I mess up, but if so and so had done this or that, then I wouldn't have responded the way I did." They just humbled themselves, confessed the fact that they'd sinned against God, and assumed the responsibilities for their actions. That's true confession, so often we look for a scapegoat, someone to cast the blame on so they can carry the weight of responsibility for what we've done. That's not confession, that's the blame game, trying to justify ourselves, God's not interested in that, this is what interests God, true open and honest confession that comes forward in our demonstration of repentance.

Vs7

Whether they thought that Israel was forming to come against them, or they figured they were all together in one place so they needed to strike while the iron was hot we're not told, but for whatever reason they decided to attack Israel while they were all together.

And when Israel caught wind they freaked out, and this just kind of shows you how deceptive our emotions can be, if only every attack could find us poised or prepared in such humility and repentance. David Guzik points out, "Our feelings of confidence can be very deceptive. In 1 Samuel 4:5, Israel was completely confident against the Philistines when the ark came into the army camp. But their confidence was false, and they were soon defeated. Here, Israel is fearful and sure of defeat, they have no confidence at all. But they are humble and repentant before the LORD, and will see a great victory."

They seemed to have more faith when they were trusting in the Ark of God, than they do now that they're trusting in the God of the Ark. But the lesson here is that the smallest faith in the living God will fare you greatly better than the greatest faith in a lie.

Vs 8-9

Last time they were confronted this way they were all, "Hey, lets grab the ark, we can't lose!" But notice the lesson they've learned, now they're crying out to God, seeking intercessory prayer, casting themselves upon the mercy and favor of God. And contrast verse 8 of chapter 7 with vs 3 of ch 4, in vs 3 of ch 4 they were looking to the ark saying, "*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.*"

Now here in vs 8 of ch 7 they're saying, "*Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.*"

And so Samuel cried out to the Lord, and the Lord answered him, or to understand that another way, even though there hasn't been any fighting yet, the battle's already over because the Lord's heard him, and answered him.

Vs10

So as they were drawing near to God, the enemy was preying upon them, don't miss that. But neither should you miss the fact that God fought for them and no doubt many of them were slain by lightning. And when you consider that they worshipped Baal, the god of storms and weather, it's no wonder they were so confused. Not to mention the fact that once again God was showing them how their god was nothing and that He was truly the One who's in control.

Vs11-12

Now, setting up stones as a memorial was a common thing, "Ebenezer" means "Stone of help" and the point here was to remind them that God has taken care of them so far, therefore there's no reason to doubt His faithfulness for the future. We need "Ebenezer stones" today; not something to take the place of God, but something that keeps us mindful of God's faithfulness. Whatever it may be for you; a lot of people keep journals or do various things (as for me, I'm not sure that I do anything specifically for this purpose but I sure see the value of it). We need to remind ourselves of the faithfulness of God.

Vs13-17

So he was the 1st traveling evangelist, or circuit preacher, but he always returned home and there he built an altar. There was his primary place of worship, and such needs to be the case with us all. Next week we'll see that Samuel didn't do so well in this area, but here the example is laid out. We need to spend time ministering to, and worshipping with our families, no matter what our ministry endeavors, our family comes 1st.

(Preacher telling me his wife didn't support him, I told him family comes 1st)