

HERE I RAISE MINE EBENEZER

1 SAMUEL 7:3-12

3And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." 4So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the Lord only.

5Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you." 6So they gathered at Mizpah 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 people of Israel at Mizpah. 7Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines." 9So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him. 10As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. 11And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.

12Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the Lord has helped us." ESV

Introduction

Today we are celebrating Keys Valley Baptist Church's 134th anniversary. There is a lot of history both in our church and in the world during those years.

I found the pastor history to be very interesting. There have been at least 42 pastors (there are some blank spots in the history; 1905-1909, 1934-1935, 1937-1939, 1961-1962, 1973-1974, 1982-1983, 1998-1999). We have two pastors that have served on three separate occasions: Charles Parker 1921-24; 1933-34; 1946-49 and our own John Roark 1983-92; 2007-08; 2010-11. John Roark has the longest continued service as pastor for 9 years at one time.

It is fun to go down memory lane. But I will be honest with you, my memory isn't what it once was. And what is startling is that it may never be better than it is today. That is a sobering thought.

Remembering important events:

Example - Joshua 4 – the children of Israel cross over the Jordan River on dry ground. They choose twelve stones out of the Jordan and placed them in Gilgal so that they would not forget they passed over on dry ground.

Joshua 4:20-24 And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. 21 And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? 22 Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. 23 For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: 24 That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.

There is another example of a “memorial of remembrance” found in 1 Samuel 7:7-12 that I would like to share with you today. It is our text and centers on a war between the Israelites and the Philistines.

History

Samuel is a judge over Israel. A judge over Israel was a “ruler or military leader and they presided over legal matters.” God spoke to them and they carried out His commandments. Therefore, they helped them to remain faithful unto the Lord.

Samuel understood the reason they could not win the war, it was their rebellion against God. They had broken His commandments by worshiping other gods.

3And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” 4So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the Lord only.

Samuel required the house of Israel to make a decision. If they were going to really return to the LORD, then they were to follow three steps that Samuel gave them. 1) Put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth, 2) direct your heart to the Lord. 3) Serve Him only.

If they will do these three things, then God will deliver them out of the hand of the Philistines.

And, they did. They put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the Lord only.

5Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you." 6So they gathered at Mizpah 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 people of Israel at Mizpah.

The people, led by Samuel, gathered at a place called Mizpah. Mizpah is the name given by Jacob and Laban where they made a covenant. They made a memorial of their covenant by gathering stones and piling them upon that spot.

Genesis 31:49 The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.

The people renewed their relationship with the LORD by fasting and confessing their sins.

7Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel.

Upon hearing that Israel was camped at Mizpah, the Philistines moved in battle array before their camp.

7b And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines."

When the people of Israel heard that the Philistines were preparing for an attack, they were afraid. Knowing the spirituality of Samuel and his relationship with God Almighty, they asked the man of God to 'cry out' to the *Lord our God* for them.

9So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him.

Following the requirement for offering an atoning sacrifice (Leviticus 22:27), Samuel offers a lamb as a preparation for his intercessory prayer on behalf of the people. Samuel cries out to the LORD for the people and He responds.

10As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel.

The Philistines drew near to the camp of the Israelites and prepare to attack while Samuel is in prayer with God. Of course, nothing catches the LORD by surprise. The LORD fought the battle for Israel that day.

“The Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines.” The word *thundered* means to tumble, violently agitate. The word *confusion* means to put into commotion, to drive, crush and destroy. Therefore, by the definition of these two words, we see that it was the LORD who routed the Philistines on that day.

11 And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.

Beth-car is a small town south west of Mizpah. It means, “house of sheep.”

12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, “Till now the Lord has helped us.”

A common practice for those living in the Old Testament times was the building of places of remembrance. This great victory over the Philistines by the hand of the LORD was just such a memorial that Samuel wanted the people to remember.

Samuel took a single stone and placed it between Mizpah, where the Israelites were in great fear of the Philistines, and Shen.

Nearly all of the monuments were given names and this stone was no different. Samuel called it Ebenezer, which translated means, *“the Lord has helped us.”*

In order to understand the significance of this name, we would have to go back to 1 Samuel 4:1-21. This is the site where the Philistines had defeated Israel twice before. The sons of Eli were killed in this location. The Ark of the Covenant was taken from the Israelites by the Philistines and this was the beginning of the Philistines rule over the people of Israel.

So the naming of the stone has a dual significance...it is a commemoration of the great victory over the Philistines by the LORD and 2) as an encouragement to the people that past defeats can be turned around into triumphs when God is involved.

Ebenezer was meant to encourage people to remember God’s handiwork, and being thankful for what He had done. The people should remember where they had been, and what had happened, and how things were now.

I believe that most of us are forgetful at times. Mentally answer these questions this morning.

1. I always know where my car keys are.
2. I always remember to take out the trash.
3. I always remember the grocery list.
4. I always remember other people's birthdays.
5. I always remember my medical or dental appointments.
6. I always remember to water the plants.

How did you did you answer them?

If the truth were told, we'd all admit to being forgetful at times. However, Psalm 103 tells us not to forget all His benefits, all the things that God has done for us.

- He's given us life and breath, health and strength.
- He's provided for us forgiveness and clean consciences.
- He's promised us eternal life and hope in the midst of death.
- Our lives have purpose and meaning because of what the Lord has done. The Bible says that everything – from good to bad, from fair to middling – works together for the good of those who love God.

What a great lesson for us to remember. Even the worst tragedies that could possibly happen to a person can be used for the good of people who have a relationship with God.

Ah, but we forget so easily.

In the face of adversity, we lose sight. We lose hope. We lose faith.

No wonder that over and over in the Bible, someone builds an altar of stones, Noah, Moses, Jacob and Elijah, for the purpose of remembering what God had done for them. One stone upon another, laid carefully to withstand the elements, to serve as a reminder for generations of what God has done for them.

We need more Ebenezers! Life gets rough sometimes, and we forget where we have come from.

- We need things like fridge magnets with Bible verses, to remind us when we get our orange juice that the Lord is our shepherd.
- We need the company of other people who love the Lord, to remind us that we are not alone on our journey.
- Wedding rings as a reminder of the promise of love and the vows of commitment.

This explains why we have so many things like gravestones or fasten seat belt lights in our vehicles... to help us remember.

Samuel's Ebenezer served the same purpose. Years later, people would look at that stone and be reminded of God's love for them, and commitment to them, and they would be thankful.

Thank you, Lord, for your watching over us.

Thank you, Lord, for your help and your care.

Thank you, Lord, that you did not abandon us to our enemies.

That's why we have the cross – to remind us of who we were, who we are, where we're going, who made it happen, and how He did it. The cross is more than a nice piece of jewelry; it is an Ebenezer, reminding us of what Someone did for us, to set us free.

Conclusion

Robert Robinson, and he wrote the lyrics to the song that we know by the first line:

Come thou Fount of every blessing, Tune my heart to sing Thy grace.

Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.

The 2nd verse says this:

Here I raise mine Ebenezer; hither by thy help I'm come;

And I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.

The word “hither” really means “so far”. The songwriter and Samuel both looked back at where they had been, where they had come from, and realized that the Lord had been with them. They got to the place where they were, not by themselves, but because the Lord had brought them this far.

The stones of remembrance

Remove your idols

Fast

Confess your sins

Raise your Ebenezer high. Proclaim to the world, “The LORD has helped us!”

*Psalm 46:1 – God is our refuge and strength, a very present **help** in trouble.*

Bob Crowder