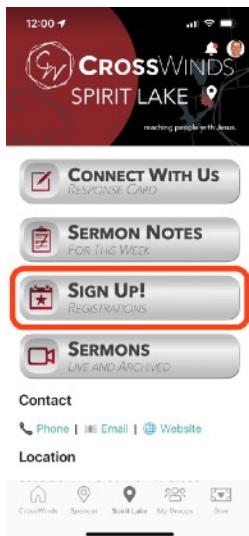


1 Samuel 7:3-17 — The Power Of Repentance

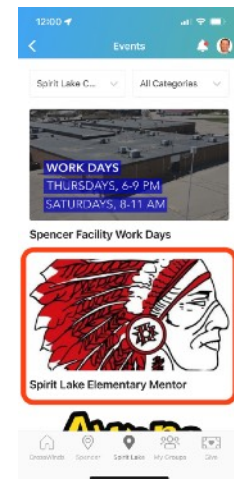
February 27, 2022

Good morning! My name is Kurt. If you are a guest, it is great to have you. If you are around CrossWinds, one of the things you will quickly learn is our heartbeat is reaching people with Jesus. One of the ways we do that is we reach our community by serving our community. We believe good works create goodwill, which opens the door to being able to share the good news.

Last week, I told you one way we are serving the community in Spencer. Through a grant and some networking, we were able to underwrite the costs of the Rides bus for the Iowa Lakes College students in Spencer so they can ride the bus for free. That is important because many of the students in the dorms next to our new Spencer Campus are from overseas and do not have cars. Now they can at least get to places around town for free.



This week, I want to share with you an opportunity to serve the Spirit Lake community that has come our way. Spirit Lake Elementary School is looking for mentors to help elementary students with reading and math. It is only a 20- to 30-minute commitment once a week. I hope a number of us have some time available during the week so we can fit in 20-30 minutes once a week to help children



learn to read and do math. If you are interested, let me know on the response card. Put the response card in the offering box in the back on your way out. An even easier way to respond is the Church Center app. Go to the “Spirit Lake” button at the bottom of the page. Select the “Sign-Up!” button. Choose the “Mentor A Student” registration. Sign up and we will contact you and see if this mentoring will work into your schedule.

The text we are going to look at this morning is the story of one nation invading another and the battle for freedom that followed. As I was studying these verses, I couldn’t help but think about what is happening in Ukraine with the Russian invasion. Before we begin our study, I want you to get into groups of three to five people. Let’s take time to pray for the people of Ukraine asking that God would stop the spread of evil, protect life, and use this all to turn people to Jesus and grow his church.

There is no easy way to transition out of a time or prayer like we just had. I will just jump into our study. Let me begin with two quotes from a popular preacher.

Most people are beaten down enough by life. They already feel guilty enough... I want them to come to Lakewood or our meetings and be lifted up, to say, “You know what? I may not be perfect, but I’m moving forward. I’m doing better.” — Joel Osteen, CBS Sunday Morning Interview

People are used to [churches] condemning people to make them feel bad so that they’ll repent, so they’ll know that they’re sinners, but I think there’s a different approach. —Joel Osteen

Joel Osteen is a great motivational speaker. Unfortunately, he is like many mega-pastors. He doesn’t want to talk about sin and the need to confess our sin to God. He doesn’t want to tell people they need to weep over their sin and

repent over their sin. As he says, "I prefer to take a different approach." Tell people to keep trying. They are doing better.

As I was thinking about his words, the question that kept coming to mind was, "Is there a different approach? Can we be faithful Christians that avoid talking about sin?" I don't think there is a different approach.

If we avoid the topics of sin and repentance at church, it seems we are out of line with some big people in the Bible, for starters John the Baptist and Jesus.

John the Baptist preached:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3:2 (ESV)

John the Baptist didn't just want us to repent of sin in our hearts but he urged people to live differently as a result of their repentance.

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Matthew 3:8 (ESV)

Jesus was also clear about the importance of repenting of our sin to be made right with God.

"No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Luke 13:5 (ESV)

The apostle Peter called people to repent of their sin when they turned to Jesus.

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38 (ESV)

Repentance is essential to knowing God and receiving forgiveness from Jesus.

This morning, as we return to our study in the book of 1 Samuel, we come to 1 Samuel 7. So far in our study of 1 Samuel, we have seen the Philistines

constantly harassed and sometimes brutally killed thousands of the Israelites. Today, we find the Philistines will attack and attempt to butcher the Israelites again. Except for this time, repentance makes a difference.

If you want to boil this entire study down to one simple phrase, it is this: Repentance makes all the difference. Not much has changed. Owning our sin, confessing our sin, repenting of our sin, and turning to Jesus will make all the difference in our life as well. Let's look at some background information, then get into our study.

Background

When we began our study a few weeks ago, I told you the theme of the book of 1 Samuel is leadership. As we followed the story of the loss of the ark of the covenant and the return of the ark in chapters 4-6, you may have wondered if the subject of leadership was forgotten. It wasn't.

What did 1 Samuel 4-6 teach us about leadership? 1 Samuel 4 showed us that God is perfectly capable of dealing with wicked leaders on the inside of a nation. God bumped off Eli and his two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas, in a single day. God cleared the deck of evil leaders in the nation.

In 1 Samuel 5-6, we see God is perfectly capable of dealing with evil leaders on the outside of a nation. In those chapters, God rescued the ark from the Philistines without the help of a single Israelite. In other words, the very things we would consider big leadership problems --- those are corrupt leaders inside a country and evil enemies outside of a country --- are not a problem for God. He can take care of those leadership problems without breaking a sweat.

Unfortunately, at this point in 1 Samuel, even though the evil leaders inside and outside of Israel were handled, the nation of Israel was still struggling. What was wrong? It turns out the real problem for God's people was God himself. The relationship between God and his people was in trouble. That is because the problem in their lives was not an evil leader outside of them but the sinful ways inside of them. Repentance is needed. In this chapter, that is what will be addressed.

When we left off the story, God had struck dead 70 of the men of Beth-shemesh. Most likely they tried to look inside the ark, which was not what they were to do. After this, the men of Beth-Shemesh feared the ark. Like the Philistines, they decided to send the ark to a neighbor and give them the ark that killed people. (What a great way to love your neighbor!) They sent the ark to Kiriath-jearim.

And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD. From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD. 1 Samuel 7:1–2 (ESV)

For 20 years, the ark remained at the house of Abinadab on the hill. Here is where things get interesting. Some of the books I read on this chapter say that the ark lodged at Abinadab's house for 20 years until 2 Samuel 6, when David took the ark to Jerusalem. That is a popular understanding of what took place. That is what I taught last week. It is possible.

The more I studied this verse and the more I looked at the best scholars' interpretation of this verse, the more I found myself coming to a different conclusion on what happened here.

I think it is telling us there were 20 years before the next recorded event, which is the house of Israel lamenting after the Lord. In other words, for 20 years, the people of Israel wanted nothing to do with the ark. They essentially abandoned the ark at Kiriath-Jearim.

Remember the Philistines overran and destroyed Shiloh, which was the city where the ark was kept after they defeated Israel. Seven months afterward, when the ark returned from the land of the Philistines and was placed in Abinidab's house, his house did not become a new Shiloh. It did not become a new place of worship. The people ignored the ark.

So verse 2 does not mean Israel lamented after the Lord FOR 20 years. It means that after 20 years the people finally began lamenting after the Lord. They finally began turning back to God.

Where was Samuel for these 20 years? After Shiloh was destroyed, he probably returned to his home in Ramah. During the 20 years when the nation abandoned God, I am sure Samuel kept preaching to them and urging them to return to the Lord. The problem was that for 20 years nobody listened to his preaching. For almost 20 years, there was little to no spiritual life among God's people and little response to Samuel's preaching of repentance to the people.

It was only after 20 years of preaching a message of repentance that people began to respond by weeping over their sin. They cried over their sin. Their hearts were broken over sin.

What were those 20 years like in Israel when God's people were far from the Lord? They were tough. Later we will see the Philistines made life difficult.

They didn't allow there to be a blacksmith in Israel so Israel could not make weapons. For 20 years the people suffered under the hand of the Philistines while Samuel kept preaching and calling them to repent.

There is some application here for us. **Even when there is faithful preaching of God's Word, sometimes there is little response when people refuse to listen.** This week, I kept thinking what it would be like to have Samuel as your pastor. I am sure he was amazing, yet everybody ignored him. Even though everyone knew Samuel was a prophet who spoke God's words they did not consult him when it came to the question of bringing the ark into battle with the Philistines. After the ark returned, they didn't consult him about the ark.

Finally, after 20 years of Samuel's faithful preaching falling on deaf ears, people begin to cry over their sin and listen to his words. This brings us to another point we need to remember. **Don't give up preaching the gospel. Sometimes repentance only comes after a long time.** Some of you have relatives who are far from God. You have children who are far from God. Don't give up telling them about Jesus and how much God loves them. Don't give up urging them to repent of their sin and run to Jesus. It may take 20 years but God can make a hard heart soft. That is what he did for Israel. If you are discouraged when it comes to telling hard-hearted people about Jesus you are not alone. That was Samuel's gig for 20 years!

As people's hard hearts began to soften after 20 years of stubbornness, Samuel told them how to repent. There is a lot we can learn from his words on repentance.

The Gospel According to Samuel

And 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.” So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only. 1 Samuel 7:3–4 (ESV)

Samuel gave steps they needed to follow to get right with God. Let’s look at them.

Return to the Lord with all your heart.

And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart... 1 Samuel 7:3 (ESV)

Samuel did not assume all the weeping and wailing of the people amounted to true repentance of the people. Sometimes when people suffer and cry over their sin, they have no intention of letting go of their sin. They have no intention of returning to God. They may regret their sin, but they have no intention of actually turning to God and turning away from sin. Many times people love their suffering more than their savior.

This reminds me of a couple I counseled years ago. The man had a drinking problem. He would drink and become abusive to the woman that was in his home. When this couple came to me, on the outside, this man said he felt terrible about his behavior and the abuse he gave to his girlfriend when he was drunk. I urged him to give up the bottle, to run to Jesus, and make a clear decisive break from this sin in his life. While there were a lot of tears, they were not tears of genuine repentance. It was all just wordly sorrow. He kept the bottle. He lost the woman in his life. He left the church. The last I heard, he sits home alone at night and drinks himself to sleep.

When we suffer for sin, plenty of people don't let that suffering for sin break their hearts so they repent and turn back to God with all of their hearts. Yet, Samuel reminded the people of Israel, and he reminds us, that is the first step of true repentance.

The Bible talks about this as the difference between godly grief and worldly grief. Worldly grief is feeling sorry you were caught. It is feeling bad over the consequences of your sin. It is getting angry at the police officer that pulled you over for drunk driving. Godly grief is not just being sorry for the consequences of our sin but being sorry for how our sin has offended God and grieved our heavenly father. It produces a turning away from sin and a turning to God in response to our sin. Paul talked about it this way.

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. 2 Corinthians 7:10 (ESV)

Here is some application. **Don't confuse worldly grief and godly grief.** If this morning, you are suffering the consequences of sin, let your sin lead you to repent and turn to God with all of your heart.

Don't sit in your sin, run to God and confess your sin asking for God's forgiveness. Turn to God not half-heartedly but wholeheartedly. Samuel was clear that this is the first step in genuine repentance.

Put away foreign gods.

...then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you... 1 Samuel 7:3 (ESV)

The implication of the words "put away" is clear. Here is the problem. For the last 20 years, the Israelites had taken on the Canaanite lifestyle. They had

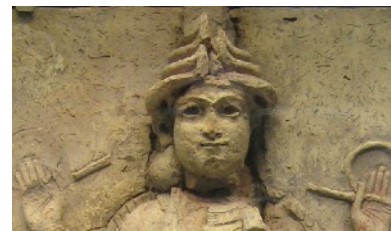
learned the Canaanite ways and were worshipping the Canaanite gods. This was the source of all their troubles.

The Bible is clear on these things. The first of the Ten Commandments prohibited this.

You shall have no other gods before me. Exodus 20:3 (ESV)

The second of the Ten Commandments prohibited idols, yet that is what they were doing. They were making and following idols of other gods. Who were the other gods they worshipped?

Ashtaroth is mentioned. Ashtaroth is the plural form of Ashtoreth, the Canaanite goddess also called Astarte. She was the wife of Baal. Baal and Ashtaroth were linked in matters of fertility. If



people hoped to secure rains and abundant crops, they worshipped these gods. They were the gods who provided success in life. Turning away from these gods was difficult.

1. **Baal and Ashtaroth worship were popular.** Everybody around the Israelites worshipped these gods. If they turned away from these gods, the Israelites would not fit in with the culture around them. There was tremendous pressure to worship these gods for crop success because that is what everyone did. If your neighbor had a better harvest than you did, you began to think Ashtaroth worship was helping him. Maybe you should join him. God's people needed the courage to step aside from culture in areas where culture was sinful. In a similar way, any one of us wants to follow Jesus must be willing to step aside from culture in areas where it is sinful. This is an important application to

remember. We must be willing to turn away from things that are popular with our friends but not pleasing to Jesus. When I was in college, it was R-rated movies. I was finally out of the house. I had freedom. Every Friday night, my friends and I would go to movies where we would watch the latest Schwarzenegger shoot-em-up and blow-em-up movies. God began convicting me that I was filling my mind with trash. I would wake up Saturday morning with violence, death, and sex scenes in my brain. The Holy Spirit kept telling me I needed the courage to not follow my friends. I needed to be willing to stay alone in my dorm room on Friday night and not join my friends in watching those movies. I made plenty of wrong choices in my life but that is one I eventually got right. Today, the greatest pressure to fit into the sinful aspects of our culture comes from social media and the videos we watch on YouTube. God is calling us to live in our culture but to have the courage and the genuine repentance to say “No” to sinful patterns in our culture that everyone else is following. This gives us a great application point we need to remember. **Turn away from what is popular but sinful in our culture.**

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. James 4:4 (ESV)

2. **Baal and Ashtaroth worship were sensually appealing.** A moment ago, I showed you Ashtaroth’s face. I can’t show you a full picture of her statue because she is a naked woman. She is ancient porn. The worship of Baal and Ashtaroth involved ritual sex with the temple prostitutes. That is what everybody did. The Israelite men thought it was more enjoyable to go to a Canaanite temple prostitute to bless their crops than a prayer meeting. The

Israelites were not just following the popular culture around them but they were enjoying the sexually enticing and seductive culture around them. When Samuel told them to put away these gods, you can see why. The men, and I assume the women, were not living sexually pure lives. When Samuel called these men to repent of this idol, he was calling them to repent of sexual sin, to repent of the ancient porn they viewed as they stared at this idol. They were to repent of sex outside of marriage.

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Hebrews 13:4 (ESV)

My friends, not much has changed. Today we are assaulted with all kinds of sexual enticements. It is easy to fall into those sexual traps in culture. After all, everybody is doing it. Everybody is watching it. Samuel called the people of Israel, and he calls us, to not follow the sexual enticements and traps in the culture around you. God's men are to be pure men. God's men save sex for marriage and are faithful to their wives. They repent of following the culture around them, a culture that is enslaved to porn and premarital sex. Don't fritter away your sexuality on everyone else outside of marriage. Save sexuality for marriage and enjoy the blessing of marriage. If today you are repenting of that, put out of your life those gateways for sexual enticements to enter your world. Get a dumbphone instead of a smartphone. Use Internet accountability software. Do whatever you have to do to cut those gateways for sin out of your life.

Direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only.

...direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only... 1 Samuel 7:3c (ESV)

Repentance is not just turning from something. It is turning to God. In our case, it is turning to Jesus. I like to think of biblical repentance as flipping a coin. Just as important as turning away from sin is at the same time turning to Jesus when we repent.

Anytime we turn from something, we have to turn to something else. If we just turn from one sin to another sin, we will continually find ourselves in bondage. It is only when we turn from sin to Jesus like we flip a coin, that we can find freedom.

So we are directed to turn from sin and to turn from the idols in life that have captivated us and turned us away from directing our hearts and affections to God alone.

God will deliver you.

“...and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” 1 Samuel 7:3 (ESV)

Here we see there is a promise that comes with repentance. God will no longer be fighting against his people. God will deliver his people.

This is also letting us know the Philistines didn't just defeat the Israelites 20 years before but had been a continual menace for the last 20 years. For the people of Israel, true repentance and turning from the idols in their lives would lead to God coming to their rescue against the Philistine menaces.

In a similar way, as Christians, for us to enjoy the fullness of God's presence and blessing in our lives, we need to turn from our sins and the idols in our lives and give our hearts to serving the Lord. I am not talking about the prosperity gospel. Don't misunderstand. I am simply saying it is better for God to be delighting in us for our obedience than for him to be disciplining us for our sin.

So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and they served the LORD only. 1 Samuel 7:4 (ESV)

This is an incredibly important moment. This is a short verse. We will miss the significance of these words if we forget that for the last 20 years Samuel preached, calling the people to repentance, but nobody listened. Finally, they listened. They didn't just listen with sorrow in their hearts and suffering in their lives but they actually made changes in their lives. They gave up following the sinful idols in the world around them. Guys gave up porn. They stopped visiting the temple prostitutes. They were willing to be holy and unpopular because pleasing God was the focus of their hearts.

Samuel gathered the people and prayed for the people.

Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." 1 Samuel 7:5 (ESV)

Mizpah was a traditional meeting place for the people about 5 miles north of Jerusalem. Now that people were turning to the Lord, Samuel was a good pastor. He wanted to pray for them. What we have going on is national revival. This is like a huge Promise Keepers meeting with people repenting of their sin and turning to the Lord.

Once the people gathered, they expressed sorrow for their sin as they were calling out to the Lord, repenting of their sin.

So 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."... 1 Samuel 7:6 (ESV)

The pouring out of water and the fasting were both expressions of repentance. These actions were not symbolic rituals but real acts of self-denial as

the people grieved their sin and called out to God asking for forgiveness of their sin.

What was the pouring out of the water? On that day, when people were thirsty, they poured out their water on the ground and essentially said, "God, I am more desperate for your forgiveness and your favor than I am for this drink. I need your forgiveness more than I need water."

In a similar way, they denied themselves food. They fasted. When they were hungry, on that day they told God they needed his forgiveness and his favor more than they needed food. This shows the desperate and genuine forgiveness they were seeking from God.

We can learn a lesson from the Israelites. Sometimes when we sin and are repenting of our sin, it is appropriate to fast and deny ourselves of food and drink for a period of time as we confess our sin and call out to God for forgiveness. That was not just true for Israel, it is also true for us.

Samuel judged Israel.

...And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah. 1 Samuel 7:6 (ESV)

When we read Samuel judged Israel at Mizpah, that sounds like a "Judge Judy" episode. That is not what was happening. Samuel's judging of Israel was him preaching to the Israelites and showing them their sin. Samuel continued to show people their sins so they could repent.

Sometimes the best thing a preacher can do for any of us is to help us see ourselves in the mirror of God's law. When we can finally see our sin, we are cut to the heart and convicted of our sin. It is only then that we can repent and be forgiven of our sin. That is what Saul was doing. At Mizpah, he was having a

massive Billy Graham crusade, calling people to repent of the idols in their lives and turn back to God.

It took no time for this repentance to be put to the test.

Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel... 1 Samuel 7:7 (ESV)

The last time we saw the five lords of the Philistines was in chapter 6 when they watched the cows bring the cart carrying the ark of the covenant back to Israel. Then they were happy to get rid of the ark and the God of Israel. In 20 years things have changed. The Philistines love to kill and plunder God's people. When the Philistines hear all the people have assembled at Mizpah, they see this as their opportunity to crush and kill the Israelites and to steal their stuff.

...And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 1 Samuel 7:7 (ESV)

This is understandable. Everyone knew their history. They remembered the slaughter of 20 years before when the Philistines killed 34,000 Israelites. At this time, things were no better. The Israelites were living in servitude. They could not defend themselves. On paper, this looked like an easy win for the Philistines.

And 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." So 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. 1 Samuel 7:8–9 (ESV)

Twenty years before, the Israelites didn't pray. They tried to use the ark as a military superweapon. It backfired. Look how things changed. Now, the people are very much aware of their sins. They were fasting and weeping over their sin. They put away their idols. They turned from sin and turned wholeheartedly to the Lord. They were asking God to save them. They were not relying on themselves.

Here is the \$1,000,000 question: Would this repentance make a difference? What do you think?

You bet it did!

The last thing Samuel did after holding his Billy Graham revival crusade was offer a whole burnt offering to cover the sin of the people. That was the last step in repentance. Their now their sin was finally covered by the blood of the lamb.

I want you to notice that Samuel did not jump into getting people ready for battle and telling them to strap on their swords when the Philistines were coming. Samuel focused on doing everything he could to take care of the sins of the people so they were right with God. Samuel knew that on that day, the most important thing God's people needed was to be in a right relationship with their God. Everything else was of secondary importance.

That gives us a practical lesson we can learn. **The most important way to prepare for the battles in life is to be in a right relationship with God in our lives.** The most important thing for each of us as we face the challenges of each day is to be in a right relationship with Jesus. It is when we are in a right relationship with Jesus that God delights in us rather than disciplines us.

The Lord answered Samuel.

...and the Lord answered him. **1 Samuel 7:9c**

In the story of 1 Samuel, this is the first time that the Lord acted positively toward his people since he answered Hannah's prayer and Samuel was born. Now, after all these years, God heard and answered Samuel's prayers for Israel's deliverance.

As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel... 1 Samuel 7:10 (ESV)

The picture is vivid. As Samuel was offering the sacrifice of the lamb, the Philistines were beginning their attack.

...But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. 1 Samuel 7:10 (ESV)

God saved his people with thunder. It doesn't say there was rain. Maybe there was. What we know for sure is God unleashed thunder. This was not your average thunder but a really, really loud thunder. I assume there was also lightning from heaven right over or right on the Philistines. It really freaked them out. This was God's version of a flash-bang grenade to completely disorientate them. Maybe it looked like Thor from the Marvel Comics showing up with lightning and thunder everywhere. The Philistines quickly realized they were dealing with much more than they expected. They ran for their lives.

Let me take a moment to step out of the story. Remember Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2? I told you that in her prayer, she unknowingly forecasted how God would work in the rest of the book. She introduced themes in her prayer that God would fulfill in the book. Look at one of the lines in her prayer.

The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven... 1 Samuel 2:10 (ESV)

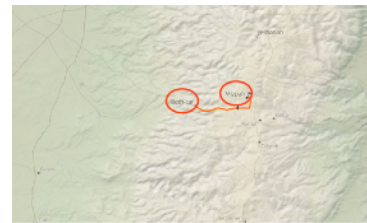
That is what happened. God broke the Philistines to pieces with thunder from heaven.

Do you see what happened? This was the battle of Ebenezer that happened 20 years before but the outcome was reversed. Twenty years before, God defeated his people because of their sin. Twenty years later, God fought for

his people and defeated their enemies because of their repentance and return to him.

Does repentance make a difference? Yes! Repentance makes all the difference! That is why for 20 years Samuel kept urging people to repent of their sin, get rid of the idols in their lives, and turn to God. Repentance from sin and turning to God was the key to changing their lives. This is why when we have pastors and churches who refuse to talk about sin, who refuse to talk about repentance and turning to Jesus, we have a dead-end road. It doesn't matter how popular or glamorous those preachers are today, people are not experiencing the power of God unless they are repenting of their sin and turning to God.

And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car. 1 Samuel 7:11 (ESV)



It was about six miles from Mizpah to Beth-car.

Since this was below Beth-car, maybe it was a 7- to

10-mile chase. The Israelites chased the Philistines for a long time.

Don't forget the times when God rescues us.

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." 1 Samuel 7:12 (ESV)

In case you missed the connections and the contrasts between the defeat at the city of Ebenezer in the north and the victory at Mizpah a little to the south, Samuel just made the link clear. At the original Ebenezer Israel was defeated and lost 34,000 men. It was a terrible memory in people's minds. Now Samuel took a rock and made it a great memorial stone. He gave the rock that memorialized the

victory the same name as the city that memorialized Israel's defeat in order to forever frame in people's minds the complete reversal of outcomes that took place. The difference in the outcome was not in the strength of the enemy. It was in the repentance of the people.

Ebenezer means "stone of help." At the city of Ebenezer in the north, Israel had not been helped. The Ebenezer memorial stone was a reminder that the second time God did provide help.

Samuel's name for the stone has a curious ring to it. Samuel said, "Till now the Lord has helped us." The Lord helped this time, but what would happen in the future? Would God's people continue repenting of their sin and turning away from the sinfulness in the culture around them and putting God first in their lives or would they slip back into their old ways? Would they go from God fighting for them to fighting against them once again?

By erecting a stone of remembrance, Samuel was trying to help the people remember the day when God stepped in and defeated their enemies because of their repentance. Samuel's hope and prayer was in the future, they would continue to repent so the Lord would help them again.

Here is a way to remember this. **As Christians, we do not live in the past. We live out of the past.** We remember how God proved his faithfulness and love to us in the past and we can be confident that as we follow him he will safely bring us home.

God protected his people after repentance.

So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites. 1 Samuel 7:13–14 (ESV)

The point of these verses is this defeat of the Philistines wasn't a one-shot wonder. It was devastating. As long as Samuel remained as priest and prophet in Israel, the Philistines never again attacked Israel. Even cities the Philistines took from Israel were restored. It is very clear that as long as God's people were repentant, God continued to fight for them. God was protecting his people.

In addition, there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. Who were the Amorites? They were the native Canaanites of the land. They also gave up attacking Israel. God protected his people. God watched over his people.

Here is a point of application we can make for today. **God honors those who honor him.** This does not mean we will be rich. It does not mean our lives will be without problems. It means that when we repent of our sin and turn to God with all of our hearts, God will be delighting in us, not disciplining us.

God sustains his people through repentance.

Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the LORD. 1 Samuel 7:15–17 (ESV)

After this, we see Samuel had a little path he followed every year. He was a traveling preacher. As he traveled around Israel, he judged Israel. Samuel continued to help people see sin, repent of their sin, and turn to their Lord. Repentance didn't just get God's people back into a right relationship with God but continual repentance kept people in a right relationship with God.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we see the incredible power of repentance and how it brings us back into a right relationship with God. This morning, I don't know your life when you walked in this door. Maybe you have wandered away from God for many years. Maybe you have followed the sinful culture of the world. If that is you, God calls you to repent and turn to him today.

The amazing part is it doesn't matter how long you have run from God. It may have been 20 years like the nation of Israel. The good news is God stands with his arms open wide, ready to forgive you and receive you when you repent of your sin and follow Jesus with your life.

Remember, repentance makes all the difference.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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