


First Baptist Church
Canton
Gather, Grow, Go.

'HONING IN ON THE HEART!'



A VERSE-BY-VERSE SERIES ON THE BOOK OF 1ST SAMUEL DURING WEDNESDAY NIGHT SERVICES IN 2024

'Honing in on the Heart!' Sermon Series

Sermon #12:

'The Effect of an Ebenezer Epiphany!'

Wednesday, April 24th, 2024

Last week in 'Honing in on the Heart':

- Last week in 1st Samuel we found ourselves in 1st Samuel 6-7:2.
 - In this text, we saw the rejoicing that took place when the Ark of the Covenant came home, but also the sadness when 70 Israelite men died because they gazed irreverently at the Ark.
 - Last week I asked the question: *What is the significance of the Ark returning home to Israel that we find in this text?*
 - **Point 1: *An Experiment Planned.* (V. 1-9)**
 - **Point 2: *An Exciting Path.* (V. 10-18)**

■ **Point 3: *An Excruciating Pain.* (V. 19-7:2)**

- Based on last Wednesday's message, how have you reelected upon how you treat God?
 - ***Have you reflected on the situation of your heart before God?***

'The Effect of an Ebenezer Epiphany!'

1st Samuel 7:3-17

Sermon in a Sentence:

We can see the Effect of an Ebenezer Epiphany in these verses by looking at the Message of Repentance, a Meaningful Request, a Merciful Response, a Memorial that is Resurrected, and a Ministry of Restoration that unfolds through Samuel.

Intro:

- Have you ever had that moment that you look back to in your life where you say 'I did that!'?
 - *Maybe it was something that you didn't think you were able to do, but you did it.*
 - *Or maybe you were diagnosed with cancer and you were able to defeat it.*
 - *Or maybe someone told you that you couldn't graduate from that school or you couldn't get that job, and you did it.*
 - ***All of these moments, are an Ebenezer Moment.***

- Samuel defined what this word Ebenezer means in the text that we are studying tonight.
 - *He (Samuel), set up a stone, and he called it Ebenezer. Which he defines as ‘Till now the Lord has helped me.’*
 - *Whenever we achieve or do anything in life where the odds were supremely set against us, we must realize that it is Christ in us who is allowing us to overcome.*
- *Sadly though, we often focus on our own poor circumstances, or let the negative voices have too much priority in our lives.*
 - This is when satan gets his way in our lives. By feeding into our ears, and letting us know that things aren’t great.
 - *Oftentimes we focus on these negative times, than the Ebenezer moments that God has allowed us to have over the course of our lifetime.*
- Tonight, 1st Samuel 7:3-17, is the break of a 20 year silence for Samuel.
 - *Robert D. Bergen says ‘This section contrast the juridical ministry of Samuel with that of the house of Eli. Hophni and Phinehas had sought to bring victory to Israel by bringing the Lord’s Ark against the Philistines. Samuel brought victory to Israel by bringing Israel back to the Lord.’*

- *What we find in tonight’s text, is what led up to and what the effects were of the Ebenezer Epiphany that Samuel led them to.*
 - Although it had been since 1st Samuel 4:1, 20 years, since we had heard from prophet and Judge, Samuel, here, is calling them back to the Lord for a moment that will hopefully be imprinted in their minds for years to come.
 - Truly this is a *‘Look at what God did’* moment.
- Tonight as we go through this text carefully, I want to you to think of ‘Look at what God did’ moments in your life. No matter when or what that may have been.
 - *At the end of our service tonight, we will have a special activity where you can truly have an Ebenezer moment with you and the Lord.*

Read 1st Samuel 7:3-17

Question to Ask:

What are the effects of Samuel’s solid leadership over Israel that we find in this text that led to the Ebenezer Epiphany that we find in Samuel 7?

Point 1: *A Message of Repentance. (V. 3-4)*

- ‘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.” 4 So

the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only.’

- ***For 20 years the Ark of the Covenant had remained at Kiriath Jearim. And for 20 years, the people had not heard from God through Samuel.***

- 1st Samuel 7:2, tells us that Israel was lamenting after the Lord.

- ***Even 20 years later, the Philistines are still a thorn in the side of the Israelites.***

- It had been so long and nothing had changed. But why?

- ***Because they had not repented and turned things over to the Lord.***

- ***Instead of chasing after God, they had gone after false gods.***

- So, the first message that Samuel gives after 20 years of silence is strong. But it also proved impactful due to the willingness of the Israelites to obey the Lord and repent.

- ***The path to your Ebenezer Epiphany starts with YOU being willing to repent, follow, and obey God!***

- I believe there are **2** things here that we see about the message of repentance that Samuel gives.

- ***The Necessities. (V. 3)***

- ‘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.”’

- ***In Samuel’s message, he clearly gives the things that are necessary for Repentance to be genuine.***

- In Israel then and in our society today, people throw around the term ‘repent.’

- ***Here’s the thing, if you really and truly repent of your sin, it is going to cost you something.***

- ***If it doesn’t cost you something, then what have you repented from?***

- Samuel starts off by posing the conditional question ***IF you are returning to the Lord with all your heart***

- ***Before we look at the Necessities to true repentance that Samuel gives, we must ask ourselves, Do I really want to return to the Lord?***

- I believe there are 3 necessities of repentance that Samuel gives Israel here:

- ***#1: Put Away idols.***

- ‘then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you’
- ***Word Study***
 - The word **‘Ashtaroth’ is the plural form of Ashtoreth, which in Hebrew was also called Astarte which was the Canaanite goddess who was said to be the wife of baal.**
 - Baal was also believed to be the son of dagon.
 - **The use of the Plural word in the Hebrew text, would indicate that the Israelites had various images of Astarte lying around. This was the canaanite god of storms and fertility.**
- **John Woodhouse said ‘It is probable that the worship of these deities involved various practices.’**
 - One of the necessities to true repentance, is

handing over to God what you put in His place over Him.

- **#2: Give your heart to God.**
 - ‘direct your heart to the LORD’
 - **God wants your heart. He wants you. If you truly repent of your sin, you’ll give Him your heart!**
 - What this means to the Israelites and what it means to us is exclusive, single-minded, wholehearted commitment solely to God. The Lord must be on the throne of our hearts.
- **#3: Serve only Him.**
 - ‘serve him only,’
 - **It’s obvious that the Israelites greatly struggled with this one due to their struggles that are noted throughout the OT.**
 - **One reason that this was such a struggle for them, was the fact that most over ancient nations had a plurality of gods, while they had one, YAWHEH.**
- **These are the necessities that Samuel gives the people of Israel that they are to follow if they**

truly want to repent and for the Lord to deliver them.

- **The Nation Responds. (V. 4)**
 - ‘So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only.’
 - **Wow, the nation of Israel hears from Samuel for the first time in 20 years, and they respond.**
 - ***It’s hard for us to really put the nation’s response in proper perspective, but when we put into account that Israel had been in 20+ years of apostasy, it was now over.***
 - The years of worshiping false gods and not serving the one true God, had ended, for now.
 - ***This came about because God gave Samuel a message to speak on Repentance.***

Point 2: A Meaningful Request. (V. 5-9)

- The scripture does not give us any indication that Samuel was shocked or surprised, but I have to think that he was. At least a little bit.
 - ***It seems clear that there was no pushback from the Israelites, they realized they were at their whits end, and decided to repent.***
- ***Like good leaders do, I believe Samuel does the right thing by taking the nation's affairs and state, to the Lord.***

- After all, this nation had turned it’s back on God, and was going to face the same enemy that they did years ago, where thousands died.
 - I believe there are ___ things that we see in this meaningful request that Samuel gives on behalf of Israel.

● **An Intercessor. (V. 5-6)**

- ‘Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.” 6 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.” And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.’
- ***The phrase ‘gather all israel’ probably didn’t literally mean every israelite, but probably meant representatives from all of the tribal territories.***
 - ***Mizpah- This town was located 5 miles north of Jerusalem on the north south road through the central highlands.***
 - This was a town that geographically, would have been more difficult for the philistines to attempt to ambush.
 - According to ***Judges 20:1***, this location was a center for tribal convocations and meeting in the period of the judges.

- ‘Then all the people of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah.’
- *Samuel is praying to God for the nation of Israel.*
 - It’s no secret that the relationship between God and Israel had been broken for sometime.
 - Israel had departed and gone after false gods.
 - *After 20 years of this stagnant and backsliding relationship between God and Israel, God provided through Samuel. To intercede for His people.*
 - *I believe that anytime there is an Ebenezer moment in someone’s life, it comes after a time of prayer.*
- *Verse 6 is also an indication of the kind of response that Israel was having to the leadership of Samuel.*
 - The water that was being poured out and the fasting were outward expressions of the Israelites inward repentance.
- John Woodhouse stated *‘The actions may be best seen not so much as symbolic rituals, but as real acts of self-denial as the people turned from their self-centered ways back to the Lord.’*
 - This accompanied by their verbal confession ‘we have sinned against the Lord’
- *When real repentance occurs among the people of God, there will be outward changes in their conduct and this will be backed up with their words.*
- *Robert D. Bergen also made an interesting observation on this ‘an action unparalleled in the Old Testament in an Israelite religious convocation, they evidently were denying themselves liquids as a symbolic confession that the Lord’s favor was more important to them than life-sustaining water.’*
 - All of this started, with their intercesor interceding on their behalf to the Lord.
- *Their Identity. (V. 7-9)*
 - ‘Now 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. 8 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.” 9 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.’

- ***It’s truly incredible to see how the identity of the nation of Israel changed after their repentance to the Lord.***
 - Instead of trying to manipulate God with the Ark of the Covenant, this time they go immediately to prayer, asking Samuel to intercede on their behalf.
- ***Now verse 7, says that the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah***
 - Remember that the Philistines had defeated Israel nearly 20 years before at this point. So, the nation of Israel was under and subjected to the Philistines.
- Robert D. Bergen pointed out ***‘In all likelihood the Philistines had forbidden the Israelites to hold public assemblies since such meetings could easily be used to mobilize the tribes for war.’***
 - ***So this would indicate why the fighting even began.***
- The philistines didn’t want the tribes of Israel gathering in large groups in case they came up with a plan to come against them.

- ***In verse 7, ‘the lords of the philistines went up against Israel’ is to show that the philistines wanted to subdue whatever kind of gathering was taking place.***

- This is why the Israelites had asked Samuel to pray. Their identity was different now. Due to the revivals that had occurred in the land that we’ve read about tonight, they wanted to go to God first, instead of as a last resort.
- ***Due to the request of the Israelites and their newfound identity (in the Lord), Samuel goes and offers a blood sacrifice, a suckling lamb unto the Lord.***
 - ***An animal could be sacrificed once it was eight days old.***
 - According to Leviticus 1:4, the entire purpose of a whole burnt offering was to make atonement.
- ***Verse 9 tells us that the Lord heard Samuel and that the Lord answered Samuel.***
 - I believe the Lord’s decision to answer Israel in their time of need is in direct correlation with their repentance and their leader encouraging them to follow the Lord.
- Tonight we’ve been able to see A Message of Repentance, and a Meaningful Request.

Point 3: *A Merciful Response. (V. 10-11)*

- *Verse 9 tells us that the Lord answered Him, and verses 10-11 explain the response that God had on the Philistines on behalf of the Israelite people.*

- *As much as Israel had run from God over time, when they returned, God was ready and willing to welcome them back with open arms.*

- Just like He does with us. God fights for us even when we don't follow Him like we should.

- *This is an example of His mercy and goodness to us.*

- There are **2** things to point out regarding God's merciful response on behalf of the nation of Israel:

- **God Sends Confusion. (V. 10)**

- 'As 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.'

- **While Samuel is offering up the burnt offering to the Lord, the Ebenezer Epiphany occurs.**

- A moment that only God could intervene in, He comes through.

- **The israelites had been gathering in a religious renewal gathering and the Philistines come up and attack them.**

- **Have you ever felt that way? Where something came out of nowhere and attacked you.**

- Sneak attack.
- These are the kinds of moments in our lives when only God can do for us what we can not do for ourselves.

- ***So, what does God do?***

- He acts powerfully and supernaturally.
- First, the Lord '**Thundered**' against the Philistines.

- David E. Garland said **'In so doing he demonstrated that he, not the Philistine Dagon, not the Canaanite Baal son of Dagon, was truly the God of the storm, the only one able to control the elements whether for good or ill.'**

- Some scholars believe this was an actual thunderstorm that the Lord sent and others believe a loud audible voice. Either way, The Lord sent them into confusion.

- Both of these things are a fulfillment of Hannah's prayer, back in ***1st Samuel 2:10***.

- ‘The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven.’
- Secondly, the Lord threw them into **‘Confusion’**.
 - This english word ‘confusion’ comes from the Hebrew word **‘Hamam’** **הָמַם** *which is found 15 times in the OT and means ‘to put in commotion, to disturbed, drive, destroy, break and route.*
- To help us understand this confusion, we can look at the first time this word occurs in the OT, which is in [Exodus 14:24](#).
 - ‘And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic,’
 - ***This is where God threw the army of egypt into a panic.***
- ***Israel Conquers. (V. 11)***
 - ‘And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.’

- Because of what God did for them through the thunder and the confusion, they were able to defeat their enemies.

■ ***The battles that you are facing in this room tonight do not have to overtake you. When God gets involved, He takes it over.***

- ***You can experience an Ebenezer Epiphany and probably already have before in your life, just remember that it’s God’s power working in and through you. Not you, but the Lord.***

- Tonight we have seen the Message of Repentance, a Meaningful Request, and a Merciful Response.

Point 4: *A Memorial is Resurrected. (V. 12-13)*

● ***Samuel knows and is well aware that what occurred that day was an act of God.***

- In order to make future generations aware of exactly what occurred that day in that place, Samuel puts up a marker, a memorial.
 - ***So that when future generations saw that rock and that place, they would be reminded of how powerful God is. And what God did before He can certainly do again if He so chooses.***
 - ***We must do the same thing in our lives for those that come***

behind us. We must speak and sing of God's faithfulness through different things that we have encountered.

- I believe there are **2** things that we need to consider concerning the memorial that was resurrected by Samuel that day.
- ***A Reminder. (V. 12)***
 - 'Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen[**a**] and called its name Ebenezer;[**b**] for he said, "Till now the LORD has helped us."
 - Now, don't get this Ebenezer location confused with the battlefield mentioned in 1st Samuel 4:1.
 - ***Most scholars believe that location would be too far north to be the one that is discussed here.***
 - ***But, I believe that Samuel does name this memorial 'Ebenezer' to be a strong reminder.***
 - ***It draws attention to what 'Ebenezer' means, as our text does define it, and it shows the reversal that had taken place.***
 - Scholar John Woodhouse said ***'The earlier Ebenezer had a terribly ironic name. At 'stone of help' Israel had not been helped! Now, however, the new Ebenezer stood as a testimony to the Lord's help.***

○ ***'Till now the Lord has helped us' most likely means that from Mizpah to the location of this stone, the Lord had helped them.***

- What about you? In just a moment we are going to each come up and grab one of these stones. We're going to write our Ebenezer moment on them.

● ***What event in your life did God come through for you? What's your daily reminder that He will come through again?***

○ This stone was a reminder, but a reckoning for the Philistines would soon follow.

● ***A Reckoning. (V. 13)***

○ '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.'

○ ***Under Samuel's leadership, the Philistines would not be an issue for them.***

- Later on in 1st Samuel they will become a problem again, but that will be under Saul's time as leader, not Samuel's.

○ ***Samuel's strong spiritual leadership had led the nation to a spiritual revival that gave life to what had been a spiritual desert.***

- ***This moment would become the flagship of Samuel's ministry in Israel. One that he would be known for.***

Known for allowing God to use him to bring about a great revival in the land.

Point 5: *A Ministry of Restoration. (V. 14-17)*

- ***The narrative tonight does not just end with Israel subduing the Philistines, it ends with God restoring the land around them.***
 - A period of Peace was beginning for Israel, until they became restless and wanted a king like the other nations.
- Here's how God restored their lands according to the scriptures:
 - '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. Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. **16** And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. **17** 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.'
- ***The Lord had restored that which had been lost for many years.***
 - ***There was also additional peace between Israel and the Amorties. (pre-Israelite Canaanites).***
 - ***God had restored them, because they had repented and turned back to Him.***

○ ***For generations to come, Israelites would look at the Ebenezer rock, and remember what God had done.***

- Truly, this was an Ebenezer Epiphany moment for them.
- And it can be for us here tonight.

Conclusion:

- Tonight as we close, I want us to close our service much differently than we normally do.
 - Down here at the altar I have two different buckets of rocks.
- ***While these aren't as big as the stone that Samuel placed there that day, they are small enough for you to write on and take home.***
 - ***I want you, during this time of invitation, to come up, grab a rock, and a sharpie, and write on that rock what your Ebenezer moment is.***
 - ***That moment that you can look back on and say 'God brought me through'***
 - It could be the death of a spouse, child, cancer diagnosis, loss of a job, divorce, anything like that.
 - Write it on that rock, and place it somewhere in your home where people will see it. So that when they ask about, you can say 'that was my Ebenezer Epiphany', the moment that God came through, when no one else would.

