EBENEZER

Despite all of our nonsense, God has helped us. Let us purpose to live wholeheartedly for God from here on in.

KEY POINTS

- The road to Ebenezer – the memorial stone in remembrance of God's help to Israel – was long.
- It was lined with the graves of thousands of people. It was soaked in the blood of defeats in battle. On the way there, the Ark of the Covenant, which symbolized God's presence with Israel and which housed God's law, was lost.
- Along that road there was greed. Even religious leaders felt they could do whatever they wanted and no one should stand in the way.
- Before there could be "Ebenezer" there had to be a turning away from thoughts and actions that were ungodly, false, disobedient and just plain wrong.
- They had to be willing to let it all go, turn toward God and commit themselves completely to Him.
- And that is what we have to do in our own lives to get to that "rock of Ebenezer" where we can once again experience the help of the Lord.
- The road to Ebenezer included a solitary voice amid all the other voices, vices and viewpoints.
- It was the growing voice of Samuel.
- The name "Samuel" combines two words – the proper noun "El", meaning "God", and the verb "Sham", meaning "to hear".
- Samuel's mother, Hannah, prayed for years for a child, crying out to God over a long-extended time. And God heard. So she called the child "God hears".
- God also called to Samuel when he was a little boy. Eli the priest told him to answer, "Speak Lord, your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:9). God told him something in his innocence that no one else seemed to be in a position to hear.
- His name – the verb of hearing and the noun of God – goes two ways: God hearing us; us hearing God.
- But for decades, most of the people in Israel would not hear – or more precisely, they would not *heed* – the word of God.
- As a result, it seemed that the land itself was punishing them and pitching them out. People they had conquered when their focus was on God now easily defeated them. They had replaced devotion to God with superstition. This led to them taking the Ark of the Covenant into a battle and losing it into Philistine hands.
- Over 20 years later, Samuel was still hearing from God and trying to get people to stop and listen.
- And they finally listened (I Samuel 7:3-4). The result of their new commitment and devotion to God was immediate – an attack from their enemy!

KEY SCRIPTURE: I Samuel 7:3-14

- The Philistines heard that all the men of Israel had gathered for this great time of repentance and renewal, and gathered their forces for battle.
- Israel had gathered for "church", not for war, and were not prepared for battle.
- But God. He took on the enemy and brought about a great victory, sending the enemy running.
- Samuel heard from God again, and he spoke to the people: "Let's get a stone – a big stone. Let's set it up right here where the blessing of God was more than we could keep up with. Here where we faced our greatest fears; where each of us realized, 'If it had not been for the Lord on my side, where would I be?'"
- Right here where it hit us that all along it has been God in your life, in my life, keeping us alive and forgiving us again and again and again. God giving us another day, another word, another opportunity to listen, to repent, to see the goodness of God in our lives.
- Each of us in our life need to put in place an "Ebenezer" big enough that we can't miss it, ignore it, or deny it.
- Declare it to yourself and anyone who wants to hear: "Hitherto God has helped me. Every day forward I will live, whole-heartedly, for Him."

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION TOOLS

1. Consider various roles you play: father/ mother/child/employee/employer/ student, etc. What are some scriptural commands to each group?
2. How do you/others stray from God's instructions in these areas? What consequence(s) have you noticed? How has God's grace been demonstrated?
3. Where in your life would you set up "Ebenezer stones" to memorialise the help God has been to you? Share an experience.

Prayer Time

Lord, thank You for all of my "Ebenezer" experiences. I cannot attempt or achieve anything of lasting value without You.

L.G. ice-Breaker: Who were you most likely to listen to (obey) when you were growing up – your mom or your dad (or someone else)?

WEEK OF SUNDAY, JUNE 17, 2018

NOTES

Meditate as you read through/listen to this week's message. If it helps, use symbols for your notes.

(Reminds me/Confirms) (New idea) (Think about)

(Do this) (Speaks to my heart) (Must share)

PRAYER NEEDS/THANKSGIVINGS