

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
August 31, 2014
12th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Acts 17:15-34 Matthew 16:13-20

Hymns: 537; 467:1-4; 33; 53:1,5,6 (38:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Samuel 7:5-12

And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." 6 So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the LORD. And they fasted that day, and said there, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

7 Now when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8 So the children 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 And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. Then Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the LORD answered him. 10 Now as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the LORD thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel. 11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and drove them back as far as below Beth Car. 12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us."

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Need some help?

Those have been welcome words to hear more than once in my life. A couple times it was with changing a flat tire on the side of the road. It had happened to me before and I had managed it on my own, but with help it would be so much easier. Once it was a man from the congregation I was serving at the time, and he knew with the flat I would be late for the evening Bible class at church. I knew he would do the job a lot quicker than I would. I appreciated his help, and I was only a few minutes late for Bible class. The other time it was two young men who looked at me like an old codger who needed help, (I couldn't even find the jack. I had forgotten it was hidden under the hood with that car.) They were young and willing to help, and I needed to stay clean, (and they knew where the jack was). It was very nice to get some help. They refused any offer of remuneration. It wasn't that big a deal, but I thanked the Lord for the help both times.

Often the help we need is of much greater consequence. We find ourselves in situations where we don't have the capability to help ourselves. If we try to fix the situation ourselves we may only make matters worse, indeed much worse.

Resolving the problem of sin is the most extreme example of those times. For that we need to turn to the Lord. However, He is present to help with all troubles in life. We are blessed that we understand that the Lord is there for us. As we look back on our lives, especially as we add a few grey hairs we see the faithfulness of our God, and we are led by the Spirit to the same conclusion that is found in our text this morning.

THEME: Thus Far the LORD Has Helped Us.

The problem, with human nature is that we all too often fail to recognize how much trouble we are in. That can happen in our

work, in our personal health problems, in family relationships. We don't want to admit that we need help from others. That is true in our spiritual lives as well. If we don't recognize this in our individual lives we need to step back and look at our situation in life a little more closely in light of the God's Word, in view of God's law. Then only with the guidance of the Holy Spirit we will begin –

I. Seeking the Lord's Help in our Great Need.

What we find in our text is an example of the enemy's cunning. The Philistines were a people who lived along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, that area we call Gaza now. Back then Gaza was one of the Philistine strongholds. The people of Israel had gathered at a place called Mizpah for a spiritual renewal. It was a time of national repentance, and dedication to the Lord. The people of Israel were assembled for peace, not armed for war, and the enemy saw an opportunity to attack. The forces of the Philistines were intimidating. They had better weapons, and were better prepared for conflict than the people of Israel who were assembled for a spiritual convocation. There was a great need for the Lord's help, and that is exactly what they asked from the Lord through Samuel.

1 Samuel 7:8 So the children 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.”

They were afraid, and they turned to the Lord for help in time of need. So often we point out the spiritual apathy within the people of Israel. On this occasion we don't see this. When they feared for their safety, recognizing the force that was against them and the danger the enemy brought, they sought the Lord's protection from a powerful enemy.

We also need to recognize the overwhelming force of the enemy we face in life. Whether we have the devil himself coming after us with temptations, or persecutions from the world, or the lust of our own sinful flesh, we need to recognize the power and the danger of the enemy. Some would deny the presence of the devil. Some don't even believe Satan is a personal being intent on our

destruction, but rather the personification of evil in the world. Peter tells us that the devil roams about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). He is real. He is very dangerous. He is intent on doing **you** harm. Satan is the original terrorist. Alternately he wants you to be scared of him, or then deny his reality. Confusion is his ally.

Then also the influence of the world upon us can take its toll. So often we would be like Israel, going about our own business, and worshiping our Lord as we know to be true and correct. The world sees that as opportunity to attack us. They will attack one time on the intellectual front, and the next time on the political and civil rights front, and then the next time on the social morality front. The world would have us believe that we are prejudiced against other people because we speak out against the sin that has overtaken our society, sin that endangers people's souls. The world would intimidate us into silence, and then also try to force us to question the truth of our own position, tempting us to doubt the authority of God's Word. The enemy can be very persuasive, and so very dangerous. In the world we find persistent adversaries.

However, we will find that we are fighting against ourselves as well. We know what is right and true, but our own reason argues against the truth of God's Word. We know what's right and true, but our own sinful desires would draw us away from God's Word that we might satisfy our own fleshly desires.

Enemies surround us. Learn from the example of the people of Israel. Turn to the Lord in prayer, seeking His help, just as the people asked Samuel to do.

1 Samuel 7:9 And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. Then Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the LORD answered him.

Samuel came to the Lord in earnest prayer. He came with the sacrifice of a pure innocent lamb, seeking the Lord's favor and protection. He prayed, Samuel cried out to the Lord! And the Lord answered him! The young lamb was a worthy sacrifice for it represented the sacrifice which God would make for all the world in sending His Son, the Lamb of God, to suffer and die for the sins

of the world. Samuel came to the Lord in faith and confidence seeking help for a desperate situation. The Lord invites us to come to Him in times of trouble. We read in Psalm 50 --

Psalm 50:15 Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.”

The Lord promises to hear our prayer. He promises to deliver us. Then we will joyfully do that second part, the glorifying part which begins with –

II. Recognizing the Greatness of the LORD’s Deliverance.

We see how the Lord intervened in a supernatural way against the Philistines, delivering them into the hands of the people of Israel.

1 Samuel 7:10-11 Now as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the LORD thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel. 11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and drove them back as far as below Beth Car.

It was a great victory for the Israel, and one that could not and would not have happened without the Lord. Yes, He allowed Israel to participate in the victory, and drive their enemies well out of their territory so that Israel was secure for many years, but it was the Lord who got them the victory!

So it is also in our lives as we stand up against our spiritual adversaries. The Lord equips us with the weapons we need to defeat the devil, to dissuade our own sinful flesh, to push back against the world. The Apostle Paul describes this in terms we can understand in his epistle to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 6:10-11, 14-17 “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ... 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all,

taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;”

The Lord equips us for battle so that we might be delivered from our enemies. And the deliverance is a great one. What is all this armor but the gospel of Christ Jesus who by His death and resurrection destroyed the power of the devil. This truth subjugates our sinful flesh and the temptations that allure us. This truth is the key because this is the victory that saved us from sin, death and the devil. We need do nothing more than draw upon the power of that victory and we shall be safe unto everlasting life.

But recognizing the greatness of the Lord’s Deliverance takes us even farther. Our hope is not for this life only. We look to the deliverance which the Lord has secured for us, the victory that is ours in Christ and we recognize that this is the singularly most important thing in our lives, at the same time it is perhaps the easiest thing to neglect in our lives.

Samuel didn’t want the people of Israel to forget the deliverance of their Lord, not in their lifetime, and not in their children’s lifetime, or their children after them. So it was that he set about --

III. Memorializing the LORD’s Deliverance.

1 Samuel 7:12 “Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, “ “Thus far the LORD has helped us.’ ”

Yes, Samuel wanted to put something in place as a permanent reminder of this great deliverance with which God had delivered Israel from her enemy the Philistines. So Samuel set up this rock as a memorial and named it Ebenezer, or “**Stone of Help.**” That was the place where it happened, so that all who passed by and saw that stone would remember the power of God to save! It would be serve as an encouragement for them to continue to serve the Lord and put their trust in the Lord as their God and Savior.

We also have a great deliverance for us to memorialize. For Christians the “Stone of Help” is Christ and His cross. We confess

with Peter, “**You are the Christ the Son of the living God.**” This confession declares that Jesus is the Savior which God promised to send into the world to deliver us from our enemies. Jesus died on the cross to secure that victory for us. This truth is the rock upon which our faith is built, upon which Christ has built His church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18)! We Christians keep the cross before our eyes as our Ebenezer, as a physical symbolical, and spiritually as well. The physical crosses are symbols that we have placed in our churches or that some of us may wear around our necks or have placed on walls in our homes. These crosses serve as reminders of the cross on Calvary where Jesus suffered and died to redeem us to God.

That cross of Calvary and its truth we carry in our hearts and it remains forever the focus of our faith. There is our Ebenezer, our Rock of remembrance that **Christ crucified has helped us this far!** He has driven Satan away, and opened up for us the very gates of heaven. **Thus far He has helped us!** As we look forward in our lives we know that even to the very end He will not leave us nor forsake us. **He who has helped us this far will help us to the end,** when He shall receive us to our heavenly home.

You need some help? You know where to turn. Turn to God, who has gotten us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, He remains our Ebenezer, our Stone of Help for all our days.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.