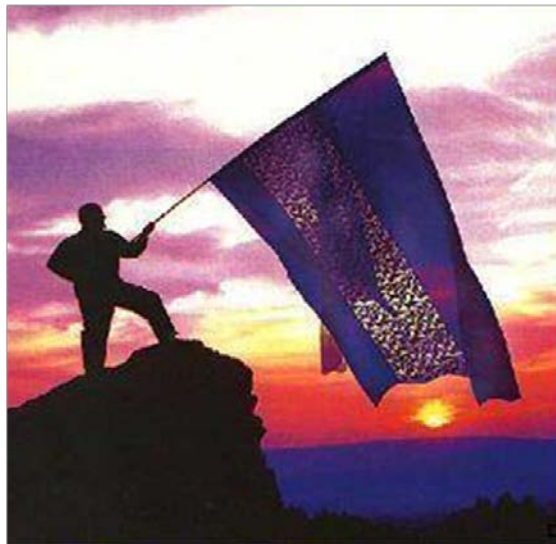


MEN AND WOMEN “PREPARED” FOR BATTLE

(How God Brings Change Where Change Is Needed)

I Samuel 7:1-14



RAISING THE STANDARD

- ◆ Pure Heart
- ◆ Spiritual Discipline
- ◆ Wilderness Fortitude
- ◆ Unwavering Faith

“...Return to the Lord with all your heart, put away the strange gods from among you, and God will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” (I Samuel 7:3)

Bill Kirk

“MEN AND WOMEN PREPARED FOR BATTLE”

Text: I Samuel 7:1-12

Subject: How Fasting and Prayer Overcomes Internal and External Opposition (simply)
(Personal Transformation God's Way)

(Today “Victory in Ebenezer”)

- How fasting and prayer opens the doors to internal transformation.
- How fasting and prayer give strength to deep repentance.
- How fasting and prayer are weapons to overcome evil.
- How fasting and prayer will change your life!

(I Samuel 7 has a remarkable setting)

- In I Samuel 1, Hannah gives birth to Samuel
 - In I Samuel 2, The sin of Eli's sons.
 - In I Samuel 3, The Lord calls Samuel.
 - In I Samuel 4, The Ark is captured by the Philistines.
 - In I Samuel 5, The Ark destroys the idol DAGON.
 - In I Samuel 6, The Ark is too holy for Bethshemesh.
 - In I Samuel 7, The crisis and the critical hour.
1. The presence chamber of God (the Ark) was received in Bethshemesh on a new cart. (6:7)
 2. The people of God were frivolous, familiar, shouting and void of all reverence.
 3. They opened the Ark and in I Samuel 6:19, 50,070 men were smitten dead on the spot.
 4. The holiness of God had been ignored and thought light of (6:20).
 5. So the people of Bethshemesh asked the people of Kirjathjearim to come down and take the Ark off their hands. (6:21)

(And now our text in 7:11)

The Ark of the Covenant was fetched and brought into the house of Abinadab.

- Eleazar was chosen to “keep the Ark” (or guard it from the unholy intrusions of before).
- In v. 2, is the time frame where many now live:
“And it came to pass, while the Ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.”

(In other words)

- The Ark of the Covenant was symbolic of the presence of God.
- The Philistines had defeated the Israelites and carried off the Ark.
- But now, the Ark was “stalled” in the house of Abinadab.
- For twenty years now, the Ark is “stalled” in a little town on the border.
- For twenty years, Israel had been without the presence of God (and lost many battles).
- For twenty years, God had been put “on hold”.
- For twenty years, Israel had struggled with the old Adam.
- For twenty years, Israel had battled with habitual sin.
- For twenty years, Israel had suffered the oppression of the Philistines.
- For twenty years, Israel had lamented in frustration (as the Glory of God had departed).

(But now it was time for change)

Ask: Pastor, how do you change after twenty years?

Ask: How do you break twenty year habits?

Ask: How is it possible to see dramatic progress?

Ask: How do you recover the Glory of God?

Ask: How does God restore what was lost?

Ask: How does God take us from bondage to liberty?

Ask: How is God's Glory restored to His people?

(It's right before us in Chapter 7)

- As God raises us Samuel to lead the church in revival (and)
- Samuel reveals to us the secret of the power of God in our life:
 - ◆ The secret of victory at Mizpeh.
 - ◆ The secret of the Ebenezer stone.
 - ◆ The secret power of fasting and prayer.
 - ◆ The secret to opening the windows of heaven.

I. It Begins With Purity Of Heart (Vs. 3-5)

(V. 3) "And Samuel said, if you do return to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only."

Question: What was the call of in v. 3?

Answer: "Put away the gods of Ashtaroth and Baal."

- ◆ Baal was the supreme male god of the Canaanite nations.
 - ◆ Ashtaroth was the supreme female god of the Canaanite nations (and God reveals something here).
1. That Israel has to prepare their hearts to make progress with God.
 2. That idols and interference must be put aside.
 3. That only a pure heart can move forward with God.
 4. That repentance is not a dirty word, but the beginning of dramatic internal change.

(What's the call of God in v. 3?)

"Put away the strange gods, prepare your heart, and serve Him only."

Question: Is there anything you need to put away?

Question: Is there anything that hinders your heart from being prepared for God's presence?

Question: Are you willing to "serve God only" and chose today to ditch the things that interfere?

Question: How bad do you want the Ark (God's Glory and Presence) to fill your life?

Question: Is there anything whatsoever that is draining God's presence from your life?

(Samuel's Call Is To "Put Away")

1. "Put away" everything strange and foreign.
2. "Put away" without delay every little sin.

3. "Put away" and God will meet you at Mizpeh."

Question: How did God's people answer the call?

Answer: (v. 4) *"And the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only."*

(What a response!)

- An immediate "yes" to the call of God!
- An immediate "yes" to the preaching of Samuel!
- An immediate "yes" to the prompting of the Spirit!
- An immediate "yes" to prepare for the next step!

II. The Price Of Fasting And Prayer (V. 6)

Question: What did Samuel do when the congregation agreed with God?

Answer: (v. 5) *"They all gathered at Mizpeth (_____)"*
your city

(In other words)

1. Samuel had a burden for the whole congregation.
2. Mizpeh was the usual place Israel would go to experience the presence of God. (Judges 10:17, 11:11; 20:3)
3. It was a definable location of assembling together.
4. It was a place to seek the Lord and believe God to meet us face to face.
5. It was a corporate gathering that would be united by a spiritual weapon.

(What was the weapon?)

(v. 6) *"And they gathered together to Mizpeh and drew water and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day and said there, we have sinned against the Lord."*

(I discover here)

- That it takes more than just gathering together to experience revival (otherwise every congregation in America would be in revival this morning).
- It takes the example of Samuel for God to come in the picture of your life.

(What was the preparation involved?) (V. 6)

1. Humility

"They drew water and poured it out before the Lord." (What does it mean?) (v. 6)

- Pouring out the water is symbolic of pouring out the heart.
- It's humbling myself before God and saying, "God, I am helpless and powerless without you."

2. Discipline

"...and fasted on that day." (v. 6)

- Israel fasted to draw closer to God.
- Israel fasted to press through in prayer.
- Israel fasted to see the glory of God return.
- Israel fasted to prepare their heart before the Lord.
- Israel fasted to overcome every foreign and strange god.

3. Confession

“...we have sinned against the Lord.” (v. 6)

- This is not external lip service here
- This is deep repentance without reservation.
- This is not shallow or superficial activity.

“We have sinned against the Lord.”

- It’s the first step to recovering strength and joy.
- It’s the big step to overcome sin that entangles.
- It’s the desire to be pure before God.
- It’s my heart not wanting to offend God’s holiness.
- It’s God’s way to live with power over sin.
- It’s part of fasting and prayer in preparation for revival.

”Lord, return my heart to you completely.”

“Lord, bring to the surface unconfessed sin.”

“Lord, restore unto me what I’ve been without.”

“Lord, I want your presence and glory in my life more than anything else.”

(It’s a choice I make.)

- ◆ When I want the blessing of God enough, I will humble myself before God and care less who’s looking on around me!!

III. The Principle of Enemy Resistance (Vs. 7, 8)

Question: Pastor, will it be an easy road in my pursuit of God?

Answer: (V. 7) *“When the Philistines heard about Israel gathered at Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel.”*

(In other words)

- Satan doesn’t easily let go of anybody.
- Sin doesn’t easily allow you to make progress.
- The old Adam doesn’t want you to flee every sin.
- The devil gets angry when you forsake everything questionable.
- It’s not a cake walk (but warfare) to be a man or woman of God.

Fact: Some of you (right now) are in a war, know why?

Fact: It’s because you are dying to yourself so that you can move forward in God.

(It’s OK!)

- God has good news for your heart!
- God has an encouraging word for your progress.
- God has insight as to what’s next!

(What is it?)

IV. The Power Of God Revealed (Vs. 9-11, 14)

In v. 9, Samuel cried unto the Lord.

In v. 10, The battle drew near against Israel.

In v. 11, The Philistines were beaten hands down.

In v. 13, The enemy was subdued.
In v. 14, An awesome revelation for today.

“And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were ‘restored’ to Israel.”

Question: What did the Israelites do when the enemy tried to hinder progress?

Answer: (v. 8) *“Samuel, pray for us.”*

(What a discovery here)

- That your best friends in the world are those who know how to pray and touch God.
- That your greatest help will come from your friends who believe in “carpet ministry”.
- Friends who are not ashamed to put their face in the carpet and pray with all their heart.
- Confidence was born in Israel because Samuel knew how to pray.

(What happened after prayer and fasting?)

#1. The powers of evil were broken (Israel was freed from sin).

#2. (v. 14) What was stolen by the enemy was restored by God.

- Israel regained the cities that had been taken by sin.
- Israel recovered what had been forfeited.
- Israel was restored to their rightful inheritance. (What was it?)

1. A clear conscience
2. Power in prayer
3. Fasting that prevails
4. Victory over evil
5. Freedom from Philistine dominion

Question: Can God still do now what God did then?

V. The Permanent Reminder For Us All (V. 12)

“Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying; hitherto hath the Lord helped us.”

- The place of victory was called “Ebenezer.”
- The word “Ebenezer” means “The Lord has helped us.”

(Why the stone?)

1. To remember what God had done!
2. To remember what God still does!
3. To remember (and give faith) to the heart!

(Why?)

- So that you and I will believe God now, as Samuel did then!!!
- This was a reformation that changed Israel’s history.
- This was a deep work of grace.
- This was a work of the Spirit with lasting fruit! (It happened then and it happens now.)

AMEN,
Bill Kirk