

Hitherto The Lord has Helped

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[0 : 00] I'm going to sing some verses now from Psalm 62. Psalm 62. And we're going to sing the first two verses and then from verse 5 to 8.

Psalm 62. From the beginning. My soul with expectation depends on God indeed. My strength and my salvation does from him alone proceed.

He only my salvation is, my strong rock is he. He only is my sure defence, much moved I shall not be. How long will ye against a man plot mischief?

Ye shall all be slain, yea, as a tottering fence shall be, and bowing wall. They only plot to cast him down from his excellency.

They join lies with mouth they bless it, but they curse inwardly. My soul with patience upon thy God alone. On him dependeth all my hope and expectation.

[1 : 08] He only my salvation is, and my strong rock is he. He only is my sure defence, I shall not move it be. In God my glory places, and my salvation sure.

In God the rock is of my strength, my refuge most secure. Ye people, place your confidence in him continually. Before him pour ye out your heart.

God is a refuge high. And so on. We'll sing verses 1 and 2 and verses 5 to 8. My soul with expectation depends on God indeed.

My soul with expectation depends on God indeed.

My strength and my salvation, my strength and my salvation. From him alone proceed.

[2 : 26] He only my salvation is, and my strong rock is he.

He only is my sure defence, but my strength and my salvation. My soul with love, with patience, my salvation.

Upon thy God alone. On him dependeth all my hope and expectation.

He only my salvation is, and my strong rock is he. He only my salvation is, and my strong rock is he.

He only my salvation is, and my strength and my strength and my strength. He only is my sure defence, and my strength and my strength and my strength.

[4 : 28] And my salvation is good In the garden rogues of my sin My refuge most secure Give me the pleasure of your confidence And continually Behold and bore ye out of you, Lord God is our refuge

And we return to the passage that we read from the Old Testament Scriptures, the first book of Samuel chapter 7.

And we can read again at verse 10. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines threw near to battle against Israel.

But the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines and discomfited them. And they were smitten before Israel. And the men of Israel went out of Mispi and pursued the Philistines and smoked them until they came under Beth-kar.

Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mispi and Shem and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto have the Lord helped us.

[6 : 35] Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mispi and Shem and called the name of it Ebenezer. We're continuing our short consideration of the role of Samuel, where we left off last Thursday.

And we saw how he encouraged repentance on the part of the people. And to all intents and purposes, their response is a positive one.

There are a number of things that we can draw attention to. We saw how important his role is as intercessor of the people or for the people.

And this is something that they put great stock in. Remember the words of verse 5. Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mispi, and I will pray for you unto the Lord.

And then verse 8. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord of God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.

[7 : 53] Samuel sees that as his duty to act as intercessor, and the people are appreciative of it.

But at the same time, he seems to be simultaneously teaching them. Not only is he functioning as a priest, which is part of the role of the priest, as you know, is to intercede, to offer sacrifice, and to offer intercession on behalf of the people, but he is also a prophet.

And part of the role of the prophet is to teach the people, to encourage them in the Lord, and to guide them in the truth of God.

And his actions, in that sense, serve as a didactic function. They are to learn from it. And there are three things recorded for us in verse 6.

And I suppose it has to be said there's some debate about the precise meaning of what happens. As a result of what's recorded, they gathered together to Mispi, 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 children of Israel in Mispi.

[9 : 30] So there's three things that we are told that take place there. The pouring out of the water, and the fasting of the people, and Samuel's judging of the people.

What exactly are we meant to understand by what happens as a result of that? And I think while there is a variety of opinions concerning it, I think that the understanding that we should take from the pouring out of water is purely a symbolic one.

An important symbolism. But nevertheless, a symbol. A symbolism. If you read meticulously the words of the text, there's no indication, as you would find on occasion when water is poured out, and the people are expected to use the water to prepare themselves for the offering of sacrifice, that the water itself is used to cleanse, in that sense.

And that's not suggested by the pouring out of water. However, it does remind us of the sense that they had of their sin, and the need for cleansing.

And I think that is why we should think of it as symbolic. While the water is spoken of, the application of it is not explained to us.

[11 : 19] And just to give you one example of opinion of the commentators, Matthew Henry, you all know the name.

Matthew Henry interprets these words entirely as a spiritual imagery that conveys to us the sense of appreciation they had of their sin.

They've already conveyed that to us by the confession that they make and the instruction that they receive from the prophet that that is how they are perceived in the sight of God.

So, Matthew Henry says that he says this is symbolic of the rivers of tears of a godly sort that they are shedding before a holy God, the God that they have offended.

And they are coming to him with that sense. So, I think that is the simplest way of understanding what what Samuel is requiring from him.

[12 : 37] I think we have to understand that this is not something that they do volitionally. This is not something that they undertake to do self-willingly.

Because in the in the worship of God it's not down to them to do what they choose to do if they choose to do it. it's a requirement.

It's something that's expected of them. Something that they can only do in light of of the need that they have. So, I think that's something that we need to understand.

The fasting, again, you could say that it was something they willingly engaged in as a response to the sense that they need that they had of their need before God.

And that they were acknowledging by fasting that they did not deserve the least of God's mercies.

[13 : 42] But I think the closest we can get to is this that it was an expression of self-denial that by denying themselves food they were showing that they were denying themselves what was formally their practice to meet the base needs of the flesh.

So, here they were putting it to one side and the fast for the day was that expressed in that way. the third thing which is I suppose a question Samuel judged them and we asked the question what is the nature of the judging that Samuel carries out and it was his function as the judge to do that and it's spoken of repeatedly his it's interesting that when Samuel came to establish a king over Israel he did not abort his role as judge he didn't forsake it he didn't abandon it he continued we're told all the days of his life as judge now what the nature of his being a judge involves is not explicitly explained to us but

I think it combines with his role as prophet in bringing the word of God to bear upon their lives and I think some of the commentators say that he would consider who of them had failed to respond to the call to repent that had clearly been brought to their attention and who of them were responding as they should and how they were encouraged into that so his judging of Israel in this context involved him in explaining to them what they needed to do why they needed to do it and directing those who were failing to do it in a path that that neglect was pointed out to them and how to deal with it so these three things are important they were a people who were convicted they were a people who experienced grief over their sin and they were a people that were informed by the

Lord through Samuel as to how to do that now Samuel then offers an offering we're told that he took a second lamb and offered it for a burnt offering holy unto the Lord and that describes to us the kind of offering it is there are sin offerings there are burnt offerings there are various various sacrifices that are offered at particular times in the calendar of the Jewish religious observation but this was a whole burnt offering and the Hebrew word is hola and it's from that Hebrew word that the word holocaust comes you're familiar with the word holocaust and that's the word that is used here it's describing the kind of whole burnt offering that

Samuel offered and he on their behalf offered this and I think if you were interested in examining or trying to get to grips with the types of offering and how they were to be offered and what the result was one emphasis that you find often is on the smoke ascending heavenwards and that the smoke of the offering was a sweet smelling sabre in the nostrils of the Lord figurative language it's describing the physical effect which obviously it can't have because God is a spirit and he will not be affected by smoke from any offering but to explain the spiritual significance of it that is the way the offering was designed to influence or to affect the

[19 : 13] Lord as he looked down on his people coming obediently and offering this offering this whole offering where the whole animal you know some of the offerings you had to kill them and flay them and the body was dealt with according to the kind of sacrifice it was so if you remember the name Stuart of Cromarty and he says of the significance of an offering that the more convinced that person was of their own sin when they came to offer the heavier their hand was placed upon the head of the victim and suppose in that sense Samuel was the one offering the lamb the whole lamb but he was doing it on behalf of the people and the indication to us that

God received the offering and heard the petitions and pleas of the servant who was acting as their intercessor that he responds instantly Samuel and to Samuel cried and the Lord heard him and as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel so it has to be explained in that way as if it's sequential but it's as if at the moment that the offering was being offered that it was at that moment that Israel were visited by the Philistines they took that moment to come into the camp because they had heard that they had gathered there but just as Israel through Samuel was making that offering to God the

Philistines drew near but God answered the prayer God answered favorably the offering that was made and he responds with thunder with a great thunder and it's interesting how limited the information is it's not very graphic it's not very wordy it's just almost as if there's a sparsity of language in describing what happened it seems as if it's just a record of how things were and that's all the way through this chapter instead of great detail you've got it's stated almost as a matter of fact Samuel prayed Samuel offered the sacrifice God heard and God answered it's as simple as that and I think that itself is a lesson to us we make things complicated in the way

God answers our prayer we think in our minds that there's a whole lot of things that must happen before God is satisfied or we receive the answer that we're craving but here it's summarized almost in a few sentences and the Lord answered the prayer the petitions of Samuel and answered the sacrifice and the smoke that ascended heavenwards and he thundered from heaven and the Philistines were discomfited that just simply means they were filled with terror because in their darkness in their idolatry they knew that this was the fruit of a deity a god that they had not met before and when they hear the thunder they take flight and again you'll notice this lack of lack of detail they were smitten before

Israel and the men of Israel went out of Mishpah and pursued the Philistines and smote them just a few words they were smitten and Israel smote them that's what happens sometimes you have the detail of a battle and there's a whole host of descriptions of the battle and what takes place but here it's focusing on God this is God's doing this is not so much what Israel did although Israel responded and did they chased their enemies they faced their enemies chased their enemies and engaged in battle with them but it was God's doing this is what is important and verse 12 onwards describes how a memorial to the occasion was to be erected if

[24 : 44] Israel defeated their enemy but Israel defeated their enemy with God's help and that's where the emphasis again lies lies on this fact this is God's doing and I think that is so important in the telling of this story this is what Israel have to remember this is where Israel have gone away from God they did their own thing they followed their own wisdom and their own logic and their own religious practices to the exclusion of God at great cost to their spiritual lives many of the commentators refer us to the words that we have at the end of the epistle of Jude these words that you find coming often well sometimes anyway people quote them as a benediction at the end of a service but the descriptive of what actually takes place here and to him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy to the only wise

God our saviour to glory be glory and majesty dominion and power both now and ever him that is able to keep you from falling it's not me it's not you it's God and that is the essence of what Samuel is bringing to the attention of the people here so the erection of a stone of remembrance this is what they are to remember this is what they are to keep before their mind it's also significant and if you haven't read carefully the whole of this account Ebenezer was erected on the very place if you go back just a couple of chapters the beginning of chapter four the word of

Samuel came to all Israel now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle and pitched beside Ebenezer and the Philistines pitched in Afik and the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel and Israel was smitten before the Philistines and they slew off the army in the field about four thousand and that takes you right back twenty years twenty years before this time Israel had experienced defeat at the hands of the Philistines and it's as if God is saying this is what happened when you decided to go without me this is what happened when you thought that you would be able to stand against your enemies in your own strength and know with me because

I'm with you this is what happens and I'm sure we all like in our thinking about the church to think about the times that there were movements of religion in just for example think about the revivals of religion that took place in the island if you know some of them you can go to to Shader and Barvis and Ballantrushal and Garivard and places like that and the names are synonymous with great spiritual awakenings and the magic excuse use the word the significance of all these places is this that the Lord worked there and if you forget that whatever else you remember you remember the people who came to faith there you remember the church services the gatherings of people the numbers that were gathered you may remember all of these things but if you omit the

Lord from that then you do God an injustice and if it is not the Lord if it is not his work then that work will not be remembered and it will be something that is clearly proved to be of man's doing I was listening to on YouTube that Grabber were holding a series of services earlier maybe at the end of the year and the emphasis was on revival of religion and one of their speakers was a lady from Shatter or Ballantrushia who had come to faith during the revival Duncan Campbell's revival and I used that word Duncan Campbell's revival but what she said was this that she came to faith as a teenager and she remembers vividly the house gatherings and the prayer meetings she does remember

[30 : 44] Duncan Campbell's preaching but she didn't come to faith because of Duncan Campbell's preaching what she was laying emphasis on was the work of the spirit within these gatherings now she wasn't dismissing Duncan Campbell and his significance but what she was putting an emphasis on was the Lord working and here we may tend to focus on Samuel and Samuel is the instrument Samuel is the one who prayed Samuel is the one who called to God Samuel is the one who built the altar Samuel is the one who took the suckling lamb and offered him but the victory was not Samuel's it was the Lord's and that is why when he speaks he took a stone and set it between Miss Pan Shen and called the name of a Debenese saying hitherto has the Lord helped us and if we move away from that in our understanding then we're in dangerous territory we always need to go to him to work and we seek him to work and we want him to work and we can look at this memory work that is ours to remember these places and remember these times but we should also remember them in our own experience and as individuals and personally where we have experienced the

Lord's help in our lives and when we know that it wasn't me it was the Lord when we understand without him I couldn't do that without his strength without his knowledge being imparted to me I couldn't do that you know he preached many sermons but he mentions in a sermon probably on this but he mentions a denou that in the in the dealing that God has with us as Christians that there are many times when we should raise a stone of remembrance when we gained a victory in our own soul over enemies that lie in our breast now what he means by that is when you've got a temptation when you've found yourself to have a spiritual weak point and you've been able to master it or overcome it if you haven't done it in your own strength if you had strength to do it you would have done it long ago but the

Lord teaches us that there is need for us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and part of the growth process is going from our own strength to the Lord Lord's strength to overcome the weaknesses of the flesh to overcome the times when we fail to rest upon him in the provision that he has made for us to deal with our own shortcomings and our own temperament or whatever it is inclinations that are sinful that we are aware of and that we're not tackling and we wouldn't tackle without him making us aware of them and we wouldn't overcome them without his help and that's the thing and there's many ways in which that could be the case the victory for Israel was not because of

Samuel's intercession that's what we need to remember the victory was not because of the smoke that wafted heavenwards although God meant it to be part of it but he is at the heart of it he is at the centre of it we tend to want to focus on the human element and the human element is human it's sinful that's what we are by nature but Samuel was God's instrument and he was that great instrument in the Lord's hand look at when he goes on down to the end of the verse Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life he went from year to year in Zirka to Bethel to Kiril called Mishpan judged Israel in all those places and his return was to Ramah for there was his house and there he judged an altar to the Lord this is his life this is how he's described and the

Lord no doubt uses him and gives us an insight into how God works but it's always with this in view that we remember him that we if we erect our Ebenezer what do we do we do it because we remember hitherto as the Lord helped us we remember his help before and in the predicaments of today the Lord is the same his power is there for us to draw on and to utilize and to depend on and if he has helped us before why should he not help us again in whatever way that help is needed well may God encourage us by thinking of these things let us pray Lord our God we give thanks that your word is a word that we need to take to heart because in its simplicity and its purity it reminds us of who you are a great

[37 : 21] God high and lifted up but with an interest in the children of men and with the desire to offer help and to supply that help as and when needed and who of us do not need that help every day of our life hear us and pardon us in Jesus name Amen our closing Psalm 138 we are going to sing two verses in Galic Psalm 138 and verse 3 and forward.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[40 : 56] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.