

Ebenezer

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[0:00] Now to 1 Samuel and I'm going to be showing these verses that I'm speaking to. 1 Samuel 7 verse 12. Samuel the prophet was marking this time, this place, something special.

He was making a mark, he was setting this memorial stone. We just had the memorial of the Lord's Supper. Samuel was setting a memorial here, something to be reminding us, something to prompt us.

And Ebenezer is the name of this stone that he set, this memorial stone. Ebenezer means the stone of help. The stone of help. What Samuel the prophet was saying is God has helped us.

God has helped us. Ebenezer, God has helped us. Hitherto, so hither, from there, to, the Lord has helped us looking back.

And we can see hereafter he will help us too. But for the time, let's look at that sense that hitherto, from there to now, the Lord has helped us.

[1:27] Looking backwards, looking at the past. He was saying God has helped us. The Lord has helped us as a people. Amen? And he is continuing to help. And he will continue to help.

And we can think that today on this time, not that we particularly make a big song and dance about an anniversary of a church, but it is a time to mark that we can thank God for his provision, for his protection, for his faithfulness.

And it's a time of remembering what God has done. And we can all think of that individually too, what God has done for me, for my soul. And the Lord had his people through the Old Testament set up memorials.

As they had victories, as they had occasions to commemorate, he had them to set up these memorials, these memorial stones, as a reminder of the people that would come of God's faithfulness unto them in the past.

And don't you know it's good to say, thank you, Lord, for your help. That was a simple prayer in the communion time, wasn't it? Thank you, Lord. What can we say?

[2:33] We can't put it into words, can we? What can we render unto the Lord for all his goodness to us? Thank you, Lord. Thank you for your help. And we're doing that today. We're marking it down. It's a line in the sand, if you like, a memorial.

We take a moment to ponder, to remember what God has done for me, for my soul, for us. Samuel was saying, look back and see the goodness of God, what God has done, what God has done for you, for your soul.

Reckon on it. Reckon up on all his benefits, on all his blessings. We can't fathom. We can't count it, can we? Count your blessings. We can't. There's too many of them. But I'll put to you three things today.

We see his protection. We see his protection today as a people. The Lord thus far has the Lord helped us. Now, this Ebenezer stone was erected in this battlefield where they had been twice defeated as a people.

There had been two defeats here. And so it reminded them of their battles and of their own helplessness. It reminded them of their own failures. You know, we can be reminded of that, can't we?

[3:42] We look back. Wow, I could have done things better. As a Christian, I could have been stronger. I could have been more faithful. There's things I could have done that I didn't do. But God has held me steady.

But this Ebenezer stone here was marked here. It was placed on a spot where the people of God had now witnessed a great victory, given them by God's help. And Samuel said, let's put a reminder here what God has done.

As we think of the memorial supper of the Lord's table, we think what God has done, what God has done. And so it reminded them God was their helper.

God is our helper. And we are saying today, unto him, he is worthy, aren't we? He is worthy of our praise. He is worthy of our adoration, of our thanksgiving.

And we are grateful to God for everything that he has done for us as a people. We want to express that thankfulness. Put it into some tangible statement today. We are saying Ebenezer, the Lord has helped us.

[4:46] One saying of 7 verse 13, in the context it is saying, following this statement of Samuel, it says, so the Philistines were subdued. And they came no more into the coast of Israel.

And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. He is saying the Philistines were subdued, the enemy of God, the enemy of God's people.

You could call it the Palestinians today, the Philistines. The Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israel's territory again. Don't you know that God has protected you?

I know that some have come from war-torn countries and they can say amen to that. They've gone through refugee camps. They've seen family suffer but they have been able to get through and they're here today.

That's a testimony that God has enabled them through trauma and testing. Times of great upheaval and trial.

[5:44] And they can say the Lord is with me. The Lord has helped me through. Don't you know God has protected you? Maybe on the way here as you were driving, the angels intervened.

You don't know, do you, really? Amen? We don't know what God has done. How God has protected us just to be here today. Just to be in fellowship today. And as a church we can see God has prevailed despite enemies' attacks.

The devil hates churches. The devil hates churches of God. The devil wants to attack the people of God, the preachers of God, the works of God.

We're under attack day and night, aren't we? You know that personally. I know that. We're under attack. But God has prevailed. Amen? God has prevailed.

He says, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. We know God's protection. We've seen fightings within, without. There's been attacks of the enemy of all kinds.

[6:46] And I could give you a, we could write a book. Julie says she could write a book from the front parsonage, from the front pew, as it were. The things that we have seen, what God has done, you that have been in ministry of different kinds, we're all in the ministry.

You can see what God has done. He's helped me. He's helped me get through. And when you do something for God, expect a battle. Younger Christian, know that you're on a battlefield.

Where the Ebenezer is, this is a battlefield. We're on the battlefield. We're on the front lines. We're in the front trenches. We're in the enemy territory, as it were, taking it back. But we are an advancing army of God.

And we are under attack, people of God. You are under attack. You might say amen to that. You don't know what I've been through. Well, there could be more yet future, but God will help you. Amen? Because God is our protector, our defender, our deliverer.

And there's been attacks of the enemy that we're not even probably aware of. Many tests and setbacks we have through the Christian walk, we know that's common. And our Lord yet has brought us this far, hasn't he?

[7:51] As we, Ebenezer, hitherto hath the Lord helped us, hitherto, and hereafter he will continue that work of protection.

And our Lord has brought us thus far, and he will keep us safe in the future. We see many scriptures that promise such victories for the people of God. Of course, these are worded to Israel here in the context of Isaiah 43.

But I'm sure we can reckon this ourselves too, as God can say to you, fear not. But now saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob.

This is Isaiah 43, verse 1 to 3. He that formed thee, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by thy name.

Thou art mine. What a blessing to know. He says to you, thou art mine. Wow. Isn't that precious? That's something beautiful, isn't it?

[8:50] And then it goes on, when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee. Personal. That means you, singular. Be.

And through the waters, they shall not overflow thee. And when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned. Talking about waters, rivers, fire.

He says, I am with thee. That's personal, isn't it? Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God. The Lord thy God. The Holy One of Israel.

Thy Saviour. What a blessing, you know, to know the protection of God. Now friends today, you might not always reckon of this, but the world's culture is hostile to Christians, isn't it?

The world's media, it hates Christians. With a vengeance, doesn't it? They find every chance they can. And as a fair dinkum Christian, you face opposition. You can expect it.

[9:52] But you know, sometimes ourselves can be our own worst enemy. It's fighting within, isn't it? That fighting within, the flesh and the spirit. God has to protect us from even ourselves, doesn't he?

I know he does for me. And in the book of Judges, it tells how God's people kept wandering here, there and everywhere. Wandering away from God over and over again.

There's these cycles of defection and then repentance. Defection and then repentance. Apostasy and then revival. For over 450 years, this time span.

Finally, God raises up Samuel, the man of God, who was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. And in 1 Samuel chapter 4, Israel once again had fallen away from God.

And they turned away from the Lord, turned unto idols. And then the Philistines waged this war on the Israelites on the plain of Atech. And 4,000 of the great warriors of Israel lost their lives.

[10:56] Then they fought again. And this time they thought, well, we'll bring the Ark of the Covenant along as a kind of sign of good luck, as a good luck charm, so to speak. And they lost 30,000 men.

And the Ark of God then was taken. What a total defeat it was. What a drastic defeat. And they knew defeat after defeat. 1 Samuel 7, Samuel calls the people to true repentance.

He calls them back. He says in 1 Samuel 7, 3 to 4, And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If you do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth, which is false idols from among you.

You know, there was Baal and there was Ashtaroth, the female counterpart of Baal. These idols, these strange gods, these foreign, these false gods, these idols, idol worship.

But Samuel says, put it away from you. And he says, turn. He says, turn to the Lord with all your heart. Put away the strange gods.

[12:04] Prepare your hearts. And prepare your hearts unto the Lord. And serve him only. And he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. And then the children of Israel, they put away Baalim, which is plural of the objects of Baal, the idols of Baal, and Ashtaroth, the female counterpart of Baal worship, and they served the Lord only.

They put away the false gods of Baal worship, and they served the Lord only. Then it goes on to say, after they had done this, how they entered into battle, and God wrought a great victory for them.

And the enemies then returned the Ark of the Covenant back to Israel. So then again, they had the visible, tangible sign of God's presence and power with them.

So that's the backdrop to this verse that we started with, Ebenezer. Let's mark this day. This is a day of victory. This is a day of God's deliverance.

This is a day of God's protection. So Samuel set this landmark memorial stone so the Israelites would not forget the goodness of God, the intervention of God, what God did for them.

[13:12] Don't we need divine intervention? Divine intervention. Don't we need that every day? Every moment? Samuel took a stone and he put it, it

says, between Mizpah and Shen, halfway between these two major cities, and he called the stone Ebenezer.

Our Lord has brought us through great dangers. Great dangers. You know, we have had committed enemies against us. They've sought to attack us and undermine.

We've got one who's in jail at the moment because of their bad behaviour, attacking us and assaulting us. You know, attacking this church.

That's the reality, brothers and sisters. There's people that hate the work of God, that hate the ministry, that hate the people of God, such that they're committed in their attacks.

This is the reality. And as a church, we've seen false teachers, false doctrines, assailers. We've had to stand against that. We've held steady our course.

[14:19] We've held our course steady. We have not deviated. That's not by any praise of me, but only thanks to God, isn't it? We haven't deviated.

We've not been tossed aside with every strange wind. And we've had people come who said they want to change us. They've come to this church and they've told me, they've been quite brutally honest and said, we want to change this church.

You know, we're used to some jazzy stuff and, you know, we need a rock band here, they told me. Things like that. Now, I'm not against other people joining us and playing the musical instruments, amen?

We want that. We'd love that. But we're not going to change our music. And that's not to say we can't have some new songs, but we're not going to change the style and the reverence and the holiness of our worship unto the Lord.

We want to hold steady to good, godly, strong, faithful, God-blessed ministry. That's our intent. And we've not been blown off course.

[15:26] The Lord has enabled us. It's all unto him, isn't it? Unto him. The Lord has enabled us. And God has grown our number with godly people who hold fast the faithful word. We thank God for that.

We don't always see that. Now, I took some little snapshots down through history here. And some of you might be a little bit, you might go a bit red in the face here, but you might see some familiar faces here.

I'm just going to show you some photos of our earlier days as a church. And there's one here. If you look carefully, you can see Brother Don Harvey in this one and others likewise too.

In our early days, we first met as a church 21 years ago. We put an advert in the paper and eight people showed up. And that was how many visitors, love?

Four visitors and our family at the time. So we started with four people and our family meeting at Craigmores South Primary School as our first meeting.

[16:24] Here's some young people doing some ministry there. And God helping us. We've seen the church grow through time. And I know through our sister June, here's a picture here, June Savile, who's with us this morning, started the first Sunday school of this church.

And we were blessed that June joined us 21 or a bit closer to more than 20-something years ago as our first Sunday school teacher in the ministry here.

And she came from another church. They were closing down the Sunday school. I mean, putting it brutally, they didn't want the kids. They didn't want the children. It was an outreach Sunday school. And the church said, this is too much work.

We're going to close down this Sunday school. So they didn't have anywhere to go. So June gave me a call. And then she turned up. And we had to get a bus, a 12-seater bus.

And the Lord extended this ministry right from those early stages before we had a building that we could call our own to meet in. We were meeting in this primary school.

[17:28] And the Lord enabled us. And ultimately, we ended up with three buses. Three buses. Mind you, they were old buses. So it was probably a lot more maintenance and keeping up.

With such things. And, you know, someone took a dislike to one of our buses one day and put some artwork on it. But the Lord has enabled us. We met in this, and my mum and dad there, a picture and others.

There's people that have come and gone. I know my mum and dad helped in the early days. And then they moved to the country and came back and joined us. And so we started meeting in this school building. And we can say, hitherto, have the Lord helped us. Amen. And then next door, there's this building here where we first, Julie and I laid eyes on it. And this building next door became the next meeting place for the church. And you can see from this picture here, it was covered in graffiti inside and out. And inside was a hollow shell, virtually. The walls were blackened with smoke because someone had, as you can see here, the aircon unit.

[18:34] They put accelerant into the aircon unit. They poured petrol or something flammable in there and set the inside alight. So this building was a write-off. It was a derelict building.

It was fit to be bulldozed. And so the Lord enabled Julie and myself to be able to secure this building, to be able to purchase this building.

And since then, we've been able to, as in the early days, we changed it and had some different ministries there. We had a Christian bookshop for a time. And then we, here's another picture of some young people.

And then you see the early congregation was quite small in number. And we know there's some people here today who, here's Brother Don Harvey again with his daughter Kathy.

Been here right from the very early days of the church. And we thank God for your brother Don, June, I know Roy and Hazel. There's so many more we can mention, my mum and dad. There's others who have joined us as time's gone by from those very early days when it was really a fledgling work.

[19:40] And we can look back and say, hitherto, amen, hitherto have the Lord helped us. Of course, now, as we know, we're meeting in this venue and the Lord's enabled us again to be able to build a building, purpose built, so we can fellowship in.

And we thank God for that. And we look back and we know there's many churches that don't have such a meeting place, that they have to rent a building that is maybe not so fit for purpose.

But thank the Lord. We thank God for what he has done and how he's enabled us. So this is just something how we can mark today. As 21 years as a church, the Lord has enabled us.

Amen. The Lord has enabled us. And we give him praise for that. But more than the building or the bus or the infrastructure, it's about the people.

That's what matters. That's who we thank God for. For you who are here today, you who identify with this fellowship today and are encouraging us in visiting today, that we thank God for what he has done.

[20:44] We've seen the trials. We've seen the testings. It's not been easy. There's been many setbacks. There's been many challenges. There's been many tests. But we thank God for his protection. Amen. Because we are under attack.

We are under attack on a relentless attack. Every Christian is. And every work of God is. We know there's other churches in our city that have struggled.

And, you know, we've got the chairs of Emmanuel Baptist Church we had to close. We thank God for Emmanuel Baptist Church who gave us these chairs. And our Northside Baptist Church gave us some chairs in the early stages too.

But then we swapped around. We've got these present chairs. Other churches have helped us. I know Oasis Baptist Church closed for a time and gave us some signs that they had which we were able to reword.

And so some churches that have closed in our city. You know, there was a church out over at Port Adelaide which closed. And now the minister has restarted a new ministry.

[21:46] Churches are under attack. And it's hard sometimes, especially for young churches and churches that are just beginning and new ministry starting up. We know that we're under attack.

But we can say, Ebenezer, hitherto have the Lord helped us. We thank him, number one, for his protection. Secondly, we also see his provision. Thus far have the Lord helped us.

We thank God for his provision. We recall his providence. To God be the glory, great things he has done. Amen. He has helped us before and he will help us yet again.

And he continues to help us. And this is not just talking about our church body, but individually. God provides, doesn't he? He's our great provider. God has given us the strength and the grace and the victory.

And we give thanks to him. We adore him. We wonder at his work for us. His provision. But now we have a place of worship, a place to worship that is suitable, that's fitting.

[22:42] The Lord has provided in so many ways. The most important of all, though, is God is raising up a people. A people, a godly people, who have rallied together in this venture of faith.

We've seen people who are motivated by love. They've been gracious and generous. We've seen people who keep a sweet spirit when we've encountered testings. We're here to love one another. You know, let brotherly love continue. That's the spirit that we want in this church. Now, some folk have strayed and have lost the trail. We know some have gone into sin. We pray for them.

It's heartbreaking. It hasn't all been rosy. We could tell you many war stories, if you like, of what we've seen, of sad things we've seen. People have gone into error and gone into immorality.

Now, God help us as a church to stay strong. When we're feeling weak, let's rally around one another. Let's support one another. Let's pray for one another. Let's encourage one another. Edify one another.

[23:40] As we see the day approaching, if you're feeling weak, if you're feeling like you're getting straying into some sin, call your brother, your pastor, your fellowship.

Minister to one another. Let's support one another so we don't see that happen again. And yet our journey continues. We must not be deterred. We see his provision. Ahead lies more challenges, no doubt.

Amen. We haven't arrived yet. There's still more to go. There's still more of a journey. And people are what matters. As we see God working in lives that have changed, transformed. And this is the biggest blessing.

The biggest blessing of ministry is life's touch for Christ. That's what we want to see. That's why as a church we care about evangelism. This is not just a little holy, comfy, snug, smug little holy club. We are a fighting unit. It's taking back territory. We have a mission to fulfil. We are all missionaries. And the Lord Jesus is building his church.

[24:42] And it says of him, I am on Mount Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty. Friends, this one we serve, the one who is our protector, the one who is our provider.

He is the Lord, which was and is and is to come. And he controls the past, the present and the future. And so we acknowledge the Lord today for the blessings of the past and for the provision of the present.

We also want to give him thanks. So we've seen, just to get back to my points here today, we've seen his protection. And we see it still, don't we?

Every one of us, he protects you. Even without you knowing it, he's your deliverer. We also see his provision, his Jehovah Jireh. He provides for our needs.

Thank God for his provision. And we see, thirdly, his praise. He was and is and is to come. At this time of Ebenezer, people of God today, we say praise the Lord, don't we?

[25:50] We say praise him, don't we? Praise God, he's brought me thus far by his grace. And in gratitude we look back. And also in gratitude we look forward. We look to the past in thankfulness and we look forward to the future in hopefulness.

We look back at the hitherto and we look forward to the hereafter. Our Lord is surely gracious to us. And we give him praise. It's about his praise.

Praise the Lord. Buana asafiwe. Amen. Buana. Glory. God.

Great things he has done. Buana. The Lord. Asafiwe. Praise the Lord. We say hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

It took one shout. Hallelujah. To bring down the walls of Jericho. Amen. One shout. Hallelujah. Glory. May we also say like Samuel hitherto at the Lord.

[26:51] Help me. Now it is the Lord we give praise to. We're not saying praise to any man, any ministry, any person. Listen, we acknowledge those who have been apart.

But our praise is not unto us. It's unto him. Unto him. Unto him. Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. That's who we want to put the spotlight on.

It's the Lord, not my skill or abilities. Not my wisdom. Certainly not. It's the Lord. Unto the Lord. He is our helper.

It says in Hebrews 13, in part it says, verse 5, Be content with such things as ye have. For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper. And I will not fear what man shall do unto me. You know, the people of Macedonia cried for help.

[27:48] Come and help us. In the vision. And we need help. We need help. The one we seek help from is the Lord. And the Lord has sent faithful people to help.

And we thank God for that too. But we're not here today to praise people. Our praise is unto him. Unto him. We sing his praises like they did in the back of the book.

In Revelation 1. And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. It says, unto him.

Unto him. Unto him. That loved us. And washed us from our sins in his own blood. And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his father. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Unto him that loved us. Unto him. Unto him be glory and dominion. And like John who heard the praises of heaven in Revelation 5.

[28:47] And I beheld and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne. And the beasts and the elders and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands.

Saying with a loud voice, worthy is the lamb that was slain. To receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing.

And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth. And such as are in the sea and all that are in them.

Heard I. Saying blessing and honour and glory and power. Be unto him that sitteth upon the throne. And unto the lamb forever and ever. May we be reminded of the faithfulness of God. Think of the faithfulness of God to you personally. That we're even saved.

[29:48] Even that. Just that. Surely just that is enough isn't it? His mercies to us. Our dependence upon him. Unto him be glory in the church.

Count your blessings. See what God has done. Hitherto. Have the Lord helped us.

Can you think of the Lord's mercies? Some of the Lord's mercies were not consumed. Let alone made his children. Glory. Can you think of the Lord's mercies to you personally today?

Maybe it's good to make today an Ebenezer moment. Isn't it? An Ebenezer moment. And this will be our forever song. I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever.

With my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. Our forever song is unto him. Isn't it?

[30:49] Likewise we can give thanks and give glory to God. Ascribe it unto him. The Ebenezer stone reminded the people of the victory that he gave them over the enemy.

His deliverance on this battlefield. Yet God wrought a victory. Ebenezer. His deliverance. His protection.

Think of our deliverer today. He's delivered us from a fate worse than death. Hasn't he? Hell. He's delivered us from our enemies.

He's our protector. He's our sustainer. He's the mighty conqueror. And his sustaining power is with you. May we trust him for further victories.

Amen. Trust him. And I just urge each one here today. Make today an Ebenezer moment. What can I do for the hereafter?

[31:45] At the hitherto. God has been faithful. Hitherto. What about the hereafter? What am I going to do now? Unto him. Unto him.

Sing of his mercies forever. Trust him for more victories. The Lord has sustained you. He's your protector. He's your provider. He's your praise. The Lord has helped us surely.

To him be glory. Unto him. Be glory and dominion. Forever and ever. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you. For your tender mercies. Which are new every morning. For your faithfulness, Lord. For our gathering today. And this time we can. Recall again.

The work of Calvary's cross. Where everything was done. That great memorial stone. As it were. Of Calvary's hill. Lord, where you took our sin and shame. Paid for our guilt.

[32:46] And gave us forgiveness as a gift. If we will but receive it.

Lord, we praise you. Of mercies. Of provision. Of your protection.

Lord, we want to be a praising people. Help us to be a people for your praise. That people see this as a church that praises God. Church that lifts up the name of Jesus. Lord, let it be all to you.

Pray if there's any present yet to trust you. That even now, by faith that springs up in their heart.

Lord, you might see fit to grant them eternal salvation.

Lord, we bless you. That each one might know that provision of salvation. That great salvation gift.

And Lord, that each one might know your calling.

What would you have us to do, Lord, in the hereafter? We pray. Lord, raise up more workers in this church. Raise up more people who will put their hands to the plough.

[33:49] Help us, Lord, to see the need. To meet the need. To bloom where we planted. To be missionaries in this great harvest field of Adelaide.

Lord, help us to be such a people.

We know you can. We know you are our helper. Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. Lord, this is our prayer. Help us to see these things. We thank you, Lord. We give you all our praise.

In Jesus' name, amen.