

Ebenezer

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[0:00] Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I am come.

! Let's talk about Ebenezer. 1 Samuel 7 Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpeth and Shem, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hither too hath the Lord helped us.

So up until this time, up until this very day, God has helped us. We're at the start of a new year, and we look forward, which we'll consider no doubt in the future messages, but we're also looking back to where we've come from.

And this is what the occasion was. At 1 Samuel 7, the Lord had brought a great victory to the Israelites. A great victory was won over the Philistines, the enemies of God.

And Samuel set up a stone to mark that hitherto, or up until that very day, God had been their help.

[1:22] Ebenezer means the stone of help. Now Ebenezer was a stone, a simple stone, a simple unpolished stone, a monument, a marker, a memorial of victory.

It was not some artistic object, someone had chiselled it out, and made it look like some modern piece of art, or some sculpture, or some object of worship.

That was not the point, certainly not. People near the word forbade them to have such a thing, as much as some well-meaning people fill their places of worship with statues, and bowed down in all kinds of acts of worship.

The Bible strictly forbids such things. But this stone was a simple stone, a monument, a marker, a memorial of victory. A simple reminder.

And we could all use tokens of reminders of God's grace, as we look back, as Richard has talked of looking back of their time thus far. We could all look back to times of God's working in our lives.

[2:27] Reminders of His grace, for His help, for the past days. And these people of God, as they took that time, as they made that mark, as it were, of a reminder, they could look back, way back to where God had rescued them, from Egypt, from the bondage, from the world that it pictured, from the sin that it pictured that He had redeemed them from.

And then in more recent times, some 20 years before, they had been defeated. A defeated nation, on that same ground. 20 years before, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were slain for their rebellion and disobedience to God.

The ark of the law had been taken, and the Philistines had triumphed. And the Israelites were a defeated nation. In that same place, they had been made subject to the Philistines.

Yet they could say, hitherto have the Lord helped us. Up until now, the Lord has helped us.

Because as we take that time to look back, sometimes the past reminds us of failure.

Sometimes the past reminds us of defeat. When we sought to rely on our own strength. And the context here is, at this time, that Samuel had called the people together.

[3:46] He called them together to faithfulness, to separation. He called the people of God together to worship, to repentance. He called the people together to prayer and fasting.

And they put away the strange gods. It was a mark, it was a line in the sand that Samuel drew. As the people of God turned from their wickedness.

And as the people were gathered together to worship at this pivotal time, they were not armed to fight. And they heard a report. The Philistines were coming. I don't know if they could hear the horses hooves or some signal method that told them that they were on their way to attack.

They were coming against them. What would they do? In 1 Samuel 7 verse 9, we read what Samuel did. 1 Samuel 7 verse 9, Samuel took a lamb and he offered it for a burnt offering, holy unto the Lord.

And Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel and the Lord heard him. There was prayer, there was sacrifice, there was a slain lamb.

[4:55] They looked to the lamb. They looked to the Lord. And the Lord gave them a great victory. The victory came because of the lamb.

Now, as has already been referred to in the service thus far, the lamb of God. John the Baptist cried out, Behold, the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

It's a message still for now. For your sin and mine, the lamb of God. He is the one who wins the great victory over our worst enemy, ourselves, and our own sinfulness and inclination that way. And hitherto hath the Lord helped us. It was a mark. Ebenezer, it speaks of redemption. Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. It speaks of testimony to the glory of God. God has helped us.

It speaks of answered prayer as the people cried unto the Lord. And today too. Today, now. This day. This New Year's Day. Today, now. We can look back at the past year and years before that.

[6:04] And also say, what God hath wrought. What God has done. The people had been on a journey. Twenty years back, it was Ichabod. The glory had gone.

The presence of God had departed. The people had rebelled and miserably sinned and failed. It was the absence of God's presence at Ichabod as that time of the Lord's people were failing God. And now they could see the help of His hand. So they travelled from Ichabod, from spiritual decline and unfaithfulness to Ebenezer, to revival.

To recognise what God has done. And that's what we do around the Lord's table too, isn't it? It's a reminder. It's a mark. It's a memorial. It's a prompter for us.

And you know, we all need reminders. I know, as I'm not as young as I used to be, I need some reminders. You know, whether it's a fridge magnet or a bookmark or a note on a piece of paper.

[7:11] And we can be reminded of the scriptures, for example, with wall texts in our homes. Get some scripture texts on the walls of your home. Get some bookmarks and fridge magnets with Bible verses on them to remind you of the goodness of the Lord.

Look at those Ebenezer stones. Look at those reminders of God's goodness and remember. And likewise, there's another account of Joshua crossing the Jordan on dry ground.

He took 12 stones from the middle of the Jordan and he stacked them up in Gilgal. It was a reminder then. A reminder that God's people had come through difficulties. They passed through some deep and wide places.

And that might be for you too. You can look back and think, yes, I had some struggles back then in 2011 or before that. I've had some deep rivers to cross, some wide rivers to forge.

And our God has brought us over the Jordan on dry ground. What God has brought. It's a reminder, isn't it? Those memorial stones that Joshua used, the memorial stone of Ebenezer that Samuel used.

[8:22] It's a reminder. And it's good to be reminded. It's a memorial today as we come around the Lord's table to remind us, to prompt us to remember.

To remember the lamb slain before the foundation of the world. To remember the lamb who takes away the sin of the world. To remember the one who gives victory to the people of God.

The lamb who's blood brings great victory. And it's an encouragement that stirs us. To deeper faith for the future. To the days ahead. To this new year.

To the days ahead as God gives us then. For deeper faith for the future. To know that he will hold us yet in his care. And we can think back.

Forget not all his benefits. And there is yet more to come. For this new year ahead. Yet more to come.