

Confidence or Presumption?

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[0 : 00] well I would like to add to Dan's welcome to those of you who are here with us today first time or what is it fifth week fifth time great to have you and what we do at this point in the service is we open the Bible and so I'd encourage you to grab a Bible if it's nearby and turn back to the passage in 1 Samuel 7 on page 230 and as we do that we try and listen to what God has to say and this passage today was read to us I hope you noticed it's a it's a kind of perfect open house passage because it tells us what God's doing why he does it and how he does it and at the heart of it is the fact that God desires people he wants to be in connection and in relation with people and it's a wonderful story it's one of the few times in all the Old

Testament and New Testament where the people of God get it right which is a very high moment indeed it's about a thousand years before Christ and I think at the end we're supposed to where we say well that's how it's supposed to be for the first time in a very very long time God's people actually listen to what God says and do what he asks and as they're praying and sacrificing to him you remember the Philistines gather and they are completely vulnerable and they call on God and God himself intervenes and saves them and the passage ends in verse 13 with these beautiful words of how they have peace they have shalom and the Lord stands against their enemies and everything's good and you kind of wish that one Samuel finished there but it doesn't so I want to ask three questions to help us understand this passage what is God doing why is he doing it and how does he do it so firstly what is God doing if you've been with us for the last few weeks in one Samuel it's been a bit of a wild ride God seems to be doing two things that appear to be contradictory he seems to be dealing with and destroying what's rotten and corrupt and at the same time he's raising up a fresh start a new beginning and there are two names associated with those two things the name Eli is associated with the corruption and rottenness and the name Samuel with what is new Eli was the spiritual leader of Israel but he was a do-nothing leader he wouldn't stand up for what he knew was right and the conditions of faith in the people of God would die he appointed his two sons as clergy and they used their position for financial and sexual favors and here are the three marks of a decay and degradation and disgrace in the people of God first weak leadership Eli knows what's going on but he does nothing about it he looks the other way and God holds him accountable second sexual immorality amongst the clergy and third the formal practice of religion without the power of God a contempt for the word of God and as we have gone through these sections it's a little like a little like watching one of those homes on homes programs I don't know there's a confession I love that TV program homes Mike Holmes is a he's a contractor in Toronto and what he does he finds people who've spent their life savings either buying a new house which is something's been covered up or on there on a reno of their house and it's a disaster and he goes in and he finds what's wrong he comes in as a sort of a deliverer rescuer figure and every mistake and everything wrong that he finds he takes personally and uh rips it all out and rips it all out and more than you think and rips it all out and uh the last scene is a beautiful scene where the family's in tears saying you know thank you for saving us and uh uh one of the sticks in my mind is a couple bought a home after it had been renovated and uh although it had passed inspection they had not connected the sewage line to the mains true story and after a couple of weeks they bought it in winter after a couple of weeks when the thaw came it was a strange odor from the front yard and the pipes were emptying into the front uh into the front yard and uh homes was deeply distressed by that he not only pulled out he had to pull up the whole basement floor the concrete floor and all the piping and they dug down and uh everything was good in the end why am i telling you this because

just because it's a good story no because you have to get to this rottenness before you can build this lovely pristine thing and it's a catastrophe underneath and chapter four last week was a catastrophe for israel they went up to fight against the philistines and the whole army was killed 30,000 people and all the leaders were killed hofnai and phinehas and eli died on the same day and worst of all the ark of god was captured the real ark of god not the not the raiders of the lost ark that melts nazis yeah and what happens well the philistines take the ark of god and they put it in their temple and their their god dagon uh falls down and worships before the ark and gradually the ark becomes a hot potato as it they don't know what to do with it and so they send it from city to city and then they send it up back to israel and here's the thing although israel is almost completely destroyed god's power and god's glory remains completely in control it was god who was responsible for their defeat he's dealing with the rot it's god who is responsible uh and shows himself completely in control amongst the philistines i just i just say this to us you know when a church becomes marked by weak leadership and sexual immorality and a form of religion without its power god will deal with it in his way and if a church should disappear if a denomination should disappear disappear will it affect the glory and the work of god and i think no you see this is how god deals with corruption but why is he doing it i mean why does mike pull up the basement and the pipes is to create something completely new so alongside this work what god is doing is creating a new beginning a new people as it were and the way he does it is by raising up a deliverer in fact the most of the early chapters are not about eli but they're about establishing samuel as a prophet why because underneath their weakness and their disobedience and their uh immorality was a famine of the word of god do you remember back in chapter three in the first verse just cast your eyes two pages back to that we read that the word of god was rare it was rare in the people of god this is worse than a physical famine that can take your physical life it's worse than a famine of bread and water this is a famine of the word of god it can take your life eternally so by the end of chapter three we read in verse 20 that samuel was established as a prophet of the lord and the lord again appeared to shiloh how did the lord appear for the lord revealed himself to samuel at shiloh by the word of the lord that is god's purpose that is what god is doing he's doing something new he is creating and saving a new people and if the people of god or if institutions implode we ought to see new churches and new leaders and new people proclaiming the word of god and it's a great encouragement to us i think that samuel's ministry was not flashy it wasn't a headline thing and if you're reading carefully at the end of chapter six where we left it last week when the ark comes back to israel they still don't they still don't turn back to god they parcel the ark off into cold storage they put it into a town that is absolutely in the boonies is that a canadian word okay you know what i mean they put it out by the black stump is that a canadian phrase okay the boonies we'll see a long way away in a in an unknown town nowhere nowhere really famous now what's the real issue the real issue is

that israel doesn't know what to do with god on his own god has dealt with both their threats the internal corruption in the people of god the external threat of the philistines so it shows that the problem for the people of god is not their threats or circumstances or corruption the real problem is god himself and god well knows how to deal with evil and how to raise up a deliverer and we expect at the end of chapter six for things to start moving forward but it doesn't in the last phrase of verse two there's a 20 year gap before anything happens 20 years what's israel been doing they have not been returning to god for 20 years samuel has preached and preached and preached and preached and nothing has happened and then after 20 years israel laments after god not sure exactly what that means and this is the shape of what god does throughout the scriptures he brings about salvation and renewal in his people through a deliverer a deliverer who can do for us what we can't do for ourselves this is the way god works question second why does he do this why does he do it well here we come into our passage now and if you just look at verses three and four after 20 years as samuel has been calling the people to return to god in verse three and four they do and they put away their idols and they serve the living god so samuel calls the people of god to gather together all in one place at mizpah and he calls them to specific repentance and confession not a vague in general sense i make mistakes in my life i'm not perfect and they say we have sinned against the lord and they fast and they ask samuel to pray and as they are all gathered in one place first time for 20 years the philistines gather like bears to honey there's a first opportunity the philistines have had for 20 years to get their hands on all of israel question what should the people of god do i mean what you're an elder you're an elder in the people of israel if they're praying and sacrificing and singing hymns or whatever and the philistines gather around what do you do i mean do you do you get a group of people together to go out and parlay do you develop some weapon of choice or some battle strategy verse eight what they do is they pray they say to samuel samuel you told us in verse three that if we turn to god he would save us god is our only hope he's our only security we're seriously outnumbered we're badly outgunned whatever you do do not stop praying for us that god may save us it's very important for us he does prayer seem like the right thing to do at this point i mean if sam is a deliverer worth his salt sure you ought to do something more masculine or something more you know uh practical but you see what really matters to god is his connection with his people and that's what ought to matter to us as well because are the philistines a big problem for god no is god able to handle them yes and what is the sign that they really believe it the sign is that they pray it's in prayer that we recognize that we just don't have the resources to save ourselves and we call on god and god loves it when we come to him and we treat him as he really is god god of grace and mercy the one who has the power of life and death in his hands it's it's really in prayer that we show we believe that we are weak and unable and that god is powerful

and capable and for those of you who are in bible study groups doing samuel right now do you notice that at the beginning of samuel god begins the work of renewing through the prayers of a woman through hannah and now as we come to the end of this first cycle in chapter 7 god continues the work of renewing as his people pray to him and if god was not god and if god was not in control what samuel's doing is worse than pathetic but i think that's why this chapter is here this is why god is doing what he is doing he wants to save a people for himself he wants a people to know him to trust him and to relate to him and to be rightly related to him so in verse 9 samuel takes a lamb and offers it as a sacrifice to god just as the instructions in leviticus tell for the forgiveness of their sins and he cries out to god and in the middle of the sacrifice verse 9 we read god answers without any human help he thunders from heaven and he throws the philistines into confusion and all that's left for israel is to mop up and we looked out at verse 12 then samuel took a stone and set it up between mispa and chen and called its name ebenezer for he said till now the lord has helped us now there's a very good song which has ebenezer in it that some of us might know come thou fount of every blessing okay that's pathetic um well christians use songs we often sing songs with unexplained words in them like ineffable in the last uh in the last hymn if you want to know what ineffable means dan will help you with that later ebenezer simply means till now the lord has helped us and here is the thing about the christian faith when you start to follow god when you you know when you give your heart to him things don't become easy it's not a bed of roses it's not all sweetness and light and god seems to do things in a kind of an upside down way a reversal kind of way and what looks to us through human eyes as weakness and and failure and defeat in the hands of god is actually power and victory and what looks to us as winning and succeeding and going ahead in the hands of god is futility see at the heart of the christian faith is jesus christ hanging on a cross the son of god completely innocent suffering for other people you just you can't get around that and this is the way of god with his people we do not move forward uh as the people of god by numbers and by power and by success and by winning we only move forward if god is with us the same way what counts uh for us for the people of god it's not our resources it's not even who stands against us it's only this if god is with us this is why god's say this is why he judges as well he wants people to relate to him rightly he doesn't want he doesn't want religious people who are tidy but ignore him he doesn't want morally upright people who do good but basically have god on the periphery what he wants is us to know him and to trust him and to hope in him and he promises that he will deliver us it is never the strength of the opposition that causes defeat for the people of god it's only if we push god to the side you sometimes hear people talking in a kind of defeatist way

[17 : 22] today they say things like oh we as a church we're facing things that the church has never faced in 2000 years new problems much more difficult uh uh you know it's a flat world connected 24 7 internet people are much smarter and smoother and um everyone has to work 16 hours a day there's no time for god they're already beaten i'm not saying they're not real they are real obstacles but they're not the real issue the real issue is whether god is god whether his arm has grown weak and whether we relate to him rightly whether we are with him and he is with us and so thirdly and finally that's the what and why how does god do it how how does god do this work i mean how does it work in our lives and how does the power of god and the deliverance of god become real to each of us this is so important i want to go back and look at the details in verse 3 and 4 if you just turn back to that in chapter 7 samuel said to all the house of israel if you are returning to the lord with all your heart then put away the foreign gods the ashteroth from among you and direct your heart to the lord and serve him only and he will deliver you out of the hand of the philistines so the people of israel put away the baals and the ashteroth and they served the lord only now um that surprise you it shouldn't uh this is the kind of thing we say every sunday and christian congregations uh in our liturgy and in our services and the preachers have anything to say that they should say they should say this but i just want you to notice every word is a person relational kind of word see uh samuel says return to the lord with all your heart which is saying i was made for god yeah i filled my life with all sorts of other things but i know none of those other things can save me and none of them can satisfy the thirst that i have and they all turn to dust and ashes in my hands they can be good things they can be bad things it's saying god alone is worthy of my single undivided love he's worth more than all this world can offer and it's directing the deepest desire of my heart to him my affections it's not a head thing it's not just an intellectual thing nor is it just an emotional thing the bible uses this word heart and it's it's the center it's who you are and who i am and it says samuel says all your heart this is not it's not a part-time thing it's not something you can do lazily or half-heartedly or an on and off lukewarm thing this is talking about god being the center of our affections and hopes and this is how god comes into our hearts now this is how his power works now it's the same lesson we learned last week in dagon's temple isn't it it's so important it's repeated twice here samuel says direct all direct all your hearts to the lord and serve him only and they put away their idols and they served him only and if you're with us for the first time today this is the this is at the very center and heart of what the bible teaches this is it the core this is the bullseye it's god saying i am the lord that is my name my glory i give to no other i am the lord your god the holy one of israel besides me there is no savior it's exactly what jesus said anyone who loves his father and mother more than me not worthy

of me anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me he demands a place of unrivaled supremacy in our affections without any competition and what does it mean practically well for israel it meant they had to get rid of their foreign gods now you may not think this but it was a huge ask and their foreign gods are named here as baal and ashtaroth that the singular is baal and ashtaroth and they were the fertility gods so if mr mr baal was fertility god ashtaroth and you can remember it because it rhymes with pock ashtaroth ashtaroth was miss sexuality and she was worshipped in egypt and in babylon and ashtaroth and canaan and she was always depicted as a carved statue of a naked woman and sunday liturgy went like this you went to church and you had sex in church and the idea was that baal and ashtaroth may be inspired to follow suit in heaven and therefore there'd be good crops and healthy animals and many children the fact that israel the people of god have to put these away show what they've been doing for the last 20 years they've taken on the sexy religion of canaan and i think that's what that's what eli's two sons introduced into the temple worship and as you can understand it was hugely popular and samuel's saying uh you've got to give this up you've got to serve god only now of course we live in a far more advanced and sophisticated culture today don't we you know we're we're much more progressive we've done away with ashtaroth and we've replaced her with sex itself as a kind of religion but it's almost axiomatic today that you cannot be fully human unless you hold your right to sexual self-gratification and you can understand it it may be uh it may be that this is the closest place people come to a spiritual reality a spiritual something that's bigger than themselves but the bible says we either worship the gifts of god or god himself and all the pleasure and all the goodness that we derive from all the good gifts of god they derive from him and they ought to point us to him but if we try and share our heart our god space with anything but god himself it leads to ruin ash-type religion still has a huge appeal this is yesterday's vancouver sun uh i don't read this paper mrs short reads it it's true i don't it hurts my eyes i can't read it uh the headline the front page is spiritual divas and here is a woman gabrielle bernstein has written a book called spirit junkie uh making it sexy stylish and cool to be conscious and in the article uh she wears five inch heels and electric blue strapless silk dress new york times best-selling author she says you can get to the mountaintop in that fabulous pair of heels where you might be handed a million dollar contract instead of a set of commandments carved in stone there you go now it takes all sorts of different forms today doesn't it um yeah i think sport there's something sensual and exciting uh uh george uh strombolopoulos strombolopoulos i got it right uh he says about the new montreal bell uh hockey center he said it's not the forum

hockey is my religion the canadians are my god and this is my cathedral and the world rugby cup is finally over thankfully and i just uh for those of you who follow it it's such a relief that new zealand has finally won it's going to make a certain new zealander on staff less unbearable in the next week so and uh although they won by one point they still won just one point barely won lucky to get away with it against the french however um my favorite part of watching the matches are the national anthems at the beginning are fantastic camera closes in on these big beefy rugby blokes as they're hugging each other and they are screaming their anthems out with tears pouring down their faces like this is the most important thing in the universe i love it but it's not and it's not why we're here and if you're new to church you will realize by now that we're not trying to copy what happens in roger's arena we don't meet here for an emotional buzz or some sort of sensual lift we meet here to do what god sent samuel to do and what israel finally did in chapter 7 to listen to his word that's different from ashtar worship that's a very difficult thing to it's much more difficult than going to the hockey it means putting aside my favorite ideas and my prejudices and having an open ear and an open heart to what god is saying that is how the power of god becomes real in our hearts so let me finish just pointing out three things firstly i want to uh i want to speak to those of us today who feel they cannot say ebenezer who feel god is not with you god has not helped you and you want to know you want to connect with god i just say again this is what you were made for and if you return to him with all your heart he will save you and it means putting away every other god and serving only him directing your affection and desire to him he alone is worthy means humbly listening to his word and just as samuel said call those people all those years ago he now calls you to trust him to put your weight on him and to follow him only secondly to us as a congregation of saint john's we've had uh quite a time recently and god has very much been our helper has he not and uh we've been thinking and talking in leadership about planning a sunday to say thank you and i think we ought to probably in the new year call it ebenezer sunday but while it's a great joy to say till now the lord has helped us that till now ought to keep reminding us we must not take god for granted we mustn't presume on his mercy and grace we mustn't be casual and introduce other gods let's serve him and only him with all our hearts let's prove his promises and if you've other if you've gathered other gods and you know you've gathered them put them away and pray for forgiveness and trust him for your future and thirdly and finally this passage urgently points us to our need for a deliverer because the way god saves the way he wants us to rightly relate to him and how he does it is in the end through the deliverer jesus christ samuel was an imperfect deliverer jesus christ is the perfect deliverer samuel taught the word of god jesus is the word made flesh samuel made a sacrifice jesus was the one true sacrifice for sins samuel prayed for his people jesus continues to pray for us now constantly in heaven and in jesus christ

is god's salvation if you look at the face of jesus christ you see the face of god and it shows us that what salvation is is god giving us himself and all the great newness that is going to come from that in the end will end up in a new heaven and a new earth and it's all through jesus christ and his death and resurrection amen let's kneel for prayer amen fight estour let's kneel Boriano age mark am are the right right all in my say we maybe in the end of the minute our words our spread the thehis