

Ebenezer: Until Now the Lord Has Helped Us

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 January 2012

Preacher: Rev. Dave Little

[0 : 0 0] today oh lord help us to know that you are our help you are a very present help you are help in the past and you are our eternal help and so god open your word to us that we may see all these things in jesus name amen well it is uh my joy to be here as a preacher today um and if you don't know me some of you may not know who i am i'm dave little uh actually the reverend dave little apparently i have an ugly purple sweater that's been commented on um but i'm a deacon here at st john's and uh aaron's obviously not here uh and he's in australia and we're overjoyed for him to be able to spend some time with uh his family now today is kind of a special day uh and as as uh as you heard earlier uh ryan sort of mentioned that this is ebenezer sunday um what may you say is ebenezer sunday what is that and uh in all the services every single one today um we've had this special occasion where uh we are we are we're doing something extraordinary uh where we're recalling we're we're we're looking back we're looking uh to right now and we're looking to the future about what god has done in help to us uh it's not as some might think ebenezer sunday it's like a day that we celebrate uh parents unusual parents who name their kid ebenezer or something like that which is as ryan pointed out probably a cool name wouldn't you want to be named ebenezer that's kind of cool it's not like ebenezer sunday where we tell you to tithe more uh because you're so cheap no that's not although tithing is good tithing is good uh ebenezer uh ebenezer it actually means stone of help stone of help and we're going to take a real quick look at this fantastic passage in 1 samuel chapter 7 so if you have that you're going to open it up and look at it it's good we're kind of doing a review a little review um we've kind of looked at this before so this may be fairly familiar to some of you uh but this this is great because this passage is going to create a a gospel framework for us to look at how god has helped us how god is helping us and how god is our eternal help and so as we as we come to this sunday let's take a look at this passage uh look with me at verse 12 and uh christy just read this to you verse 12 ebenezer it's where god's people resolutely mark god's help in their midst listen to these words then samuel took a stone and set it up between mitzvah and shen and called its name ebenezer for he said till now the lord has helped us and this is really cool this this stone being set up is expressing the reality it's proclaiming god's goodness and help it's expressing the reality and proclaiming god's goodness and help in this context uh it's going to be very very helpful to remember if you remember some cool things that aaron said about this passage we'll kind of uh walk through it a little bit more but it's absolutely fantastic so let's take a look what's the gospel framework well what we do is we begin in this chapter kind of at verse two with absence i'm not talking about like school absence you know or you know there's truancy or something there's there's a definite absence there's a there's an emptiness at the beginning here i don't know if you heard it if you felt it let's listen to how it begins

the ark was lodged at kirith jerim a long time past some 20 years there there's represented here that there's no real presence of god the ark of the covenant the presence of god the salvation of god the word of god has been absent from the people of god for lo these 20 years instead of having this absence and just longing for it for these 20 years it seems that the people of god have been filling their lives with everything else besides god you get this uh this picture that that that samuel says that they've been filling their lives with foreign gods these ashtaroth and in verse three and i think what you've got here is basically the culture around them the culture around them the culture of the people of god surrounding them has kind of taken a hostile takeover of the people of god this hostile takeover of the people of god and it's this this takeover that's that's brought them from a life of fullness with god to this absence does life of fullness with god to a life that they're filling it with counterfeit empty substitutes for god it's an empty culture that's filling their life their foundations are counterfeit the relationships their business practices the morality their worship and they've been feeling it i don't know if that that this culture kind of taking hostile uh takeover uh rings a bell at all

we've got this kind of culture that's hostile to the gospel here in vancouver canada 2012 and there's this there's this pressure on the people of god even of today and there's this desire for for for for this culture to impinge on the church to replace the gospel with this counterfeit i don't know if that rings true for you but it's very true for the people of this day now the people of god then and this is this is an amazing thing that happens you start with this absence and then what you get is this acute feeling there's this feeling there's this acute feeling in the people of god and i'm not saying like a cute feeling like you're feeling a cute bunny that's not it's a sharpness there's the sharpness and it's like the bunny died you know that they're there there's a this pain that's going on there's like death it's more it's more than a bunny dying by the way it's it's this absence of the presence of god right now i don't know exactly what brings this on it's kind of cool where it doesn't actually explain why um it could be that the philistines are scary and they are and they're kind of they're right there uh frightening the people of god uh kind of threatening the people of god that may be it we're not sure exactly what it is but what we do see is that it is a spiritual sharpness this spiritual acute pain at this loss and listen to this verse in verse two it says and all the house of israel lamented after the lord this is a corporate like a church-wide thing but it's also personal it's very deep and personal and if we listen to the language here this is going to set up the the really cool framework i think this gospel framework for us to actually see how god is our help that god has been our help and that god is our eternal help i think this is going to set us up now listen to this language it's a language of lament of mourning something has died in the life of the people of god it's a language of returning from going from something to something else from going from this counterfeit to the living god it's this language of moving towards serving yourself and the the counterfeit culture to serving the lord only it's this language of putting away the things that are detestable to god and turning to our heavenly father and it's a language of confession and just as we have confessed this is part of the life of the people of god listen to these these this verse six it's fantastic we have sinned against the lord there's this absence there's something painful going on in the life of the people of god and they realize their sin before god and it is a language of the heart samuel says with all your heart direct your heart to the lord i don't know if you remember aaron speaking about this this is a language of repentance this is a language of repentance repentance and one of my absolute favorite examples of repentance in the bible as jesus tells the story of the lost son the prodigal son do we know the story we have this son who's been given everything and he and he he rejects his father and takes what he assumes is his and uh let me let me read a bit from from luke chapter 15 and when he had spent everything a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need there's something going on something there's a need there that's one of my favorite verses verse 17 but when he came to himself there's something that changes there's something that switches there's something there's a realization of the need for god of the absence of god the absence that jesus points out of the of the heavenly father he came to himself he realized that he was in need and listen to his language of of confession and repentance i will arise and go to my father and i will say to him father i have sinned against heaven and before you and i am no longer worthy to be called your son make me as one of your hired servants and i think we see here true repentance it's a heart humbled before god and surrender submitting and trusting it's a heart that repents and turns in faith i think that's part of this this great gospel structure we're looking at where we see how has god been our help how is god our help and how is god our eternal help and let me let me point this out this is something uh that i think has been going on 20 years or more that we have trouble seeing that god is our help because we assume in a sense we presume on god that he he owes us and i don't think we do it deliberately but i don't know if you've noticed this switch in the culture and i've noticed it over the years uh when i when i was a kid uh back in school 20 plus years ago um if you got in trouble if you like punch some kid in the face or whatever you went to the principal's office and it's a big deal and if your parents had to come in you are in really big trouble and if lord have mercy if grandma heard about it you know because because you're thinking man this is terrible i have done total wrong i've been caught i there is a consequence to my action now some of these probably teachers out there this is not always the case but this is often the case now you punch someone out knock some kid down a kid goes to the principal's office the parents come in and what happens we blame the school you my child punched jimmy because your school's too boring and i think what's happened is there's this presumption that you owe me that the school owes me that the government owes me now i'm not saying that the school and the government uh and uh you know oughtn't to take care of us that's not what i'm saying but there's this presumption in our hearts that we're owed and i think that is that's one of those things in the

culture that's pressing in on us in the church and if we if we have that presumption well god kind of owes me i do good things for god and he does some good things he helps me because you know i say some nice things to him and and i do some nice things i don't do bad stuff we will never get grace we will never understand that god does not owe us anything we owe god everything we owe him everything and it's only by his grace that he helps us and when we come to that place of true repentance where our heart truly turns to him and realizes humbly lord i got nothing and you've got everything i'm just going to fall on your mercy i'm going to fall on your mercy that's a great picture for us of understanding that god is our help we're not the culture's not all these things around us are not but god is our help now now as we move from this language of repentance we move into this language of salvation this language of salvation as we turn to the living god i hope you're hearing that there's this incredible language of salvation verse 3 samuel says this direct your heart to the lord and serve him only and he will deliver you there's this this incredible provision that god gives as we turn to him and serve him the picture in samuel is this this provision of god yes it's a temporary a temporal one that at this time as the god's people turn to him he delivers them absolutely but it's a bigger picture there's a bigger wider greater picture that we are need we need to see direct your heart to the lord and serve him only and he will deliver you it's a language of relationship of prayer verse 5 i will pray to the lord for you there's this intercession where samuel comes before the people in intercession and in verse 8 they they're fearful and i think it this actually shows that that perhaps they're humbled they're like well we can't take these philistines on ourselves they're humble before god and they and they say you know what only you can be our help we cannot do this come before god in intercession cry out to the lord our god in verse 8 it says that he may save us from the hand of the philistines got this great language of salvation in relationship it's also of worship and offering samuel says put away the foreign gods in verse 3 and in verse 9 we've got this picture of of the sacrifice and offering so samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the lord um this is the reality this is the reality of you and i cannot have a relationship with the living god unless there is sacrifice we cannot have forgiveness we cannot stand before god unless there is sacrifice that's the picture that the bible gives and i hope as you heard this verse samuel taking this lamb and offering it to the lord i hope you're hearing well i i know that that jesus is called the lamb and maybe you go right to to john the baptist saying behold the lamb of god who takes away the sin of the world it is by god's help and only by god's help through christ that we will have this salvation we will have that relationship we will have eternal life and as i said there's this there's this there's this incredible beautiful deliverance the salvation that happens that's kind of a picture of the wider salvation here uh in uh in in samuel it says samuel cried out to the lord for israel and the lord answered him as samuel was offering up the burnt offering the philistines drew near to attack israel but the lord thundered with a mighty sound and it's it's it's the voice of the lord thundering into his creation it's him taking command and lordship bringing deliverance through his power and at this time he's bringing it against the philistines and throws them into confusion and they were defeated we have this sacrificial offering language and we find this beautiful language sort of melded together in hebrews i don't know if you've read hebrews lately it's a fantastic book of the bible and it helps us to see who jesus is as the forgiveness as the pure and awesome eternal help of god listen to a hebrews chapter 9 starting at verse 11 but when christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come here is here's the one who is bringing intercession who is bringing the the offering before god perfectly but it's even greater the greater and more perfect and he's actually bringing the offering into heaven the perfect tent not made with hands that is not of this creation he entered once for all into the holy places not made by means of the blood of goats and calves like it's good good in the in the provisional sense that that samuel offered this lamb but even greater even greater than all those is by means of his own blood and this is this is where it is thus securing eternal redemption god is not just your help now and god is not just your help in the past you've repented and trusted in jesus but he is our eternal eternal help you are secure in your salvation eternally he is your help always now that's kind of a cool framework god who is who has brought help to his people who has delivered them and saved them who has come into relationship with his people and we see in the over this chapter that a right order is restored there's a right order that's been restored that now we have the people of god instead of serving counterfeit culture and their and their selfish nature they're now turning to serve the lord and him only we have a switch from the people of god listening to their own selves their own devices and desires to now being rightly judged or ruled by god's chosen judge who is samuel we have this people who are rescued and restored and now have

peace but it's only

[20 : 17] by god's hand and with his help what a great picture of a god who saves and as they place this incredible stone of of of help it's a stone remembering back to what god has done he has rescued them it is god and him alone that has rescued them and it's to remind them in the present of the god who does rescue who loves them has called them into a relationship to serve him and him only and it is to remind them constantly of the future there's this this solidness to this rock to remind them that he is the god who saves and for us we can see through christ that he is our eternal salvation he is the one who is our eternal help who has secured for us this eternal redemption what a great picture god's work in the past his work in the presence and his his incredible help all the way to eternity now this passage i hope has given you uh a review of the the pictures of stuff most of us know now you and i get to actually participate uh in this incredible work of god we get to um we get to do like samuel did and express the reality of god's help in the past in the present and eternally um i think a really cool way of doing this is just to see where is it that god calls us to action um a couple of weeks ago ryan actually preached on one thessalonians it's like review day for me uh aaron preached this sermon and uh and ryan preached another sermon but we're actually looking at one thessalonians chapter five and they're familiar verses to you do you do you remember these verses rejoice always pray without ceasing give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of god in christ jesus for you there's an an action that goes with the reality of god being our helper of the one who has helped us redeemed us saved us we look to god's presence in our lives where there's an absence we repent and turn to him and we can rejoice in the work he's done we can rejoice always because there's an eternal salvation for us we can pray to god because he is the god who is trustworthy we can trust him because he is our helper he has delivered us he has provided everything for us on the cross that we would have relationship with him and we can give thanks we could thank him for all the work he has done in our lives for calling us to himself to the ways in which he has been delivering us and taking care of us over these years i want to kind of wrap up here as we as we come to this time where we can look to this stone of remembrance this stone of god's health like the whole rest of the church we're going to actually be able to express that and in a few minutes you guys are going to express this everybody in their pew has three little pieces of paper little slips of paper and they're kind of in a in a little bag you can hand those out and i'll explain what we're going to do with those and here's what i suggest there are three different colors of sheets on the greenish one if you just write thanks on it just write thanks on that sheet on the blue one you can you can write prayer and on the orange one you can write serve or commit either one commit or serve and these these these are actually going to be sheets that we're going to collect at the end of about five or so minutes when we start and we're going to collect those sheets that are going to be the prayers and the thanks and the commitments of god's people and we're going to place them in this ebenezer i don't know if it looks like typical ebenezer but this is our ebenezer it's a very colorful one at the moment and we're going to collect these and there it's actually a very beautiful thing that's the prayers of god's people and commitments of god's people and you may choose to write your name on it if you want but most people will probably say i'm just going to leave it blank because what we're going to do with these is over the next well months we're going to start to share these with the people of god we're going to we're going to sort of express here are some of the thanks that we have for what god has been doing in our midst here's some of the longings of our heart the prayers that we have here's some of the ways in which God's people here at St. John's are committing their lives to Jesus and this Sunday marks the Sunday that we hope to do yearly that we can kind of reflect back on all the ways in which God has been so faithful to us that he has been our help and we'll use these over the course of the year and beyond so let me just give you a quick sort of picture of what each card is so thanks and this you may do this generally things you're thankful to God for but what might be really nice and helpful is things that you you're thankful for over this last year perhaps here at St. John's things that you're thankful for that God has been our help to this point God has been taking care of us and loving us and bringing us together as God's people maybe you have some thanks and i'm not going to direct you in that you need to sort of search your own heart the prayer is kind of a trust that God is the God who is our eternal redemption that we can trust in God now and we can trust and entrust our prayers to him because he is trustworthy maybe there is a number of prayers for well i'm just going to lay it out there people or situations or yourself that you're longing for this year for God to help bring his help and you can write those on the blue sheet the prayer sheet and

finally on the orange sheet ways in which you've been moved by God to commit to him this year to serve God and him only to turn maybe away from some things maybe thinking I want to turn from this to serve in this way maybe it's here in the church maybe it's your neighbors maybe it's your family it's up to you ways in which you are your prayers that you would serve this year in our midst so I'm going to say a quick prayer for us and we're going to move into a time where you get to express these things heavenly father we thank you that you have been our help that you are the God who delivers you are the God who saves who moves us from repentance in repentance and in a place of emptiness to a place of fullness in you we thank you God that you are our help now you are present with us now by the power of your [29 : 37] Holy Spirit and you call us to know you and serve you by the work of your spirit in our lives and God we thank you that you Lord Jesus are our eternal help that you have saved us on the cross you have offered yourself perfectly and been the perfect offering that we have forgiveness of sins help us Lord to be thankful and grateful for all you have done and so we lift this up to you in Jesus name Amen