

Ebenezer

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: 30 May 2010

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Let's turn together to that second reading, 1 Samuel chapter 7, and focus our attention on the verse that I didn't read, which comes directly after the passage I did read, verse 12.

1 Samuel chapter 7 and verse 12. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer, for he said, Till now the Lord has helped us.

Not far from here is one of the most famous sightseeing spots in Scotland and is certainly the most famous in Lewis, and that is, of course, the Calanish Stones.

Nobody is quite sure how or why they were set up. There are all kinds of theories, and I'm certainly not going to go into any of them this evening, except to say that they have been there for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years, and they are still there, and they're likely to outlive, if I can use that word, outlive any of us here today and in generations to come.

And in Samuel's day, like today, you set up a stone when you wanted to mark something, or when you wanted something to be remembered. It was not unusual for a stone to be set up in order to teach something to the coming generations, so that when they look at something, they will remember and they will see not only that the stone has lasted, but that there was something, there was an important reason why the stone was erected in the first place.

[2 : 17] This is what happened when Samuel set up this stone in between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer. The whole point of him doing so was for the coming generations, the children, the grandchildren, great-grandchildren, all through the Old Testament, so they would know what happened and what he wanted to be remembered on this occasion.

I want us to look then at this stone. I want us to go back to this stone and ask and to do exactly what Samuel wanted and hoped and intended when he did that, because not only was the stone there, I'm not sure if it's still there or not, but whether it is or not, it's in the Bible, and that means it's going to last forever, and that means that at all times people will be able to come to this and know why he set this stone up.

I want us to say, I want us to see first of all, the name that Samuel gave to this stone. He called it Ebenezer. Now Ebenezer was not just a name of, that means the Lord has helped us, that's what it does mean, but it had a particular significance in terms of 20 years back, because this was the place, I don't know if you noticed when we're reading chapter 4, if you were reading carefully with me, you will have noticed that this is exactly the name of the place where one of the greatest disasters in the history of Israel took place, at the place Ebenezer.

Verse 1 in chapter 4, now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, they camped at Ebenezer. So it is no coincidence that Samuel is calling the stone Ebenezer to remember something that happened 20 years ago, and that was only sorted out and resolved 20 years later.

And I believe that in chapter 7, what you have is a returning to the Lord that needed to happen in view of this disaster that took place in chapter 4 20 years previously.

[4 : 19] You'll remember that in those days, this was a very dark time in the history of Israel. There was no leadership, and that for many, many years, many decades, in fact, hundreds of years, there was a continuous cycle of highs and lows in the book of Judges, where Israel would go astray from what they knew to be correct and knew to be obedient behavior.

And when they went into a low, when they went astray, God would allow their enemies to take over, to oppress them and to subject them to slavery. And in their need, they cried to the Lord, and the Lord would raise up a judge, and he would lead them, and he would free them once again from the enslavement to which their enemies were subjecting them.

And this happened a number of times. In fact, the book of Judges is all about this continuous cycle from one to the other. And by the end of Judges, things were not improving at all.

We read those terrible words. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. There was no prophet. There was no word from the Lord. And their worship had become corrupt and become mingled with all kinds of evil intents and purposes.

And God had taken a step back from his people. And as far as they could see, he was not helping them, and he was not in their midst.

[5 : 44] But that did not mean that he had left them altogether. God was working in the background, and he was going to. It was his purpose to raise up for himself this Samuel.

Samuel, who was going to be one of the greatest leaders that Israel had ever seen. One of the most God-fearing men that we read about in Israel. And sure enough, you know, of course, the story of how Samuel was born.

His mother wasn't able to have children. She cried to the Lord in the temple, or rather in the tabernacle. And God gave her. He answered her prayer, and she gave him back to the Lord. And when he was a young boy, he was looking after the Lord's house. And God spoke to him when he was a young boy. But what he had to say to Samuel was not easy listening at all. It was God's judgment on Eli, on the priests, and on the whole house of Israel.

Because he said that he was going to judge Eli's house. And this, in chapter 4, is when it happened. Samuel grew up, and he was... And what happened was that the Israelites, on this occasion, went out to battle against the Philistines.

[6 : 50] And as they were losing the battle at Ebenezer, somebody had the bright idea, let's get the Ark of the Covenant. Now, on the surface, that may look like a good idea.

Because the Ark of the Covenant was a very sacred item of furniture that God had ordered to be put into the most holy place in the tabernacle. And you might think that this was showing reverence to God.

And this was a people returning to God, and giving him the place that they ought to have given him. That this was them truly asking God's help. But that wasn't the case at all. In actual fact, it was just superstition on their part.

For them, the Ark of the Covenant was something, it was like a lucky charm. The kind of way that people talk about God, in many cases today, when they say that they believe in God, they want to turn to him when things go wrong.

They want him to be there for them when things go wrong. And they like to believe in him, but not if things are going well. They don't want him in their lives if things are going well. But they want to include him when things are going badly.

[7 : 52] Well, that's exactly the way it was here. And God was not going to rise to that kind of treatment at all. Because we must always remember, in every generation, that we are accountable to God.

God is not there just for us. We are here for him. We were made for him, to glorify and enjoy him. And tonight, we are not here so that we can sort of give something to God in order for him to give something back to us in time of need.

If that's why you're here, you're badly mistaken. That's completely the wrong way to deal with God. You can't get much more irreverent than to deal with him in such a way as that.

But that's the way that the Israelites were treating God. The Ark of the Covenant, instead of being something that represented the glory of God amongst them, it just was a charm.

It was something that they just, they trusted in, rather than trusting in the Lord himself. Well, at first, when they brought the Ark of the Covenant into the battlefield, a great cry went up from Israel.

[8 : 56] This was the help that they were waiting for. And when the Philistines heard it, they were afraid. And they thought that God was somehow attached to this Ark of the Covenant. and that somehow God was going to defeat them.

But they remained steadfast. And they said, they said, Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews, let be men and fight. And what happened was that the Philistines won the battle.

It was an utter disaster for the Israelites. 30,000 men were left strewn. Can you imagine 30,000? Can you imagine a battlefield where there are 30,000?

I'm sure many of the Philistines died as well. That means even more than 30,000 men strewn all over. Can you imagine the blood? Can you imagine the awful scene that would be?

I mean, it just defies all imagination to think of the awful, the awfulness and the violence of these occasions. But in any case, the Israelites were catastrophically defeated.

[9 : 55] And not only did the Philistines defeat them, but they stole, they took the Ark of the Covenant away with them to their own country. And this was the greatest disaster of all because there was nothing as sacred as far as outward things are concerned as the Ark of the Covenant.

And when news spread that this had happened, the hope of Israel completely died. It just completely, their hearts sank. And as we know, Eli, when he heard, as well as the daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, who was pregnant, about to give birth, she died as well.

Such was the disaster that took place. Well, that was what Ebenezer represented, an unmitigated disaster as far as Israel were concerned.

But again, just like I said before, God was working in the background. It looked from the outside as if God were taking a step back and he no longer had any purpose for his people at all.

That wasn't the case. God never did that to his people. Although he had to judge them and he had to discipline them on many, many occasions, God never departed or forsook his relationship with his people.

[11 : 08] And the Old Testament is all about God maintaining his people and making them ready for the coming of his son, Jesus Christ, into the world. And so what happened, chapter 5 of Samuel is one of the most amazing, one of the most mysterious and interesting chapters.

Because what happened was the Philistines, just bear with me for a few minutes while I just tell the story because I think it's one of the most interesting stories. It tells us something of the way in which the Philistines thought they captured the ark and they took it, first of all, to the first place they took it was to Ashdod.

And they put it in the temple of Dagon, the house of Dagon. Now Dagon was a fish god. I'm not quite sure. It tells us later on in this chapter that he had hands and feet. I guess that he must have appeared like a fish with, if you can imagine, a great fish with hands and feet.

I don't know what that looks like, but I guess, I guess that's what it must have appeared. And that's the god that they worshipped. So they put it in his temple, but when they rose up the early the next day, Dagon had fallen face down on the ground before the ark of the Lord.

No explanation, it just happened. And so what they did was, they took Dagon and put him back in his place. Next morning, we know what's going to happen, don't we?

[12 : 32] Dagon has fallen face down on the ground before the ark of the Lord. Now I don't know how high, I guess, that Dagon must have been a significant size of an image.

And the next day, he had fallen face down on the ground before the ark, but this time, his head had broken off as well as his hands were lying cut off on the threshold.

Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. And that's in verse 5. So, what happened, coupled with that, was that the people began to feel ill.

And not only did they feel ill, they became ill. And their illness wasn't just something light, it was something, it was deadly. And God afflicted them and terrified them in Ashdod.

And they began to realize that this was no coincidence. They had taken the ark of the covenant, they had put it in the temple of Dagon, their God. At the same time, Dagon had fallen, their people began to get ill. That was, it's not, it's not rocket science to guess that there's a connection between the people becoming ill and the ark of the covenant.

[13 : 39] So what they said was, let's get it out of here, out of Ashdod into another city. So they sent it to Gath. And so when they sent it there, no prizes for guessing what happened there. The people started getting ill again.

And so they very quickly sent it from Gath to Ekron. What happened in Ekron? Well, the people were ready for it in Ekron. They said, it's not even getting in the door. We're not even going to allow it in the gate because by that time they had realized that this ark of the covenant was a dangerous piece of furniture.

They weren't even going to allow it inside the gate. What are we going to do with it then? They asked, what will we do with it? We don't want it in the city gates. What do we do with it? So what they did was they devised a hugely clever and interesting plan.

What they said was they have to send it back to Israel. But what they said was, well, we can't send it back without sending an offering. So what they did was they constructed five golden tumors because that was the illness that people got in connection with the ark.

Five golden tumors and they put it alongside the ark and then they made five golden mice because it appears that the place was overrun with mice. There was no question but that this was a plague

spread by mice.

[14 : 53] I'm not quite sure what guesses there are as to the medical, perhaps, disease that it might have been. I don't know what it would have been. But they made five golden mice and they were going to send these five mice and five tumors alongside the ark but they had to send it on a cart back to Israel.

But who was going to sit on the cart? Who was going to lead it? No, they said, if this is the Lord's doing, if this really is God's doing, then he will lead the cart all the way back to his own country by himself.

And what they did was they got two cows that had just had calves or recently had calves and they attached these two cows to the cart but they took their calves in the opposite direction and they locked them up in a pen.

Now, what would two cows naturally do if they knew their calves were that way and the Philistines knew that Israel was that way? What would they do?

The cows would naturally turn around and go towards their calves. And they said, well, if they go towards their calves, well, we'll know that this is all a coincidence and the Lord hasn't done this at all.

[16 : 03] But, if the cows do what is unnatural to them and they go in the opposite direction and they go in the direction of Israel and don't stop until they get there, then we will know for sure that God is in this and that God has led us.

Well, guess what happened? Exactly what they always knew was going to happen and that was when the cows they were attached to the cart off they went in the opposite direction to the calves and they didn't stop until they got to Beth Shemesh.

Isn't that fascinating? It's one of these chapters in which even heathen people, even people who on the outside worship another God are made to know, are forced to realize that they're worshipping the wrong thing.

who are you worshipping this evening? Are you worshipping the right God? The only God? The God of the Bible? The living and the true God? Or are you giving yourself to something that doesn't take much before it's fallen down and its head and its hands are broken off?

[17 : 24] What is it that you're worshipping this evening? We all worship something. We all have gods. What are they? I'll return to that in a few moments time.

Well, the ark was brought back by the cows to Beth Shemesh in chapter 6 and they then they put when they took the ark off the cart and they put it into the house of Abinadab in a place called Kiriath-Jerim.

In actual fact that place is still there even today. So is Beth Shemesh. You can actually go to these places. I believe that they're Palestinian places but you can actually trace where these places are even today.

Beth Shemesh and Kiriath-Jerim. So they put the ark of the covenant into a house of a man called Abinadab and there it stayed for 20 years. Now, what happened then was quite remarkable because this is the 20 years where you're wondering what was going on in that 20 years.

Well, we're told all Israel in verse 2 in chapter 7 from the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-Jerim a long time past some 20 years and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

[18 : 39] I should have read that verse when I was reading the chapter because that's the key verse to the whole chapter. What was happening was nothing short of a revival was taking place throughout Israel.

Beforehand, the people, they had gone so far astray that God had judged them. They had left them to themselves because that's what they wanted. They didn't want a land in which they worshipped and served God.

They wanted a life in which they could go their own way and do their own thing. Well, God judged them for that but what was happening now was a new uprising of people who really sought the Lord and who wanted him and who wanted to put him first and to worship him.

And that didn't come overnight. It took 20 years and neither did it take place without any effort because later on in this chapter 7 we read that Samuel's work was to go from place to place town to town city to city street to street he spent his whole life he spent all these 20 years tirelessly going around the whole of Israel bringing to them God's word.

And I guess he must have thought at some times I'm having no effect whatsoever on these people. The work that I'm doing is not bearing any fruit whatsoever.

[19 : 58] Perhaps there were times when not very many people would come out to hear God's word. Perhaps he would see some of them falling asleep. Perhaps they showed very little interest at the time.

I don't know but as time went on God blessed the work that Samuel was doing. And sometimes the same is true for the work that you and I have been doing for the Lord.

Sometimes we think we feel it's not going to have any effect whatsoever whether it's the life in the ministry or whether it's the life in whatever service that you're doing for him.

And the Bible says that if you're a Christian you're a minister a minister is a servant a minister is someone who works and lives for the Lord and who makes him known to others.

There's all kinds of ways in which we can minister just like Samuel. And sometimes we feel like giving up. We feel that nothing is happening. You look at other people and you see how effective that they are as Christians and you say to the Lord why did you not give me the gift that you gave them and I don't have that gift and I'm not as effective as them.

[21 : 08] There's nothing for me to do in your kingdom. That's wrong. You must never say that because God has raised you up to be you the person you are in your home and in your family and in your community and in your church and he's given you the gifts that you have.

Don't say you don't have gifts because you do. And there are some times when we feel as if nothing is happening. But if you're living for the Lord you're putting God first and you're seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness you're letting your light shine before men then God will use you and it may be years before you see anything coming from it and you might never see anything. It might be afterwards that the real result of your life for the Lord ever becomes apparent. This is what it was here. Look at that little tiny verse. all Israel lamented after the Lord so that 20 years later by the time they're all gathering to Samuel they are new people all together.

They have a new attitude. They have a new eagerness and willingness to listen to what Samuel has to say and they want more than anything else to put God first to love him with all their heart and soul and mind and strength.

They are renewed people. This is a revival. 20 years ago the people have gone so badly astray that there was no recovery for them. But now God has been working in the people that remained and he had brought them now to himself as an invigorated people, a renewed people, a revitalized people, a people that had learned from their mistakes.

[22 : 47] Look at the difference between chapter 4 and chapter 7. When in chapter 4, the Philistines come against Israel, we read this, Israel were struck down. Verse 2, verse 3, verse 10.

Israel were struck down. But in chapter 7, in verse 10, the Philistines were struck down by Israel. The tables have turned 20 years later. In chapter 4, the Israelites said, let the ark save us. This is the hope that they put in the ark of the covenant.

In chapter 7, it's all changed. In verse 3, they said, let God save us. Verse 8, let God save us. Let the Lord save us. What's the difference? The difference is they're not putting their trust in a piece of gold.

They're putting their trust in the living and the true God. In chapter 4, the result, the tragic, catastrophic result was Ichabod. You notice that word in chapter 4.

[23 : 45] Ichabod means the glory of God has departed from us. But now the result is Ebenezer. God has helped us. That's what God wanted to do all along.

If only these people had been willing to obey and willing to serve him. God wants our willingness and our readiness to serve him. He can take care of all the weaknesses and sinfulness.

If you're willing to listen to him, he can renew you and transform you and create in you and clean the heart. All he's looking for you in is a heart that will listen to him and is ready to do what he wants you to do and go where he wants you to go.

The problem in chapter 4 was the people were stubborn and they were unwilling. They had put their sins first. They had put their sinful lifestyle first. They had become addicted to a sinful lifestyle.

A lifestyle that was far removed from what God wanted for them. Disaster. Now the people have returned to God. They want to put him first. Result was victory.

[24 : 46] Glory of God. The glory of God once again is in their midst and there's joy and gladness and great thankfulness amongst the people of God.

Now I want us to look also at the place. The place in which this stone was set up and what took place in this place. Mizpah and Shen.

Mizpah and Shen. What was it that took place there? Well we read about it in that chapter between verses 3 and verse 11 and particularly four things I want us to just mention briefly because the time has gone four things and I'm just going to mention this particularly in terms of perhaps preparing for next Lord's Day as we come to the Lord's Table and to come to examine ourselves.

That's what the Bible tells us to do. We're to examine ourselves in the light of the scriptures. And here's a time when the people of God were really taking a fresh look at how they stood before God. What there was in their lives, what there were in their lives that were unacceptable to God and how they returned to God and how they worshipped. But even although I say this and reflect in relation to the Lord's Table this ought to be true continuously for all of us today.

[26 : 05] First of all I want us to notice the repentance of the people. Verse 3 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 and the ashteroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only.

Now that's what repentance is. It's one thing to say that we're sorry for sinful things in our lives. It's another thing altogether to actively put away whatever God shows us in his word are sinful things. Repentance is an eviction. It's an action on our part. It's a determination when God reveals to us elements in our being which are unacceptable to him and which are against his word then we have to actively put them away.

Now I'm not saying this is easy and I'm not saying it happens overnight but if all we do if all we think about repentance is saying that we repent it's one thing to say that you repent it's another thing altogether to actually ask the Lord.

You know what David said? He said search me and know me and that's where repentance begins. Sometimes we're so blind to our own deficiencies and our own sinfulness is that we have to ask the Lord and you can do no better thing tonight than to ask the Lord to show you any area in your life where you've gone wrong.

[27 : 36] And you know when you do that he'll answer you. But be very careful when you do that and he shows you then the next step is to do what he wants you to do and to put it away.

And that's the hard part isn't it? To putting it away especially when it comes easy to you when you've got a particular weakness for it. But that's what God expects us to do and asks us and commands us to do.

Repentance is putting away the things that we love. And that's what they were. That's what an idol is. Put away the ashteroth from among you because as happened so many times these idols would creep in amongst the people of Israel before they even knew what they were letting themselves in for and what they were doing.

And over a period of time things were creeping in slowly without them even noticing. You might say tonight well I don't have any idols. Yes we do. anything that you give yourself to whatever you make sacrifices to.

I don't mean with some kind of altar in your home or some kind of shrine in your home. I don't mean that at all. I don't suppose any one of us has got a shrine in their home or an altar. Of course we don't.

[28 : 49] We're living in the 21st century. Of course we don't. But idolatry is as relevant today as it always was because the idol was the thing that you gave yourself to that filled your mind and your affections and took up your life instead of God.

An idol is anything that stands between you and God or anything that stands alongside God or anything that you give yourself to in preference to God. Now you have to ask yourself what that is. I don't know what it is. I know what it could be. I know what mine are. And I have to continuously ask the Lord that he would take away all of whatever it is that stands between me and him tonight. Let's give him our whole heart. Let's go for it. Let's seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all the let's not be so tolerant of things creeping in to our being that are going to take our hearts away from the Lord and the affection that he deserves and he demands.

After all you think of what he's done for you and Jesus Christ on the cross. then is it too much to ask to give our all to him? Our all.

[30 : 06] So then what they did was in verse 7 the second element I want to see and I know is that they came to him with sincerity of heart.

And this I guess touches just what I've been saying. I'm not going to dwell on it very long. But I want you to notice how it's demonstrated and expressed in the people of God.

In verse 5 Samuel said gather all Israel at Mizpah and I will pray to the Lord for you. Verse 6 So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and they poured it out before the Lord.

They poured it out before the Lord. Now this was an outward symbol of an inward reality of their heart. You find it again in Lamentations chapter 2 and verse 19 where God says Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches, pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord.

Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children who faint for hunger at the head of every stream. What you're doing, what the people were doing and symbolically pouring out the water was saying to the Lord once again, here is our hearts and we're giving out all.

[31 : 14] We're keeping nothing back. We're giving out all. all. We want to love you with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and all our strength, not just a portion of it, but all of us, our every being.

Now imagine tonight, if that's what we were saying to the Lord, if we really came to him and if we said, I want to give you everything, I don't want to hold anything back, that's what Jesus demands. Our lives, our souls, our all. Pour out the water before him and give him everything. Look at how they fasted. They prayed and they fasted. They prayed and they fasted.

There was a day when fasting was common amongst Christians. Let me confess to you, I'm as guilty of anyone as anyone of losing sight of fasting.

It's in the Bible. It's there as an accompaniment to prayer. It's not there because it's not some mechanism of drawing us closer to God. You cannot be closer to God than being a Christian.

[32 : 24] If you're in Christ, you are close to God. You're in Christ. You're filled with the Holy Spirit dwelling within you. It's not a mechanism of attracting his attention.

It's not a mechanism of being more holy. There's no merit in fasting itself. It's an aid. It was something that was done in conjunction with prayer for a certain period of time, whether it was a few hours or whether it was a day or whether it was more than that, in order to concentrate and focus your mind on a particular issue that you were praying for.

What's happened to it in the 21st century? We're all so well off. We're all so accustomed to just opening the fridge. I'm talking to myself, opening the fridge and taking out biscuits and cheese and just feeding ourselves whenever we want to.

And yes, we're thankful for it. Of course we're thankful for it. And we have to be thankful for it. But yet, have we lost sight of, I'm just asking this question, have we lost sight of something important that our forefathers had?

The Thursday of the communion was always a fast day. And I reckon that it arose naturally. It wasn't as if a bunch of elders decided or a presbytery decided, right, from now on we're going to have a fast.

[33 : 41] It arose naturally for Christians saying, this is good, this is something we need to get into. Not to try and please God more, but because we feel that it's going to be beneficial for us to concentrate our minds as we pray to the Lord and as we ask for his mercy and for his grace and for him to work within us and in our communities to save people.

To save people. And that's our greatest prayer, isn't it? Well, I'm just leaving that with you and I'm talking to myself as much as I'm talking to anyone. I'm just leaving it with you. The Lord spoke about it. The apostles did it.

The Old Testament saints did it. Why do we think that somehow or other we've risen beyond, we've evolved spiritually beyond what the men and women of God did in the scriptures and what our forefathers, I don't believe we have at all.

It's to our detriment that we've lost sight. And again, I'm just going to leave it with you. But then lastly, they came to the Lord by sacrifice.

Samuel took a sucking lamb, verse 9, and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. And 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 it.

[34 : 55] It was then that God stepped in and he saved his people. And of course, every sacrifice in the Old Testament had always represented the sacrifice. that one day would be made when Jesus would be nailed to the cross at Calvary.

And whereby his death, by his agonizing death on the cross, that God would step in and rescue us from our sin and from our guilt.

death. And that is why we want to remember it tonight. We want to remember it continuously. We want to remember it particularly by sitting at his table and by thinking back by means of what we are, by the symbols that God has given us, that Christ has given us to remember his death. Rather like the stone, isn't it, that Samuel set up by which whenever someone saw that stone, they would think back.

It was important for them to think back, to remember. It's always important to remember. Yesterday was the 70th anniversary of Dunkirk.

[36 : 16] Dunkirk. I have to confess, I got an education. I should know all about these things, but not having been around at the time, it doesn't take long before these events are forgotten by subsequent generations, doesn't it?

It's the same with the death of Jesus. It's important by means of what God has given us to remember his death, never to lose sight of the day when our sins were paid for at Calvary by the Son of God himself.

Somebody said, it is memory that keeps gratitude fresh and gratitude keeps faith faithful. And he also went on to say, that same writer went on to say, we stand in the present but dwell on the past in order that we can be steadfast for the future.

For Samuel, he wanted the people never to forget what God had done for them on this occasion. He also wanted the people never forget to forget what they had done against God 20 years before. but how God had in his mercy, he had rescued his people from their folly and from their sinfulness because he is such a merciful God.

[37 : 47] That's why tonight, if you have gone astray from him in some way, God's mercy endures forever. That's what Psalm 118, we're thinking about in the Galactians this morning, his mercy endures forever.

You have not gone so far as not to be able to lay hold upon the mercy and the kindness and the grace of God. And that's what Samuel wanted to teach the people with the stone.

Hitherto, up until now, the Lord has helped us. He never changes. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. And you can lay hold upon that mercy once again today as we come to him afresh and as we want to present ourselves to him.

in all our confession and all our guilt, but knowing that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our unrighteousness. Let's pray.

Our gracious and eternal God, we pray that as we look back, not only over our failure and over our sinfulness in many, many ways, we pray to look back also upon the consistent, persistent, relentless mercy of God.

[39 : 06] And we take hold upon that mercy once again this evening. We want it for ourselves. We have no hope without it. We want to be drawn back as Israel were drawn back in that chapter that we were reading.

And we want to present ourselves afresh to you and we want to serve you because we can say, Lord, we love you because you first love does. We ask, Lord, that you will bless that love and bless your love to us and create within us a love that wants to serve you and obey you and wants to live for you every day.

Forgive our sin, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.