

The God of Ebenezer

1 Samuel 7:3-12

Life Group Discussion – April 29th, 2018

When God first established Shining Star, He gave the words, “And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” These words would become the proclamation of our church.

For this proclamation to come true, we decided Shining Star needed to focus on 5 things: a church that grows leaders, a church that does missions, a church for the next generation, a church that teaches disciples, and a church that fills a person’s spiritual needs.

Our church was born with this vision. And now we have come 17 years, doing everything we can to make this vision our reality. I remember that the healthiest and most active time of my life started when I was 17 years old. Our church is not one that is simply getting older, but one that is consistently and constantly revealing God’s dream and His words to others everyday.

Today’s passage is a lesson for our church and our members. People call God the “God of Ebenezer”. Samuel gathers the people at Mizpah and tells them to turn to the Lord in order for them to be victorious. The Israelites turn away from their idols and God honors their obedience by setting a revival in His people. But the Philistines heard what had happened and began to panic. They decided, in their panic, to attack the Israelites. The Israelites became afraid of what could happen to them but Samuel steps out among them and tells them to pray.

When they cried out to the Lord, lightening fell from the sky and the heavens shook. The Philistines became confused and frightened, and in that confusion the Israelites overtook them. **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.”**

What do we need to do in order for us to be helped by the God of Ebenezer?

First, God will help you when you move towards repentance.

In Mizpah the people repented before the Lord. God loves when we look into our own lives and turn back to Him in repentance.

And 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 Ashtaroth 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.” (1 Samuel 7:3)

Samuel is pressing to his people the importance of repentance. Repentance is giving up your other idols and making sure that it is God alone whom you serve.

What was the Israelites response to Samuel’s call toward repentance?

Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you.” So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day and said there, “We have sinned against the Lord.” And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah. (1 Samuel 7:5-6)

The Israelites began to fast and repented on their knees before the Lord. The purpose of repentance is not to simply just confess your sins before the Lord, but it’s the beginning of a relationship where you throw away your idols and look only toward God. Fasting is one of the greatest ways to help us turn from those things that are harmful toward the One that is good.

We must pursue holiness in our lives. Holiness is an ability that is honed.

For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:45)

If you do not strive to be holy, it will be impossible to experience God in the way the people in the Bible experienced Him. If you do not get rid of your own ambitions, greed, and desires for the things of this world, the Spirit of God cannot fill your heart or your mind.

God’s purpose is for you to draw close to Him and it is always the Devil that tries and draws you away from God. As we come closer to God, our hearts become more pure, our lives reflect His kindness, and we must always remember that it is a blessing that He has given us to grow in relationship with Him.

Second, God will help you when you are active in your worship.

So Samuel took a nursing lamb 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. (1 Samuel 7:9)

When the enemy troops were drawing near, Samuel placed a burnt offering on the altar and cried out to the Lord. Worshipping God is of the utmost importance.

The danger in today’s church is the lack of an active worship life.

When we worship, we take it too lightly and we do not prepare ourselves to worship God. Worship is asking the Lord to come on this Earth and to show His glory and power to us. We cannot think of worship lightly.

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. (Isaiah 1:11-13)

The people of Judah believed they had done enough sacrifices to cover their sins. Therefore they thought they could continue to sin as long as they continued to bring more and more offerings to God.

They believed they could indulge in their sins as long as they played their part and asked for “forgiveness” from God. Just because you worship the Lord and ask for repentance does not mean you are allowed to continue to sin. Real, active worship means not forgetting your past and striving toward leaving your sin behind.

Third, God will help you when you pray.

And the people of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” (1 Samuel 7:8)

Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. (Joel 1:14)

Everyone must come before the Lord and call out to Him. It is only through prayer that we can truly live. Prayer is the road to blessing.

The Devil will always try and attack you and make you fall. But it is only through prayer that we can overcome the temptations the Devil places in our lives.

The main reason we pray is because if we don’t, we allow the Devil to enter our lives and our hearts without any protection. In order for our spiritual lives to experience revival, we must protect ourselves against Satan. The Israelites heard Samuel, received grace, and repented in Mizpah. But the Philistines were still going to attack whether

or not they repented. In other words, their repentance had no connection with the Philistines. Our fight with our souls is not dependent on what is happening outside, but only between our souls and God. Satan is always trying to take us away from God. This is why we must always be praying.

As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car. 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.” (1 Samuel 7:10-12)

The Philistines experienced a huge thunderous sound and they could not fight back against the Israelites. The Israelites chased the Philistines to a place called Beth-car and renamed it Ebenezer. The meaning is “Till now the Lord has helped us.”

When the Israelites were not living a life of faith like in 1 Samuel 4:5, the Philistines defeated them and took the Ark of the Covenant. The place that they lost the precious ark was in Ebenezer.

But through repentance, fasting, and prayer, God brought victory in the same place where they faced defeat.

We are the same. When we do not rely on God we will fail, but when we trust in the Lord, even the ground that we experienced that failure will turn to victory.

Ebenezer! God has helped us in this place. Every year we will experience God’s hand in our lives and in this church. I hope that we can be a church that continuously experiences God’s blessings in our lives.

SHARING-----

1. In today’s passage, we talked about 3 different ways to experience God’s help in our lives. Out of these three, which one am I lacking the most? Please share.
2. It is the 17th year anniversary of our church. We have come from all different walks of life to this point here in 2018. As we look back on our time at this church and in our lives, when was a time where God was the “God of Ebenezer” in your life? When did you receive help from God? Please share with one another.