

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 55
Ebenezer!

Reading: 1 Samuel 7. 1-12

1 And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord.

2 And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

3 And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashteroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

4 Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashteroth, and served the Lord only.

5 And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord.

6 And they gathered together to Mizpeh, 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 children of Israel in Mizpeh.

7 And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

8 And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.

9 And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him.

10 And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car.

12 Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.

Address

There are three things, beloved friends, in this chapter that really concern us as a congregation in our prayer meeting this evening. There is humble

confession and repentance; then there is prayer; and then there is gratitude, thanksgiving. Surely we need all these things.

God blessed Israel here. They did not deserve it. They had been walking contrary. They knew their unworthiness. They confessed their sin. They repented. They turned away from their idols and they fasted before the Lord. And their language was this: “We have sinned against the Lord.” Now that is a good ground on which to start, our prayers personally, our prayer meeting prayers. We need God’s mercy, God’s forgiveness. We need His cleansing in the Redeemer’s blood. So that is where we start. We are not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies.

But then there was the prayer, and it was urgent prayer; it was real prayer. It was Samuel who prayed, but the people pleaded, “Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us.” And Samuel did cry. But before he wrestled with God in prayer, he offered a lamb for a burnt offering. I know that was the old dispensation, that was under the law, but the principle is still the same. If our prayers are to be answered, it must be because of the Lamb of God, because He shed His precious blood. This is our only plea in prayer. This is the ground and foundation of our prayer. This is the ground of our access. So there was a lamb slain, and then Samuel cried to the Lord, and not just for himself: for Israel. We pray for ourselves, we pray for our families, we pray for our loved ones, we pray about our circumstances, but especially in our prayer meetings we pray for the welfare and the prosperity of one another, the welfare and the prosperity of the church of God.

But Samuel received answers and he looked for answers. We do need to watch that our prayers are not just a devotional exercise. May we pray for answers and look for answers and expect answers and receive answers. Now in this case it was a difficult thing. It was a hard thing. But they prayed about it. Now we have our hard things at times. May we pray about them. The old divines used to emphasise one point and it was a good one, that the Lord is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” We know that, don’t we? The Lord is “the same yesterday, and to day, and forever.” But they said, it should be in the light of that scripture that we read the Old Testament. Otherwise what does it mean to us? Almighty God is the same now as He was in Old Testament days. He can perform the same things now He performed in Old Testament days. His power is the same; His promise is the same; His mercy is the same.

Well, you know what the trouble was. There was a great army, the army of the Philistines came against them. Of course, they gathered together, the Israelites had gathered together in prayer, in worship, in confession. They were not ready for battle. They were completely unprepared for battle. But do not forget: confession, prayer, the looking for the answer, expecting the answer. They cast themselves completely on the Lord. What hope was there for them? They were not ready. They were not armed. They were not prepared. Well, there was nothing they could do, but there was nothing they needed to do. The Lord did it all. "The Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel." "This God is our God for ever and ever," the God who still does wonders, the God to whom we pray tonight.

So confession and prayer, and then finally thanksgiving. "Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." The Word of God tells us there is a time for gathering stones together. Samuel here gathered an Ebenezer stone. He set it up. "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." And our anniversary prayer meeting is a time for gathering stones together.

"My glad Ebenezer set up,
And own Thou hast helped me till now."

But O this point. There is that word in Jeremiah chapter 31: "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps." The gathering of stones, these stones of help, Ebenezer stones, stones of remembrance. Some of them are waymarks. They were great stones. They stood out in the countryside. When we come and look back over the year at Bethel, we see a waymark here and a waymark there, that time when you were helped and blessed, that time when you had answers to your prayers, and so you might go on, these signal blessings, these signal deliverances. You might just have one or two waymarks, but set them up this evening.

Now these high heaps were different. They were piles of little stones and as the travellers went along, they would take a stone and they would drop it on the pile. It helped to mark out the way. You still have them in parts of our country. You have them up in the Lake District. I think the expression they use there is *cairns*. Philpot writes very beautifully of this. He says that sometimes the high heaps reach higher to heaven even than the waymarks. It is that little that the righteous man hath, "here a little, and there a little," "line upon line,"

“precept upon precept,” that little help you receive, that sense of the Lord’s presence, that token for good, that answer to your prayers, and so you might go on and on.

So may there be the humble confession and may there be the real prayer for our peace and prosperity. Do not forget the thanksgiving, and if you have any waymarks, set them up. But you have all got your high heaps, haven’t you? So this evening, those who pray aloud and those of you who sit in your place in the pew, may you not be idle, may you not be inactive, may you be picking up a few of these stones here and there that you have received during the last twelve months. May you be throwing them on the pile. May you set up your high heaps. It is like the little old hymn:

“Count your many blessings,
Count them one by one,
And it will surprise you
What the Lord has done.”

This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on Monday, 15th June, 2009, at the chapel anniversary prayer meeting.