

8. A Call to Repentance

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Repentance is not like the person who sent the IRS a check for \$150 with the remark, "If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the rest."

When we feel sorry for doing wrong or for getting caught, it may be nothing more than a spiritual band-aid. And it is nothing more than "Remorse." But true repentance occurs deep within our hearts and should result in a visible difference in our actions.

For a change, we find the Israelites repenting from their stupidity of idol worship and turning to God by the leadership of Samuel.

A. START OF REPENTANCE – TURNING TO GOD

1 Samuel 7:1-6 Then the men of Kirjath Jearim came and took the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord. 2 So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath Jearim a long time; it was there twenty years. And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. 3 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines." 4 So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only. 5 And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you." 6 So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted that day, and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

What is your interpretation of this?

The men of Kirjath Jearim treated the Ark of the Covenant with respect and honor. Yet they did not take it to the tabernacle.

They consecrated Eleazar, Abinadab's son to keep the ark of the Lord. We don't know if Eleazar was of the proper priestly lineage, or if his consecration ceremony was like the ones that truly consecrated a priest in Exodus 29. But it all reflected at least a desire to do the right things.

Israel found that they were no more right with God just because they had the Ark of the Covenant again. Instead, all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. And they had good reason to lament. Their cities were in ruins; their armies were defeated; and they were under Philistine domination; all because they were not right with God.

If we are not right with God in our relationship with Him, we do not have peace in our hearts. Until we come to the Lord and make it right with Him through our repentance, no matter what we try, we experience turmoils and uneasiness deep inside.

In v3 and 4, Samuel was calling the nation to repentance. The repentance must start from the inside – "*with all your hearts,*" and it must be manifested to the outside – "*put away the foreign gods.*"

The inside is more important than the outward, and it has to come first. That is why Samuel first called Israel to return to the Lord with all their hearts, and then told them to put away the foreign gods.

However, inside repentance is a secret thing. It is hidden. No one can really “see” the heart of another. Yet, the inside was proven with the outside.

The outside appearance can be seen in our daily lives – the way we talk, the way we behave ourselves in the midst of difficult times. Most of all, our inside changes will ooze out to our daily lives, if we are really changed. This is the fruit of the Spirit that we find in Galatians:

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

In v3, Samuel demanded the Israelites “Serve God ONLY.” Previously, Israel did not think that they were rejecting the Lord God. They felt they were only adding the worship of other gods to their worship of the Lord. But this was totally unacceptable in our God’s sight. As Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters.”

Ophra Winfrey stated this on her TV show, September 18, 1987: “Jesus did not come to teach how divine He was. But to teach us how divinity is within each of us. For Jesus to claim God would a pure egotism. There could not possibly be only one way to God. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to what you call god.”

While the great theologian Ophra says there are many ways to get to God and we are also gods, Jesus tells us, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Who should I believe, Ophra or Jesus?

Our God doesn’t share His glory with anyone. Some of us might think, “Isn’t that egoistic?” No. Everything belongs to Him, He made everything, including the lives of these so-called Bible critics. Without Him, nothing exists. God is simply declaring the truth.

What is this Baal? As we learned from last two studies, Baal is supposedly the son of Philistines’ god Dagon. Baal was depicted with a horned helmet. In one hand he grasped a club or mace and in the other a shaft of lightning or a spear with leaves. They believed that Baal controlled weather.

What about Ashtoreth? It is a Canaanite goddess of sexuality and war. The rites connected with her worship usually involved sacred prostitution.

Do these gods sound familiar to you? We still have these gods in the 21st century. We see them daily. How about nature worship by American Indians and New Age people? What about sex and violence from Hollywood and MTV? How about these pathetic “Survivors, Big Brothers, Bachelors, or any other reality shows? They are worse than soap operas. They are nothing more than a bunch of “Peeping Tom” shows. I hope that you don’t watch those junks.

In v5, Samuel told the Israelites to gather to Mizpah. This was the place where Jacob separated from Laban according to Genesis 31:49, and was the gathering place for a repentant Israel in Judges 20:1. This was a place remembered for separation and repentance.

This showed the spiritual need that Israel felt at the time. They did well to express their repentance both with the desire to put away the false gods, and to pursue the true God. The experience of conviction of sin proves nothing. It is our response to that conviction that demonstrates repentance.

A ceremonial pouring of water, in this context, was a demonstration of having one's soul poured out before the Lord. It was an expression of emptiness and need.

Some might say, "Our sins are not forgiven, because we have not confessed." If this were the case, if forgiveness for a sin could only come where there was a confession, then we are all doomed. Because it would be impossible for us to confess every sin we have ever committed. We are forgiven because our punishment was put upon Jesus, His blood cleanses us. However, confession is still vital to maintain a relationship with God.

B. TROUBLE AFTER REPENTANCE

1 Samuel 7:7-14 Now when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8 So the children 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." 9 And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. Then Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him. 10 Now as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel. 11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and drove them back as far as below Beth Car. 12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the Lord has helped us." 13 So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. 14 Then the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath; and Israel recovered its territory from the hands of the Philistines. Also there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

Please give me your interpretation for this.

The Israelites repented. Shouldn't they have an easy life from now on? What about us? After our confession to the Lord what a mess we made, shouldn't we have a wonderful life? In many cases, not only the consequences of our actions still follow, but also God allows us to be in test periods for us to see if we really repent from our stupidity.

In this case, the Israelites did just fine.

The Philistines should have been afraid of the Israelites' repentance. They knew what the God of Israel could do against them. That is the same with satan. He doesn't want us to be right with God. He will do anything to discourage us from getting right with God.

The Israelites no longer depended on the ark as their lucky charm, but solely depending on the power of God through prayer.

Why did Samuel take time for a sacrifice at such a critical time? Because he knew he could only effectively pray in light of God's atoning sacrifice.

Think of that poor lamb – a suckling lamb – who had never hurt anyone or who had never sinned itself, had its throat slit, its blood poured out, its body cut up, and its carcass burned. Why? Because Samuel and Israel were saying, "This is what we deserve. This is the punishment that should come upon us. We thank You God, for accepting the punishment of this innocent lamb instead."

When we trust in the Lamb of God, Jesus who takes away the sin of the world as it says in John 1:29, we are saying the same thing.

God fought against the Philistines from heaven on behalf of Israel. The Israelites heard the same thunder, but only the Philistines became so confused that they were overcome. God not only sent thunder, He sent confusion to the Philistines and confidence to Israel.

It is also significant to understand that Baal was thought to be the god of weather as I said earlier. When Israel put away their worship of Baal that was mentioned in v4, it was as if God said, "I'll show you who the real God of thunder is."

This battle was won by the Lord, not by Israel, so Samuel named the stone Ebenezer, which means "stone of help." God brought us and helped us this far, He is not going to drop us now. He didn't teach us how to swim in the river of life in this world, so that we can drown.

Philippians 1:6 He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ

God gave the army of Israel a great victory. What a day that was! Samuel accomplished a victory with one prayer while Samson could not win during the entire twenty years of his leadership.

The victory at Ebenezer was so decisive that the Philistines made no more attacks against the Israelites during Samuel's time.

Up to this point, the Philistines were beating the Israelites in every turn. But from this point, God took care of the Philistines through the Israelite army.

C. HERE COMES THE JUDGE SAMUEL

1 Samuel 7:15-17 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places. But he always returned to Ramah, for his home was there. There he judged Israel, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

This one is short. What can you say about the interpretation?

Samuel was one of the 5 individuals who are in the Bible does not show a lot of negative comments with the exception of Jesus – Joseph, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) When we turn to Christ and yield ourselves to Him, He produces real change in us – not just a cover-up.

Let's not hide our sins and cover them up or push them under the rug and pretend there is nothing wrong. Instead, let's confess them and repent, and God will fill our hearts with peace. Repentance is not just words, but actions.

2) Serve Him only.

Jesus told us that we cannot serve two masters. Either follow Him or you're against Him.

3) God won't give up on you.

You may feel that you are at the end of the line. You thought you saw a light at the end of the tunnel and realize that it is an oncoming train. Don't give up, because God will not give up on you. Bring your burden to Him and lay at His feet. He will take care of it.