

The Gospel Stone

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Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] Let's get to our study tonight, 1 Samuel, and I want you to go ahead and find chapter 7.

I'm going to take that entire chapter, actually, not the entire chapter because we moved a little bit into it last Sunday, but I'm going to start with verse 2 and then read all the way to the end of the chapter, chapter 7 of 1 Samuel.

For it was that the ark remained in Kirjath-Jerim a long time. It was there 20 years. And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

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.

By the way, at this time, I just remembered this and wasn't part of my notes. This time, the Philistines were pretty much calling the shots there and greatly oppressing Israel.

[1 : 25] In fact, Israel was just short of being kind of their slaves, kind of subservient to them, vassals of the Philistines. And so that's why it says there that He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.

They were oppressed by them. So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths and served the Lord only. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you.

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. That is, he led them and delivered them. 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. 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.

[2 : 37] 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.

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.

The men of Israel went out of Mizpah, pursued the Philistines, and drove them back as far as below Beth-kar. Then Samuel took a stone, set it up between Mizpah and Shan, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, Thus far the Lord has helped us.

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.

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.

[3 : 49] Also there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, 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. Alright? Now, I've entitled the message tonight, The Gospel Rock, or Stone.

Actually, I got to think, I'd rather call it Stone. Alright? The Gospel Stone. Alright? That's our title, the title for my sermon tonight, or really my teaching from this portion of 1 Samuel.

The Gospel Stone. And I want to change it to Stone, because Gospel Rock sounds like some genre of contemporary Christian music, and that's not what I'm thinking of.

Although, I do have music on my mind, after reading this passage. And perhaps you do too. And what I'm talking about is an old, old hymn, written back, by the way, in 1758, a long time ago.

[5 : 00] Written by Robert Robinson. You probably have never heard of him. Was, by the way, a man saved under the ministry, under the preaching of George Whitefield. You have heard about him.

And Robert Robinson wrote this hymn, this old hymn, and I bet you can go ahead and name it, Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.

Are you familiar with that hymn, aren't you? Or you may not just right off be familiar, especially if you're of a younger generation. We don't really sing it all that much. We do sing, from time to time, a kind of newer version of it, that has another, kind of another stanza or bridge, whatever they call that thing, to it.

And so, but you're familiar with it. Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing, or Come Thou Fount. Sometimes we see it in the shorter version. Let me ask you something.

The second stanza of the hymn begins with the words, Here I Raise My Ebenezer. All right? Now, I'm not going to really require any verbal response from you, congregation, but I would ask the question, What does that mean?

[6 : 10] You know, sometimes we sing, quite often we sing hymns and lines in a hymn, especially if they're old hymns, and we don't really know what they mean. You know, Here I Raise My Ebenezer.

Well, one thing we should know, at least should know now, if we didn't before, and that is that the meaning of that comes from this passage in 1 Samuel chapter 7.

That may not necessarily help us very much. To be able to just really, in words, clearly, and precisely, define what that means when we sing it, Here I Raise My Ebenezer.

And so, what do we mean by that? Well, that's what we want to discover here tonight in this passage. And so, let's kind of get up to speed on the story, the storyline.

And you don't really need any reminder if you've been here for the last several Sunday nights, then you kind of know how the story is progressing, but you remember the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistine.

[7 : 17] And they had placed the Ark of the Covenant in their temple to Dagon, and you know, things didn't work out too well for old Dagon because he kept falling over and eventually lost his head and hands.

But also, things didn't work out too well for the Philistines because there was suddenly a dire need for a large quantity of Preparation H. The Bible says tumors, tumors, but it was hemorrhoids.

Hemorrhoids that God struck them with, the Philistines. You know, little tumors, I guess in a sense they're kind of little tumors located in unmentionable places on your body.

And so, I'll just end it there. All right, so the Ark is then sent back, isn't it? Sent back where the people of Israel were still in charge, and that was in a place not far from there.

But how would they get the Ark back to Israel? Well, they put it on a cart, you know, and they tied to the cart a couple of milk cows that had, that still had calves or new calves.

[8 : 25] They were, you know, in that time, that period, and so they took the calves away from the milk cows. That was the Philistines kind of quirky little way to figure out if this really was God doing this to them.

So then they watched to see what happens to the cart. Well, the milk cows, of course, take the cart and they make their way a beeline for Beth Shemesh, the nearest Jewish town.

And, you remember, things didn't work out too well for the people there in Beth Shemesh either, because God struck, you know, anywhere from thousands to some interpreters who look at the passage say only 70 people, but there was a great slaughter of people who died because they looked inside the ark.

Okay? And apparently, you know, they had set the ark on this stone slab out in the middle of a field, and beside it they put the box of the, you know, that contained the trespass offering from the Philistines.

And what was that? Well, some golden mice and some golden hemorrhoids. I can't imagine what they might have looked like. Terrible. And, and apparently it had become kind of a tourist attraction.

[9 : 40] You know, so people were coming by and looking curious and some would open the lid of the ark and look inside and God struck many of them dead for their disrespect.

And so, they then make a deal with the people of Kirjath-Jerim and I can't imagine how that deal went. And so, the ark was taken there to Kirjath-Jerim where it remained for twenty years.

So that kind of gets us up to speed here. Up to our current story here tonight. And so we read in chapter seven verse two, and all the house of Israel did what?

They lamented. Lamented after the Lord. And the idea, and I brought this out last week, the idea is that it had taken them twenty years to become truly contrite.

Twenty years. It's a long period of time. To become contrite, truly contrite before the Lord. Twenty years for Israel to eventually confess their sins before the Lord.

[10 : 41] And that's what we read about here in the chapter. To genuinely repent. Twenty years. And then God had mercy upon them. And that's really what this story is about in chapter seven.

It's all about mercy. The mercy of God. And mercy is what we need. Isn't it? We need it from God. Why? Because we're sinners.

We've sinned against the Holy God just as Israel had sinned against Yahweh God. And they needed, they had to have His mercy. So the story is all about mercy.

So with that in mind, the first thing I want you to see from the passage is mercy required. Mercy required. If there is to be forgiveness.

Forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness of rebellion. Which was true of Israel in this period. Well, in most of their history. If there is to be forgiveness for sin and salvation or deliverance and a relationship with God, then mercy is required.

[11 : 49] Without mercy, the mercy of God, there is no salvation. without His mercy. Now I want you to notice the spiritual condition of Israel. And we just have to surmise this condition from just one little thing that is said here.

This thing about the 20 years. Verse 2. For 20 years, Israel lamented after the Lord. Lamented. That means they were sorry.

They were sorrowful. Sorrowful about their sin. Sorrowful about their rebellion. Really, more or less sorrowful for their kind of broken relationship with God.

They hadn't heard from God. They were sorry about that. So, what kind of sorrow was it? That's the question. Well, the fact that it lasted for 20 years tells you something. They were lamenting for 20 years.

Apparently, it was not what the Bible calls godly sorrow. Remember what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 10 where he said, for godly sorrow produces repentance.

[13 : 01] Caught you on that one, didn't it? or the King James says, leads to repentance and that without repenting of or leading to produces repentance leading to salvation not to be regretted.

So, it's true repentance. You never regret that. You never come back and say, well, I wish I hadn't repented or I wish I hadn't given up that sin or wish I hadn't turned from that sin without regret, without repenting of.

That's godly sorrow produces repentance. And so, there is a godly sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation but there is also a worldly sorrow.

A worldly sorrow that leads to something else. And what is that? Death. Alright, it's just all right there in that verse of scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 7.10 leads to death. That's what Paul said. He said, but the sorrow of the world produces death. Produces death.

[14 : 02] Alright, so for 20 years, Israel had the sorrow of the world. That's what they had. And not a godly sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation.

And that's why Samuel said what he said. Here, recorded in chapter 7. And by the way, and I mentioned this a few Sundays ago, that at some point we hear from Samuel and then we don't hear from Samuel for quite a while, for several chapters.

So it's been several chapters since we've heard a word from Samuel. Samuel has been silent. Who is Samuel? He's the prophet of the Lord. And we don't hear anything from Samuel.

He's silent, which means, of course, that God is silent. God is silent. And that's, we can understand that because the ark, which symbolized the presence of God in Israel.

But the ark has been captured. It's been with the Philistines. The glory has departed. Right? So it's not a strange thing for us to understand the implication here that God is silent.

[15:13] Samuel's silent. God is silent. Now God, of course, is not confined to a golden box. I'm not suggesting that. The ark merely represented his presence.

But when Israel sinned by taking the ark into battle, the ark was taken from them. And God then removed himself from Israel. And so he did not speak to them for 20 years.

And we just have a few chapters, but it's 20 years has elapsed here and God is not speaking to them through his prophet Samuel. All right. So now, this is the good news.

This is what makes this chapter so amazing and we like the story in this chapter. Israel is finally ready. Ready to hear the voice of God. They're finally ready to return to him.

And so what does God say to them? Because God is so gracious. You notice in the preacher with his word. And so what does God's preacher say? Well, he says basically three things there in verse 3.

[16:15] We could boil them down to three words. return, remove, and renew. Easy way for us to remember it. Return, or we could use the word repent and that would be okay.

It starts with an R. Samuel said, if you return to the Lord, the whole idea is repentance. If you will repent, turn to the Lord. Return to him with all your heart.

That's step number one. If you will repent and then remove, put away, put away from you, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you.

These were the Canaanite deities that Israel had brought into their worship. They had a strange mixture of Yahweh worship and Baal worship.

In fact, most of it was Baal worship. And so they were worshiping Baal and Ashtoreth. Baal, that's Mr. and Mrs. God for the Philistines. Alright? Baal is the masculine deity and Ashtoreth is the female, the wife, so to speak, of Baal.

[17:20] And so they, he said, put all those away. If you will return to the Lord, then put away your idols. They'll stop your sin and then renew.

Prepare your hearts for the Lord and serve him only. Renew your worship of the Lord. So, repent, remove, and renew. Or we could think of it this way. First, to repent, this turning or returning to the Lord, it requires two things.

One being a negative thing, the other being a positive thing in one sense. That is, on the negative side, get rid of your sin. Turn away from your sin. Remove all vestiges of your idolatry.

Flee that. Remove that. Get that out of your life. But on the positive side, renew your heart relationship with God. Renew your fellowship with Him. So, repent, remove, and renew.

So, what did Israel do? Well, they did the right thing. They did the right thing. Verse 4, so the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Astaroths, the husband and wife deity, and served the Lord on them.

[18:27] That is, they worshiped the Lord on them. They did the right thing. And verse 6 says, and they said, we have sinned against the Lord. So, here it is, just plain as it could be stated here. We have sinned against them.

So, they confessed their sin. Bingo! They finally got it after 20 years of going, kind of going through the motions in some kind of worldly kind of repentance or just simply a sorrow or a guilt or whatever it was.

So, mercy required. And listen, there's no salvation apart from the mercy of God. No salvation apart from His mercy. And there is no mercy without repentance. And many people in the world today just are flat out wrong about these things.

You know, a whole lot of people like to talk about God's grace and mercy. They want His grace. They want His mercy. But they don't want to talk about sin and repentance. And so, it's kind of a, not kind of, it's very definitely a cheap grace.

Grace without repentance. And that doesn't, it doesn't work that way. No repentance, no mercy. No mercy, no salvation. No salvation. And so, Israel finally got it.

[19:36] Mercy is required and that's what they received. So, that's the second thing, mercy received. Now, it's God's turn to come through. And, He does.

He does. And so, just as soon as the Philistines heard that Samuel had gathered the people to gather there at Mizpah, then, they took that as a precursor or they interpreted it as a prelude to war. And so, you know, they're thinking they're preparing to attack us. Samuel's got all of Israel together here. So, we can't allow that. And so, verse 7, the Lord of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, they were afraid.

They were afraid of the Philistines. And that's okay. You would be too. Sometimes, we're afraid. Someone has said that, said this, take heart, dear Christian, if you are easily afraid.

You are not alone. We're not alone in that. We're afraid. Israel was afraid. But to their credit, they did the right thing. They responded the right way. In a sense, it's, they prayed.

[20 : 48] They turned to God. They turned to God through the prophet Samuel. And that's the way it worked in those days. Samuel was a priest. Priest and prophet. And so, that's the idea here in verse 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 mercy us.

Now, I'm paraphrasing there, adding in other words, but that's basically what they're asking. That God would mercy us. That He would save us. Save us from the hands of the Philistines.

And then, verse 9 introduces really the only basis upon which God can grant mercy, grace and mercy. That is through sacrifice. Through the blood of innocent sacrifice.

Through a substitution. Verse 9, 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.

[21 : 52] So, mercy received. Israel is saved. Israel is delivered. And, we read about that in verses 10 and 11. God comes through.

He does a mighty, mighty miracle. Causes confusion among the Philistines. They're so confused that they can't even fight and they run and Israel chases them and defeats them.

And, never again, at that point, at least all throughout Samuel's life, did the Philistines come in and dominate Israel's life. Now, they continue to have little skirmishes with them.

I mean, don't forget about David and Goliath. The Philistines were still causing troubles, but never again were they in that position of dominance over Israel.

Even the cities that they had taken were given back to Israel's control. So, mercy received. So, mercy required, mercy received, and then there's one more.

[22 : 49] This gets us to this Ebenezer thing. That is mercy remembered. The mercy of God remembered. And I love this. Verse 12 says, Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shan and called its name Ebenezer, saying, Thus far the Lord has helped us.

And that's basically what the word Ebenezer means. Stone of help. Only, in this sense, in this context, help is with a capital H. Or we could literally translate it, the helper is our stone.

stone, or our rock. Why? Because, verse 12, because thus far the Lord has helped us. So, it's help with a capital H. The stone of help.

The helper is a stone. Now, what then does it mean when we sing, Here I raise my Ebenezer? Well, that's why I have titled this message The Rock, the Gospel Rock, or Gospel Stone.

The Ebenezer, in verse 12, was a stone, right? It was a stone. Now, you know, there's some question as to whether the place was called Ebenezer or the stone itself, and I think it's pretty clear that it's the stone.

[24 : 07] Now, it was placed in a certain position and a permanent place, and Samuel called it Ebenezer, and there was a reason why he called it that. Samuel took a stone, called its name Ebenezer, and this stone, this rock, pictures the Gospel.

Pictures the Gospel in one very obvious way and maybe in another way that perhaps is not as obvious if you don't look outside of this particular passage. It pictures the Gospel.

And why? Because when Israel would look at the rock, that stone, that Ebenezer, they were reminded of the good news. the good news that a merciful God had delivered his beloved children.

It was a constant reminder of God's deliverance, the good news. And that's what the Gospel is to us, isn't it? It is that glorious and merciful God, gracious and merciful God, has, through Christ, delivered us.

Right? That's what the Gospel reminds us of. That's the truth of the Gospel. He's delivered us, forgiven our sins, adopted us into His family, saved us, redeemed us, given us eternal life.

[25 : 25] He has delivered us. But now, hold on, because this rock reminds us of something else as well. The rock reminds us of our sin.

It reminds us of our sin. The sin that God has forgiven us. And it's interesting. Why did Samuel name the stone Ebenezer? Well, do you remember a few chapters back?

And when Israel came up with the harebrained idea to go and get the ark at Shiloh, bring the ark there, bring it into battle against the Philistines.

They came up with that idea. You remember that right? And they were so out in left field in their relationship with God that they somehow thought that His power and His presence and His protection were contained inside of this golden box.

The ark had become little more than just another idol they were worshiping. We kind of covered that ground back there when we were in chapter 4. Well, you remember what happened, right?

[26 : 34] Israel was defeated. Hophni and Phinehas were killed on the battlefield. The ark of God was captured by the Philistines. News gets back to Eli. He falls over dead.

And Phinehas' wife suddenly goes into childbirth. She has a child and names him Ichabod, the glorious departed. You know all that happened there. Now, where did this happen?

Well, according to chapter 4, verse 1, it happened in a place called Ebenezer. A place called Ebenezer. You see, mercy remembered, yes, but every time Israel looked upon that stone, it reminded them of two things.

It reminded them of their sin. The sin that had brought all this judgment upon them. The sin that had wreaked all this havoc in their lives.

reminded them of that. The very word Ebenezer reminded. It also reminded them of the mercy of God where there was the removal of that judgment.

[27 : 50] All that, all that, see here, here's what we need to understand. All that was lost through sin in the first Ebenezer event was restored by the mercy of God in the second Ebenezer event.

And that's what the cross reminds us of. Right? The cross is a gruesome reminder of the ugliness of sin.

Our sin. You ever think of the cross in those terms? It's a reminder of our sin. We know that, don't we? But it's also at the same time a glorious reminder of the beauty, the great beauty and glory of God's grace and mercy at the cross.

Both those things. So the next time we sing the hymn, Come Thou Fount of every blessing and you get to the line, Here I raise my Ebenezer. Think of the cross.

Think of the cross. Here I raise my Ebenezer as the song goes. Here thereby thy great help I've come and I hope by thy good pleasure safely to arrive home.

[29 : 07] Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God. He, to restore me from the danger, now listen to this, interposed his precious blood.

That's the cross. That's what Jesus did at the cross. Interposed his precious blood. That is, his blood intervened, came between us. It was interposed.

The cross then is my Ebenezer. I raise my Ebenezer.