

CCH sermon 3rd March 2019 1 Samuel 7:2a-17

"Returning to the LORD"

- 1 Sam 7:3
 - It's an exciting and hopeful time of year Spring. Plants out.
 - And it's an exciting time in the life of our church
 - And as we recommit ourselves to serve him in this next season of outreach
 - At ACM (2 weeks, talk about
 - loving one another,
 - loving Huntingdon,
 - hence our commitment forms today
 - but it starts here with a new commitment to Christ.
 - Loving Jesus
 - What tragedy/hypocrisy to seek to
 - Offer God our help
 - Without offering him our hearts!
 - Well this is culmination of all that we have been leading up to in our studies in 1 Sam so far:
 - People of God are "sensitized/reawakened" to God and return to Him
 - New leadership, (ch1-3)
 - new humility before God's holiness (had to learn hard way (4-6))
 - And this is a key passage for us as I believe God is reawakening us as a church back to a fresh commitment to him,
 - Title of series and sermon Returning to God.
 - particularly as we approach our first ACM
 - We need to listen in, praying that we too might be renewed, reawakened.
 - That we (as a result of what we see in this passage) might turn back to him, and be recommitted to him.
- SO LET'S PRAY, as we look at Returning to the Lord- message today

Here's the big lesson today... RETURN TO THE LORD in 3 areas

1) in REPENTANCE

- V2 (ESV) All the house of Israel (lit) lamented after the Lord
- Some time has elapsed
- But the people seem to have a new sensitivity to the Lord, new humility (perhaps caused by the lessons learned in ch4-6)
 - Had to go so low to Ichabod see God's glory depart after treating God like a lucky charm and tolerating the immorality if Hoph and Phin.
 - Had to see 70 men in coffins after they disrespected God and his ark in Beth Shemesh.
 - Both Israelites and Philistines had to learn his Holiness.
 - Us learning that last 2weeks (C & D) - no complacency
- Seems there's a new sensitivity to God
 - We'll never turn back to God unless we first see his Holiness as seeing in recent chapters.
 - One of the marks of revivals in church history has been a fresh realisation of God's holiness.
- But Samuel checks it's not just crocodile tears.
 - Frothy emotion with no real action.
- V3-4
 - There's a double turn.
 - Turning from
 - Turning to! U Turn.
- Turning from
 - Rid yourselves.
 - Ashtoreth- female goddess of locals (husband of Baal- fertility god). Heady mix of religion and sex. V appealing. V wrong.
 - Always easy to fall for the idols that are popular around us today on Instagram and in lifest. mag.
 - Idols won't nec be metal images/ Mental images.
 - What is it for you?
 - Money
 - Sex
 - Power

- As we saw with Matt & Becca from Romans 1.
 - Exchanging
 - How foolish.
 - And how ugly.
- **Turning to.**
 - ALL YOUR HEARTS. Serve him ONLY.
 - No two timing.
 - No spiritual adultery.
 - Have God and I'll bow down to the idol of
 - Pleasure/ Treasure/ Leisure
- **⌚ Today as we take communion together, it's a chance to come back to the Lord. Recommit our time to him.**
 - REMEMBER **HE IS HOLY**
 - We shouldn't rush into this, as if we just work through a list of tick boxes, and hey presto we are returning to the Lord.
 - This is a relationship not a transaction.
 - And it must affect our actions.
 - ▲ John Sung (Billy Graham of china)- chucked degrees. p40.
 - Can have a degree, but can't worship it.
- For me the idol I often battle against is image.
 - Wanting people to think well of me
 - The great image that needs to come crashing down like Dagon before Yahweh's ark is *me!*
 - Wanting people to like me
 - Wanting people to think well of me, so ugly!
- And I don't think we can deal with these things on our own
 - As we'll see in next section it's a corporate thing
 - Hence the need for some to chat to someone.
 - It's why Lifegroups (homegroups) are so precious
 - And why biblical counselling can be very helpful too.
- Return to the Lord in repentance.
 - Turning from idols, turning to the Lord.
 - He is Holy (that's been mark of revivals in past- holiness)

RETURN TO THE LORD 1) in repentance

2) in DEPENDENCE- leaning on the Lord

- In v 5-9 we see the people's absolute dependence on the Lord.
- 3 things to see in passing.
 1. Their **desperate prayer** led by Samuel v5.
 2. Their **confession**- admitting their sins, alongside what could be the self denial and/or picture of wholeheartedness represented by pouring out precious water before the Lord. V6.
 3. The place of a sacrifice of **atonement** v7-9
God has provided a sacrifice to cover their sins- and they are totally reliant on this. In fact v10 Samuel doesn't stop sacrificing as the Philistines arrive.
- It's so different from when they were in exactly the same situation in chapter 4.
- It's almost a carbon copy of the battle in chapter 4- same name or place Ebenezer. Some of the same language (you can explore it in Life groups).
- But different attitude. No longer do they just grab the ark and bring it into battle, treating God as a lucky charm.
- Now they come humbly before the Lord in prayerful dependence on him because v8 he's the Lord **THEIR** God now. He really is- not other gods. HE is their God .
- **⌚ Don't we need this same desperation.**
 - Don't be sad when God puts you in a place where you are totally helpless and all you can
 - When things are going well we tend to think that we don't need God.
 - But when we are at our wits end that's when we cry out to God.

- I thought this quote from Dale Ralph Davis, (whose book on 1 Samuel is excellent) was worth quoting.
 - "Sometimes the Father may box us in, place us in a situation in which one by one all our secondary helps and supports are taken from us, in order that, defenceless, we may lean on his mercy alone. More and more God's people must walk the way of desperation- prayer!"*

DRD 1 Samuel p76.

➲ As well as turning from idols
 We need to depend on him in prayer.
 We need to remember HE is the great RESCUER.
 Call on him. Not presume on him (ch4), not depend on ourselves.

Desperate dependence on God and the sacrifice he made in Jesus at the Cross. John Sung p41. Forbid it Lord that I should boast.

- Let's look at how the battle went in response... **V10-11!**
- In fact God steps in.
- It's exactly what Hannah spoke about in her prayer 2:9b-10- turn back p272.
- They depended on the Lord, not on their strength.
- In fact God did the work- *thundering from heaven*, and the people are panicked.
- What a contrast from ch 4 when they were routed. Now their enemies are routed, and they mop up with the cleanup operation.
- And so now the final stage is gratitude

RETURN TO THE LORD 1) in repentance 2) in dependence 3) in REMEMBRANCE- leaning on the Lord

- In this final section we see that a decisive victory has been won. V13-14.
- And we see his work carry on throughout the area, on a little roadshow v15-17. That takes the story in a nice circle back to Ramah, where the book began with Hannah and Elkanah.
- We've really reached a high point in the book- the people have been chastened, sensitized, return to the Lord and are now under good and godly leadership.
- But it's v12 I want to focus on.
- Ebenezer- that means stone of help. He is a Helper.
- They put a memorial stone and put it prominently in the ground so that they will never forget where God has brought them
 - up to this point in the ground
 - Up to this point in time.
- We will return to this verse in 2 weeks at our AAS before the Annual Church Meeting, and we'll use this stone (volcanic glass-obsidian) as a remembrance of where God has brought our church in 5 months.
- But for now, we have a memorial commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we might never forget how far he's brought us:
- Not a rock but Bread and wine to remember a greater battle, and a greater victory- won at the cross.

Let's pray.