

Morning Service Part 2: 1 Samuel Chapter 1 v 1- 15

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[0 : 00] Please turn back to 1 Samuel and chapter 7 in your Bibles. It will be very helpful for you if you have an open Bible to do that.

And we're going to pick up and look at the events that we read about here in chapter 7. The other week, for the first time in ages, I went to the pictures with the family to see the new Disney version of Jungle Book.

And if you remember the old one, the original cartoon in the 1960s, then it's very similar except it's not a cartoon. It's life animals and live actors and CGI graphics as well.

And in one of the scenes, which I don't think is in the, maybe I can't remember, in the old cartoon version, Mowgli, the young jungle boy, rescues a baby elephant. The baby elephant has fallen down into this pit, this muddy and slimy pit, and the older elephants can't reach it to get it out.

But Mowgli, being a man, made a rope out of vines and went down and tied the vines around the elephant and he was pulled to freedom, pulled out of the mud and the mire.

[1 : 13] If you know Pilgrim's Progress, that wonderful allegorical story of the Christian life, there's a scene in which Christian, too, falls into a boggy mire. It's called the Slough of Despond.

And I don't know if that's where they got the name of the town Slough from. I don't know. But I don't think it's quite as bad as that. But Christian had missed the mark.

He'd missed the pathway. And the foot, the stepping stones that God had laid for him, or the Lord had laid for him, and he'd fallen into this muddy mire. Again, thankfully, to get out.

Now, all of God's children, at times, find themselves in a boggy hole, a muddy mire. As we journey through the Christian life, there will come times when we are stuck in this hole.

And that period of hole dwelling is called by all sorts of different names. It can be called backsliding, growing cold, losing our first love, lack of zeal for the Lord, any number of descriptions.

[2 : 23] But basically, it means that we have got off the path, that we are not in the place where we should be. We are not where God wants us to be in that journey of faith.

Now, when we come to chapter 7 of 1 Samuel, we find one of the many occasions when God's people, the Israelites, were in a bog of backsliding.

And they'd been there for quite a while when we meet them in chapter 7. It had been centuries since the glory days, the wonderful days of Moses and Joshua, when the Israelites, God's people, were following him and living for him and honoring and glorifying him.

Those days had gone. Yes, there'd been good leaders who'd come up from time to time and brought the nation back, but over and over again, they'd fallen into a hole. And so by the time we get to 1 Samuel 7, the spiritual health of God's people is at a very low ebb.

They are in a bad place spiritually. And because of that, they had lost the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was the object that God gave his people as it was a security and assurance that he was with them.

- [3 : 41] The Ark was that symbol of God's presence. But now that had been taken from them. Their enemies, the Philistines, had removed it during battle and captured it.
- So they had lost God's presence with them. They were in very real difficulty. However, God, of course, can take care of himself.
- God doesn't need us in that sense to fight for him. He can take care of himself. And so marvelously, miraculously, he restores and returns the Ark of the Covenant back to his people, Israel.
- And when we come into chapter 7, verse 1, we hear about that. It's being brought into the land of Israel and it's placed in Abinadab's house.
- And the result of the Ark being returned, the result of God, as it were, bringing the Ark back in, is that there's a wonderful transformation that takes place in the lives of the Israelites.
- [4 : 39] There in verse 2, then all the people of Israel turned back to the Lord. They began to once more seek God. They began once more to get right with God and to be restored to that place that God had chosen them to be, to be the people God had chosen them to be.
- Now, I wonder this morning, where are you in that Christian journey? Do you feel yourself to be distant from God, to feel as if his presence is absent from you in your life day by day?
- Do you feel and know that in some way your relationship with him is not as it should be, that there's something that's spoiling it, something that's got in the way of it? Maybe it is that you know for yourself, though you may not show it to others, that you are actually backslidden.
- You're in church, yeah, and you say the right things when people ask, how are you, but in your heart you know that there's a coldness, there's a distance, there's not a right spirit, there's not a zeal for the Lord, there's a lukewarmness.
- I wonder if that's where some of us are. If that's the case, then dear friends, there's a great deal of help for you and for me here. A great deal of help in what we see happening.
- [6 : 00] Because in the actions of God's people, we have real practical instruction about how we can renew our walk with the Lord. It's Samuel that we've been looking at, his life, his events, and it's his words, particularly here, that speak to us as they spoke to God's people of old.
- His words we need to put into effect. His words that we need to learn from. The series of events that we're going to look at together, following their desire to return to the Lord, very much mirror how we can be restored to a right relationship with God.
- How we can be made right with the God who made us, the God who loves us, the God who longs for us to be reunited with him. So what do we do first?
- What's first to be done? What's the first stepping stone on the way back to God? What has to be done? Well, we see it there in verse 3. If you are returning to the Lord, said Samuel, with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths, and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only.
- We've got to put away the idols that caused the separation. Now there's always a reason why we are out of sorts with God. There's always a reason why things are not as they should be between us and God.
- [7 : 25] And the reason is always our fault. The reason is always our fault. Or rather, it is always our sin. For Israel, it was just the same.
- It was their fault that they were in this mess. They had wandered from God by turning their attention to the foreign gods, the idols of the nations around about them.

The nations that were near to them. They had made altars. They had made idols and sculptures. And they would go to these and they would offer sacrifices and prayers to these empty gods, including the sacrificing of their own children at times.

Now, I doubt whether many of you have a shrine in your house or your garden towards Buddha or some Hindu deity or something like that.

And you may say, well, what has it got to do with me, this idol worship? Well, the truth is that you will have definitely committed idolatry. An idol is anything that we think of or treat as more important than the Lord God.

[8 : 34] It can be our football team. It can be our career. It can be a hobby. A relationship. It can be money, popularity.

A career. May even be your garden. It can be any number of things in any number of different guises. But one or more of these things has distracted us in our life and our love for God.

It has become more important. It has become number one in our lives so that God has been pushed down the scale. Perhaps he's gone down the pecking order not just to second place but even third or fourth place in our lives.

He doesn't really figure in our thinking, in our decision making, in our actions and our lives. And the very first thing that we've got to do if we are to return to God and be right with God is we've got to put that right.

We've got to correct that sin, that error, that practice, that attitude. And so what do we find happened here in verse 4? The Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths and served the Lord only.

[9 : 42] They put away, they got rid of those idols that they had worshipped. They got rid of those statues, they got rid of those sort of totem poles we might think of them looking like and they destroyed them.

For us it will be something just as drastic. For us to get rid of the idols in our lives it will be something which is just as severe. In fact that's exactly what Jesus said in Matthew 18.

Listen to what he says about those things that get in the way, that create a bad relationship with God. He says this, if your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away.

It's better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin gouge it out and throw it away.

It's better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. Jesus isn't saying physically remove your hand, physically remove your eye.

[10 : 50] He's talking about those things which are very, very important to us. Nobody would want to lose their right hand or lose their right eye. They are so special to us. But when the things in our lives become so special to us, so important to us that God does not have the proper place, they've got to be cut out.

They've got to be removed. They've got to be got rid of. They've got to be kicked into touch. We have to get rid of the problem that has created the separation. And that's not always possible, of course.

It's not always possible to throw out something which is very much a part of our lives. If our job is the problem, it's not so easy to simply just leave that workplace.

If our career is what is the problem, if our house or our garden or perhaps even our husband or our wife is the idol of our lives. But they must no longer be number one.

They must no longer be the center of our heart and our affections. They must no longer be the thing that we live for and put first before God. We have to return to the Lord, or rather return the Lord to his proper place in our affections.

[12 : 06] Well, how do we do that? How do we begin the journey? How do we remove those things which are the hindrances? How do we remove those idols in our lives? Well, the first thing we do is we do, again, what the Israelites did.

There in verse 6, on that day, they fasted and they confessed we have sinned against the Lord. We have to confess our sin. We have to admit that we have sinned.

And to admit we've sinned is the only way for us to get out of the place where we are stuck. If sin has got us in the hole, we need to acknowledge that it's the problem.

If you're stuck in a hole, you're never going to get out of that hole until you accept the fact that you're stuck. If you just say to people when they've walked by and you're stuck waist deep in that sinking sand, no, I'm fine.

No, no, that's okay. I don't need any help. No, no, it doesn't look as bad as it appears. Then we're always going to stay there. You cannot be reconciled to God, the God against whom you've sinned until you acknowledge to him that you have sinned.

[13 : 07] Until you're a sinner, you won't want a savior. Until you're a sinner, you won't see the need for forgiveness. The trouble is, of course, that in our present generation, we think of ourselves as victims in this world.

We think of ourselves as those who have been on the wrong end of somebody else's sin. The reason that we're in this problem is somebody else's fault. The reason that I'm far away from God at this time is because of what somebody else did in my life.

If they hadn't said that thing or done that thing to me, then I would have never have been tempted to leave God or to go that way or to find my pleasures in other things. I never would have looked to that idol.

But dear friends, you and I are responsible for our actions. We are not the victims. We are the sinners. We've got to shoulder the blame for what we've done, the decisions we've made, the actions we've taken, the lives we've lived.

We can't shift it onto somebody else. Whether it be our parents or our husband or our wife or our friends or our children or our bosses or whoever it may be, we can't shift it onto our government or onto our culture.

[14 : 21] We have to share the responsibility. Worst of all, we must not put the blame upon God. If you hadn't let that happen in my life, God, if you had treated me kinder, if you had done this, dear friends, to put the blame on God is to sink deeper and deeper into our own sinful quagmire.

Now, says the Apostle John, he says, if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. And later on in verse 10, he says, if we claim to be without sin, we make God out to be a liar.

But, he also says this in verse 9, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins. Confession, recognizing that the idol is there, confessing it to God to receive his forgiveness.

How can God forgive us? How can God accept us? How can he forgive us when we've sinned against him, when we've gone our own way, when we've rebelled against his love and care, when we've made idols and we've worshipped them and made them the gods of our lives, which really means we've made ourselves the God of our lives.

How can God forgive us? How is it possible for him to do that? Well, because of what we see happening with Samuel and the people in verse 9, Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord.

[15 : 51] He cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf and the Lord answered him. See, there's an unchanging principle, an everlasting principle that goes all the way in the Bible from the beginning to the end and it's simply this.

When it comes to forgiveness and reconciliation with God, there must be bloodshed. Hebrews 9, verse 22, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

We cannot be forgiven apart from the penalty being paid for our sin. And the penalty for sin is always death. It always has been and always will be.

Either the death, which is our death, when we pay for our own sins, or that somebody else pays the penalty in our place. A substitute takes our place and dies for us.

to atone for the sins of the people here, that lamb was offered by Samuel as a sacrifice. Its death secured God's favor, his acceptance, his forgiveness.

[16 : 56] That suckling lamb, which is sacrificed, points us very strongly to Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist saw the Lord Jesus approaching, he pointed out back to everybody, look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus Christ sacrificed himself on our behalf when he went to the cross. He secured for us there forgiveness for our sins because there he paid the price, he paid the debt, he suffered the hell that our sins deserve.

Not just the sins that we've committed before we came to know Christ, but those sins that we continue to commit day by day, moment by moment throughout our lives.

We are always sinners and we always will be sinners until that day when we are in heaven when everything is stripped from us of our sin and unrighteousness.

We'll continue to fail, continue to get it wrong. But here's the wonderful truth. In 1 Peter he writes this, for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, the good for the bad to bring you to God.

[18 : 15] That was the whole purpose, that was the whole mission, that was the whole reason Christ came into the world that he might come as an atoning sacrifice, he might come and die as a substitute in your place and mine to bring us to God.

Yes, to show us the great love of God that he has for us, he's willing to die in our place. Yes, to show us the great power of God that he could raise him from the dead and overcome death, but especially that he might bring reconciliation between you and God and me and God.

It was a once forever payment for sin that Jesus made, once and for all. There's nothing more that you and I can add to that. There's nothing more that is required or needed to make us right with God.

Jesus did what we could never do for ourselves. Hebrews again, the writer says this, he, Jesus, offered for all time one sacrifice for sins and he goes on to say later in that chapter, where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

So if you are far from God, if you've wandered away from him, there's nothing that you need to do, if I can put it that way, to make you right with him, there's nothing that you can sacrifice, nothing that you can pay, there's nothing that you need to contribute.

[19 : 37] Rather, you need to come on the basis of what Jesus has done for you at the cross and receive the forgiveness that God faithfully will give to you. He doesn't want you to do penance, he doesn't want you to go on a pilgrimage, he doesn't want you to do anything in some way to atone for your sins, you cannot do it, it has been done, all you can do is receive it and thank him for it.

So the Israelites got rid of their idols, they confessed their sin and they trusted in the sacrifice that was given on their behalf. What next?

If we are to be restored to God and made right with God, if we are to be brought back, if we are to be lifted out of that muddy mire, if we are to be the people that God wants us to be, not only need we to get rid of the sins that have separated us from him and confess them, recognizing that it's our fault and trusting in what Christ has done, but then we need to do something else, we need to get back to active service, because that's what happens in verse 10, while Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle, but that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and they threw them into such a panic, they were routed before the Israelites, say the Israelites now are right with God, and so what do they do, they go out to fight against those that would rule over them, and God went with them, they get back to doing what they should have been doing in the first place, standing up for God's righteousness, standing against those enemies, when we're in that muddy mire, when we're backslidden, when we're far from

God, when we're not in the right place, we are inactive, we are useless, we are consumed with our own pleasures, consumed with our own desires, consumed with doing what we want, we're not living for Christ as we were saved for, our inactivity in God's service has to be changed to activity, see living for Christ is a fight, living for Jesus is a battle, it's a struggle, it's never been any other way, it has never been an easy path to follow, it's never been a gentle walking through lovely fields of daffodils with the sun shining on you, it's often been traipsing through mud and storms and rain and thunder, why?

Because we have enemies who are hard at work seeking to rule over us and to keep us from living the lives that God saved us for, we have enemies who are always looking to trip us up that we might fail to perform and to live as God desires, those three enemies are well known, first of all they are the flesh, that's our sinful nature that's still with us, it's like an old athletics injury that gives us gyp all the time, slows us down, tries to make us fall, then there's the world, the people around about us who are without Christ, their lifestyle, their words, their desires, their idols discourage us and hinder us from putting Christ first, we want to fit in with them and they want us to be like them and then of course there is the devil, he's real, the Bible calls him our adversary, he's clever, he's scheming, he's plotting, planning, attempting to trap us into sinful attitudes, sinful behavior, sinful words, do not think that he is some cuddly red horned toy that you can stick in the back of your car, he is the absolute epitome of evil and he is the one who is behind every evil action this world sees, these enemies are there, they are active and so we must be active, we can't just sit round, we can't just take it easy thinking that we'll be fine, in Ephesians 6 we have this passage which tells us how we can be protected as we go into battle of the armor that

[24 : 00] God provides us but it teaches us the secret to living the Christian life, the secret to going forward, the secret for being the people of God wants us to be is here, verse 10, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power, how did the Israelites overcome the Philistines, because they were so good with the sword, no, because they had the greatest archers in the world, no, we're told because the Lord went with them and fought for them, when you and I live for Christ we do not live for Christ in our own strength, we do not have to follow him, trusting in our own abilities, our own skills, our own intellects, it's his strength, his power, he is with us, he fights for us, he equips us, those who are going out to the mission field, are going out in the strength of the Lord, you're not going out alone, you're not going out to do these things by the power that you have, or even with the training you've received, you're going out, and Christ goes with you to work in you and through you, and if that isn't your confidence, then stop, don't go, please, for your own sake.

one last thing as we close then, want to live for Christ, want to be first in your heart, that's the desire of every single genuinely born again believer, him first, his will, his glory, his name, is that your heart?

Then that is the heart of a Christian who has been born again in the spirit. If that's not your heart, sincerely ask yourself, am I first of all converted? Am I truly trusting Christ?

Am I really a Christian at all? Because that will be the mark. Finally, we see here something to help us, to keep us from falling back into that pit, keep us from going away from the path that Christ calls us to, and it's there in verse 12, Samuel took a stone, set it up between Mizpah and Shan, he named Ebenezer, which means stone of help, saying, thus far the Lord has helped us.

Samuel wasn't setting up another idol for them to worship, another marker for them to bring sacrifices to, no, he was setting up a milestone, he was setting up a stone of remembrance, he wanted to remind them of just what God had done for them, and how God had brought them to that place.

[26 : 25] You see, the problem is, and one of the reasons that we do tend to slip backwards, is that we are forgetful. We forget all that Christ has done for us, we forget all the way he's led us, we forget the mistakes and failings that we've had.

We'd like to concentrate on others rather than our own. But God has given us his word, the scriptures, as well as he's given us his people, he's given us reminders, set up things for us that we can see just what God has done for us in Jesus to keep us from getting bogged down again.

that stone was there so that whenever the people passed by, they saw it and they remembered what God had done, how he had restored them, how he had rescued them, how he delivered them, so that they might continue to trust in him and to live for him.

Was that part of the reason why the people of God and that land knew peace for so many years? Was that why they were able to go on to retake other parts of the country that had been captured before?

I like to think it is. They remembered, they saw that stone and it thrilled them and it drove them on and it caused them to be those who went on and did greater exploits for God.

[27 : 40] It reminded them of the years that they had wasted pursuing false and empty gods and idols. It made them realize that all the potential years of blessing they had thrown away because they had not got right with God sooner.

Dear friends, I'm here to be a marker stone to say to you, to remind you, dear friends, how much longer will you waste your time pursuing those things which are temporary, failing, empty, hopeless, disappointing?

How much longer will you live a life of half measure? How long will you, dear Christian, continue to be just mediocre, to be one who has one foot living for Christ and one foot living for self?

How far can you continue to walk when you're going in opposite directions? You won't go anywhere. You'll stay exactly where you are. Won't you return to him when you seek him with all your heart, when you kick out those idols, when you put him first and get involved in the work he's called you to do?

Won't you be the person that Christ saved you to be? Close with these words that God spoke to his people again, this time centuries later, because he had to say it again and again.

[29 : 08] That's why I've got to say it again and again to you. In Zechariah in chapter 1, therefore tell the people, this is what the Lord Almighty says, return to me, declares the Lord Almighty, and I will return to you.

Such is the grace of our God and such is his love. Let's sing together our final hymn this morning. It's a hymn which reflects something of that sense and attitude of being restored, being back with the Lord.

Let me encourage you and urge you not to forget what God has been saying this morning to you. Take action and he will return to you.

So 846, oh, for a closer walk with God. and they will serve his heart.

I will do it. I am hacia Mitch and across them, see that The God is behind and God and heaven have walked around.

[30 : 25] I will go■ and heaven pray. great the eyes to shine upon the road that leads me to the land where is the blessed blessed I knew when first I stole the Lord where is the soul refreshed in view of Jesus and his bread best the dearest title I have known whatever title me help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee so shall I come be close with God how answering my prayer so pure a light shall mark the road that leads me to the land to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his presence in glory without fault and with great joy to the only

God our saviour be glory majesty power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all of time today and forever more amen