

1 Samuel 7:2-17 | “Great Sinners, Great God”
Preached on November 7, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 7, and we will be starting in verse 2 and going through the end of the chapter.

I'm so glad that you have come this morning, and I pray that God would use His Word to grow you today. *[pauseee]*

Isn't it great when there is a breakthrough in something that brings a reversal of its trajectory?

Often this can happen when someone is seriously sick.

All of a sudden, they start to become on the mend, and are on their way to getting better.

There was a reversal of their health: they were getting worse, but now they are getting better. *[pause]*

Or maybe this happens in a relationship...

A husband and wife are really struggling in their relationship, and it looks like it's going to end in divorce.

But then all of a sudden, there's a breakthrough, as they reconcile and start to work through some of their issues. *[pause]*

This can happen in a business, who is struggling to barely make ends meet, but then all of a sudden the business turns around and it's booming. *[pauseeee]*

This sort of a breakthrough and reversal also happened with our church.

One day, I was looking through some of the historical documents of our church, and I came across a document that explained the history of our church.¹

I came to find out that our church was first started in 1854, but from the period of 1883 to 1888, the church had no pastor and the membership was down to 5 people.

It was so bad that in 1890, the church had to convey the church property over to the PA Baptist General Association. *[pause]*

But then things started to reverse course and get better.

5 years later, they were able to get the property back, and by 1905, the church was thriving so much that the building was often found to be too small for the congregation.

¹ All of these historical details were found in a document called, “History of the First Baptist Church of Clearfield, June 1854-June 1954”. Page 2.

That's when they decided to build a new building, which would be where our current lobby area is. *[pause]*

Truly, there was a great reversal and breakthrough as our church went from 5 people and having to convey the property over to their association...

...To 15 years later, having to build a new building because they had outgrown their previous one. *[pause]*

That reversal of trajectory is just a small example compared to the great reversal and breakthrough that Israel had in our story for this morning.

Yet Israel's reversal didn't involve numbers of people or buildings, but it involved changed hearts, a victorious battle, a solid leader, and peace in their nation.

Let's READ THE STORY (1 Samuel 7:2-17). *[pause]*

If you remember from where we have been so far in 1 Samuel, things were not going well for Israel.

They had been defeated by the Philistines, lost the Ark, and the glory of God had departed.

This was a major low point in Israel's history, and it seemed like all hope was lost, as the Philistines were in control.

But then all of a sudden, there was a glimpse of things turning around.

The Ark was returned to Israelite territory, yet even after that happens, Israel sins against God, and many men are struck down.

And now we are told in verse 2 that twenty years have passed. *[pause]*

So even after the Ark returns, Israel is still in rebellion against God for 20 more years!

This is a sad and sorry state for Israel, but there's a breakthrough, there's a great reversal, for we are told that, "Israel lamented after the Lord."

Israel was finally returning to the Lord.

And that's the first application point for this morning...

I. Return to the Lord. (1-6)

After years of rebellion against God, Israel had at last gotten to the point of recognizing their desperate state, and mournfully seeking after God. *[pause]*

Doesn't it sometimes take a lot for us to finally recognize our sin, too?

We always like to point fingers at Israel, yet we should be pointing the finger right back at ourselves.

Sometimes it takes a lot for us to finally get that wake-up call, like, “What am I doing? This is wrong!” *[pause]*

Think back over your life, hasn't it sometimes taken time for you to recognize your sin and repent of it?

Some of you, it may not have been until you were older that you repented of your sins and turned in faith to Jesus Christ.

But even for those who have received Christ at an early age, we still struggle with sin, and in regards to that sin...

...We sometimes catch ourselves doing something wrong, and we think, “What am I doing? This is wrong!” *[pauseeee]*

Repentance is sometimes slow in coming.

Now it shouldn't be that way - but it is - sinners often change slowly. *[pause]*

We should remember this as we interact with people, that like Israel, it may take some time.

I can't guarantee that they will turn from their sin, but I can say that some people will eventually be like Israel, after a long time, they will lament after God. *[pause]*

I've heard of children raised up in godly homes, who rebel for a time, but eventually they recognize their wretched state and turn to the Lord.

I've heard of people who have lived a life of sin, only to turn in faith at the end of their life.

Like the prodigal son, we each need to feel our desperate plight before we see need for the Father.

And the grace of the Father waits with open arms, ready to forgive and receive his child home.² *[pauseeee]*

Israel took a while, but they did return to the Lord, and the Lord, full of grace, was ready to love on His people. *[pause]*

Aren't you thankful for the patience of the Lord?

He could have given up on *you*.

He could have been impatient, and just walked away, but He didn't. *[pauseeee]*

² This story is found in Luke 15:11-32.

So Israel mourns over their situation and sin, and that's when Samuel comes back onto the scene.

If you remember, Samuel was on the rise, but then for years he was out of the picture.

Now he's back in the spotlight after 20 plus years, and Samuel uses this moment of lamenting to call them to repentance and recommitment to God. *[pause]*

So Samuel tells them that if they are returning to the Lord with all their heart, they should put away their gods, direct their hearts to the Lord, and serve him alone.

And surprisingly, Israel does put away these gods and serve the Lord only. *[pauseeeee]*

In just a few verses, we see verses jam-packed with truth about repentance.

We already saw that repentance is sometimes slow, but we also see that repentance is not *just* mournful over circumstances, but it mournfully seeks the Lord. *[pause]*

There is godly grief, and there is worldly grief.

The truth is, sometimes people can cry and be sad over merely the bad consequences of their sin.

Maybe they are sad about the hard situation they are in because of their sin.

Maybe they are sad because they got caught.

But that grief is not godly grief, unless it is accompanied by repentance. *[pause]*

In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul says, "I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."³ *[pauseee]*

Israel wasn't just sad because of their bad situation, which was a result of their sin, they were sad because they had sinned against God, which brought this bad situation.

They were "lamenting after the Lord." *[pause]*

The proof that their grief was godly grief was their repentance.

That is the tell-tale sign of a person's grief - whether it be godly or not - do they repent?

If they are saddened, but refuse to turn from their sin, then that is mere worldly grief. *[pause]*

Like Israel, our sin shouldn't lead us to turn *from* God, but *to* Him.

³ 2 Corinthians 7:9-10.

They sought Him, for they recognized that they had sinned against Him, and they desperately needed Him. *[pause]*

So when you sin, don't let it turn you away from God, but let your sin continually push you into the Father's loving arms. *[pauseeee]*

Repenting is essentially turning from sin and turning to God.

We see that so very clearly here with Israel, for they wanted to return to God, and Samuel tells them to turn *from* idols and direct their hearts *to* God. *[pause]*

This is really the pattern of what happens when someone gets saved.

They repent and believe.

They turn from their sin, and turn in faith to Christ.

They understand that they are a sinner in need of saving from the penalty of death, so they turn from that sin, and seek to be saved from it by belief in Jesus Christ.

Have you done that? Have you trusted in Christ alone to save you from your sins? If not, do that today, don't delay. *[pauseeee]*

You see, turning to God means recognizing that He is what you truly need above all.

That's what Israel was doing.

They fasted, which was their way of showing God that they were genuine about repenting and returning to Him.

And it demonstrated that they needed God more than food. *[pause]*

They also drew water and poured it out before the Lord.

Now we don't know exactly why they did this, but this action may be a way of showing that they were pouring out their soul like water to the Lord.

So the fasting and the water pouring were both ways of saying, "We need God!" *[pauseeee]*

Is that your mindset and attitude in life? "I need God."

"I need God more than food. I need God more than water. I need God more than physical life itself." *[pauseeee]*

We are people who always seem to 'need' that new next thing.

We are people who think we 'need' certain things.

But our greatest need is God Himself.

Maybe like Israel, we need to get on our knees, maybe even fast, and pour out our souls to Him in desperate need. *[pause]*

Truly turning to God means that I know that God is what I need above all - do you believe that? *[pauseeee]*

In Israel's example, we also see that repentance involves the heart, but also the actions.

Samuel tells them that if they are returning then they should get rid of their foreign gods and serve the Lord only.

If their repentance was real, then it needed to be proved by action. *[pause]*

The truth is, if we say that we repent, but there's no evidence afterwards, then it's most likely proof that we didn't truly turn from that sin and to God.

When one turns from sin and to God, there will be a difference in how they live.

They will still fail, they will still sin, but there is a difference in their relationship with that sin.

They no longer want to give in, but strive to put away sin and serve God. *[pauseeeee]*

This story also teaches us that God and idols cannot co-exist, but we need to serve God only.

As Jesus talks about, you can't serve two masters.⁴

They needed to put away the idols and serve God.

So we need to put away the idols of our heart and serve God alone. *[pause]*

The sin that we commit comes from a root, an idol in the heart.

Are you being impatient with your spouse? Your idol may be control.

You want things done in your time. *[pause]*

Did you lie to your co-worker about what you did last weekend? Your idol may be approval.

You want the approval of your co-worker, so you will lie to get it.

These idols creep up in our hearts time and time again, and it's about time that we each put them away, and direct our hearts to the Lord.

This is why throughout the letters of the New Testament, they call us to put away sin and put on Christ.⁵ *[pause]*

⁴ See Matthew 6:24.

⁵ One example of many is Romans 13:12-14.

At the moment of salvation, we turn from our sin and turn in faith to Jesus.

But really, even after the moment of salvation, we are people who live by repentance and faith.

When we sin, we confess it, resting in the forgiveness of Christ.

And when we go through our day, we live by faith in Him.

This is how we are to relate to God, repentance and faith. *[pause]*

As we are told numerous times, “the righteous shall live by faith.”⁶

And as David declares, “a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”⁷

This is what God desires, people who continually confess their sin, and cling to Christ their Savior as they walk throughout this life. *[pauseeee]*

As you evaluate your life, do you turn from your sin when confronted with it?

Do you cling to Christ in faith, and desire to serve Him alone?

We are all works in progress, so this won't be perfect, but may we each be growing in these areas, trusting the Lord to work in us. *[pauseeeee]*

Use this moment even now to return to the Lord in closer fellowship, draw near to Him!

As genuine Christians, we can never lose our union with the Father through Christ, but our fellowship or communion with Him can struggle at times.

Let's not get into a lukewarm state,⁸ but let's zealously draw near to God in confession of sin and in faith. *[pause]*

He desires that you would draw near, but will you?

Even now, will you pray, “Yes, Father, I come. I go to You. I draw near to You. I want to have closer communion with You.”

Maybe there are sins that you need to confess: “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”⁹

Or maybe you need to draw closer in faith, then “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”¹⁰

⁶ This is quoted numerous times in the Bible. It originally comes from Habakkuk 2:4.

⁷ Psalm 51:17.

⁸ An allusion to the Church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22.

⁹ 1 John 1:9.

¹⁰ James 4:8.

By doing these things, we can return to the Lord like Israel, but also this story shows us that we should...

II. Rest in His Saving Work. (7-11, 13-17)

In verse 7, the Philistines hear that the Israelites are gathered together and probably think that they are preparing for war.

So the Philistines come up to go to battle against Israel, and Israel hears of this and is afraid.

But notice what their fear leads them to...

Their fear *doesn't* lead to giving up.

Their fear *doesn't* lead to trusting in their own power, or even turning to their foreign gods, or superstition like last time.

Their fear leads to trust in God, as they tell 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.” *[pauseee]*

There are many things in this life that lead us to fear, but it's about what you do with that fear.

Does fear paralyze you?

Does fear make you trust in yourself?

Or does fear fling you into the arms of the Father?

Take all of your fears and anxieties and cast them on Him!¹¹ *[pauseeee]*

You see, when the Philistines drew near to fight, this was a testing moment for Israel.

Was their repentance and recommitment really genuine?

Would they go back to trusting in themselves? Would they turn to their foreign gods? Or would they run to the Lord?

So also, moments of hardship and fear are testing moments that reveal where *your* trust lies.

What do you do in your trials?

What do you do when you get really sick?

What do you do when you are fearful of something?

Those moments will reveal where your faith lies.

¹¹ An allusion to 1 Peter 5:7.

We can say that we trust the Lord until we are blue in the face, but testing and trying moments will always disclose the truth. *[pauseeee]*

When Israel went to Samuel, they said, “Cry out for us,” and that shows us a lot about their current state.

It shows us that Israel was desperate, but it also shows us that they were filled with faith, for it’s like they were saying, “We need God, or else we are done for good!”

It was a cry of desperation, but it was also a cry of faith in God.

They were needy, so they called out to a powerful God.

May we each do that.

Like a child calls out “Mommy! Daddy!” when they are scared, may we call out to our Father in Heaven.

As David says in Psalm 56, “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.”¹² *[pauseeee]*

This kind of faith pleases God, it’s how he wants us to relate to Him.

For notice how God responds to Israel’s cry of faith - he works powerfully!

But notice before we see what God does, let’s zoom in to what Samuel does. [pause]

Israel goes through Samuel to God, Samuel offers a sacrifice, and God answers Him.

Samuel is the one who intercedes between God and Israel.

He provides the sacrifice to atone for the sins of Israel and goes to God...sound like anyone else?

What about Jesus? [pause]

Jesus is the greater Samuel.

Like Samuel, Jesus intercedes for us and provides the sacrifice, and the sacrifice was Himself. [pauseeee]

I love how in this story, the Philistines are drawing near to attack, and as they are, Israel isn’t doing anything.

The only thing that’s happening, as death looms, is that Samuel is offering a sacrifice, and God works powerfully to save them.

So also, death was looming for us as sinners, yet amidst that threat, Christ’s sacrifice was offered, which brought us life.

¹² Psalm 56:3.

We didn't do anything, but God did it all, and it was the sacrifice of Christ that provided salvation and brought victory. *[pauseeee]*

Isn't it amazing how once you hear about what Christ has done, even stories like this in the Old Testament really come to life.

We see pictures and patterns of what Christ would do everywhere. *[pause]*

God shows us that this is how sinners can have a relationship with God: we need an intercessor, who goes to God and provides the sacrifice for our sins.

For sinners can't just approach a holy God without their sin being dealt with.

So praise Christ! When we had no other hope, He interceded for us and made a way. *[pauseeee]*

For Israel, they repented and then there was a sacrifice for their sins.

For us, we repent, trusting in the sacrifice already, once-for-all given. *[pauseeee]*

Like Israel, we are sinners, who need God to forgive.

And like Israel, we are helpless, and we need God to save. *[pauseeee]*

Going back to the details of the story, we find that God thunders with a mighty sound, the Philistines get confused and are defeated.

And then we are even told that after this event, the Philistines are subdued and do not enter Israelite territory again.

The hand of God was against the Philistines during Samuel's time.

Even the cities that the Philistines had taken were restored to Israel, and there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. *[pause]*

Samuel judges Israel his whole life, and does a yearly circuit throughout different cities. *[pauseeee]*

Israel's situation had a breakthrough, as there was a great reversal.

They used to be under Philistine domination, but now the Philistines were kept at bay, and there was restoration and peace.

God had truly brought victory for Israel, as their situation was completely flipped.

The difference maker was God. *[pause]*

God had acted on their behalf simply because they came to him in repentance and faith.

Israel certainly didn't deserve this victory.

Israel certainly didn't merit this victory, for God alone provided it.

But they had simple faith in a powerful God. *[pause]*

That's how we are saved, and how God brings victory to us.

We have simple faith in a powerful God.

We place our faith in what Christ has done on the cross and in the grave. *[pause]*

It's through Christ that there is victory over sin and death.

It's through Christ that he restores our relationship to God.

And it's through Christ that we can have inner peace and security in this life. *[pause]*

God's saving work brings victory, and it's through repentance and faith that we receive this great blessing in Him.

A right relationship with God brings victory, restoration, peace, and security. *[pauseeee]*

Israel really didn't do much to bring victory, except they simply rested in God's saving work.

They simply cried out to God to save, and he did the work.

So likewise, that's all we do.

We rest in His saving work, and are blessed in Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Do you rest in Christ's saving work?

You rest in His work when you repent of your sins and turn in faith to be saved.

But you also rest in His work all the days of your life thereafter, as you rest in the forgiveness, approval, security, and peace that Christ provides you.

Will you rest in His saving work? *[pauseeee]*

There's one more application point that comes out of this story, and it's this...we should...

III. Remember His Grace. (12)

According to verse 12, after the victory that God had brought over the Philistines, Samuel sets up a stone.

And he calls this stone, "Ebenezer; for he said, 'Till now the Lord has helped us.'" *[pauseeee]*

It's interesting how Samuel names this stone, "Ebenezer."

If you recall from chapter 4, Ebenezer was where Israel camped against the Philistines before losing badly to them.¹³

Now Samuel uses 'Ebenezer' to show the dramatic reversal of their situation.

It was at Ebenezer that they used to remember their great loss, but now at the new Ebenezer, they can remember the great victory that God had brought.

So this stone becomes a memorial, a visible reminder of what God had done for Israel.

It was a way to praise and always remember that God had helped them. *[pauseeee]*

Isn't that how any of us should respond to God's saving work? With praise and remembrance.

What else can we do when it's all because of His grace and power that he brings us victory?
[pause]

And did you know that this remembering actually helps us to have future faith in God?

For Israel, whenever they saw this stone called 'Ebenezer', they could remember this battle.

They could remember the utter helplessness and desperation they felt.

But they could also remember God's marvelous grace and matchless power that he demonstrated to win the battle.

And because of this remembering, they could think...

...“Back then we said, ‘till now the Lord has helped us,’ and we can say the same thing even now, ‘till now he has helped us and he will help us every day that's called ‘today’.” *[pauseeee]*

You see, remembering God's saving acts helps us to have faith in Him today.

We can reflect upon His prior power and faithfulness and know that God will work like that again. *[pauseeee]*

We each need some Ebenezer stones in our lives, helping us to remember the help of the Lord throughout our life.

Are there monuments of grace in your life, those moments that you can clearly remember what He has done for you, which lead to praise and faith?

Maybe for you, you can write down a list of ways that He has been faithful over the years.

These are like Ebenezer stones, helping you to remember his powerful work, but also helping you to have faith everyday along the way. *[pause]*

¹³ 1 Samuel 4:1.

Each of us needs Ebenezer stones, where like Samuel and Israel, we can remember “till now has the Lord helped me.” *[pauseeee]*

Did you know that the Lord has wonderfully incorporated an Ebenezer-like remembrance into the life of the church?

It’s true, it concerns the greatest work that He has done for us, and we are actually going to experience it today.

It’s the Lord’s Supper.

The Lord’s Supper is like an Ebenezer stone, helping us to remember what Christ has done for us on the Cross.

He wanted us to know that we ought to always remember His grace, and praise Him for His powerful work. *[pause]*

And so we always remember that...

The Lord powerfully works for those who turn to Him in repentance and faith.

That’s what He did for Israel in 1 Samuel 7, and that’s what He did for us at the Cross.

He powerfully worked on Israel’s behalf, winning the victory over the Philistines.

So also, he powerfully worked on our behalf, winning the victory over sin and death.

And it’s because Israel repented and believed, and that’s what we are called to do as well. *[pauseeee]*

The Lord is so patient, so kind, so powerful.

He knows that we can’t do it on our own, so all he calls us to do is to turn from our sin and trust Him.

He wants us to see that *He* is everything that we need. *[pause]*

So will you draw near to the One who loves You with an unfailing, forgiving, and patient love?

Will you rest in Christ’s saving work, knowing that He has done the work that you could never do?

And will you always remember His grace...

...Knowing that “till now the Lord has helped you,” and the truth is, you can always (even in the unseen future) say, “till now”, for you have a God who is truly the Stone of Help.