

Series: Shepherd, Poet, Fugitive, King - The Life of David
1 Samuel 7 – “The Lord has Helped Us” / Ryan Patty / 10.15.23

Scripture Reading: **Psalm 51:10-17 (ESV)**

If you have your bible please turn to 1 Samuel chapter 7. Have you ever had a time in your life where you felt far from the Lord? Clearly living in sin and not wanting to give it up? If you have grown up in the church and experienced what I'm describing they might often use this super-theological term called “back-slidden” to describe where you were. Now I'm not trying to make a case about how to properly understand back-slidden, I have thoughts of course, but you were far from the Lord. But then, by the grace of God, through the Word of God, you repent. You turn back. What was that experience like? Maybe even now you are far from the Lord but desiring something more for your life. Well in 1 Samuel 7, we see a picture of what it looks like, after a long season of idolatry, to turn back to the Lord.

We have been steadily working our way through the book of 1 Samuel and we are at a critical section in the book, right before we see the rise of Israel's first king. What is important to keep in mind here is this book's closeness with the books of Judges and Ruth (don't divorce Judges and Ruth from 1 Samuel, the context is the same throughout them, just progressing in time). Sometimes when we read our bibles we can go through a book and think okay that period of history is done, and then we open another book of the bible and we are starting something new. But the Bible has one main storyline of redemption, tying in all 66 books, it's *moving somewhere*, and it's important to know where and how it is moving. And so it's important to know 1 Samuel's closeness with Judges and Ruth. These books are all building off of one another, describing this common time frame and period and moving us to the coming Davidic King.

So this morning we are in chapter 7. But there is a slight mystery here, or a question. Where in the world has Samuel been? If you remember some chapters back we saw the Lord calling Samuel in the middle of the night, and he grows, and at the end of chapter 3 it says that all of Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was an established prophet of the Lord. And then in verse 1 of chapter 4 it simply says, and the word of Samuel came to all Israel. And then he's off, he's out of the picture it seems. And this is intentional from the writer. We should be wondering, if there is a clear prophet of the Lord, "where is he? Where has he gone?" Because in chapters 4, 5, and 6 and all the drama with the ark of the covenant and the Philistines, surely Samuel would have had something to say! Well I think he did, as we will see in a moment.

But much like his birth is a sign of grace to Israel (especially after Eli), so here he is brought back to bring new mercies to God's people. But let me say this. At this point in redemptive history, the King is coming. One that the people want, and then eventually one that is after God's own heart. And so Samuel serves to close out this section of Israel's history. In a way, he is the last of the Judges – we will even see some similar themes and patterns in this chapter that we looked at in Judges. And as serving as the last of the Judges thankfully he does in a new and promising way... So Samuel is serving to bookend the Judges who were all pointing to someone coming greater. So keep that backdrop in mind with today's passage.

If you remember last week, the Philistines recognized that they royally messed up. They can't have the Ark, it belongs amongst God's people. So they send it back with a guilt offering. And then some foolish Israelites seek to look at or in the Ark, and the Lord kills them. You cannot approach a Holy God on your own terms, but only on his. Jeff taught us this last week. But then notice this line at the end of chapter 6 that the men of Beth-Shemesh (where the 70 died), notice what they say, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this

holy God?”

In our sin (as the rest of Scripture tells us), that is none of us. We need an intercessor, we need a mediator, someone to go between us and God. And in chapter 7 we see how Samuel will do just that. 3 points from the text for us to consider.

1. Repentance

Look with me at chapter 7, starting in verse 1.

And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the Lord. 2 From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

3 And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” 4 So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and they served the Lord only.

5 Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you.” 6 So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day and said there, “We have sinned against the Lord.” And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.

Repentance is turning from your sin and by faith trusting in God.

Israel finds itself over the course of this 20 years, and probably longer when you include what happened in chapters 4-6, of being in a state of sin once more. Yet, Samuel is preaching. He is known as a prophet of God, and all Israel recognized him as such. So he is preaching. Preaching for 20 years and there is no response. I find this so encouraging as a young pastor where it is easy to think, “just

gotta do this to get them to listen, just gotta do that to get them to respond.” **But no, it’s the Word of God by the Spirit of God that brings about the people of God.**

- 20 years Samuel is doing the Lord’s Work with no response from the people, until there is. Like Mark chapter 4 and 1 Corinthians 3 teach us, we are called to be faithful, water, planting, watering planting, watering planting, and looking to God to give growth. And here he does.

Because at the end of v. 2, we read that all of Israel “lamented” after the Lord. They turned back. **The root of the word here implies a groaning or wailing.** This is a national repentance that is coming about. God by His Spirit is moving amongst his people as His Word is going forth. So that they long for the Lord in a more tangible way. They are coming back to their true God, Yahweh. That’s what happens when Samuel speaks in v. 3 - the Word of the Lord goes forth, and the people listen.

So after 3 chapters of Samuel missing, God’s grace towards Israel comes once again to His people. They lament and Samuel responds to them and tells them what to do. He *directs* their repentance. Two things I want to highlight about Samuel’s direction of their repentance, and the first is this, it is God-focused.

- It is God-focused

Samuel says, “if you are returning to Yahweh..” a moment later he says direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only. A right repentance is focused on God. Don’t get me wrong, an awareness of sin for sure brings about the repentance, an awareness of what they have done, but more important is *to whom* they have done it to. They have forsaken their covenant God, they have turned to the idols. They have betrayed Him above all.

Remember the story of David and Bathsheeba? It happens in 2 Samuel. We read that David is at home at the time when kings go out to war. Bathsheeba is bathing. David wrongly takes another man's wife and sleeps with her. And then the natural result is that she is pregnant and so she tells David. And what does he do? Sends her husband to the front lines so he can die. Here is a precursor to the coming King we will see, let me remind you a man that is described after God's own heart. He fails horribly here. He is an adulterer. He is a murderer. But in our Scripture reading we read from Psalm 51 and David's repentance to the Lord. Notice what he says earlier in that Psalm.

Psalm 51:3-4 – 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

Against you, you only? Our rational minds say no! He sinned against Bathsheeba! He sinned against Uriah! What are you saying David?! But David is not blind to this. Notice what he just said in v. 3, for I know my transgression, my sin is ever before me. He knows what he did to them, but ultimately he knows that his sin is first and foremost against God. It is a grievous offense against him. Why? Because the divide that happened between God and man in Genesis 3 because of sin is catastrophic. He knows that ultimately all sin goes against his holy and perfect God. It is an affront to who he fundamentally is. God is the sovereign ruler over all, he sets the rules, he tells us what is righteous and what is not, and therefore sin goes against all that he is and stands for. David has an understanding of that.

And so in 1 Samuel 7, in this repentance, God is the focus. Return to him, direct your heart to him, serve him. Repentance is always God-focused first and foremost, because ultimately that is who our sin is against.

Applying this we must ask ourselves is this how we think of our repentance? Do we think of it ultimately in terms of whom we are sinning against? Or Do we take sin lightly?

- To the unbeliever here, the one maybe checking our Christianity or wondering what this church thing is all about, welcome! We are glad that you are here. Here I am talking about the need for us to recognize our sin, our wrong-doing before God and maybe you aren't even sure there is a God. Well, the idea of sinning and repentance implies a standard (as I said earlier it implies that someone tells us what is righteous and what is not, what is good and was it not), it means there is a mark to hit and that we have missed that mark. Let me leave you with this, where does your standard of morality (right and wrong) come from? Where does society's standard come from? When we say we have sinned, we understand that we have broken God's law, that we have done that which he said not to do, or failed to do that which he said to do. Think about where the idea of morality even comes from.
- CCC may we be a church who, like David, recognizes that our sins are ultimately against God and therefore our repentance must first and foremost be God-focused. Fundamentally, foundationally we have sinned against a holy God. And as we will see may that drive us all the more to avail ourselves of the grace and mercy of God that he has shown us in Christ.

- It is Specific

Notice Samuel's directing of the people's repentance. This isn't some vague sense of repentance. "God, forgive me for I have sinned." Nor is Samuel wanting to be swayed by any emotional response (how often has Israel wanted deliverance before, crying out to him yet not truly meaning it?). No, Samuel knows that tearful eyes and wet cheeks are not the answer, the people must move beyond that. They must wrestle specifically with the sin that entangles them. He doesn't

treat their wounds here with a sponge but with a scalpel.

So Samuel, as the prophet and priest, says, “no this is your sin. You have gone after these idols. Therefore, put away the foreign gods and the ashtaroth and serve the one true God.” Like we saw in Judges, Israel in various ways had become canaanized, and this was most noticeable in their worship. This Canaanite religious worship had such a stronghold amongst Israel. Why is that? Because it combined sex with worship. Baal worship and Ashtaroth worship was prevalent, a male and female deity that through sexual intercourse provides fertility via rain and a growth of crops. So cultic priests and prostitutes would be engaged in either temple in order that they might sway the gods to do their bidding. And it has entangled Israel.

Liturgy and orgy combined, the chapel and brothel in one place.

What’s not to like? So Samuel says this gross sin, this thing you try to do alongside serving Yahweh, or this thing you don’t want your neighbors to know about, this is what I am calling out. Show your repentance in how you deal with the specifics of your sin. Yahweh is a covenant keeping God, but he will not abide the worship of another. We have seen that time and time again. And the same is true for us today. Christianity is monotheistic, one God alone. Our Lord Jesus picks up this OT teaching when he says, **37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. – Matthew 10:37-38** - Jesus knows it is a whole-hearted, undivided allegiance that must take place.

And so this repentance isn’t superficial. A superficial repentance has the idea of hopefully returning to the sin. It’s giving lip service, but no true heart change. But a supernatural repentance, that is brought about by the Spirit of God, is what we see here as Israel turns back to Yahweh. The repentance is specific.

I trust that God by His Spirit will convict if needed where some of us need to be more specific in our repentance in order to truly repent, to not keep flirting with the sin. **There are times where we like to save face** and use generalities rather than give the more concrete example. It's always easier to say I'm struggling, then I have been lusting after someone that's not my spouse. It's always easier to say I'm struggling then I often eat like a glutton and like to waste my time vegging out with television and social media. It's always easier to say I'm struggling then I often covet material things that I don't have and am upset with what God has given me.

Our repentance must be specific or we will keep playing games with sin. Second thing we see in our passage...

2. Testing and Deliverance

Notice here in a moment what comes after repentance. Testing. This is true for you and I as well. You will be attacked with a renewed vigor when repentance takes place because Satan hates for you to overcome any sin. He wants to keep you entangled. And here Israel has an opportunity to forsake that repentance, yet they don't. Look with me back at 1 Samuel 7, starting in verse 7.

7 Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8 And the people 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 So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him. 10 As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack

Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. 11 And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.

The Philistines hear noise and they come running. They come to see what Israel is doing and decide to attack. And notice, Israel's testing. They are afraid. They are fearful of the Philistines and their might. Like I said, attacks come upon true repentance. And in their fear in the past they have taken matters into their own hands. They have sought to provide their own deliverance. They have thought, "I know what is best here..." And everytime it ended in utter failure. And so here, hopefully learning from their past, they turn to the Lord.

- **Simply put**, like the Israelites, our initial emotional response might not be the right one. Even further, it could be sin. How many times had the Israelites been scared of enemies before? And in that emotion, they turn to something other than God. In our anger, in our sorrow, in our confusion, in all things, let us guard against looking to ourselves for the answer instead of looking to our God. Emotions are fine, emotions that lead us to sin are not.

So Israel is tested after their repentance, and then deliverance comes. Now that Samuel is back, they talk to the prophet of God. They talk to God's designated person. So briefly, two things I want to highlight in this deliverance:

- **Mercy**

So Samuel offers the lamb as the whole burnt offering. And as the Philistines draw near to attack, God thunders against them, he confuses them, He delivers His people. They cast themselves upon divine omnipotence. Upon omnipotent mercy. Israel has no strength here, and they know it. The Philistines are stronger, Israel has been

engaged in idolatry and they know what has happened in the past when they have turned to those idols for deliverance, they have no strength here and they know it. And so what do they do?

They throw themselves on the mercy of God. They cry out for Yahweh, slow to anger and abounding in love, to rescue them. And he does. Friends, this small picture in Israel's history points directly to our salvation that we experience today. Dead in our sins, loving the world more than we loved God, yet God in his mercy through the sacrifice of His Son saves you and I. The same omnipotent mercy that was at work here is at work today saving sinners and calling His people to repent. Just as a lamb was offered up for Israel, so the spotless lamb has been offered up for the saints. God in his mercy, and throughout the OT, was providing sign post after sign post to point forward to what is to come. And praise God for the finished work of Christ.

- Don't be blind to this! Don't have a hardened heart towards the mercy of God. Sometimes the Lord takes things from us so that we might rely on him all the more.. Do you recognize that? Or simply lament that which was taken?
- Don't have a hardened heart towards the mercy of God. You here who have been playing church far too long, hiding a life of sin, cast yourself upon the mercy of God. In Christ his mercy towards you is calling. Do not succumb to the temptation to continue to rely upon your works for your standing before God (continuing to think that just doing more "good than bad" is enough... it's not!), look to Christ, look to omnipotent mercy, and place your faith in the only one that can save.

Remarkably, Israel learns this here. They turn to God and through Samuel seek to pray to the only one that can deliver them.

The second thing we see in this deliverance is the role of a mediator.

- **Mediator**

Israel needed a mediator. If you know your Bible well you'll know that God uses a mediator to go between him and his people. Moses, Samuel, David, the Prophets. A God appointed person to go between us and God. And although we did not hear from him for some time, Samuel comes back and is doing the Lord's work.

He intercedes for the people of God. He goes between them and God and pleads their case. Isn't this in many ways striking from all the failed judges we had seen before? Judges who, although blessed with God's Spirit, often failed to pray to God for deliverance but instead are known for taking matters into their own hands. But here, the last of the Judges, pointing forward to the coming Davidic King, models what the mediator, the intercessor, is to do. Pray to God that he would act. As the last judge, Samuel makes war via prayer. As we have already seen, he extols the mercy of God and trusts that God will work.

So Samuel in his prophetic role has called the people to repentance. And now in the priestly role he intercedes for them via sacrifice and prayer. But as important as Samuel is, he is pointing forward to someone else. Samuel is functioning as a prophet, priest, and even a judge, but he points forward to the perfect prophet, priest, and king. You see Samuel's intercession, his sacrifice, his prayer, is fitting for this occasion but it has no lasting effect on you and I.

The people would sin again after this. They would need another sacrifice. Another mediator down the road...

But that is not so with the sacrifice and prayers of Christ, our great mediator. Just as Samuel is functioning as a priest for the people, so he points forward to our Great High Priest who once and for all time has made the perfect sacrifice for us. And not only that, he prays for us. He is interceding for us.

Luke 22:31-32 – 31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

That is a prayer that we know to be true for Simon Peter.

Romans 8:34 – 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Hebrews 4:14-16 – 14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Friends, Christ our risen Lord is interceding for us. Interceding for you, right now in all the problems you are facing. He is able to sympathize with you, right where you are. Marriage, family, money, faith, doubt, discipline, love, grace, he intercedes that you might overcome in the midst of things you are struggling with; Of where you find yourself lacking in this season.

And brothers and sisters, his prayers are effectual. That means they are effective. We in our Christian life rely on the prayers of Another whose prayers are always effectual (repeat).

Be encouraged this morning at the mercy of God shown toward you through our great mediator, Jesus Christ.

3. Remembrance

12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and

Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the Lord has helped us." 13 So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. 14 The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.

Repentance takes place, deliverance has come, and now in the wake of Israel's defeat of the Philistines, Samuel sets up a monument of remembrance to the Lord. He calls it Ebenzer (Stone of help) and explains why he does it, "till now the Lord has helped us." Obviously Samuel is commemorating what God has done for them most recently, but I think even more so he is commemorating and reflecting on God's dealings with Israel throughout the years. He's mindful of God's covenant faithfulness to a people that keep on forsaking the covenant.

That "till now" is the key. Until now, up until now. Samuel isn't saying the Lord won't keep helping them in the future, but he's remembering all that's happened in that until now. He's remembering God calling his forefather Abraham out of paganism to come and worship the one, true God. He's remembering plague after plague that was delivered like a hammer to Pharaoh and Egypt so that they would let his people go, He's remembering God preserving them in the wilderness and aiding them in the conquest. He's remembering time and time again God's covenant faithfulness.

Till now. Think back even to what the Israelites had experienced so recently. In chapter 4 they had been routed by the Philistines right near where this stone was set up. The memories of their fellow Israelites that had lost their lives, of the Ark being taken. But this stone of help, this rock of help reminds them that the Lord, even in the midst of their punishment, had not abandoned them. He was still

helping.

But the question comes, even in their defeats, “How was he helping?” How is it helping when the Philistines win and Israel has sorrow? Because those losses came in the midst of sin, and it is in the sorrow of sin that we often recognize the error of our ways and God uses that to drive us all the more to him.. So how was God helping them? “He was helping them to know their sins, and helping them to know the bitter fruit and woeful punishment of sin...” When Samuel says “Till now,” the links of that chain are not all mercies but also chastisements. The Lord will use both to draw us to himself.

Samuel, then, in this moment, this Ebenezer monument, seeks to remind Israel of God’s mercies from the past and the present. They are to show gratitude, because gratitude is a boost to faithfulness. Remember from Romans 1 the vice list? We studied this over a year ago now, but remember that list and remember how Paul characterizes the vice list? “They did not honor nor give thanks to God.” Ingratitude for what God has done or given, leads to calloused hearts that turn away from God and turn to our own selves for gratification; we turn to what we love, and God gives us over to it.

Samuel doesn’t want that for Israel. He wants grateful hearts that despite the failings, look to God’s grace and mercy and know that He has never abandoned nor forsaken them. He is with them. They must remember.

I wonder how well you remember the acts of God in your own life?

Many of us who have been following the Lord for sometime have prayed so hard in the past that he would do something, that he would help us, that he would guide us on a decision. And in his perfect timing he does. But we forget. We fail to practice Christian remembrance. Sometimes our hearts can be ungrateful for what has happened in the past because we are so focused on the present.

We were so *desperate* that God would answer, and now it's been a few months later, a few years later; and we find ourselves desperate for another answer... And so rather than remembering his mercy, his faithfulness towards us we are quick to look elsewhere for the answer. My friends, remember the wonderful works of God in your life. In the life of this church. (Think back to God's faithfulness to Christ Community over the years... it's encouraging to hear from those who have been here 20, 30, 40 years of how God has seen us through the storms).

- Be quick to share them with another. Remember the Ebenezers. Remember those moments of help that the Lord provided. It is a good thing to remember.

"Till now," the text says. "Till now" you and I can say as well. As we reflect over our lives, by the grace of God we are where we are. By grace alone. And if for you that's in a really tough spot, a season in the valley, where you feel despair closing in because you are pressed to the limit, would you remember now his faithfulness? You are wondering "can you still trust God to work?" Well, let God through His Word and by His Spirit encourage you this morning from 1 Samuel.

- Till now, the Lord has helped us. Up to this point he has been with us "till now the Lord has helped you, up to this point he has been with you." And day by day we can let that be our refrain. We don't know what the future holds, but day after day, till now the Lord has helped us. I love what one writer says, "We stand in the present but dwell in the past (remember the past) in order that we can be steadfast for the future." - Davis

Till now the Lord has helped us. And where has that help been given to the utmost? At the cross. **Romans 8:32** says **He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**

How has God most graciously and mercifully helped us? By not sparing his own Son. By pouring out his wrath on him instead of you and I. Look to the cross friends, and be reminded today and everyday, till now the Lord has helped us and He will continue to do so.

Let's pray.