

THE PRAYERS OF OLD SAMUEL
1 Samuel 12:19-25

Intro: Samuel was one who foretold the coming of the Messiah. Cf. Acts 3:22-24. Consequently he knew the promised redemption, and looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, Christ.

At the time of this account in 1 Sam. 12 he was an old man, and had served the Lord faithfully--as the chapter shows.

But Israel had recently sinned one of her most grievous sins in asking for a king. In doing so she was rejecting the Lord from being her king. See v. 12. Nothing could have been a greater reproach to the Lord their God!

But, when Samuel through the signs given from heaven convinced them of their sin, then they sought for his prayers. They knew that they could easily fall under the judgment of God.

In response we have those great words of this old prophet which are found in v. 23. (Read.) It seems that the older a servant of the Lord gets, the more he realizes the importance and value of unceasing prayer. Samuel considered prayer not only to be a part of his work, but he held that failure to pray would be sin for him. Thus he said, "God forbid," or far be it from me, that he should stop praying for them. The statement indicates that he had been praying.

Prayer for the people of God, and for the servants of the Lord, can be very discouraging. But in this way the Lord tests our faith and our patience.

But notice another thing: You have evidence here that Samuel's praying was reflected in his preaching. How did he pray for them? Read verses 19 through 25 and you will see. Perhaps this is what the apostles had in mind when they said, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Constant prayer followed by the teaching of the Word. We cannot help but see the connection between the two.

I come to this tonight thinking of the heart-searching that is to precede our observance of the Lord's Supper. When we see our sins, it causes us to feel our unworthiness to observe the Lord's Supper, and can often be very discouraging especially if one sin has followed another until something has been done which causes us great distress. Or, if we are dealing with people in our families or in our churches who have displeased God, how shall we minister to them, and how shall we pray for them? It would be hard to find anyone better to answer our questions than Samuel.

Four things are in text:

I. THE WILL OF GOD -- for the present.

This tells us what the burden of Samuel's prayers were for the people concerning what they should do at that very moment, and then continue to do.

Notice what he said in vv. 20, 21, and the first part of v. 24. They can be put into negative and positive categories.

A. Things not to do:

1. "Fear not." Cf. v. 20.
2. "Turn not aside from following the Lord." This is stated in v. 20 and repeated in v. 21.

B. Things to do:

1. Follow the Lord.
2. Serve the Lord.
3. Fear the Lord.

Note the prominence of the Lord in what Samuel had to say. And note also the twice-repeated statement, "with all your heart." What they did was to be done sincerely and lovingly--with love toward the Lord.

What does it mean to fear the Lord? It is one of the most repeated statements of Scripture and yet we all know very little about it.

To fear the Lord is to give Him and His will priority in my life. If I am faced with a decision as to whether I will do His will, or my own, or someone else's will, the Lord always wins. And I do this for two reasons:

- 1) Because I love Him.
- 2) Because I do not want to face the consequences of being disobedient.

This is a different kind of fear from that which Samuel mentioned in v. 20.

What does it mean to serve the Lord?

It means to make ourselves obedient to His will. We become His servants to do His bidding.

Secondly, notice what Samuel said about . . .

II. THE WORKS OF GOD.

In those times when our hearts are overwhelmed with a sense of our own sinfulness, how important it is for us to be able to meditate upon the works of the Lord. These have to do with the past, the present, and the future. How pitiful is the child of God who does not have these resources, who does not know these truths.

Samuel mentioned three of them.

A. A promise for the future: "For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake" (v. 22a).

The second is related to it:

B. The work of God in the past: "Because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (v. 22b).

Cf. Isa. 53:10.

C. This also looks backward: "For consider how (or what) great things he hath done for you" (v. 24b).

Cf. Rom. 8:31, 32.

If you dwell on these truths, your heart will be greatly encouraged and brought to peace.

But this is not all:

III. THE WAYS OF GOD.

And here I want to talk about Samuel.

It was a part of God's ways to have Samuel praying for the people of God, praying continuously, without ceasing. How could he do this for people who were so consistently disobedient?

It was only because of the work that the Lord was doing in Samuel's heart. God keeps us faithful in praying for His people, and even for His servants, when outwardly there is little or no encouragement. This is what God does.

Have you ever noticed how somebody will tell you that they are praying for you when you are so discouraged that for little or nothing you would give up?

But I will tell you something even better than what I could

say about Samuel: that has to do with the intercession of Christ. Cf. Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34.

But we are not through with the ways of God.

Samuel told the Israelites that he would not only pray for them, as he had been doing, but that he would teach them.

It is because we do not know the Word of God, because we forget what we know, that we are inclined to stay away from the Lord's Table.

It is God's way to direct us to His Word, and often He does this through the ministry of some person who comes to us with the Word of God.

One more thing:

IV. THE WARNING OF GOD (1 Sam. 12:25).

God's mercies are new every morning. His patience is the greatest wonder in the world. His love is everlasting. But it is because He loves us so much that He will not allow us to persist in sin. Therefore, the warning!

We believe in the grace of God, but the grace of God does not exclude the holiness of God, the righteousness of God, even the judgment of God.

What a dangerous thing it is to persist in sin! We may have our excuses as to why we are not doing what we know God wants us to do, but there is never any excuse for sin!

Concl: May the Lord enable us tonight to benefit from what Samuel said to the people of Israel, for our encouragement, and so we will know how to pray for those who are in spiritual need among the people of God.