

Victory Over Our Enemies

1Samuel 7:2-17

I was fairly fortunate growing up to avoid having problems with bullies.

That is not to say that I didn't have any encounters with them, it is just to say for the most part they left me alone.

There is one clear exception to that in my memory.

There was one kid who went to my grade school and played on my hockey team that decided I would be his target.

Thankfully, it was nothing like some kids have to deal with today, it was getting pushed to the ground, the odd punch in the arm, and a regular cross check when the coach wasn't looking.

Up until that point in my life I had always stood up to bullies, but this kid was different in my mind.

He was easily more than twice my size and three times my strength.

I knew that if I decided to fight back I'd get my clock cleaned.

I was afraid and so I just took it.

I remember one hockey practice we were out on the ice waiting in line and for no reason this kid turned around and cross checked me to the ground.

That wasn't unusual but what was new that day was my coach was standing right there watching it.

Finally I thought someone would come to my rescue, but instead the coach encouraged me to toughen up and skated away.

I know the bible says to turn the other cheek but to this day I wish I had punched that kid in the face.

No doubt I would have taken a real beating but at least it would have let him know there was some kind of cost to picking on me.

It was a terrible feeling to feel like I was at the mercy of this kid and there was no one to help.

I know I could have handled it better maybe even without punching him in the face and I know looking back in the grand scheme of things compared with what other people have to deal with it wasn't even a big deal, but in the moment it felt like a big deal.

It felt like an inescapable situation. It felt like I had an enemy that needed to be defeated that I could not defeat.

[Do you ever feel that way? Having come to learn something of God's word I've come to realize that things like that are to be expected in a fallen world. In fact, the Bible tells us that

Christians have very real and powerful enemies that need to be defeated. Our text **1Samuel 7:2-17** reminds us of that this morning. In this passage we meet the people of Israel still living under a threat from their enemies called the Philistines who lived right next door and caused them problems on a regular basis. Their experience I believe has some powerful lessons for us in terms of gaining victory over our enemies. I believe these lessons apply to more than just other human beings that set themselves against us, but to every kind of enemy we might face. I don't want to live like a scared little kid. I want to live in victory over every enemy of the cross. We should all want that, so let's pay close attention to what this text has to say. The first lesson for us is that...]

Point #1 – To be victorious we must turn to the LORD. (Verses 2-4)

No victory can be won by God's people against their enemies apart from crying out to Him for deliverance.

The people of Israel have been on a bit of a roller coaster in chapters 4-7. In particular as it relates to the Ark of the Covenant.

A clear tangible reminder of the Israelites being in a covenant relationship with the LORD.

In chapter four the Philistines had captured it, chapter five tells us about God's judgment on Israel's enemy, in chapter six the ark returns and Israel rejoices, but their joy is short lived because some failed to regard the holiness of God, they looked inside the ark and died.

In fear they move the ark to a place called Kiriath Jearim and keep it under guard.

It was like that for twenty years according to chapter seven verse two.

That length of time reminds us of the need for patience.

It is common for the people of God to be in hardship for long periods of time.

This is what they do in that time (**Verse 2b-4**).

When God put the Philistines in their place and brought the ark back to Israel, the Philistines went right back to oppressing the Israelites.

We should ask, why did God allow that to happen? Well, it would seem it is because the Israelites were still worshipping "foreign gods" according to verse 3.

They are worshipping "Ashtoreths" and "Baals" those are female and male fertility gods.

They were turning to false gods to supply their needs.

God's intention in causing the Philistines to oppress them is to turn them away from that foolishness and towards Him.

He could just bring judgment on them, but instead He brings a situation that opens their eyes to their need of the LORD.

A hard, but extremely glorious lesson that every believer needs to learn is that God is NOT primarily concerned with our temporary physical wellbeing.

We often are and often it is for good reason, but what we need to see is God has a bigger much more important goal.

God's goal is to turn our whole heart to Him.

To see Him as our only hope and our highest treasure.

If that goal is accomplished in our hearts then we cannot lose.

Just as Samuel promises the Israelites that the LORD will deliver them, so too He has promised to deliver us.

[The only way that can happen is if we turn to the LORD. That is the only pathway to victory over every enemy in our lives. Every other option leads to defeat. Our enemies are too great and it is impossible to defeat them on our own, but if we turn to the LORD with our whole heart we can be sure that no enemy will have the final say over us. Now how we turn to the LORD is important. That is what we see next in these verses, we see that...]

Point #2 – To be victorious we must be sincere. (Verses 5-6)

God does not save those who look good on the outside. He saves those who are genuinely converted in their hearts.

Samuel seems to at least have some sense that the people are truly turning to the LORD after they put away their idols (Verse 5).

'All Israel' probably means a substantial number of people come from each of the tribes from all over the nation.

This call to sincere devotion to the LORD is for all the people of God.

Samuel calls them to 'Mizpah' a name that means 'watchtower'.

That is a most appropriate place to call them as they are dealing with their enemies.

A watchtower is the place from which the people would be warned of an attack.

Calling them there is a way of calling them to keep watch.

It's a way of preparing for battle.

The prophet's willingness to intercede for them tells us that he believes they are genuine in their desire to come to the LORD.

We can also see that in their actions described in **verse 6**.

Commentators think that the pouring out of water here is symbolic of pouring out their hearts.

It is a way of saying we are holding nothing back, we are all in when it comes to giving ourselves to the LORD.

On top of that they are fasting as well.

How many people here can live without food?

We all need it right. That is what makes fasting such a powerful spiritual exercise.

It is denying ourselves what we need physically as a way of saying we need God more.

Those things add significant weight to their confession of sin at the end of the verse.

They are giving strong indications that they really believe in their hearts that they have been wrong and are acknowledging that God is right.

That is absolutely essential to gaining victory over the enemies of God's people.

It's essential because it is impossible to fool the LORD.

[Remember Ananias and Sapphira. They were members of the early church and thought they would make a name for themselves as very generous people by selling some land giving some of the money to the apostles but claiming it was all of it. There was no obligation to sell their land and there was no obligation to give the money. There was a huge problem lying about it. The Holy Spirit knew their hearts and God struck them down because of it.]

Sunday morning Christianity doesn't save anybody.

What you put in the offering box doesn't save you.

Good doctrine that is only intellectual will do you no good in the face of a fearsome enemy.

What does the Bible say? It says, "If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

[No one can come to the LORD and be delivered from their enemies apart from a sincere heart. Now a genuine desire to come to the LORD does not turn us into robots that never have any struggles. We can see that here among the people of Israel. As they are gathered seeking the LORD something happens that shows us this third lesson...]

Point #3 – To be victorious we must persist through fear. (Verses 7-8)

Enemies of God's people can at times appear powerful and intimidating. Fear is our natural response to such things, but we must act counter to our nature and keep the faith.

Verse 7 sets the scene for us, look there with me.

We need to keep in mind here the whole reason the people are now seeking after the LORD.

They are seeking Him because for the last twenty years or more they have been under "the hand of the Philistines" as Samuel describes it in verse 3.

That likely means that either they have been getting beat every time they fight, or they have been just surrendering and losing crops, land, and other resources to their enemies.

It would be like giving up your lunch money to a bully every day and one day deciding you are not going to give it to him anymore.

If you have been beat up by him before and everything on paper says you will be beat up again aren't you going to be afraid?

Of course! That is the people of Israel here, but notice what it says here in **Verse 8**.

It would have been easy in that moment to go back to what they were doing before.

They could have sized up the situation and said, "Let's get the Baals and Ashtoreths back because obviously serving only the LORD isn't working out."

They could have gone out to their enemy and said, "Sorry about getting together like this, what can we give you to make up for it?"

They could have tried to run away.

They could have done a lot of things in their fear, but they stick with it.

Even though they are afraid, they ask Samuel to keep asking God to rescue them.

Having no fear to do what is right would be great, but it is also no small thing to trust the LORD when we are afraid.

[Imagine two sisters standing on the edge of a pool ready to jump into their father's arms. One sister is fearless. She has made the jump a hundred times. She knows how it is all going to go and jumping doesn't bother her in the least. The other sister is afraid. The last time she jumped her little brother was supposed to catch her but let her down and remembering that experience she is fearful to make the jump. Even though she is afraid she trusts her dad and makes the jump. Now, which of the two girls are caught by their dad? Both of them are! Why? Because dad's ability to catch them is not diminished by fear.]

I love how Don Carson puts it. He says, "It is not the intensity or the quality of our faith that saves us, but the object of our faith."

We don't need to be people who are never afraid in the face of great enemies.

Bad news from the doctor is scary.

Increasing hostility to Christianity is scary.

Standing up for what is right when everybody else is going in the other direction is scary.

If you can do all of those things without feeling any fear that is wonderful and I am happy for you.

If those things make you afraid, persist in faith through it!

[If we do that brothers and sisters we will not be disappointed with the outcome. We can see that here in this chapter. What happens here for the people of Israel will also happen for everyone who belongs to the LORD. That is because of this fourth lesson about having victory over our enemies. Here is the lesson...]

Point #4 – God will always be victorious. (Verses 9-12)

The LORD never loses when He takes the field of battle. He will prevail over our enemies.

Samuel does continue to intercede for the people in Verse 9.

God sees that the people have genuinely turned to Him.

He accepts the confession of their sin and He accepts the sacrifice of a lamb that Samuel has made on their behalf. (To be a Christian we must confess our sin as well and God Himself has provided the perfect lamb in the LORD Jesus Christ)

Because of all that we read this in **verses 10-12.**

I love the phrase in verse 10 “The LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines.”

Whatever that was it was supernatural and it was the difference maker in the battle.

The enemies of Israel are thrown into confusion by God and the people of God win the victory.

Let’s ask an important question about what happens here. Was this hard for the LORD?

There is no sense from the text whatsoever that this was a difficult thing for God to do.

God takes the field of battle and wins the day. It is as simple as that.

That is exactly what happens every time God goes to war, He wins.

Samuel sees that. That is why he sets up a stone and calls it “Ebenezer” meaning “rock of help”.

He wants everyone to both know and remember that God is the reason the people get the victory over their enemies.

[When I was in Bible College I played pick up with some guys from church once a week. Most of the guys were average, a handful were good, but there was one guy that stood out above the crowd. When he was young he was drafted by the Vancouver Canucks, I don’t believe he ever played in the NHL but he was good enough to get drafted. If you put all the best players on one team and all the worst on the other but gave the team of bad players that guy, the terrible team could easily win. He could skate through everybody and score whenever he wanted. It was always good to be on his team.]

That is how it is with the LORD. If He is on your side then you will always be victorious over your enemies.

That brings up an important question, what or who are our enemies?

On this side of the cross we aren't going to war against the Philistines, but that doesn't mean we don't have enemies.

There are godless people who hate the message of the cross and therefore will hate us and hurt us if given the opportunity.

Certainly we can count the devil as our enemy.

He seeks to tempt us toward evil, he wants us to be filled with fear and doubt.

There are the enemies of sickness and death.

There is our own sin nature, which is perhaps our greatest enemy of all.

Those enemies are far more powerful than us and we all have to face them.

The good news is that all of these enemies have been defeated by the cross and empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

Godless people cannot take away your inheritance in heaven, the power of the devil and sin is nothing in comparison to the power of the Holy Spirit living in the believer.

Sickness and death will not have the final word over those who belong to Jesus.

God will prevail over them all.

[I know it doesn't always feel like it, but if you know and believe that Jesus died and rose again then you can be sure that God will be victorious over every single one of those enemies. If we could just see past our momentary afflictions and into a glorious eternity with Jesus we would see that is true. That brings us to one more lesson about having victory over our enemies. We must turn to the LORD, we must be sincere, we need to persist through fear, we need to remember that God is always victorious, and finally we need to know that...]

Point #5 – Lasting victory requires consistency. (Verses 13-17)

When God grants deliverance on this side of eternity there is a great temptation to slide back into godless thinking and behavior. If we are to enjoy lasting fruit from turning to the LORD we have to stick with it.

The victory over the Philistines is described for us in verses 13-14.

We'll see the Philistines back later on in the book, but here during the bulk of Samuel's life and ministry they are no longer a threat to the Israelites.

They no longer come into the land and even towns that were lost to the enemy are recovered.

There is even the additional note at the end of verse 15 that there was peace with the Amorites who were typically thought of as enemies of Israel.

They lived on the East Side of the Jordan River which is the far side of the country from where the Philistines lived.

Because they had sought the LORD He gave them victory and peace all around.

With the victory won they could have become complacent and drifted back towards the Baals and Ashtoreths, but we see this instead (**Verses 15-17**).

Samuel continues to 'judge' meaning he continues to administer justice among the people of God.

He continues to do this year after year, traveling regularly to bring the LORD's will to the people.

He sets up an altar to the LORD to continue to intercede for the people and every indication we have from this text is that the people continually submit themselves to his leadership as long as he judged the nation.

Do you see? They kept seeking the LORD.

[Jesus illustrated this point with a parable. It is a story about seed falling on four different kinds of dirt. You can read about it in Matthew 13. He says, some seed falls on the path and gets eaten right away by birds, some on rocky ground where it springs up quickly but doesn't last long, some among the thorns that lasts awhile but eventually gets choked out, and finally some on good soil which takes roots, grows, and bears fruit. The seed is the word of God and the dirt is people. The clear difference between the types of soil is how long the seed lasts.]

The Bible says, those who persevere to the end will be saved not those who hang around for a short time.

If you find yourself close to God in times of trouble and then drifting after He has brought you deliverance then don't expect to be victorious in the end.

On the other hand, if you cling to God through thick and thin. Seek His face and trust in Him all the days of your life then you can be sure that you will prevail over every enemy no matter how great it may seem.

Turn to the LORD is the plea of this text, turn to Him with sincere hearts, persist in faith through fear, know that God always wins, and stick with the LORD.

If we do that, no enemy can defeat us.