

CONSIDER WHAT GREAT THINGS GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU

If I asked you to describe the children of Israel with one word or phrase, how would you answer? How about “God’s chosen people?” That’s true isn’t it? I bet most of you would have thought of words like ungrateful, complainers, forgetful, idolaters. How about the word unfaithful? That one word would describe them in a nutshell, wouldn’t it? What word would you use then to describe God? Forgiving, patient, loving, merciful. How about the word faithful? I think that describes God in a nutshell. Our text for today is part of Samuel’s retirement address to the people. In his message he reminded the people of God’s undeserved faithfulness to them in spite of their repeated unfaithfulness to him. Samuel told them to sit back and consider all the great things God had done for them. This morning I want you do the same thing. **Consider what great things God has done for you.**

In order for us to understand the words of our text, we need a few moments to look at what was going on in the previous verses. Samuel brought up some moments in Israel’s history when they had rebelled against God and then what happened because of it. He then specifically referred to one of their acts of rebelliousness against God that they would regret. The Israelites demanded that they have a king like all the other heathen nations around them, a king who would rule and lead them into battle. Samuel warned them about what a king would do; that they didn’t need a king because God was their king. Demanding a king was a slap in God’s face. Yet they insisted thinking they knew better. So God basically said, “Whatever” and granted their request. He gave them a king by the name of Saul who would turn out to be a very wicked king.

Years ago the singer Garth Brooks came out with a song in which he thanked God for unanswered prayers. What he meant was not that God didn’t answer his prayers but that God had said no to his prayers giving the impression it was not answered. Aren’t we like the Israelites more than we would like to admit? Just as they thought they knew better than their all-knowing God, don’t we often think the same way? We bring our requests to God, which is a good thing, but I’m afraid it often is with the attitude, “Not your will be done but mine.” Then how often don’t we complain or get angry with God for unanswered prayers, in other words, when God says no and doesn’t give us what we think is best for us? Shame on us! How dare we treat our gracious God like that!

Getting back to Samuel’s message, he told them that even though they had rejected God as their king, he had not rejected them. Then to prove to them that what he said was true, he told them he was going to call on the Lord to send thunder and rain. That might not sound like a big deal but this was wheat harvest time. Rain at this time of the year was unheard of. Well, the rain came and the people said to Samuel in the verse prior to our text. **Pray to the Lord your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.** They realized their sinfulness and their unworthiness and that they deserved death. They asked Samuel to ask God for mercy on their behalf.

Isn’t that basically what we do at the beginning of each service? We confess our own unworthiness and ask God for his mercy. The response you hear from the pastor is priceless, one of mercy and forgiveness; a response that reminds us of the love of our faithful God of grace. It really is similar to what Samuel told them in the opening verses of our text. **Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own.** The Israelites were afraid that God had had enough; that he was going to reject them. They knew that’s what they deserved. Samuel comforted them and said, “No! God won’t reject you. Think of whom he made you. God in his grace chose you to be his people from whom the Messiah will come. But don’t be so stupid to go out and worship the false gods of the people around you. They are useless. They can’t hear. They can’t speak.

They can't save because they have no power. They exist only in the minds of the people. So be thankful for the only true God that you have and follow him with all your heart."

My friends, Samuel is speaking the same message to you and me. By the grace of God, God has chosen and called us to be his own people through faith in Jesus. We know who the true God is, the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is our loving, faithful God who will never reject anyone who comes to him again and again with a repentant heart and says, "Lord, forgive me for Jesus' sake." Nothing we say or do can change who our God is. No matter how loud the atheists might cry out, "There is no god;" no matter how loud the Muslims cry out, "The only true God is Allah;" no matter how people tear apart his word and trample all over it; no matter how many false gods people choose whether it be Allah or Buddha, money, fame or power, the Triune God remains our unchanging God of grace. The same Lord who bailed the Israelites out of mess after mess and continually held his forgiving arms out to this stubborn and ungrateful people is our Lord who continually holds out his forgiving arms to foolish sinners like us and always will. That's how much he loves us. Nothing can change that.

Samuel was not done with the Israelites yet. He had more spiritual advice and encouragement for them. **As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.** Samuel promised the people that he would not stop praying for them. He may be retiring as their pastor but his would continue to pray for them especially that they would remain faithful to their faithful God. That was their responsibility and privilege-to show respect by the way they lived, by the way they worshiped, by the thankful and positive attitude they displayed. Their focus was to be on their never-changing God and the great things he had done for them .

As one of your pastors, I can assure you that I as well as Pastor Schwartz am praying for you, praying that you remain faithful followers of the Lord Jesus who find joy in serving him in your home, at work and in the church. I also ask that you continue to pray for your pastors that we faithfully and joyfully carry out our duties as your shepherds and remain faithful to God's Word. Never take for granted what we here at Zion have, our house of worship, the beautiful organ and piano for our music, the altar, the cross, the triptych, the windows, everything we have here in our sanctuary which reminds us of the work of each person of the Trinity and the sacrifice our God was willing to make for us to earn our forgiveness and salvation. These are all blessings from the hand of the God of all grace. How about this blessing we often take for granted? Look around at one another, your brothers and sisters in Christ. What a priceless gift we are to one another! What a blessing to be able to come every week and worship in this peaceful house of worship with our fellow Christians and friends!

Then after worship we walk out these doors and face the realities of life in a sinful and evil world. How do we handle them? As we witness the deterioration of our society, our values and morals; as we see the disregard for human life and the violence in the world; as we look at how God's institution of marriage is being rewritten by our society; as we see the general lack of love and respect people have toward one another; as we then deal with our own sins and failures and how we so often hurt others with our words and deeds; as we know that a hardship or tragedy could be right around the corner for us or a loved one, how do we cope? How do we not focus on the bad all around us and the bad that happens to us? It's not easy. God knows that. That's why he comes to us with his calming and gentle voice and says, "Don't forget about me. Consider and think about the great things I have done for you. Don't forget that I chose you to be my child before I created the world, and then called you to be my own through the waters of holy Baptism. Don't forget that I took on human flesh so that I could live and die for you. Don't forget that I rose from the dead so I can assure you that I have prepared a place for you in heaven, all bought and paid for with my holy, precious blood. Don't forget that nothing can separate you from my love. Don't forget that you can cast all your anxiety on me because I care for you. Don't forget that I am with you, that **I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**" All the bad in life, all the negative cannot take away all the great things I have done for you."

My friends, through faith in Jesus and through your contact with God's Word, take your eyes off the bad and focus on these invisible blessings from God. Then, enjoy every minute you have with your spouse, your kids,

your parents, your friends; enjoy all the visible blessings God puts into your lives each day; blessings which make us smile; blessings which make life worth living. Consider what great things God has done for you and appreciate them, truly appreciate them and thank God for them. Thank him by fearing him above all things and serving him faithfully with all your heart. Amen.