UBF Sunday Message 1 Samuel 03/29/2020

The LORD always helps us

1 Sam 7:2-27 Key verse 12

 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mitzpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.”

 As we know, people in NYC, including us, are living in the midst of a pandemic. We are living under the constant fear of an invisible enemy; Covid 19, a virus that has infected 652,000 and has killed 25,000 worldwide.

 The Israelites also lived under the constant fear of their enemy, the Philistines. They were supposed to live as priests, only serving God. But they lived as slaves with fear, serving other gods. How could they overcome their fear? They, as a nation, turned to God in repentance. When they returned to God, God helped them to overcome their fear and defeat the Philistines. Samuel took a stone and set it up, naming it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.” In this passage, we will think about how we can overcome the fear of our invisible enemy: Satan, and now Covid 19, and reset our order of life as royal priests - spiritual rulers - in this pandemic.

 I. Turn to God (1-9)

 It was a dark time in Israel’s history. They had been defeated by their enemy, the Philistines. They even lost the ark of the covenant to them. The wife of the priest, Phinehas, said just before her death, “the Glory of God has departed from Israel” (4:21). The Israelites lost God and His calling. So they lost their identity as God’s people. By God’s mercy, the ark of God was returned to Israel and was put in Abinadab’s house. The ark remained there a long time – twenty years in all. The Philistines had subdued Israel for twenty years. The Israelites were under constant fear. The NIV 1984 version states that they “mourned.” They came to realize that they were far away from God. They realized that they should return to the LORD. So all the people of Israel turned back to the LORD (2b).

 What does returning to God entail? First, it involves the external action of removing one’s idols. Samuel said to all the Israelites in verse 3, “If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” Second, it involves the internal action of repenting of one’s sin. Verse 6 states, “When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the LORD.”

 It was a National Day of Repentance in Mizpah. Samuel said in verse 5, “Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the LORD for you.” So all the Israelites came to Mizpah and fasted and repented of their sins.

 When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. So they said to Samuel in verse 8, “Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.”

 They feared their enemy, the Philistines, because they had threatened their lives for a long time. We also fear our enemy. Nowadays, our invisible enemy is Covid 19. This virus has infected the entire world, more than 600,000 people, killing 25,000 since Dec. 2019. WHO declared the pandemic of Covid 19. In the US, this enemy has infected more than100, 000 people, killing 2000. In NYC nearly 30,000 people have been infected and 517 have died as of March 28th.

 However, we should also know that we human beings, according to Jesus, not the WHO or CDC, are living in a pandemic outbreak of not Covid 19 but of the sin virus. This virus is more deadly and infectious than Covid 19. Covid 19’s infection rate is 0.4% in NYC, yet the infection rate of the sin virus is 100 %. The mortality rate of Covid 19 is 2-3%, but the sin virus’ mortality rate is 100%. Covid 19 causes physical death, but the sin virus causes eternal death. The problem is that everyone is aware of Covid 19 and is afraid of being infected while most people are not aware of the sin virus and not afraid of being infected. There is no cure for this sin virus. The world is helpless and hopeless. That is why God came to the world as a man and lived among us and eventually died, shedding his blood on the cross in order to provide humanity with cure.

 Verse 9 is a foreshadow of Christ, the Lamb of God who cried out on the cross for the world. It says, “Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel’s behalf, and the LORD answered him.” Samuel killed a suckling lamb, shedding its blood, and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. As a Lamb of God, Jesus was also killed, shedding his blood and sacrificed his life as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to God on behalf of the whole world. Luke 23:46 says, “Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.” Through his blood, he provided the world with a cure for the sin virus.

 The cure for the sin virus is in His blood. When the Ebola virus broke out in 2014, a patient at Emory Hospital was dying. There was no medicine to cure the Ebola infection. His only hope was the blood of another person who had recovered from Ebola. The patient received the blood and was cured. The donor’s blood had the antibody against the Ebola virus, because he had recovered from Ebola. However, no one in history is able to recover from the deadly plague called “death” that is caused by the sin virus. No one can say, “I have recovered from death.” There is no cure for death. But Jesus recovered from death. Jesus said in Rev 1:18, “I am the living One; **I was dead**, and look, I am alive for ever and ever! I hold the keys of death and Hades.” Since Jesus recovered from death, he has the antibody against death. Whoever receives His Blood will be recovered from death and have eternal life. Do you want to receive His Blood? Then, confess your sins and accept Jesus as your Messiah. And you will receive His Blood.

 II. Trust in God (10-17)

 What happened to the Philistines? While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Kar. The Israelites defeated their enemy! It was a great victory. When they returned to the LORD with repentance, God helped them to defeat their enemy.

 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mitzpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.” Samuel set up a stone to remember God’s help. Here we learn a few things about God. First, The LORD always helps us. The word, “thus far” means “up until the present point.” It points to the past and the present. The LORD had helped the nation Israel up until the present point by defeating their enemy; the Philistines. God was faithful to them when they returned to God. The word “thus far” also points to the future. It has a prophetic element. Since God had helped them thus far, he would also help them in future. So the word thus far points to God’s faithfulness not only up until the present but also into the future. Since God has been faithful to us thus far, he will be faithful to us in future. God’s faithfulness in the past is the proof that he will be faithful to us in the future. So Ebenezer points to Jehovah Jireh, the LORD who will provide for us in the future.

 Second. The LORD’s help comes with repentance. The LORD helped the Israelites when they turned to the LORD with repentance. The LORD’s help doesn’t come when we worship idols. Victory doesn’t come when we are unrepentant. We should do our part so that God would do His part. Our part is repentance.

 Third, The LORD’s help has a goal. God helped the Israelite to defeat their enemy, the Philistines. God’s help always has a “direction.” The direction was to restore the order of the nation, Israelites. And the goal of God’s help was to make Israel a kingdom of priests and a holy nation for the whole world. For that, the Israelites had to be spiritually fit for service by being faithful to God. However, they were unfaithful to God, worshiping idols: Baals and Ashtoreths. They, instead of living as priests, became slaves living in fear, being subdued by the Philistines. The order was up side down. But God helped them to restore the order of the nation when they returned to the LORD with all their hearts. They subdued the Philistines, restored the territories and had peace with the Amorites. Verses 13-14 states, “So the Philistines were subdued and they stopped invading Israel’s territory. Throughout Samuel’s lifetime, the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines. The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to Israel, and Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.”

 So, how can we overcome fear in this pandemic of Covid 19? When we look back our lives, we find God’s faithfulness: God’s Ebenezer. So we trust in God. As I said before, God’s faithfulness in the past is the proof that he will be faithful to us in the future. We believe in Jehovah Jireh. Yesterday he helped us as God of Ebenezer. Today He is going to help us as God of Immanuel. Tomorrow He will help us as God of Jehovah Jireh. So faith, not fear, should be our response to the present pandemic. Faith in the blood of Jesus is the vaccine to this Covid 19 virus.

 David said in Ps 91:1-7, “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’ Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge, his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, or the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.”

 We have two choices: to live as slaves in fear or to live as priests in faith. Jesus died, shedding his blood in order to restore the order of our lives, from slave to priest; from fear to faith; from victim to victor. If we believe in Jesus, we should honor his blood by living as royal priests in faith, not in fear. We should reset the order of our lives as priests in the present pandemic so that we may be a blessing to the world, beginning with NYC. If we live as slaves in fear, we cannot be blessing. Rather, we would be burden to the world. There are already enough burdens in the world. As royal priests, we should help others in this crisis.

 I am so inspired by many people who offer what they have in order to help people in this crisis. New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees offered $ 5 million to the state of Louisiana to help people who are suffering from corona virus. Tesla CEO Elon Musk offered 1,255 ventilators for free to help the fight against Covid 19 in NYC. The Five-star Four Seasons NY Hotel offers free stay in their hotels for health care providers. A one-night stay in that hotel costs $1,295. But Ty Warmer, the owner of the hotel said, “Our health care providers are working tirelessly on the front lines of this crisis. Many of those working in NYC have to travel long distances to and from their homes after putting in 18-hour days. They need a place close to work where they can rest and regenerate. I heard Governor Cuomo’s call to action during one of his press conferences, and there was no other option for us but to do whatever we could to help.”

 Drew Brees has money, so he offered $ 5 million. Elon Musk has machines, so he offered ventilators. Ty Warmer has hotels. So he offered hotels. They offered what they have. Let me ask you, “What do you have?” Offer what you have. We don’t have $ 5 million like Drew Brees. We don’t have ventilators like Elon Musk. We don’t have hotels like Ty Warmer. However, as Christians, we have what others don’t have, that is, “the blood of Jesus.” We have the Power of the Blood of Jesus. As Christians, we should offer “prayer in the blood of Jesus” every day so that God may cover NYC, US, and the world with the healing power of the blood of Jesus. We, as royal priests, should offer our prayer day and night so that God may heal our land with the blood of Jesus. Just as the Israelites defeated their enemy with the blood of the suckling lamb and with prayer and repentance, we should defeat our enemy, Covid 19 with the blood of the Lamb and with prayer and repentance.

 Personally, I would like to offer what I have, besides prayer. As s physician, I have tested Covid 19 only for my patients. I didn’t extend the Covid 19 test to the public for fear of high exposure to the virus. But when I saw people waiting for hours to get tested in Elmhurst Hospital on TV, I realized that I have to do something. Also, as a royal priest, I should be a blessing to people, the city and the nation. So I decided to extend the test to the public although it may increase exposure to the virus. That is what I can offer in this crisis. I pray that all of us may live as priests in faith not as slaves in fear so that we may help people in this crisis, bringing glory to God. We should also pray for our leaders and health care providers. Let’s pray.