

## **“INQUIRING OF THE LORD.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Texts for the Sermon: I Samuel 23:1-5**

### **Introduction.**

It is human nature to want answers to our questions and solutions for our problems. The human mind is incredibly uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. We don't like not knowing what's going on and what to do. We are meaning-seeking creatures. Covid has shown us that.

Scripture gives us two perspectives on this human drive for meaning.

On the one hand, reality tells us life is a complex mystery and God often calls us to walk by faith and not by sight. God has given us the book of Ecclesiastes to help us navigate life under the sun when wisdom seems elusive and answers are not what we expect. For help with this I encourage you to join us on Sunday evenings to dig into this great book.

Scripture also teaches us God is the God of all wisdom who delights to impart wisdom to us through Scripture and prayer. God is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God.

### **Inquire of the Lord.**

So it is we find the phrase “inquire of the Lord” about 40 times in the Bible. The Hebrew word means to seek or ask, as in to seek the Lord for supernatural guidance.

We hear the phrase “he inquired of the Lord” so often in Scripture that when we come to the phrase “he didn't inquire of the Lord” we trip over it, we notice it, it stands out to us as a sign of trouble. This is not going to turn out well.

There's a stark incident of this in Joshua 9. Joshua was leading the armies of Israel in taking over the Promised Land and one of the foreign nations, the Gibeonites, came to deceive Joshua and the Israelites. They ran a scam on them and Joshua didn't check it out, he didn't inquire of the Lord, and Israel got taken, and entered into an unholy agreement with the Gibeonites.

We read a sad commentary on the life of King Saul in I Chronicles:

**I Chronicles 10:13-14** Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. 14 He did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.

Clearly inquiring of the Lord is what God wants all of us to do and with much frequency. I am sure all of us can think of times when we have done something without first praying.

### **I Samuel 23:1-5, David inquires of the Lord.**

I turn our attention this morning to this brief text in Scripture because it is the first time in the life of David when he turns and inquires of the Lord, when he seeks direct communication with God. It is a text that speaks to us and our need at this time in our church's history.

David is still a young man. He had been anointed by Samuel to be the next king, but at this point Saul is still king and is aggressively trying to find and kill David. So David and the men with him are on the run. Their lives are at risk. He has his hands full just trying to stay alive and keep his men safe.

He receives word that the Philistines are raiding the threshing floors in Keilah and stealing their grain, which of course is their livelihood, creating an economic and humanitarian crisis.

David was willing to help these people of Israel. What a gracious spirit, that in the midst of his own trial and extremity, he considers the needs of others.

But before he goes he inquires of the Lord, "Shall I go and attack?" This is a testimony to his spiritual maturity at a young age. Indeed, he shows himself to be a man after God's own heart. David didn't ask his military advisors first, he turned to God. And God gave him a clear answer.

But David's men are not so sure. Fleeing from Saul and hiding out was one thing, fearful enough. But going and picking a fight with the armies of the Philistines was a whole other matter. They already had enough enemies, they didn't need to go and make some more.

Saul's army was pursuing behind them. If they go out against the Philistines, they might end up having a two front battle, one in front and one behind. Talk about your rock and hard place.

So David's mighty men are just real men after all, with fears and doubts, they are thinking about their own skin right now and not others. More concerning is they were not united, but divided. There was a division between the leaders and the followers. They question the wisdom or advisability of such action.

So does David just quit, throw his hands up and say forget about it, is he paralyzed? After all the voice of wisdom can come through men. Does he argue or debate with them? David listens to his men. He doesn't just trust his own wisdom. He goes back to God again, "Is this you, God, speaking through these men or do you still want me to go?"

God answers again with greater clarity, "Arise, go and *I* will give you victory."

The seriousness of David's challenge was heightened, to test their trust in God. God wanted them to see His sufficiency.

So this time they listen to God. They were united through seeking the Lord and listening to the Lord's voice and they go and win the battle and save the people of Keilah.

This is the power of answered prayer on several levels. *First*, in just knowing what to do. *Second*, in bringing unity of mind and heart. *Third*, in giving the comforting assurance of God's presence and favor. *Fourth*, in a fruitful result from their obedience to God's Word.

It was David's habit to inquire of the Lord whenever he was in a particularly challenging situation, whenever he didn't know what to do.

### **How does this apply to our Phase III building project?**

I am calling us to five weeks of prayer, of inquiring of the Lord to seek His will for us.

This project is huge. It might be the biggest thing we have taken on in our history. And just like the situation David and his men faced, there is some fear and trepidation. Some have doubts or reservations. Some are for it, some not so much. Some are full steam ahead, some are putting on the brakes. Some think it is impossible for us to do it. Some think the timing is off.

There is no lack of human opinions, we all have our opinions about this Phase III building project. And some of us think that whatever opinion we have, that is the Lord's opinion.

But have we asked God, have we inquired of the Lord? Have we sought the Lord in earnest inquiring prayer with hearts open to His voice and will? Are we willing to take some time to listen and discern if God is in this, if this is God's leading?

I don't want us to presume on the Lord or assume each of us knows God's heart and mind. I don't want us to miss out on what God wants, because we didn't ask. As I have said before, there is one thing worse than waiting on the Lord, that is wishing you had.

### **How should we inquire of the Lord?**

We are not left in the dark on this. David left us his prayer journal, his written prayers of how he inquired of the Lord. It is the book of Psalms. Some of those Psalms were written during the time of I Samuel 23.

We know that David was a man after God's own heart, but how was he a man after God's own heart? Listen to these *four ways* David inquired of the Lord and apply them to our need here. Let's do these four things over the next five weeks of inquiring of the Lord together.

*First, David prayed with a heart of confident assurance God heard his prayers.*

**Psalm 18:6** In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

**Psalm 66:16** The Lord has heard my cry, the Lord accepts my prayer.

May we be like David. In every need, in every trial, in every difficulty, may we cast our cares upon the Lord, confident He will hear and answer.

**Ephesians 3:20** [He] is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.

Pray with faith and confidence.

*Second, David prayed with a repentant heart.*

**Psalm 66:18** If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

**Isaiah 59:2** Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Sin is a great obstacle to hearing the Lord. Let's be constantly confessing our sin and sinful desires, our lack of love and faith. Ask God to create in us a pure heart that we might see Him.

*Third, David prayed with a humble heart.*

Another great obstacle to seeking the Lord and inquiring of the Lord is pride so humble yourself.

**Psalm 25:9** He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble His way.

**I Peter 5:6-7** Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

When we pray we show our dependency on God rather than on ourselves. When we pray we show in whom is our confidence. We always lose when we act independently from God. We never lose when we humbly seek His wisdom, counsel, guidance and direction.

*Fourth, David prayed with a trusting heart.*

**Psalm 20:7** Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

**Isaiah 31:1** Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord!

The more we seek particular wisdom and guidance from God through prayer and His Word, the more He is honored and glorified, and the more we are benefited and blessed.

God doesn't mock His children, He doesn't ignore our needs, our pleadings with Him in earnest, sincere prayer.

**Proverbs 3:5-6** Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

God wants to be inquired of. We have not because we ask not.

I don't want to know what we can do, I want to know what God will do. I don't want my will to be done in this, I want His will to be done.

Before we do anything, before we take one step, let us seek the counsel of God. How many times have all of us rushed into things without prayer? Before we do anything let us pray. Make this your constant habit before any decision, before any plans, before any action.

Apply this teaching to every aspect of your life and to the project before us, to pray with confidence, with repentance, with humble hearts and with trust.

My plea this morning is that we, as God's children, in this place will unite our hearts and prayers in seeking God's wisdom and will for this Phase III project. With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

I urge us to daily prayer in private, at home, before meals, during family devotions, and whenever we gather together, whether for worship or Bible Study or in our ministry teams.

Here is the plan. Next Sunday you will receive more detailed information and explanations and answers to questions in your boxes.

On Tuesday, March 22 there will be a Town Hall meeting to answer more questions and hear more clarification.

Then in five weeks on Sunday, March 27 we will distribute the pledge cards and you will have a couple of weeks to respond with what you prayerfully believe God would have you do in response to His leading.

After that time the pledges will be totaled and the council will bring a recommendation to the congregation.

But over and around and under all of this we want to be inquiring of the Lord and asking for His will to be done. The first thing must always be prayer.

## **Conclusion and application.**

Let us pray because we want this to be about God and not us, we want Him to receive all the glory and we want to guard our hearts from pride.

Let us pray because this is bigger than us, which is how God likes to do things. He makes it so we have to depend on Him and we don't take the credit. Remember when God reduced Gideon's army to 300 so he would see the battle was the Lord's. Remember when Jesus told the disciples to feed the five thousand with five loaves of bread.

Let us pray because these kinds of projects can divide a church, and we want to be united around His will and not our own wills. We want to make a decision based on faith and not fear.

Let us pray because we want to be faithful and obedient to God's Word, and He has commanded us to make our requests known to God. Praying is obedience.

Let us pray because we know how often our own opinions can be wrong or misguided or selfish.

Let us pray because there is an enemy who opposes every work of God and we need God's strength. Let us pray so we can see the power of God displayed among us. Let us pray.

**Prayer:** Gracious Lord, you are, indeed, enthroned above the highest heaven. You are great beyond greatness, glorious beyond glory. Yet, in love and mercy, you reach down to help us. Every day you bend down to hear and answer our daily, routine prayers in miraculous ways. Father, thank you that you are the one true prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God and that you only give good gifts. Help us to see your answers when they aren't what we asked for or wanted. And all of this we ask, believing in the strong name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.