

1 Samuel 11 - The Need for a Spirit-filled Savior

One of the things I mentioned in the very first sermon in Samuel is that God loves to tell the same story over and over. It's actually his story, his biography but it's played through different people in the Bible.

We're about to read about Saul rousing the people of Israel to go kill the Ammonites. And you think: boy, that's interesting but not a lot of devotional material there. Not a lot to apply to myself in all of that. But here's the thing: this is the same story we see from Genesis to Jesus. I'm going to sketch the big picture for you, then we'll read through the passage, and then dive in.

God's people are up against an enemy that they cannot defeat in their own power. And so what they need is a king who is filled with the Spirit to deliver them from that enemy. And so the Spirit-filled king leads the people of God in triumphant victory over the enemy and as a result the people of God praise the Lord.

Let me ask you something? Am I talking about Saul? Am I talking about David over Goliath? Am I talking about Gideon or Samson? Or am I talking about Jesus? Because that's the same basic story line isn't it? In the OT God tells his redemption story over and over through different people in different situations to prepare and remind us of Jesus. **Read 1-17**

So this is the basic story: God's king, saves God's people from their enemy and ultimately he gets praise. Now, if you've ever been to a family reunion or family gathering there's always grandpa or someone who inevitably tells the same story over and over. But they tell the story for different reasons and in different situations. "Oh that reminds me of the time..." And we know where they're going with the story.

I don't want to trivialize God, but he comes back to the same story over and over. Not because he doesn't have anything else to tell. But because this story is the greatest story that can ever be told. When we go through the OT Jesus is preparing for himself.

And when God tells this story he often emphasizes different things. In this telling of the story what God is emphasizing is the work of the Holy Spirit. What comes over Saul to rouse him to save the people? The Spirit - it rushes upon him. Why do the people gather together to go into battle? Because the fear of the Lord descends upon them. They have conviction - I would argue - from the Spirit. So this chapter is a telling of the redemption story with special emphasis on the Spirit.

Now, here's the deal: If you're in the NC, you have the Spirit of God within you. If you are a believer in Jesus, if you have turned from your sins and trusted in him alone to forgive you and impute to you his righteousness, you have the Spirit of God within you. But here's the hard part as NC believers: we don't sense the Spirit at work. It's like fish in water - all they've know is water so they don't perceive the water itself. The Bible says Christians have been baptized into the Spirit. We been plunged into him and so sometimes we're like fish. We don't even realize the work of the Spirit in our lives.

And so sometimes I think we might think that if we woke up some morning and the Spirit were not inside of us we wouldn't know the difference. We might think there wouldn't be any substantial change. If you're not a believer, that would certainly be true. But those who are believers would find out just as quickly as a fish who had their water taken away. Our whole lives of following Jesus are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The reason you don't give up on Jesus? The Spirit.

The reason you have any evidence of salvation at all? The Spirit.

The reason you are comforted by God's grace in Christ? The Spirit.

The reason we instinctively call out to God as Father? The Spirit.

And here in 1 Samuel we see the work of the Spirit in a very clear way because of how he affects those who don't have him. This is a foreshadowing of the Messiah who was completely filled with the Spirit leading the people of God to victory.

I want to break this into 3 simple parts. The need for the Spirit, the work of the Spirit, and the response to the Spirit.

1) The need for God's Spirit. **Read 1-4**

So earlier I mentioned this pattern of God's people needing to be rescued over and over again. They fall into sin, they cry out for help, God saves them, they recommit themselves to the Lord - for a time - and then they fall back into sin.

The connection to us, of course, is that we aren't much different. Just about the time we feel like we've got our act together in life we fall flat on our face and are reminded of our need for mercy from God. And you know what? When we cry out to God in humility and repentance, God gives us mercy. That's what God does because that's who God is. He, by nature a God of mercy; he is by nature a Savior. This is what God delights to do.

And here, Israel is in need of saving. We saw a couple of chapters ago that the reason they wanted a king was to deliver them from their enemies. The Philistines were their primary enemies. But the Ammonites were enemies as well. You remember Lot, Abraham's nephew, in the book of Genesis? Well, the Ammonites were descendants of Lot. And they lived on the east of the Jordan River and that's where this whole brouhaha takes place.

Now, one of the cool things about the OT is that if you do a little investigating, you can sometimes figure out that there was a whole lot of stuff going on.

First of all, remember several weeks ago that I told you Saul was from the town of Gibeah in Benjamin? And in **Judges 19** Gibeah had essentially become the Sodom and Gomorrah of Israel and that all the other tribes waged basically a massive civil war against Benjamin to punish Gibeah? And the tribe of Benjamin was almost completely wiped out in that civil war. And none of the other tribes would allow their daughters to marry the men of Benjamin because they hated them so much. Well, if you recall, to keep Benjamin from dying out, the other tribes found a town that had not helped punish Benjamin in the civil war. And they basically allowed the men of Benjamin to steal women from that town and make them wives. And they did. Crazy times in Israel.

Well, get this, the town that they took their wives from was Jabesh-Gilead. Guess what town is being threatened by the Ammonites? Jabesh Gilead. **Read 1**

So Saul is there in Gibeah farming when he hears about the coming attack on Jabesh-Gilead. And part of the reason he's concerned is because the whole town of Gibeah is related to the town of Jabesh-Gilead. It'd be like if every man in Deer Park was married to a girl from Chewelah and Chewelah was suddenly under attack from Canada. It's not just other people down the road, it's family who is under attack on the other side of the Jordan River. That's what was going on here - this is very personal.

And they are threatened by a guy named Nahash. Interestingly, Nahash in Hebrew means snake. The people of God are threatened by Snake. When was another time the people of God were threatened by snake? In the Garden of Eden - pretty simple connection. Why does Nahash want to go to war against Jabesh-Gilead? **Read 2**

Their real motivation is to humiliate Israel. To bring disgrace. There's no other motivation for doing this. Nahash wants to be cruel to Israel simply to be cruel to Israel.

Side: This is something we need to understand as Christians. Oftentimes when people attack us as believers they're not doing it because we have genuinely offended them or because there is some wrong. They're doing it because they want to bring disgrace on us.

Matt. 5:11-12: "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

1 Peter 4:15-16: But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Part of being the people of God is that we suffer just because we're trying to please God. You see this with the LGBT+ community trying to destroy florists and bakers and photographers. There's no injury, there's no discrimination. But they want to make a show to bring disgrace upon us.

We saw this with Pastor Brunson who was released from prison in Turkey last week. He wasn't a spy; he wasn't a terrorist. He was a pawn of the Turkish government. A very Islamic Turkish government. People will do anything they can to simply bring disgrace on the people of God. Don't be surprised by it. That's what's happening here.

And Nahash thinks he has the upper hand. Notice the back and forth here - it's very unusual. **Read 3-4**

That's a weird dialogue. Imagine a bully at school comes up to a kid and says "Hey, I'm going to beat you up." And the kid says, "Look, give me a week to find some help and if I can't you can beat me up." That's unusual. That's basically what's happening here. "Hey, give us a week to muster some troops up and if we can't you can gouge out our eyes and we'll serve you."

Why wouldn't the Ammonites just attack them? Why give these guys chance? Here's why: Because the Israelites have absolutely no military power. They have no army. And they have no weapons. Look over at **13:19-23**. This is a little later, but the same basic time period. Saul is about to go to war against the Philistines but there's a problem. **Read 19-23**

This is why Nahash wasn't worried. Israel doesn't have an army; they don't even have any weapons. "You want to take a week to find some help? Sure. Take 2 weeks. Take 2 months. No one is going to help you because you guys don't even have a blacksmith. All you've got are hand tools. And to get those sharpened you have to go to your enemies."

It'd be like us asking Iran for blackpowder to put in our muskets so we could go fight a war with North Korea. It's a total joke. This is where Israel was at. They were hopelessly outgunned. And especially for those in Gibeah, it seemed like there was nothing they could do to save their own family from disfigurement and slavery. This is why back in **11:4** all the people weep aloud. What can be done?

They need God to save them. They need God to work. Of course, to bring this around, this is where we all found ourselves before we came to faith in Jesus: we had absolutely no hope in life. This is actually where the gospel begins. It begins with our sin and depravity and the righteousness of God who owes us nothing but judgment for our sin. We need God to work because we can't get work to get ourselves out of our situation.

More than anything we need the Spirit to come into our lives and save us.

2) It's the Spirit of God that saves the people of God. **Read 5-6**

So there's a lot going on here. This is still something of a transitional time from Israel being led by judges to being led by a king. It might seem a little odd that Saul is out farming, but apparently the monarchical system hasn't been completely established just yet.

But we do see an amazing turn of events. We see Saul - for all of his faults and flaws - presented as the unifying factor in Israel. A couple of amazing things to note here: The army that gathers together is the second largest gathered army we have recorded in Israel's history. It's a standing army of 330k men. That's a big army. At the end of chapter 10 we got the idea that there was a small detail of military men who followed Saul. **Read 10:26**

These men followed Saul but there was no organized army. Here, the army that is raised is astounding. And they were gathered in the course of just a few days. Remember there's no email, texting, national alert system. This was travel by foot or horse both directions - to say come to battle and then to actually travel to the battle.

Second, the way they are gathered is a little eerie. Saul slaughters his own oxen and sends them throughout all Israel and says: If you don't come to help, this is what will happen to your oxen. That's a pretty graphic threat. It's also very ironic.

Remember I said this is the second largest army that was ever gathered in Israel? The biggest army ever gathered is in **Judges 20** when the people of Israel gathered together to punish Gibeah for essentially acting like Sodom and Gomorrah. You know how they were mustered? The woman who was killed at Gibeah was cut up and sent throughout Israel. Disgusting. But Saul uses that method and manages to bring an amazing army together in just a few days. They don't have any weapons - but there's a lot of men.

And the plan is to have the men from Jabesh-Gilead go back and tell the Ammonites that they'll surrender the following day. But the army will make a surprise attack before sunrise. **Read 10-11**

The morning watch was somewhere between 2-6am. They surprise attacked in the middle of the night. And the Ammonites were utterly destroyed. This was massive victory for Israel. And this also had a confirming affect on Saul's leadership.

But here's what we really need to see in these verses. Because we could easily be led to believe that this is Saul's great victory. That the turning point in this whole situation is how Saul steps up in his leadership role as king. How he proverbially grabs the bull by the horns and rallies their troops. Maybe he's the Israelite version of William Wallace who's rousing speech encourages all the troops.

What we need to understand very clearly here is that it is not Saul who gives victory. The turning point here is the work of the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who is front and center and gives victory to Israel. It's the Spirit of God who saves the people of God. It's the Spirit who comes upon Saul and it's the Spirit of God who comes upon the people of Israel. **Read 5-8**

Who compels Saul to lead the people into battle? It's the Spirit. And who compels the people to come meet Saul to go to battle? The Spirit. It's the Spirit of God - the Holy Spirit - who works in the people of God to bring about victory.

The Spirit works in Saul to lead. The Spirit works in the people to follow. The Spirit also works in the people to be unified. The Spirit works in the people to provide and protect other people of God. The Spirit gives these men courage when they are completely outgunned. They have no weapons! They have farm tools. What are they going to do when they get to the battle line? Hit them over the head with a shovel? It doesn't matter. The Spirit is working in them and the Spirit will conquer through them.

That's the key to all of this. We're not to go: Wow - look what Saul did. What we're supposed to say is: Wow - look what the Spirit of God did through Saul and through the people of God.

The phrase used in **Vs. 6** is a very unique phrase in the OT. If you're familiar with the OT - especially the book of Judges - this is exactly what happened over and over when God used a man to lead his people to victory.

Othniel: **Judges 3:7-11 Read**

Gideon: **Judges 6:33-35 Read**

Jephthah: **Judges 11:29-33 Read**

Samson: **Judges 14:5-6, 19-20, 15:14-16**

Do you realize all these great stories about the heroes of our faith have nothing to do with the heroes themselves? Why were they able to do what they were able to do? Because they had the Spirit of the Lord. It was the Spirit of the Lord that enabled them to accomplish what needed to be accomplished and save God's people and bring God glory.

I know you probably get this but let me say it in case the connection isn't super clear: the same Spirit that empowered all of the men and women we read about in the OT is the exact same Spirit that is inside every believer in Jesus Christ. It's the same Spirit who not only transforms us - just it transformed Saul and the people of God. But the Spirit empowers us to live our lives for the glory of God.

You say: Well, my life doesn't feel as dramatic as killing 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. My life is pretty boring and mundane compared to that. Well, I would hope so. If you were out killing 1,000 Philistines we might need to have a talk.

But what we need to understand is that God doesn't need us to go kill 1,000 Philistines. Actually, what God wants us to do is go live a life submitted to his Spirit. He wants a people who are filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. What do we call that list? The fruit of the Spirit.

Can I tell you something? If we just live a life submitted to the Spirit - which is really just another way of saying if we live a life in obedience to the Word of God - but if we did that, God will continually transform us and our lives will be lives that built up the Kingdom and provided for the Kingdom and protected the Kingdom.

We can suppress the Spirit or we can submit to the Spirit.
We can disobey the commands the Spirit, or we can obey the Spirit.

And the more we submit to the Spirit of God through obedience to his Word the more we will realize that although we are working, it's God working through us:

Phil. 2:12-13: Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

How does God work in us? Through the Holy Spirit. As we live out our salvation - work it out, live it out through obedience - it is God who works in us. Our working shows the true work of the Spirit within us.

Again, not to *kill* Philistines or Ammonites or Jebusites, but to show them the glory of Christ through our transformed lives.

3) Response to the Spirit: Renew our commitment to God. Read 12-13

So here's what happens when we go through a tough situation - even when we come out of it in good shape: we start passing blame around. We want to point out how other people were wrong and we were right and we want our pound of flesh. We are just like these guys! When they should be celebrating, they want a lynching. This is the sad reality of our pride in the midst of a difficult situation.

These guys want blood. Remember back in **10:27** we had a group of people who despised Saul and said he wasn't fit to lead? **Read 10:27**

We have no idea how many people rejected Saul, but now these guys are being called out for their rejection. You reject the king you get put to death. And Saul of all people, is the one to bring mercy into the situation. When God gives us victory, when he gives us deliverance, we need to celebrate. We need to praise him properly for what he's done.

There is a time for calling people to account and addressing their sinful actions, but when he gives amazing victory that's not the time.

Actually, what we see is that it's time to celebrate. And not just celebrate for celebrations' sake. But celebrate in such a way that God gets the glory.

They do 3 things. First, the renew the kingdom. **Read 14**

What does it mean to renew the kingdom? Probably what this means is to renew their covenant before God. To be reminded that they are the people that God has called out from all the other people in the world. That they are to committed to righteousness. That they are to live a holy life and walk humbly before God.

This also happens in a rather notable place: Gilgal. Gilgal is mentioned or referenced 7 here. Why is there so much emphasis on this little city? It's because this city is the place where Israel comes back to time and again to be reminded of their covenant with God.

When Israel crossed the Jordan to enter into the Promised Land, remember they brought in 12 stones and had a ceremony? That was at Gilgal. It's where all of Israel was circumcised before going to battle at Jericho. This was their base camp of operations and a continual reminder of God's faithfulness.

"Gilgal...[was] a reminder of God's past deliverance from Egypt, a token of present victory under his guidance, and saw the promise of inheritance yet to be gained." (*New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 413).

2) Sacrifice. The sacrifices are peace offerenings. They celebrate the work that God has done to deliver them from certain death.

3) Rejoice. They praise God for what he's done.

In Presbyterian circles or Anglican circles they often refer to Sunday worship as a time when the people of God come together for covenant renewal. When we sing praises and are reminded of the pardon we have in Christ and the covenant we have through the Lord's Supper. They would view Sundays as something similar to this occasion. I have to say: I don't really like that language because there is a sense in which it seems to imply that our covenant with God expired or was broken. Obviously it wasn't. And I think if you asked them they would say the same thing.

But I do think they are on to something. That when we come together week in and week out we are reminded of the work of God among us. We are reminded of our original need for Jesus when we were first saved, but we are also reminded of our continual need for deliverance. We are reminded of the death and resurrection of Jesus. We are reminded that in Christ not only are we saved individually, but together as the Church. And, as we see here, we are reminded that all of that has come about through the Spirit who has raised us, sealed us, empowered us, and will one day in glory, perfect us.

Pray