

1 Samuel 11-12 – “Trusting God Beyond The King”

It's been a little while since we've been in 1 Samuel as we took our summer break and enjoyed Church in the Park. When we were last in the book we saw Saul being selected and pronounced as the king [read 1 Samuel 10:24-27]. This is what Israel wanted. It's not necessarily who God wanted, but God gave Israel what they wanted. So far everyone is basing their selection off of Saul's appearance. He's tall, dark, and handsome (9:2). He seems to everyone like the perfect fit to be king. And Saul will start off well, there will be some good things he does, but there's also some little things he begins to do that were more self-serving than God serving. As we continue on in our study, we'll see the character flaws start to unfold which led to Saul's downfall.

Again, it doesn't matter how you begin, it matters how you finish. And Saul's is a life of squandered potential.

1. God Delivers His People – 11:1-15

11:1 - *Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against Jabesh Gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you.”*

Nahash the king of the Ammonites comes up with his army and encamps against Jabesh Gilead (they're literally laying a siege against this city). Jabesh Gilead is a city on the east side of the Jordan River in the territory belonging to Gad. This was a tribe that didn't want to go into the Promised Land and settle down there. They just thought they would take it easy and settle on the outside of the Land of Promise. They never entered into the fullness of what God had for them, and here now we see them becoming prey for the enemy.

- Interestingly, **Nahash** means snake or serpent.
- **Jabesh** means 'dryness' or 'confusion'.

You see, these people have chosen to take up residence on the other side of the Jordan, outside of God's will, and they failed to help out Israel in dealing with a grave sin at the hand of the Benjamites (Judges 21:8-12). These people are not walking in obedience or a desire to serve the Lord, and they become an easy target for the enemy.

- So too, if I am walking in disobedience, not living close to the Lord, I will find myself in a dry place, possibly a place of confusion, where I become an easy prey for that serpent of old – the devil.

- Staying close to the Lord doesn't ensure a lack of attack from the devil, but I will be in a much better position to defend myself and stand up against his schemes through the strength of the Lord.

So as the enemy begins to circle their wagons, the people of Jabesh recognize this is probably not going to go well for them, so they try to strike a deal with Nahash. Make a deal with us to spare us, and we'll be your servants. Nahash then gives them his terms...

11:2 - *And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, "On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may put out all your right eyes, and bring reproach on all Israel."*

Nahash agrees to spare them if he can take out their right eye. Now this may sound kind of peculiar to you, but in this day a person would go into battle holding their shield in their left hand and looking out past their shield with their right eye. If they had no right eye they would pose no military threat against Nahash and the Ammonites. They would attempt to shoot an arrow or throw a spear and take out their own which he didn't see in his peripheral vision.

Plus Nahash thinks, *If I can't wipe you out, then I want to humiliate you.* He wants to bring reproach upon all Israel. This would leave all the tribes reeling in defeat and embarrassment.

11:3 - *Then the elders of Jabesh said to him, "Hold off for seven days, that we may send messengers to all the territory of Israel. And then, if there is no one to save us, we will come out to you."*

This is such a humorous exchange. The people are thinking this through. They're like, *Uum, can we see if we can get some backup and defeat all of you before we go ahead with letting you take our eye out?*

I mean you'd think right off the bat they'd be saying, no deal! We like our eyes! And then they have the audacity to ask if they can enlist some help to take out the Ammonites. Very interesting.

And Nahash goes along with it! Perhaps he's thinking if they bring some more people out it will only increase his booty and add to the servants he'll inherit when he defeats them.

Well, Israel has a new king. And it was the king that was meant to lead them to defeat their enemies. So the people naturally go and find Saul, their new king.

11:4-5 - *So the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the news in the hearing of the people. And all the people lifted up their voices and wept. ⁵ Now there was Saul, coming behind the herd from the field; and Saul said, "What troubles the people, that they weep?" And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh.*

The messengers go to Gibeah where we last left Saul. The news of this unfortunate situation caused everyone to weep.

And then Saul comes, and notice, he's just continuing his regular life. He's farming and tending the herds in the field. Things don't seem to have gone to his head just yet. He's not out throne shopping or getting crowns sized, he's just doing his work, dirty work at that.

And he's curious why everyone is troubled. So, the news is passed on to him.

11:6-7 - *Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused. ⁷ So he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, "Whoever does not go out with Saul and Samuel to battle, so it shall be done to his oxen." And the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.*

We read here that the Spirit of God came upon Saul. Throughout the Old Testament there were these incidences where the Spirit would fill someone for a specific task and use them to carry out the Lord's work. We already saw this with Saul in 1 Samuel 10:10. But the relationship between the Spirit and the individual was very different than it is today. Today the Spirit is dwelling in every believer, empowering the church for fruitful ministry. We're told in **Galatians 5:25**, "*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*"

In this time, the Spirit would fill a person for a task but not indwell that person permanently. The Spirit of God is prompting Saul with a righteous anger towards those laying siege to Jabesh.

- There are times we should have an anger that is righteous. It's not an anger that leads to sin, but it's an anger that leads to doing the right thing. And here under the unction of the Holy Spirit, Saul is being aroused to carry out God's will against the Ammonites.

Saul sends a pretty bloody message to the people.

- This was reminiscent of the brutal scene in Judges 19:29-30 when the Levite's concubine was abused and killed and he divided her up into 12 pieces to send to the 12 tribes of Israel and have them take action.

And now was time for Saul and others to take action. Saul meant business. He's establishing himself as a no-nonsense guy. And in effect he's saying to Israel: *'If you don't stand up now you're going to lose your oxen, the price will be far greater if you don't fight the enemy.'*

- Sometimes we can let the enemy gain small advances because we think the price is too high to stand up to him. We may think, *'Some people will think I'm weird for making a big deal of this. I don't want to stand out.'* So we give in to avoid the price it may cost to stand and fight. But the price will always be greater if we do succumb to the devil's advances.

Our fear for the Lord must always be motivating and driving us. It's not being afraid of the Lord, but it's having a reverence for Him that moves us to carry out His will.

11:8-9 - *When he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. ⁹ And they said to the messengers who came, "Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh Gilead: 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have help.' "* Then the messengers came and reported it to the men of Jabesh, and they were glad.

Up until this time there's been no standing army. Nahash was probably filled with confidence against Israel and Jabesh because they've had no king, there's been no formal military army. But now as people are being moved by the Lord 330,000 men are rounded up. Suddenly, the people are feeling pretty good against the Ammonites.

- As much as the people are feeling confidence in the size of their army, we never have to fear or worry when we are walking with the Lord and being led of Him.
- I think about the story of the Syrian king who sent a great army to capture Elisha. When Elisha and his servant woke up they saw the city surrounded. The servant was afraid but Elisha said to him, *"...Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them"* (2 Kings 6:16). And the

eyes of the servant were opened to see what God was doing in the spiritual realm.

- When we trust the Lord and rely on Him, we're always on the majority side.

So they send word to the people in Jabesh that backup is coming, and it no doubt comforted them greatly.

11:10 - *Therefore the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do with us whatever seems good to you."*

The men of Jabesh reported to Nahash that we'll come out tomorrow and we're all yours. Whatever you want to do with us is your choice. And they're totally bluffing. I'm sure they're fighting to hold back their smirking.

11:11 - *So it was, on the next day, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and killed Ammonites until the heat of the day. And it happened that those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.*

Saul exercised some wise military prowess here in dividing the people up into 3 companies (similar to what Gideon did). And like Gideon, Saul came at a time nobody would be expecting battle – the morning watch. This was between 2am-6am.

- Saul led Israel in a great victory this day. Yet earlier he was saying, I'm from the smallest tribe and my family is the least in the tribe. I'm nothing. Why the change? The Holy Spirit! Don't be caught saying, 'I couldn't do that' or 'That's not for me.' Don't underestimate what the Holy Spirit can do through you. Saul was empowered by the Holy Spirit and carried out a great work of the Lord.

11:12-15 - *Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is he who said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death.'" ¹³ But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has accomplished salvation in Israel." ¹⁴ Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there." ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they made sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.*

Now everyone is beginning to see the potential they have with Saul. And they're thinking about the naysayers (10:27) and how they should be eliminated. But Saul stands up and steps in on their behalf and says this is a day the Lord has brought salvation. Nobody is going to be put to death. It's a day to honour God and glory in Him. Saul gives all the credit to God.

- This may be Saul's finest hour. Sadly, it will slowly unravel from here on in. He will begin to get insecure, jealous, and will begin to rely upon himself rather than the Lord.
- After great victories you can be sure the enemy will be looking all the harder to trip you up.

Let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there. This was an appropriate time to do this because, although Saul had been declared king, and presented as king, it was now affirmed to the nation through this victory. So Samuel decides to renew the kingdom under a more widespread approval.

All the men of Israel rejoiced greatly. This was a positive time in Israel. They have a king like all the other nations, they've gained a great victory with their king leading the way, things couldn't be better, or could they?

2. God Confronts His People – 12:1-19

12:1-3 - Now Samuel said to all Israel: "Indeed I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you. ² And now here is the king, walking before you; and I am old and grayheaded, and look, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. ³ Here I am. Witness against me before the Lord and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you."

Samuel is seeing his life winding down and he asks all of Israel if there's anything that he's done that needs to be corrected. He's walked openly before them since he was a child, but if anyone has been wronged by him, speak up and he will make it right.

- I wonder if we gave such an offer how long the line would be?
- We sometimes think living an integral life is out of reach. But here Samuel was just an ordinary guy who lived a dedicated life to God. And nobody has anything against him.

12:4-5 - *And they said, “You have not cheated us or oppressed us, nor have you taken anything from any man’s hand.”⁵ Then he said to them, “The Lord is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they answered, “He is witness.”*

Samuel holds up his life in a sense to show that all has been good. God has protected and provided for Israel by having leaders to lead. But now in their request for a king, they are dismissing God’s plans.

- Notice in vs. 3 Samuel said he has not taken a thing. He’s showing the blessing they’ve had when they allow the Lord to lead and govern. It’s as though he’s contrasting what they will experience under a king. He’s even warned them of this previously in 1 Samuel 8:13-19.

So in this charge to Israel that takes us to the end of this chapter, Samuel is going to review their history of what God has done for them. Ultimately it’s to show that they’re not to blindly follow a king, but that they need to rely on God and follow Him above all. Following a king does not trump obedience to God!

12:6-8 - *Then Samuel said to the people, “It is the Lord who raised up Moses and Aaron, and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt.⁷ Now therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord concerning all the righteous acts of the Lord which He did to you and your fathers:⁸ When Jacob had gone into Egypt, and your fathers cried out to the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place.*

As Samuel goes through their history he’s showing them that it was God who provided leaders that led them out of difficult things. It wasn’t the nation of Israel looking around among themselves and saying, *Hey, you look like you got some muscle on you, we need you to get us out from where we are and to where we need to be.*

No! It was God who raised up Moses and Aaron to lead them out of Egypt. It was God that brought them to Egypt to begin with for His good purposes, and it was God who brought them out. He not only brought them out, He brought them into the land of promise.

12:9-11 - *And when they forgot the Lord their God, He sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab; and they fought against them.¹⁰ Then they cried out to the Lord, and said, ‘We have sinned,*

because we have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and Ashtoreths; but now deliver us from the hand of our enemies, and we will serve You.’¹¹ And the Lord sent Jerubbaal [Gideon], Bedan [Barak], Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side; and you dwelt in safety.

Now Samuel basically sums up the period of the Judges. It was when they were settled in the land that they began to get comfortable, and they began to drift. They forsook the Lord and served the gods of their neighboring nations. And God disciplined them by raising up these nations to come against Israel and oppress them. Israel would eventually get to a place where they would see their error and cry out to the Lord. And guess what? God was faithful to deliver them. Time and time again!

In fact this chapter is a real turning point for us because Samuel held a dual role of authority in Israel. He was a judge and a prophet. He was the last of the judges. And now that office is closing and a new role is beginning – that of king.

Here’s how Samuel breaks that down...

12:12-16 - And when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ when the Lord your God was your king.¹³ “Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen and whom you have desired. And take note, the Lord has set a king over you.¹⁴ If you fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the Lord your God.¹⁵ However, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers.

When Nahash came against Israel, they didn’t cry out to the Lord (as far as we know), they just cried. And they went to Gibeah in hopes of enlisting Saul to help them.

Even though God’s track record of helping them has been flawless, this time around they’re saying they don’t want to go that route. They don’t want to rely on the Lord; they want to be like everyone else and have a king reign over them. This is a big tipping point in Israel’s history.

And God gives them the king they want. But Samuel gives them a strong word that having a king does not mean they can now move away from following the

Lord. Their obedience to God and His word is still paramount to blessing and success. A king will not provide success if they disobey the Lord.

The problem here is that the nation is moving away from a reliance on God. They're looking to other means and finding hope in things that will not give hope!

- It is a problem many encounter today where they become self-sufficient and begin to neglect God. And all that does is open the door for failure and hardship.
- Samuel says in vs. 15 that people that go down that path will experience the Lord's hand against them. This is not a pleasant thing.

In fact Samuel gives them a little demonstration next...

12:16-19 - *"Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the Lord will do before your eyes: ¹⁷ Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the Lord, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking a king for yourselves."* ¹⁸ So Samuel called to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. ¹⁹ And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves."

The wheat harvest happened around mid-May to mid-June. It's when it's hot and dry. Rain is scarce during this time. So Samuel prays up a storm – literally. And when the people saw God's power, they were completely humbled and convicted. But this is more of a fear of being wiped out than a fear of God leading to converted hearts.

That's evident because they want the rain to stop, but they don't ask God to reign over them. They're not looking to fire Saul.

- But the Lord will work through all this. He'll let them have the king they want so that they'll see the error of their way and be more accepting of God's way – which would be giving them David as king.

3. God Calls His People – 12:20-25

12:20-22 - *Then Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. ²¹ And do not turn aside; for then you would go*

after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing. ²² For the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people.

I like this, Samuel comforts them and lets them know that though they've committed wickedness, if they will seek the Lord and follow Him, they'll be safe. Going any other direction, any other way other than the Lord's way is complete futility. You may chase after things you feel will be of great help and strength in your life, but if it's not of God it is empty.

- I think of Solomon, who had pretty much anything and everything at his disposal. And yet after living life fully for whatever this world can offer, he writes in Ecclesiastes that it was all vanity. It was empty, meaningless. It was a grasping of the wind.
- This is what Samuel said life will be like if you turn aside from the Lord.

And yet, ***the Lord will not forsake His people***. What great words those are and yet sadly many seem to think Israel deserves to be forsaken and indeed has been.

But the Lord has called this people and made a covenant with them, and He will not forsake this covenant (even though we may think God would be in the right to end this covenant or disqualify them). He will not do so ***for His great name's sake!*** God's name is on the line. If He forsakes Israel, then people could say God's not a God of His word; He doesn't uphold His promises. All of this is untrue. Israel is God's proof that He is a faithful God. That He is someone to depend on.

And God's choosing of Israel had nothing to do with Israel or their worthiness. Their being kept in God's plan had nothing to do with their faithfulness. It is all about God's grace and faithfulness.

- **Deuteronomy 7:7–8**, *"The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; ⁸ but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."*
- ***It pleased the Lord to make you His people*** simply because of the love and grace that is demonstrated in doing so.

Think about that for a moment. God working in your life and leading you to Him is for the desire of revealing His love for you.

- **1 John 3:1**, *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him."*

Samuel continues to give some important instructions:

12:23-25 - *Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. ²⁴ Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. ²⁵ But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."*

Samuel was committed to pray for Israel – he knew they needed it. And how we need to continue to pray for Israel.

Samuel lays out 3 important things for them to be doing to ensure God's blessing and goodness:

- 1) ***Fear the Lord***. A healthy fear of the Lord would prevent a lot of the pitfalls we run into. This simply speaks of having a right view of who God is and walking in reverence before Him; desiring to honour Him knowing He alone is holy.
- 2) ***Serve Him in truth with all your heart***. If you're not serving the Lord, then what are you serving? Because you're going to have to serve somebody, as Bob Dylan sang. And God's not looking for people to serve Him half-heartedly or do so with ulterior motives. He wants people serving Him in truth and with all their heart. That means you're not doing in when you feel like it, or begrudgingly. You're doing so in truth because you know He deserves our devotion.
- 3) ***Consider what great things He has done for you***. If those first two things are difficult for you, perhaps you're not doing this third one enough. Because when we stop and consider all the great things God has done for us, we'll want nothing more than to live with a godly reverence and awe of Him, and to serve Him whole-heartedly. You may think you've had a life where there's nothing to be grateful for. Maybe you've been through some real rough times. But the good things God has done for you will always outweigh the bad things you may encounter from this world. Because everything in this world, good or bad, is temporal, whereas God has secured the eternal for us.

He sent His Son Jesus to die on a cross to forgive us our sins and to reconcile us to God. All those who believe are given the free gift of eternal life! What great things God has done for us.

May you remember this often and may this motivate you to fear God and serve Him faithfully.

The chapter ends with a clear warning that if they choose to disobey God, they will be swept away. And this is exactly what happened as they were taken away into captivity.

- “Never was a people more fully warned, and never did a people profit less by the warning.” (Clarke)