

1 SAMUEL 11

INTRODUCTION

Tomorrow millions of children in our country will be heading back to School. I remember my first day back at School after a long summer break (for me it was about 9 weeks). There I was with a new uniform and new shoes, new pencils and pens that were not chewed. I even had a rubber and sharpener and protractor etc.

It was a new beginning, a new academic year with renewed hope that perhaps this new academic year would be different with a new teacher etc. In 1 Samuel 11 we breathe the air of a new and hopeful beginning for the blossoming kingdom. Saul's military debut in this chapter kindles hope for the future. The theme of this chapter is clearly one of salvation for words that derive from the Hebrew word meaning salvation appears three times in this chapter (vs. 3, 9 & 13).

The newly appointed King brings salvation to God's people through the power of the Spirit and in doing so he rebukes those who questioned or opposed his appointment (10:27). The answer to their question is that Saul can save them through the power of the Spirit; only with God's help and empowering will the King be able to help the people. But before we consider the teaching of this chapter let us take time to recap the story so far.

After the events at Mizpah where Saul is appointed King, Saul returns to his own town of Gibeah and to his own occupation of farming where he apparently makes no attempt to set up or establish his kingdom. One reason for this delay may have been his desire not to give his opponents an opportunity to criticise his administration (1 Samuel 10:27).

Saul could only establish his kingdom through men and money and these could only be acquired through conscription and taxes. Samuel had warned the people that this is what having a King would mean (8:10-18 & 10:25) so perhaps Saul wanted to show that he had no intention of abusing his office.

A second reason for the delay may have been his lack of a united army. In the absence of military support Saul preferred to wait for a more suitable time before establishing his kingdom. God had after all appointed him without any desire on his part so he needs to wait on God's timing before establishing his kingdom. In the meantime he was content to act as each occasion required.

He did not have long to wait before being given that opportunity to act for as chapter 11 opens it appears that Nahash the Ammonite had launched an ambitious campaign against the tribes of Israel on the eastern side of the river Jordan. He had probably raised an army by assuring his subjects that Molech their national god had commanded such a campaign and would therefore guarantee their success.

1. SAUL DELIVERS ISRAEL BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT (vs. 1-11)

Now Nahash marshalled his troops and besieged the city of Jabesh Gilead the main city that belonged to the tribe of Gad. It seems that the citizens of the city were far too willing to accept Nahash's rule (v 1) and asked Nahash to make a treaty with them rather than going to war against them. They were more than willing to become his subjects rather than fighting him. What happened to their faith in God?

The truth is that what we see here is the effects of spiritual apathy, it seems they did not remember or even care that the Lord was the one who exercised authority over them and now they are far too willing to give that authority to someone else.

Nahash's response to the proposal of a treaty is both cruel and arrogant (v 2). He will make a treaty with them as long as part of the deal includes having the right eye gouged out of all the citizens. Such mutilation would make the men unfit to fight in the future and assure their continual subjection; for in battle the shield usually covered the left eye.

The news was very concerning for the people of Jabesh Gilead so the elders having discussed the matter asked if they might be given time to send for help (v 3). The suggestion seems ludicrous but it actually appealed to Nahash's arrogance. He was supremely confident in his own ability to defeat Israel so he agreed to such a barmy request (v 3).

Perhaps he thought why commit his army to battle when if he waited a week they would willingly surrender to him. Nahash was sure that none of the other tribes would come and help Gad. Besides Nahash's whole point was to bring disgrace upon all Israel (v 2), so if their failure to get help brought more disgrace upon this nation then that would further fulfil his aims.

Now what we have in these opening verses

Is an example of what the world desires for the church? If disgrace is brought upon the church if it is mocked or scorned then that fulfils the purposes of those who oppose Christianity today. There is a silent delight among the majority of unbelievers when a major scandal in the church hits the news or is known within a locality.

Although many people say they are indifferent towards the church or they say, "Live and let live" yet the reality is that if disgrace is brought to the church then there is a quiet contentedness about it. There are some who will pounce on every opportunity to bring further disgrace upon God's church today but the silent majority can simply have a sense of glee when disgrace is brought upon God's church.

What lies behind such an attitude is one's hatred for Jesus Christ. No one is neutral when it comes to him you are either for him or against him and those who are not for him are often glad when the church is disgraced in one way or another. That is why we who are believers must be careful how we live; we do not want to do anything that would bring disgrace upon the church by our actions or our words for there are many in our town who would be delighted to see disgrace brought upon this church.

Now this hatred for Christianity should not surprise us for Jesus said that is how it would be and the reason for its hatred is that it hated Jesus first (John 15:18 & 1 John 3:13). Once we identify ourselves with Jesus through faith in him then what happened to him is what we ought to expect to happen to us.

It is therefore foolish to seek to win the favour or approval of this world there are some Christians who try to do that, yes we must not do anything that will give unbelievers an opportunity to malign the church but at the same time we must remember that the church will always be maligned simply because it maligned Jesus Christ who is head of the church.

The truth is that we cannot be friends with the world and a friend of Jesus Christ (John 15:14-15), being Jesus' friend makes us an enemy of the world and therefore hostility and opposition is not something that we go looking for but it will be something that comes our way if we are disciples of Jesus Christ.

Now messengers were sent throughout the major cities of Israel and when the message reached Gibeah in Benjamin the people wept (v 4). The question is this. What is Saul as the newly appointed king going to do about it? As if by chance but we know as a result of God's providence Saul was coming home from the field where he had been working during the day (v 5) and he asked what all the commotion was about?

When Saul heard what had happened the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (v 7) and the effect of this was that he was filled with anger because of the way God was being treated.

He was being dishonoured and robbed of his glory. But Saul also took action and raised an army through dismembering two oxen and sending the parts of the oxen to the various tribes with a very serious message (v 7). The method although bizarre in our own time and culture communicated the seriousness and urgency of the message.

It had the effect Saul intended; the terror of the Lord came upon the people and they came together as one in order to do something about the situation in Jabesh Gilead (vs. 7-8). God was being offended by Nahash's attack so God's people should also be offended and act accordingly. They realised that they had to act otherwise God would be angry with them.

Of course Saul's action only had an effect upon the people because it is clear that the Lord is at work for it is his terror that came upon the people. Saul set up a plan and sent word to the people of Jabesh Gilead that within 24 hours they would be delivered (vs. 9-10). When Nahash is told the message by the people of Jabesh Gilead he understood the message to mean that they have been unable to raise the help they needed (v 10).

Perhaps this had the effect of complacency and perhaps a standing down of some of his army, which made it easier for Saul to attack. Whatever may be the case during the night Saul launched his attack and slaughtered the enemy (v 11).

Those who could escape did so; but we are told that the victory was decisive for no two Ammonites could be found together, God had acted through the King and instead of humiliation for God's people He brought them victory and enabled them to rejoice in his goodness to them.

What made Saul successful in his action is that the Spirit of God was upon him. What made the people respond to Saul's request? The answer is that the terror of the Lord came upon them. In other words it is because the Spirit of God is at work that victory is achieved. People are given courage and wisdom to implement a plan and the enemy is defeated. The lesson that Israel needed to learn and the one that God wants us to learn from this passage is that salvation came not because Israel had a King but because God's Spirit was at work. It is something that we always need to be reminded off.

Salvation only comes to people not because a church is evangelistic or that it preaches the gospel but because God's Spirit is at work. Of course it is only because His Spirit is at work that the church is evangelistic and preaches the gospel; but those things of themselves will not save anyone. What we need more than anything is for God's Spirit to work in power to convict of sin and to bring conversion to sinners.

Without the Spirit's help then salvation will not come upon people. Therefore we must pray for the work of the Spirit within the life of our church. We must pray for his help in living godly lives and in all our evangelistic efforts and in particular we must pray for him to be at work in the lives of sinners in order to bring them to faith in Jesus Christ.

The church can so easily become self-sufficient. We can become good at organising events and activities, we can have a Pastor who preaches through books of the Bible and can have people who faithfully come to church and support its activities. But we can do all of that without ever stopping to think of our need for the Spirit's help. How many of us today prayed for the Lord's Spirit to be at work in our services?

How many of us prayed that the Spirit would help the Pastor in his sermon preparation and delivery? How many of us prayed for the Spirit to be at work at our Lunch and Listen Club or to be at work tomorrow night at the Discovery Club. I hope you get my point it is so easy to do what we always have done and so easy to be good at arranging services and activities that we almost feel that we can do these things on our own.

But the reality is that unless the Spirit of God is helping us in arranging such things and unless He is present during such services and activities then all that we do is a waste of time. Jesus said that without him we can do nothing (John 15:5). I wonder do we really believe that. If so then how often do we plead with him for his presence and power to be with us and at work in us and through us?

Perhaps church life would be very different if more of us took seriously our need for the work of the Spirit and prayed towards that end. Perhaps our Sunday services would be different if we really petitioned our God for his help. I wonder what would happen if the terror of the Lord came upon our community and us?

Let us pray faithfully that God by his Spirit will be at work among us, let us pray that we may see some evidence of God's power at work in people's lives and let us pray for God's Spirit to work powerfully in the lives of sinners in order to bring salvation to them. Let us this week take our responsibility seriously to pray daily for the work of the Spirit in our own lives and in the lives of this community and in this church.

2. THE IMPLICATION OF ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE (vs. 12-15)

There are two implications that come as a result of Israel's deliverance by the power of the Spirit.

a) Glory Goes To God (vs. 12-13) - The first one is that when the Spirit is at work then glory goes to God and not man. The dramatic events of this chapter demonstrate clearly that Saul is God's appointed King and so the people want to put to death those who opposed Saul's kingship (v 12 cf. 10:27). But Saul intervenes and says that no one will be put to death for this day should be remembered for what the Lord has done (v 13). It is the Lord that delivered Israel.

Saul did not take the credit even though he and the people thought up the plan and executed it perfectly. It was the Lord by his Spirit that had enabled them to do so and therefore the only One who should be given praise is the Lord for what He has done and so Saul is not prepared to let anyone or any other event be remembered on this day.

You see the reason why it is important that we understand that God's work in this church is the work of the Holy Spirit is that we will give him the praise in return when we see him at work by his Spirit. The problem with churches being self-sufficient is that they rob God of the glory due to his name.

Perhaps one reason the Lord has removed some people from us in recent years is to teach us this truth that everything depends upon the Lord and not upon certain individual people. Perhaps as a church we have been guilty of depending too much on people and therefore robbing God of his glory. Therefore as we pray for the work of the Spirit and as God answers our prayers let us not forget to give him all the praise and the glory that is due to his name.

This church is His church, it is his work, we need his power and we must return all the praise to him alone.

b) Reaffirmation of Kingship (vs. 14-15) - The second implication is a renewing or a reaffirming of the Kingship. Samuel takes the opportunity of calling the people to Gilgal in order to reaffirm the Kingship (v 14). There was a great celebration in confirming Saul as King and the fact that we read

that “all the people” (v 15) did this suggests to us that any who opposed Saul as King had been won over by this event.

But in the midst of this confirmation there is the worship of the Lord and so it is likely that this renewing of the Kingship was not merely to commit oneself to Saul as Israel’s King but to commit oneself to the Lord as the true King who rules through the earthly King. For us the application is on this level.

When we consider the Lord’s work of deliverance by his Spirit then clearly it should lead to us giving him the glory but it will cause us to renew our commitment to him. The Lord Jesus calls on us to seek first his Kingdom (Matthew 6:33) and it is good for us to renew our commitment to putting the Lord and his Kingdom first; if that is what is needed in our lives. There are many times in our life that we let this commitment slip.

The fact that the people’s commitment to Kingship had to be reaffirmed tells us that it had slipped. In the same way our commitment to the Lord being King over our lives can so easily slip.

Other people and other things can take his place, it is so easy to let legitimate things take first place in our lives and slowly we push the Lord into the background. We do not do this deliberately but the pressure of life can cause us to do this if we are not careful.

But by being forced to think about our dependence upon the Lord will I hope cause us to have a spiritual health check and if as a result the Lord and his Kingdom is not first and if we are seeking other things first; then take this opportunity to put things right and to renew or reaffirm our commitment to the Lord and his Kingdom.

Only you and the Lord knows if such a reaffirmation is needed therefore let us spend a moment in silent prayer and reflection before we finish asking the Lord to search our hearts and to enable us to renew our commitment to him if that is what is needed.

Amen