

SAUL, THE DELIVERING KING

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God brings victory through His chosen leaders, who are called to express God's character in their leadership.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

1 Samuel 11

+ **SETTING:**

In response to the people's sinful demand for a king like those of the nations, the Lord raised up and anointed Saul, a Benjaminite, as the king over Israel. Yet a public revelation of Saul's kingship was met with Saul initially hiding in fear. Still, when the people of Israel saw this man of impressive physical stature, they proclaimed their loyalty to him, at least, most of the people did; some wicked men despised him. When we next see Saul, however, curiously, we find him once again in an agricultural context, leading a team of oxen. But the Lord was about to change Saul's circumstances significantly.

DAY 1

READ:

1 Samuel 11:1-4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 11:1-4

NOTES

What's in a name? Couples love to make lists of potential boy and girl names as they wait expectantly for their little one to enter the world. Sometimes those names include places they're fond of, such as Dallas or Charlotte. But if you were an expectant couple in ancient Israel, the city-name Jabesh-gilead wouldn't have been on your list. Besides the fact that it's a mouth-full, Jabesh-gilead had a regrettable past.

When a wicked atrocity occurred in Gibeah during the time of the judges, and the tribes of Israel were summoned to war, not a single man from Jabesh-gilead was present (Judg. 19–21). Call it laziness or cowardice, the little town didn't show up to carry out its tribal responsibilities. So, it seems a little ironic that when besieged by the Ammonites, Jabesh-gilead would send messengers for help from Gibeah! Nevertheless, Saul summoned the people to action, and God worked a great salvation for His undeserving people.

The reality is that we all have things in our past that we would rather forget, much like Jabesh-gilead. In fact, if we're completely honest, we know that we don't deserve help, especially from the God who created us and called us to live as His faithful citizens. Nevertheless, God delights in showing mercy to the undeserving.

So yes, you and I are unworthy of God's help. But when we're finally willing to admit this, we find ourselves in the perfect place to receive His help. Come to Christ with your sins and failures, no matter how ominously they hang over your head, because He will hear your call and come to your aid.

What sins will you acknowledge and confess to God today, knowing that He has been and will be merciful to forgive and save?

DAY 2

READ:

1 Samuel 11:1-7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 11:6-7

NOTES

Saul's tactic for getting Israel's attention is interesting. In fact, it's downright gruesome. Nevertheless, Saul got the response he was looking for—a people united for the purpose of serving the Lord's will.

Contrary to popular belief, the fear of God doesn't simply mean that people cower in terror before a wrathful God (though that is often the first step toward the believer's fear of the Lord). As Michael Reeves notes, drawing upon the work of John Bunyan, "It is . . . the devil's work to promote a fear of God that makes people afraid of God such that they want to flee from God. The Spirit's work is the exact opposite: to produce in us a wonderful fear that wins and draws us to God . . . In a sense, then, the trembling 'fear of God' is a way of speaking about the intensity of the saints' love for and enjoyment of all that God is."¹

Indeed, though God's people were called to battle through the dismemberment of a beast of burden, in the end, they sacrificed offerings in the Lord's presence and rejoiced—they worshiped the Lord on account of their king and his victorious leadership (1 Sam. 11:15)! As Solomon teaches, the fear of the Lord provides a refuge, a protection from the ways and consequences of the world (Prov. 14:26-27). In the end, the deciding factor of our lives is not whether we lived in fear, but what sort of fear defined our lives. The fear of human beings distracts and traps us, keeping us from what matters most; whereas the fear of the Lord protects us and frees us to live for the Lord as we ought (Prov. 29:25).

What comes to mind when you think of "the fear of the Lord"? How can you cultivate a right fear of God that draws you to Him rather than pushes you away from Him?

DAY 3

READ:

1 Samuel 11:8-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 11:13

NOTES

Christmas was a wonderful season in my home when I was growing up. My mother usually went overboard with decorations, food, and presents. On Christmas morning, my siblings and I would rush to the living room to find the Christmas tree surrounded by gifts of all shapes and sizes. But there was always an order to the morning:

First, we would open our stocking stuffers. Second, we would enjoy breakfast together (which always included bacon and my grandmother's cinnamon rolls and cranberry muffins). Third, and finally, we would exchange and open presents. To this day, I still laugh to myself when I get a package with a label that reads, "To: Matthew – From: Santa." Oddly enough, Santa's handwriting looks very much like my mother's, but that never stops me from opening it and telling my mother to let "Santa" know how grateful I am for all the gifts.

In a similar sense, the rescue mission that Saul led against the Ammonites, who had besieged the town of Jabesh-gilead, was so successful that Saul would not claim the victory—that distinction was reserved for the Lord (1 Sam. 11:13).

Sometimes the hand of God is so obvious that no one, not even the rising king of Israel, can take the credit. When you look back over your life, do you see the hand of God at work, orchestrating the events of your life for your good and His glory, or are you tempted to take the credit? Though your gifts and achievements might bring attention your way, we know who they're really from—the Lord! When was the last time you acknowledged that to Him and gave Him all the glory (Rom. 11:36)?

How will you acknowledge and glorify God for His provision in the past? In the future?

DAY 4

READ:

Matthew 5:43-48

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:43-45

NOTES

Perhaps one of the most controversial of Jesus' teachings is found in Matthew 5:43-45, where Jesus told His disciples to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them! This truly is shocking stuff.

Over a thousand years earlier, an anointed and acknowledged king faced just such a test (1 Sam. 10:27). You can imagine how shocked Saul's followers must have been when the king-elect chose to show mercy to the wicked men who dared to question his fitness for the throne. But in one of the rare humble moments of Saul's recorded life, he extended the hand of mercy rather than the sword of revenge. He knew that the credit for Israel's victory and for his ascension to the throne belonged to the Lord alone (11:12-13).

Believers today are confronted with the same choice when they've sinned against—the choice to show mercy or to seek vengeance. In these moments, we need to remember Paul's exhortation to the Roman believers that vengeance belongs to God, and He will take care of it (Rom. 12:19). In other words, God will right every wrong when He wipes every tear from our eyes (Rev. 21:1-4). With that hope, we can extend mercy and offer forgiveness to those who have wronged us.

But the reason for granting forgiveness goes a step further. Yes, we forgive because we know that God will ultimately deal with all injustices, but we also forgive because we are forgiven. And when we understand that our salvation belongs to the Lord, as Saul understood Israel's victory was from the Lord, then we have no excuse to withhold forgiveness from others.

Whom will you forgive today and to whom will you show mercy because you have been forgiven in Christ?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Forgiving others is a crucial aspect of our new life in Christ. It is a natural and daily token of our gratitude for his salvation. Rather than being an extraordinary manifestation of faith, it is an expected attribute of all Christ-followers who have been forgiven by Christ himself and who now seek to imitate him."²

—Aaron Sironi

DAY 5

READ:

1 Samuel 11:12-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 11:14-15

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #57: ASPECTS OF THE ATONEMENT

Christ's substitutionary death on our behalf stands at the center of His atoning work. Without this work, there is no gospel (1 Cor. 15:3). While this substitutionary aspect is central to the atonement, His death also supremely demonstrates God's love for sinners (John 15:13; 1 John 4:10). It shows us how seriously God takes sin. It satisfies every requirement for God to be able to forgive the failures of humanity. And it puts Christ's cosmic victory over sin, Satan, and death on display through His resurrection (Col. 2:15). Every aspect of the atonement should inspire gratitude, praise, and a desire for obedience because it is only through Christ that we are reconciled.

We love watching the kids' show Bluey in our home. The cartoon revolves around the daily life of a Blue Heeler dog family. Bluey, the oldest of two children, is full of imagination and ideas. Inevitably, however, Bluey and her younger sister, Bingo, find themselves in relational and moral quandaries. Not shying away from tough parenting situations, Bluey and Bingo's mom and dad engage the children on their level, guiding them through the uncertainties of growing up while having fun with them in the process. Our children really enjoy the show, but my wife and I enjoy it too because some of the humor, while totally family friendly, is intended for the adults watching the show with their kids. So, Bluey is a kids' show, but in a way, it's a show for parents as well. And in a world filled with terrible television, it's refreshing to watch a show that's both encouraging and enjoyable for the whole family.

In a sense, this relates to what happened the day the Israelites officially installed Saul as the king of Israel (1 Sam. 11:14). Though the occasion was meant to mark the beginning of Saul's reign, it unfolded in the Lord's presence with sacrifices to the Lord (1 Sam. 11:15). What's more, the ceremony took place at Gilgal, the very location of Israel's first Passover celebration in the promised land (Josh. 5:10). In celebrating Saul's kingship in the Lord's presence, Israel recognized Yahweh as the true Sovereign.

As unbelievable as it may sound, believers in Jesus are citizens of the kingdom of heaven and children of the living God, inheritors of a realm beyond our comprehension! Yet we must regularly acknowledge this truth because of our tendency to drift. Even as God's beloved children, we sometimes try to establish our own kingdoms. It's in these moments, when we find ourselves in the muck of our sins, that we must recognize Christ as King once again. And when we do so, humbly confessing our sins, we will find God eager to forgive and restore us as His sons and daughters.

In what areas of your life do you operate as if you are sovereign? Repent and confess these to the Lord.

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: God's chosen king unites his people in the face of an enemy (1 Sam. 11:1-7).

The city of Jabesh-gilead had a negative history for refusing to _____ a call to arms. But now they required rescue by the tribes of Israel. Their history made them _____, and so too does ours.

It pleased _____ to raise up _____, an unlikely savior from an unlikely city, to rescue His people.



What are some ways God has answered your prayers in unexpected ways?

POINT 2: God's chosen king secures victory over an enemy (1 Sam. 11:8-11).

Saul wasted no time gathering his forces and sending a _____ word to the people of Jabesh-gilead that they soon would be _____.

Saul won the victory, but the details surrounding Saul and Gibeah reveal the _____ of God to accomplish His _____.



What are some reasons God often seems to use the unlikely and undeserving to accomplish His purposes?

POINT 3: God's chosen king extends mercy after victory (1 Sam. 11:12-15).

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VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us."³

-Richard Sibbes (c. 1577-1635)

substitutionary aspect is central to the atonement, His death also supremely demonstrates God's love for sinners (John 15:13; 1 John 4:10). It shows us how seriously God takes sin. It satisfies every requirement for God to be able to _____ the failures of humanity. And it puts Christ's cosmic _____ over sin, Satan, and death on display through His resurrection (Col. 2:15). Every aspect of the atonement should inspire gratitude, praise, and a desire for _____ because it is only through Christ that we are reconciled.

? How does extending mercy to others help point people to God, and specifically Jesus Christ?

Saul was finally installed as king over Israel, but the context of this ceremony made it clear that the _____ alone is _____ over all.

? What will it look like for Jesus Christ to be sovereign in our lives?

MY RESPONSE

Because God has extended so great a mercy to us while we were His enemies, we seek to extend mercy, grace, and compassion to all people so that they too might come to fall on the mercy of God for their salvation.

- **HEAD:** What will submission to the kingship of Christ look like in your life?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you will reflect upon and worship God for His amazing mercy and grace given to you by faith in Jesus Christ?
- **HANDS:** What steps will you take to forgive others because of your salvation in Christ? To seek forgiveness from others?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For a town, or city, after a long siege, to receive a *king*, is not to believe him to be their special friend, though such he may be, and in the end they may see it; but to lay down their arms, throw open their gates, and come under his government. These remarks are easily applied; and it is no less easy to perceive that every sinner has not only a warrant thus to receive Christ, but that it is his great sin if he receive him not."⁴

-Andrew Fuller (1754-1815)