

People can respond in a variety of ways in a crisis. Some people's response is to fight. You can get really overwhelmed with emotion and just be ready to do something. Anything to fix it. Other people's instinct can be to flee or run away. To get as far away from this problem as they can and just try to not worry about it. Some people can just be overwhelmed with shock and shut down. Their body doesn't know how to handle what's happening, and it's like the lights just go out.

There's probably other ways we can respond in crisis as well. But when we were experiencing a spiritual crisis, there is one temptation that all of us face.

What we're gonna see in 1 Samuel 11 is a group of God's people who are faced with a crisis. It's a physical crisis, but it's also a spiritual crisis. And what I want us to see in this moment is a reminder of how we should behave and what God does.

I. In difficult moments, we (doubt) what God (can do) (v. 1-4).

When we find ourselves at the end of our rope.

When we find ourselves in deep trouble and cannot see a way out.

We start to doubt that God can save us.

And this is exactly what happens to Israel here.

Verse 1, **"Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead, and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, 'Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you.'"**

Verses like this can be challenging.

And it can be hard for us when we read the Old Testament because most people don't know what to do with all these names and places.

Here is the situation and what we need to know.

The Ammonites are enemies of God's people.

They are descended from Lot and his daughters' unholy union.

They have been on the other side of the Jordan River, terrorizing Israel for generations.

During the time of the judges and the conquest, Israel was actually commanded to leave them alone in Deuteronomy 2:37.

So, they are not just from a shameful part of Israel's history.

They are an ancient enemy and a constant thorn in their side.

So, the king of the Ammonites comes to besiege Israel.

He surrounds the town with his army.

And it seems he has already conquered plenty of other towns in the region.

This is just the latest one.

And the people of Jabesh do not even put up a fight.

Their town is surrounded.

And they are basically just saying, "You win, we give up."

"Tell us how many of us need to be slaves."

":Let us know how much we need to pay you in tribute."

They are willing to quit.

It just looks so hopeless for them.

But the king has no interest in letting them off easy.

Verse 2, **"But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel."**

He sets a condition.

He is going to remove the right eye from every single person in their town.

This would leave them without a capable army to defend themselves.

They can't fight in the army missing a right eye.

They would normally cover their left eye with a shield.

This would lead them totally vulnerable and only useful as servants of the Ammonites.

It would also just be shameful.

Imagine if everyone in our community experienced the trauma and shame of losing an eye.

That isn't something you can hide or cover up.

The Ammonites are trying to completely shame and disgrace Israel.
They did not just want to win or conquer.
They want the entire nation to be embarrassed.
And so this is the reality Israel is facing.
The people who are in that town have no hope of victory.
And in the best-case scenario, they're gonna lose their right eye forever.

Verse 3, **"The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days respite that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to save us, we will give ourselves up to you."**

And so they ask for seven days.
They want seven days to ask someone for help.
Seven days will be a theme in 1 Samuel.
Later on we are going to see Saul be commanded to wait seven days.
Keep it in the back of your mind for the rest of the book.
Maybe make a special mark in your Bible.

But we may wonder why the Ammonites would allow this.
That is because sieges take a long time.
When a city has walls, and you want to siege the city,
Several months would be an incredibly short siege.
Many of them take years.
So, one week and they will probably surrender is actually ideal.
This is an easy deal for them to take.
And really they are asking, give us seven days to see if we can find anyone who can save us.
Anyone in the entire nation who can come and make this happen.

Verse 4, **"When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the ears of the people, and all the people wept aloud."**

And so the people are spreading the news throughout Israel.
And this message comes to Saul.
And all the people who are there weep.
They are not just disappointed by the news or sad.

They are so overcome with emotion that everyone who hears it loudly cries out.

In the same way that you may cry if you got news that someone you love has died.

Part of what makes this especially difficult is Israel's past.

You see it just the circumstance seems hopeless.

It is also that this hopelessness is related to one of the darker moments of their history.

It reminds them of some deep shame.

The Ammonites' existence by itself would fill them with shame.

Because it would remind them of their history and Lot's shameful act with his daughters.

It also would remind them of the darkest part of the book of Judges.

Do you remember years ago when we went through the book of Judges or from your own reading?

That book ends in a very dark place.

A prostitute is brutally killed in a reenactment of Sodom.

And a priest responds to this outrage by cutting up her body into pieces and then sending those all throughout Israel.

And all of Israel rose up to deal with this sin.

And they go and slaughter almost all of the Benjamites.

However, there is one town that does not go.

There is one town that doesn't care and approves of what happened.

That town is Jabesh-gilead that is now under siege.

Israel feels bad about the almost complete genocide of the tribe of Benjamin.

They decide to kidnap 400 young girls from Jabesh-gilead and force them to marry the surviving Benjamites.

After killing every other man, woman, and child in the town.

And the town where the original murder happened at?

That is in Saul's hometown of Gibeah.
The whole tragic affair was not that long ago.
It is one of the dark moments of their history.
And it is being brought up again.

This matters because it is part of what makes them feel hopeless.
They probably are already filled with shame.
They probably feel like they deserve this.
They doubt God would save them because look at what they have done.

You have probably felt that way before.
There are crises that have come to your door that remind you of your failures.
Or they fill you with shame.
Or they remind you of some of the dark times in your life.
The reality is that all of us face this at one time or another.
We all have moments of doubting God.
You are not alone and you aren't a terrible Christian for wondering.
But you do not have to despair or lose hope.
Because there is someone who can save.

II. God can use even imperfect people to save (v. 5-11).

God does not need everything to be perfect.
He does not need the most holy people only.
He can save even when things look hopeless.

Verse 5, **"Now, behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen. And Saul said, 'What is wrong with the people, that they are weeping?' So they told him the news of the men of Jabesh."**

Saul hears the news.
And it appears Saul is not really acting as a king right now.
He is just working cattle.
He is acting kind of like a shepherd this time.
He pauses his work when he hears the weeping.
And he asks what is going on?

Verse 6, **"And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled."**

And here we see Saul doing what he's supposed to do.

This is Saul's best moment.

He is filled with the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit rushes upon him.

He is filled with the power of God.

And his response is not the way everyone else responds.

He does not respond with doubt or despair.

Instead, he is filled with anger.

He is filled with a righteous and holy spirit-filled anger.

There's gonna be a lot of other things that are gonna happen, but we're gonna come back to this verse.

Because this is the key.

It is the fact that Saul is used by God because he is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Verse 7, **"He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, 'Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!' Then the dread of the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one man."**

There is a lot going on here.

It is violent and strange.

This is probably offensive to some of us.

It probably isn't one of the stories we teach our kids in Sunday School.

But what is going on here?

You need to see that this is almost a reenactment of Judges.

Just as the unnamed prostitute was cut into pieces and sent through Israel.

So, Saul cuts the oxen into pieces to send through Israel.

The connections to that previous passage were already there.

But this makes it obvious that God wants us to connect them.

Part of this is that animals were cut into two during making a covenant. God made a covenant with Abraham. He cut animals in two and walked between them.

To show that just as these animals could not be put back together, he will not break his word.

And so some of this is a covenant that Saul is making.

A lot of it is a curse, saying I will do this to you if you do not do what is right.

But it also, on another level, is God at work.

God is using what man meant for evil for his good.

The last time something was cut up into pieces and sent out from this place. It was terrible and wrong.

This time it is happening in the right way to bring about the redemption of God's people.

It's the reminder that God can use even the imperfect and the shameful parts of our story to bring about salvation.

That's what He's doing here.

Their shame is not gonna keep God from delivering.

Verse 8, **"When he mustered them at Bezek, the people of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand."**

All of the people had been crying and doubting.

But now hundreds of thousands of people respond.

The same people that had been wondering, how is this guy going to be our king respond in mass to his call.

Verse 9, **"And they said to the messengers who had come, 'Thus shall you say to the men of Jabesh-gilead; 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have salvation.' When the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, they were glad.'"**

And the messenger said go back and tell them we are coming.

But it's not just telling him we are coming is that salvation is coming.

They will have salvation before the hottest part of the day.

When it is still early in the morning tomorrow, they will be saved.

Verse 10, **"Therefore the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you and you may do to us whatever seems good to you."**

So the men in the city, tell the Ammonites we will surrender tomorrow.

I'm not sure that this deceit was necessary.

I don't even think it's right.

It seems to me a little bit like their lack of faith in that God would not be able to save them.

That they think they need to employ some trickery.

Verse 11, **"And the next day Saul put the people in three companies. And they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together."**

The next morning, Saul comes.

He splits them into three groups.

Somehow these groups are able to march right into the Ammonite camp and beat them.

And they are destroyed so mightily that, as they were running away and fleeing no two are next to each other, and no two are going the same direction.

They are utterly decimated.

The same Saul that was too scared last chapter to fight the Philistines wins handily.

The same Saul that was too scared and hitting the baggage now stands boldly.

God can use imperfect means which should be encouraging to us!

We do not have to be perfect for God to use us.

We do not need to wait until a perfect holy saint is born to deliver.

The encouragement for you is that you could've been running from your calling like Saul.

You could be hiding in the baggage and hiding in the back of the church. You can run as far from God as you want and ignore him for decades of your life.

And when you finally decide to turn around and do what God called you it's not too late.

You haven't missed it or forfeited anything.

God could still use you.

And God can even use you to do things beyond what you can imagine.

And he doesn't need you to be perfect for or to clean yourself all the way up where to conquer all of your sins.

He just needs you to be willing to be filled with the Spirit.

On the other hand, this means we don't need to defend the imperfect.

We can acknowledge their sin.

We can acknowledge how Saul failed without blushing or being embarrassed.

This is a temptation that I often see, especially in older Christian writings, but I still see it today.

There can be a tendency to always try and defend people in the Bible.

And we can twist ourselves and knots to try to explain how they're every action actually is OK or even those that are bad. Aren't that bad.

But the gospel set us free from having to do this.

The people God uses in the Bible are not used because they are so great.

They are not used because they are such brilliant military leaders.

They are not used because they have such incredible talents and gifts.

They are not used because of their grit or the vastness of their faith.

Most of the time God uses them and chooses them because they're not great at all.

And God wants to show us that he can use imperfect, sometimes downright awful people for his purpose.

And so even Saul, who is a tragic character who we will see is gonna fail and fail, and fail, and fail.

God in his grace uses him mighty to save his people.

III. God is the only one who empowers salvation (v. 12-15).

This is the key.

Saul does not experience victory because he's a genius.

God is the one who saves.

You would be mistaken if you came away from this chapter thinking, "Wow, Saul is wonderful."

But you would be right if you came away from thinking, "Wow, God is wonderful."

Verse 12, **"Then the people said to Samuel, 'Who is it that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us? Bring the men, that we may put them to death.'"**

The people get it wrong.

They start thinking about how awesome Saul is.

They're ready to hop on the bandwagon.

They all wanna celebrate and talk about how this is the best king ever.

They're telling each other that they always knew he had what it took.

And now they wanna ask who doubted him and let's kill them.

Which, to be clear is the wrong way to celebrate what God does.

Verse 13, **"But Saul said, 'Not a man shall be put to death this day, for together the LORD has worked salvation in Israel.'"**

In one of Saul's best moments, he says no.

He does not want anyone who doubted him to be executed.

He does not want his rivals done away with.

He does not want those who would threaten his rule to be punished.

And this is in contrast to what he's gonna do later.

Later on, he will kill so many people and try to kill more who think someone else should be king.

But for now he does what's right.

Because he acknowledges, God is the one who brought salvation.

He is saying rightly this doesn't have to do with me. This has to do with God.

Saul was able to save because God brings salvation.

Saul did not get victory because he was so brilliant and how he attacked.
Saul did not see victory because the deceit of the city was so brilliant.
Saul did not win because he had insight no one else had.
Saul did not win because he was such a good speaker that it worked everyone up into a frenzy that they couldn't lose.
Saul did not win because they had some kind of technology.
Victory came because God brought it.

This is something that we have to understand and we have to get because we forget.

Saul is gonna forget.

We forget to.

We so often think that amazing things and success happens because of people not God.

We see your church grow from a Bible study to 70,000 people and we think it must be because they have a brilliant strategy or because the leaders are such visionaries are so charismatic.

We see a Christian start a business and it becomes a global enterprise and they are a billionaire and we think wow they must have something no one else has.

God is the one who does it.

Now, particularly in this passage is about how God saves his people from death.

But I think this is a very real spiritual principle that we have to understand.

Ultimately, God is the one who empowered us to accomplish anything.

We are only able to breathe because God put the breath of life into dirt.

We are only able to live and move and have our being because Jesus holds the universe together.

And anything that we accomplish or that we do is not just because of us it is because of the God who empowers us.

Atheists will object to this.

Those who do not know God will always want to point to others instead of God.

They refuse to recognize that even though God uses means, He is the cause.

Yes, a doctor may be the one who performs a life-saving surgery.

But we recognize our lives are not saved by the brilliance of a man or woman and their education.

Our lives were saved by God.

We must see this when it comes to God's people, and when it comes to the kingdom of God and when it comes to the church.

God is the one who empowers; He is the one who brings his work about.

We get a very big trouble when we start to think it is a particular person who did this instead of a particular God.

Verse 14, **"Then Samuel said to the people, 'Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom.'"**

But because the people get it and they're ready to worship God and acknowledge him, they go to renew the kingdom.

In some ways, this is a rededication.

It is like a renewing of their vows.

Where they are ready to actually make all king over them.

Verse 15, **"So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."**

So all the people go there and they make saw the king.

And they sacrifice to God.

And they worship and rejoice and praise God.

And so also rejoice and praise God, not himself.

And this location is significant because it has been significant all throughout Israel's history.

This is the place where they raised 12 memorial stones to remember that God left them across the Jordan River on dryland.

This is the place at the new generation was circumcised and renewed the covenant after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

This is the place where the walls of Jericho came tumbling down after they did nothing but March and yell.

This is the place where the man of ceased because now they were in the promised land.

This is the place to remind them of all the times that God's power has been with saved them.

And they are here again because of what God has done.

Because God is the only one with the power.

God uses people.

But God is the only one who saves.

He does not need human beings.

He can do it all on His own.

Often He does do it on His own.

Like with the plagues, or splitting the sea, or casting out demons.

And the ultimate salvation that all of us need was only found in Jesus Christ.

Because we do not need to be saved from Kings or tyranny or unjust laws. We don't even need to be saved from other armies who would attempt to mutilate us and kill our children and enslave us.

We need to be saved for the tyranny of sin.

We need to be saved from the disgrace and shame that sin brings.

We need to be saved from the chains that holds us in bondage.

We need to be saved from the eternal death that sin brings.

We need to be hailed from the way sin this figures and destroys us.

And that kind of salvation cannot come from any human agent.

And cannot come from any human project.

It cannot come from any brilliant insight.

This salvation can only come through Jesus Christ.

Who is not just empowered with the Holy Spirit but who is God.
And this God came not to kill this time but to die in our place.
He came to shed his blood that through his wounds we would be healed.
He came to defeat darkness and overthrow the kingdoms of the world.
He offers salvation to the weak in the imperfect and the far off and the
unclean and the blind in the lame and the prodigal and the sinner.
He offers it to you and he offers it to me.
We should receive it and embrace it.