

12. Saul's Finest Hour

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A pastor took over a church that has a lot of problems in Waltham, Massachusetts some time ago. It used to be a big church, but quite empty due to the previous church infightings. When he started his first service, people sat in the last three rows of the church, and it's a long building. The first thing he did was picking up his pulpit and carried it all the way down the aisle and set it down in front of the first pew where they were sitting.

As his teachings become more fiery and great, more and more people were starting to attend the church services. He kept having to move the pulpit back, Sunday after Sunday, until finally he was almost in the choir loft with people everywhere. He preached the Word, and faithfully labored under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Many years later, God moved him to be the president of a good Christian college on the West Coast.

He was followed by a brilliant man with two doctor's degrees, but a retaliatory and petty man. He had biblical knowledge and experience, but he didn't do well with criticism. He hired guards to monitor who would play the instruments and who would be allowed to enter and to exit from the church. Through public debates, arguments, and one retaliatory action after another, the church was emptied. Sure, the pastor won the arguments, but he lost the battle.

This evening, we are going to see the only finest hour of king Saul. He not only wins the battle against the Ammonites, but also wins the battle against his own pride and insecurity. It was too bad that his finest hour stopped before the reign of his dynasty.

A. JABESH GILEAD UNDER ATTACK

1 Samuel 11:1-4 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." 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." 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." 4 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.

What is your interpretation?

It might seem to us that the men of Jabesh Gilead are cowards, and unwilling to fight against this enemy. We are quick to ask them where their trust in God is. They were in what seemed to be an impossible place, but it is where the power of God can shine the brightest. Instead of humbling themselves before God and confessing the sins that had rescued them from the trouble, they put God altogether aside, and basically offered to become the slaves of the Ammonites.

Before we, too, condemn the people of Jabesh Gilead, let's remember that we also often run to other sources to handle our difficult situations before we turn to God Almighty in prayer.

Why did Nahash make the demand of destroying the men's right eyes?

1) It was to glorify himself by humiliating the men of this city, and all of Israel.

2) It was to make the men of Jabesh Gilead unable to fight effectively in the future battle.

In hand-to-hand combat, and a man with one eye has less depth perception, and is at a disadvantage to a man with two eyes. Because he who holds his shield to the enemy with his left hand, thereby hides his left eye, and looks at his enemy with his right eye. He, therefore, who plucks out that right eye makes men useless in war.

By the way, the name "Nahash" means serpent or snake in Hebrew. This guy was a snake.

From these two verses, we can see in this account of similarities between satan, our spiritual enemy, and Nahash, the enemy of Israel:

1) Satan attacks us, but cannot do anything against us without God's approval and our pre-mature surrender to him.

2) Satan wants us to serve him, and will attempt to intimidate us into giving in to him.

3) Satan wants to humiliate us, and exalt himself over us. Through humiliating one saint, satan wants to bring reproach on all God's people.

4) Satan wants to take away our ability to effectively fight against him.

5) Satan wants to blind us, and if he cannot blind us completely, he will blind us partially.

In a way, the men of Jabesh Gilead were in a good place, because they absolutely knew two things. They knew their need to be saved, and they knew they could not save themselves. Many today – even in the church – don't know what the men of Jabesh Gilead knew. Many today don't really know their need to be saved, rescued from the righteous judgment of God against them and their sin. And many today don't really know they cannot save themselves. They still think in their hearts that they can do it.

Why did Nahash let the messengers from Jabesh Gilead go? Nahash had two reasons:

1) He was confident of Israel's disunity, and figured they would be unable to find anyone to save them.

2) By allowing the messengers to go through all Israel, he was making his name big and his reputation fearsome throughout the whole nation.

3) The people of Jabesh Gilead didn't have a good reputation among the Israelites according to Judges 19-21.

Nahash was over confident and prideful just like satan. Like Nahash, satan constantly tries to remind us that our past failures prevent future rescue. When he reminds us of our miserable past, remind him of his future eternal damnation. God forgives us and forgets our past failures. He graciously gives us chances after chances.

B. SAUL'S LEADERSHIP

1 Samuel 11:5-11 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. 6 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. 8 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. 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." 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.

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

Saul had already been anointed and recognized as king over Israel, yet in a sense there was nothing for him to do. He really didn't know where to begin when it came to setting up a royal court and a government, since Israel never had one before. So, he just went back home and to the field, and figured God would tell him what to do when the time was right.

It was time for Saul to act, and God was with Saul. The Spirit of God came upon Saul, but He did not come to entertain him or to thrill him. He came to equip Saul for service, so that he could do something for the Lord.

The righteous indignation is shown here as well as in the Gospels of Jesus. When Jesus entered into the temple and saw what the Pharisees did to the temple for their financial gain.

John 2:15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables.

The difference between righteous anger and our own selfish anger is whom we are angry for. If we are angry for the sake of God's name, that is a righteous anger. But in most cases, we are angry, because we don't get our way. Here, Saul's anger is not out of a personal sense of hurt or offense, but out of a righteous concern for the cause of the Lord among His people.

Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath

Saul looked at his oxen and the oxen looked at their master. They didn't like the way their master looked at them. Another telegram with the body parts of his oxen via the Jewish FedEx to all over the nation. It sounds like something that the Mexican mafia would do.

The people got the clear message that this newly appointed king means business. Grant that Saul was not a soldier or general. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon a man, that person doesn't need formal training or experience to do God's work. Because God will equip the person. Remember whom God calls, God equips. This is what we call "Empowerment of the Holy Spirit," or "Falling of the Holy Spirit," or "Anointing of the Holy Spirit" upon someone.

The people of Jabesh Gilead were glad to hear the news from Saul. Before, they did not know if there was anyone to save them. Now they know they have someone to save them. Knowing that we have the Savior should make us joyful, hopeful, and confident in our future, too.

Here, the men of Jabesh Gilead are tactically deceiving Nahash. They are speaking as if they will surrender to Nahash, so his army will be unprepared for battle. Of course, one might say they really didn't lie. After all, the next day they would indeed come out to Nahash, and he could do to them whatever seems good. The message contained a clever ambiguity, while giving the impression that surrender was intended.

C. SAUL'S MERCY TO HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS

1 Samuel 11:12-13 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."

Please give your interpretation of this portion.

Saul was gracious to prevent his trigger happy supporters from unnecessary bloodshed.

Satan, having failed in the attack through Nahash, was now trying to attack Israel – even in victory – by dividing the nation against each other. Satan will attack us any way he can, and often use times of victory to deceive and divide us.

Saul himself knew that the Lord had accomplished salvation in Israel. It was the Lord who did the saving, and Saul was humble enough to know it. At this moment of victory, it would have been all the more tempting to take the credit for himself.

The phrase "*the Lord has accomplished salvation in Israel*" points us to Jesus, because His name means the Lord is salvation. Whenever salvation is accomplished, it is through Jesus.

D. SAUL'S INAUGURATION AS THE KING OF ISRAEL

1 Samuel 11:14-15 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.

Samuel wisely sees this time of victory as a strategic opportunity to renew the kingdom at Gilgal. Saul had to prove himself before many would accept that he was the king. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It is one thing for a person to be "anointed" or "appointed," but the evidence must be in the action.

The Israelites decided to make Saul their king, when they saw him marching all night to rescue the town once it was terrible; and ignoring the mouthy people who wanted to kill those who complained against Saul before. They saw his love for the country and its people.

Jesus is the King of kings, the Lord of lords. He wasn't appointed by men that He had to prove Himself to anyone. He is the King no matter who accepts the fact or not.

Saul won the battle that day, but it was more than one battle he won. This chapter records Saul's inward and outward battles. The outward victory was obvious, but inwardly, Saul fought the strong and subtle temptations to pride, insecurity, and revenge. But would he continue to? Unfortunately, we find that this is the ONLY finest hour of Saul. He heads to failure due to his insecurity and pride.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Instead of turning to our own resources at the time of difficulties, let's turn to our God.

The problem with us is that we think we are capable to solve our life's problems. When the bottom drops, that is when we realize that we are not so capable anymore. We need to turn to our all loving God for help and wisdom. He will guide us with His strong righteous right arm. We can find a shelter under His protective wings.

2) If we want to lead any unbelievers, we need to lead them by our love for Christ and one another and for them.

Unbelievers might be lost, but they are not stupid. They know if we treat them with stuck-up elite attitude and they will despise our hypocritical witness. But they will be drawn to Christ, if we bring the love of Christ to them.

3) It is not ours to revenge those who hurt us.

I am not talking about self-defense. It is about taking vengeance with our own hands. It is better for God to take care of it than we try to do it. If we do it, we make more mess than its worth.

Romans 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." says the Lord.