

1 Samuel 11

Intro July 13, 2008 Missions: God's Theme in God's Word

Today is our Missions Celebration at Cornerstone. We are pleased to have Nicole Franz with us from Wycliffe Bible Translators, serving in Thailand and Chad Selje with Navigators serving at UW-Whitewater as well as other people representing various agencies serving around the world. As we begin, I have a question for you:

- Who here has served the Kingdom of God having been appointed by a church or Christian agency?
- Who has done short-term missions (longer than 1 month)?
- Who has gone on a missions team for a week or two?
- Who has traveled outside the state of Wisconsin and experienced a culture not your own?
- Who has made an acquaintance with someone from another culture?
- Who has met a non-Christian?

All fall into at least one of these categories. For that reason to call ourselves *Christian* is to be engaged in the world, that is, to be a missionary. We are ambassadors, representing Christ. As we have this missions celebration today, as we pray every Sunday for a variety of missionaries we support throughout the world on an ongoing basis – we are reminded that missions is the heartbeat of the Christian life.

Missions is about engaging the world with the good news of Christ taking on our sin, clothing us with his righteousness, of removing our alienation from God, so that you and I can be adopted by the Father, to be co-heirs with Christ. If that is our calling in life, we should expect that whenever we open the Word of God we should expect to see this central concept ooze out in every verse.

I know this is true, but I don't always believe it. As Laurie Beyer and I talked about this missions celebration we looked into the possibility of having an international speaker bring the message. That did not materialize. In God's twisted providence, I am as international as you'll get today. As I began my work on today's message last Tuesday, I knew what our theme today would be and I looked at the passage that again, in God's providence, would be our text for today...1 Samuel 11. I thought God made a mistake. I culled through sermons from years past and thought it best to pick a passage that is more missions-minded, like Psalm 67 that calls for all nations to praise our God, or Matthew 28, the Great Commission or Acts 1:8 how God sends us out into the world.

But God brought me back to 1 Samuel 11, a passage that deals with Ammonites gouging out eyes, cutting up oxen and sending them out as bovine invitations to wage war, and kingdom renewal at Gilgal and I was suddenly reminded that if all the Christian life is about the kingdom of God, that is, missions, then every passage will take us to these vital truths.

So with that said, we are going to dive into 1 Samuel 11 and let it speak to us about reaching our world today. Hang in there. After I read the passage some of you are going to ask yourself, "How does Chris intend to get there from this text?" READ 1 Samuel 11

Israel's world three thousand years ago was in turmoil.

A technological and political revolution was going on; nations moving from the Bronze Age to the Iron. Small change to you today, but then it is like moving from a telegraph to an iPhone overnight. God's people, fearful of falling behind the times sense the need to become contemporary. No longer content to be ruled by Judges whom God randomly raises up, they clamor for kings, so they will be like the nations around them. The political climate is about to be transformed.

Saul is anointed and appointed as king over Israel. Yet the benefits of his reign remain to be seen. He's yet to be tested, but that is about to change. Israel's adversaries and distant relatives to the east, the Ammonites, are not content to allow Israel to remain unchallenged. But what unfolds is not just an ancient tribal conflict, but will help guide us today to see how missions is God's theme in God's Word.

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE IN CONFLICT

Nahash the Ammonite enters from the east and besieges Jabesh-gilead. Jabesh is located to the east of the Jordan River, belonging to the tribe of Manassah, not too far from the people of Ammon. This area had been hotly contested for centuries, but over a hundred years before Jephthah established Israel's primacy in this region. That has now changed.

Sensing defeat, the men of Jabesh-gilead ask for a treaty, a covenant that will ensure peace. But peace will come with a cost. The people of Jabesh will have to serve Nahash. Israel already

demanded a king like the nations and this town is willing to accept the rule of a foreign king. But it appears they have no choice. Who wants to be eliminated?

The people of Jabesh ask for a covenant, to cut an agreement. Nahash is more than willing to comply. With wicked wisdom, Nahash sets out his terms of surrender. The right eye of every man will be scooped out.

The sadistic stipulation would disgrace Israel and protect Nahash's interests. The loss of an eye would leave the men still productive in the field and trades, thus generating revenue for Nahash. But the loss of the right eye would render the men useless on the battlefield. As the left hand held the shield and the right arm the spear or sword, the right eye was what peered out. With that gone, Nahash would emasculate God's people.

The people are out of options. They capitulate with the caveat that they be given one week to see if there is anyone who will come to their aide. Nahash agrees. Why? Not sure, except for the common arrogance of the human heart. Perhaps Nahash felt assured that no one would come to the aide of these people, who, just a generation or two before refused to help their brothers in another battle which we will look at in a moment. He may have been so confident that he could defeat the men of Jabesh and any other army sent by the descendants of Jacob. Either way, Israel will be disgraced all the more. "Bring it on!" he no doubt thought.

Messengers were sent out. One reached Gibeah some 40 miles to the southwest. When the people heard the news, they wept. But you need some background from Judges 20 to know why.

You recall the sordid tale of the men from Gibeah, those from Saul's father or grandfather's generation. How the Levite spent the night in the town only to be threatened with gang rape by some unsavory sorts in the town. Instead of the Levite, they abused his concubine, left her for dead. The Levite called on all Israel to fight against Gibeah and the entire tribe of Benjamin.

All Israel gathered, all except the residents of one town...you guessed it, Jabesh-gilead.

After the near genocide of the tribe of Benjamin, only six hundred men were left. With no wives the tribe would die out, since all the other tribes took an oath not to give their wives to these degenerates. An idea was born. Since the men of Jabesh-gilead did not come to battle, Israel surrounded their town, killed every living thing there, except four hundred virgins. These women were given to the men of Gibeah.

I'm sure you're wondering...when is he going to get to missions, because this is nothing like missionary work that I have every heard about before.

Missions is about conflict

We somehow imagine that conflict, war, battle is something indicative of the Old Testament, but we live in the context of peace and love, where there is rarely a harsh word spoken. Interestingly, the image of God's work in God's world is often of conflict and war.

To think that our world will acquiesce to the gospel, will look to us for God's wisdom is not only foolish, but deadly. We read from 2 Corinthians 6 and see again in 10:3-5, our lives are one of warfare. But, notice, not a physical battle. There is no jihad, no call to arms, but a spiritual battle. Ephesians 6 describes the Christian life as one in which we clothe ourselves in armor.

I suspect that in our day we have a problem with this kind of talk. We are not entirely comfortable with the language of aggression applied to Christian work. "Going to do battle" is not how we like to think of our evangelistic efforts. This Biblical language does not fit comfortably with our approaches to making Christ known. In many ways the business world has replaced the battlefield as a source of categories for thinking about this work. Gospel work is then not war but commerce we go to sell a product, not to fight a battle. We are marketers, not soldiers. We have merchandise, not weapons. We face potential customers not an enemy. We are out to expand our market share and increase our customer base, not to capture, defeat and destroy a foe. We form a business plan, not a battle plan. The conflict we face arises from the competition in the marketplace of ideas where our product is not the only one offered, rather than the hostile wiles of an enemy. The language of war, weapons and battle is too extreme from the way we think about evangelism. We are more like advertisers than fighters.¹

But to ignore the truth that we are engaged not in a physical battle, but a spiritual conflict is to deny the power of sin, the urgency of our call, and the supremacy of the gospel. Far too often we, like

the men of Jabesh-gilead will submit to the world, imagining that a covenant with the world is necessary. In the end it will only spell our destruction.

Do not be surprised that our world issues ultimatums or that for many believers they choose to capitulate to Satan's terms of peace. But we are not alone in the fight, for...

Missions is about community

We will see how this plays out in the coming verses, but we should never forget that the world is filled with our brothers and sisters in Christ who call out for help.

How easy is it to forget that in the 2000 years that the Satan's stranglehold on the nations has been restrained, that you and I have brothers and sisters in Christ who can use our support and we theirs. The mission of the church is to come to the aid of our family throughout the world, knowing that as we go, God has many more of His elect here and there who will come to a saving knowledge of Christ.

That support comes not only in those we know, those who have been sent out by Cornerstone and are supported by us in prayer and finances, but recognizing that God opens and closes doors throughout the world and we need to respond to needs both in our own area and elsewhere.

GOD'S PEOPLE GO OUT

When news came to Gibeah of the terms of surrender for Jabesh, the people wept, wringing their hands. Those in Jabesh-gilead wondered if there was one to save them (v3). Those in Gibeah knew their native son, Saul, was now king, de-facto leader of Israel, but they seemed to have wondered as well.

Did they forget the acclamation of Saul as king and so moan about the sorry state of the world, or, did they know that their only hope was Saul...and so moan about the sorry state of the world.

Saul returns from the fields finding his town bawling. When he hears the gloomy ultimatum, all heaven breaks loose. The other euphemism does not apply, for v6, tells us that the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul and his anger was kindled.

He takes his oxen, hack them into pieces and sends them out as cattle calling cards requesting the pleasure of all of Israel to come join him in battle. If this sounds familiar, you've know your gruesome Old Testament allusions...the Levite's concubine in Judges 19-20. I say invitation, but to RSVP regrets means that the same fate will befall one's own oxen.

Something radical has happened in Israel. For all the failures to date, for the unlikely leader of Saul, we see what happens when a gracious God empowers His servants.

What good could come out of Gibeah? A generation before it was a by-word for sadistic rapists. Now it leads the charge for God's kingdom. All of this happens not because Israel has a new political structure, a king, but because the king of Israel has the Spirit of God.

Israel responds and 330,000 men are mustered to the west of the Jordan, some ten miles from Jabesh. Word is sent to the men there that by noon the next day, they would be delivered, saved.

Jabesh sends a message to their would-be masters that they may have their way with them; they give up and will not fight. The camp of the Ammonites no doubt partied well that night, for they had their eye on the prize...a pile of eyeballs in the morning!

Saul divides his army up, surrounds the Ammonite camp and during the morning watch, between 2-6 AM they rolled over the slumbering enemy, so that the few Ammonites who survived did not even flee together.

Missions is about God empowering His people

Saul's been the butt of jokes the last few weeks. This clueless king is transformed into the man of the hour. This is exactly what God does with us. God transforms His servants by the power of His Spirit. Fortunately God's empowerment does not entail slaughtering livestock and sending pot roast parcel post. But God graciously empowers even the most unlikely people to serve Him and when He does, watch out.

That tells us something else; God's empowerment means that people must be active. There is no passivity here or in missions today. Could God have caused a great confusion to fall on Nahash and his troops, so that even the wimpy men of Jabash-gilead would win the battle? Sure. But God

chose not to. God's will was for God's people to come together and do God's will. There is no place in God's Word or in God's world for a passivity to hide behind one's theology

At the beginnings of the great missionary movement at the end of the 18th century, hapless pastor and cobbler, William Carey, dared to raise the question of whether "the command given to the apostles to teach all nations was not binding on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world." To such a seemingly innocuous truism, Carey inquiry was met by common sentiment of the day, when a senior minister retorted:

"Young man, sit down, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me."

While never doubting God's sovereignty in missions, we likewise never doubt God's grace in using people like us to reach the world. So the words of Carey's later, famous sermon from Isaiah 54, still rings true when he repeatedly asked:

"Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

What are the great things God is doing in the world today? Certainly to join us this afternoon for lunch and hear various reports, to read the prayer letters of our missionaries and keep in touch is a start. But God's empowerment is not just in Thailand or UW-Whitewater. It is in the hearts and lives God has placed before you. There is where you are called to see God's empowering grace.

GOD'S PEOPLE CELEBRATE GOD'S VICTORY

The question raised after Saul's coronation in 10:27 by the worthless men as to whether Saul could save them had been answered. With victory in hand, the tables are turned. What would become of those who dared to doubt God's grace in Saul's life?

Saul's response was to show grace to those men as God shown grace to him. No one was to be put to death (13), but instead they were to celebrate God's salvation of Israel.

With that settled, it was time to gather at Gilgal, the spot where Israel celebrated after crossing the Jordan River into the Promised land several centuries before under the leadership of Joshua. Under the direction of the aging prophet and priest, Samuel, sacrifices were offered, the victory celebrated and the kingdom was renewed.

Missions celebrates our commitment to the kingdom

This kingdom renewal and sacrifice is an important reminder for us today. While some see this as yet another coronation of Saul after the victory, the terminology points not to Saul's rights as king over Israel, but God's people renewing their commitment to God's kingdom.

This renewal recognizes the need we all have to commit and recommit to the cause of Christ. What we said or did a year ago or thirty years in the past matters little. The question of trusting Christ is much more about at this point in time. That renewal takes place in the context of worship.

This answers the question: "Why Saul?" Because God uses Saul to his glory. Why you?

The same reason, to show his power, his grace at work in your life. Worship then gives us that view of the Father's transforming grace.

When we celebrate all God does throughout the world, in Thailand and in Packerland, in the lives of a Compassion child or an adopted child, of evangelistic outreach or disaster response, we have the opportunity to worship the goodness of God in reaching His world.

But if this celebration is to be more than just an informational meeting, more than just a travelogue of interesting people and places, we need to realize what an integral part we are to God's plan in the world. Missions is all about what you and I are doing in our world. The location matters little. God's grace working through God's people is the key.

¹ John Woodhouse, 1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader, Crossway Books, 2008, p192.