

Title: Can Anyone Save Us?
Text: 1 Samuel 11:1-4
Theme: How can we be saved?
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmt: Only God can rescue us.

Read Text:

The song that the choir sang came from Psalm 3 which David wrote when he was running for his life from a coup in his kingdom, led by his own son. The odds of survival were not in his favor. The people of Jabesh-Gilead could say the same thing, only 100x more. One of the story lines of the Bible is how God rescues his own from impossible situations. All of those events, Joseph and the Egyptian prison, Israel and Pharaoh, then Israel and the Red Sea, Gideon and the Midianites, Samuel and the Philistines at Mizpah, David and Goliath, David and Saul, David and the Philistines, Jonah and the fish, Hezekiah and the Assyrians, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and the fiery furnace, Daniel and the lion's den, Jesus and the blind, the lame, the hungry, the deaf and even some who died, are all designed to teach us two lessons. 1. Our God saves. All of these events are little rescues that are designed to hammer this truth in your heart that our God saves. But the ultimate salvation that God does, is not from armies, evil kings and disease. The ultimate salvation that God does is this: God, only through faith in Christ saves you from your sin. God saves you from the penalty of your sin, from the power of sin and will one day save you from the very presence of sin. That is the greatest and ultimate salvation that there is. That is what the death and resurrection of Christ accomplished. All of these other examples of rescue and salvation are previews of the greatest salvation. Most people only want the previews. Know what I mean? They want God to save them from their difficulties but they do not necessarily want God to save them from their sin. We want God to save us from the mess that we are in, but God wants to save you from you. The difficulties are designed to teach us a very important lesson. 2. We cannot save ourselves. We have to call upon God to save us from our sin. But, this second point is the most difficult truth for people to grasp because we all like to think that we are a little better than we really are. Our hearts fight against the truth that on our own, we are in a hopeless situation and we cannot save ourselves and therefore, we have to throw ourselves completely upon the mercy of God.

This morning we are going to focus on the first four verses of chapter 11 because they help us understand the end of chapter 11 like we should, and they help us understand our world and our hearts as well. There is an extreme swing of emotion from the beginning of the chapter to the end of it. The chapter begins with frantic, sheer panic despair and ends with such unbridled euphoria that Samuel has to once again be a reality check lest the people get totally carried away. What was it that caused the people to be so terrified?

The answer to that question is given in how this man, Nahash wields his power as a king. The way that Nahash uses authority results in the people under his control being terrified. Nahash is evil. He is like a little Satan. Nahash uses power on a small scale the way Satan uses power on a large scale. What he does is an abuse of power. Nahash is a classic example of how power can

reveal the corruption of the human heart. There are people, like Saul, who show no inclination for abuse or authoritarian, dictatorial, and maniacal control, because they are not in a position of power. But, when they get into that position, and either get drunk on the power, or the prominence of their position puts their character on display and their decisions are subject to public review, we often see how defensive, angry, and destructive people can be. This is so often the case when their reputation is threatened, when someone else looks to be better than they are, or when their hold on power is at stake. Oh my goodness! This is going to be a major theme of much of 1 Samuel and this text sets us up for it.

The big idea of this sermon is: Is there anyone who can save us, because we need to be saved. You live in a world that is full of people like Nahash. You live in a world that is profoundly influenced by sin and Satan and therefore there are people like Nahash all over the place. I am stating the obvious when I say, 1) We have an enemy who is terrifying. 2) Your own heart may be inclined to be like Nahash. What makes you think that you wouldn't use power like Nahash? Are you aware of what is lurking in your heart? How do we deal with how our insecurities result in a lust for control? A little bit of money, success, power and influence so often reveals the fact that we have a problem that we cannot solve and that problem is ourselves. 3) I want you to see the contrast between Nahash (a mini Satan) and Christ. I want you to see the contrast between a leader who terrorizes others, that he might be feared so he can try to have control over something that he cannot keep and a leader who loves others and protects others so that he might enjoy a relationship with others with a love and joy that can never be taken away.

(Map) The Ammonites have long been threatened by Israel and have in turn been a serious threat to Israel on the east. Keep in mind that in the Transjordan region (land east of the Jordan River) the tribes of, Reuben, Gad and part of the tribe of Manasseh lived. Many of you have heard about the Dead Sea Scrolls. Between the years 1945 and 1954 a search was made of hundreds of caves in the Dead Sea region that resulted in the finding of all sorts of ancient documents hidden in the walls of the caves. Some of those were the most ancient copies of the OT that are known to exist. One of the fragments of one of those documents states that Nahash had been terrorizing the tribes of Reuben and Gad and that any of the men that he captured, he would gouge out their right eyes. This had both a practical and a psychological effect. The practical effect was to make these men ineffective as soldiers.

Battles were generally fought in those days with a sword and a shield, sometimes with a spear as well. Soldiers held the shield with their left hands and fought with their swords in their right hands. Holding up the shield with their left hand, meant that the vision of their left eye was usually blocked. So, if they had their right eye gouged out, they were useless as a soldier. Nahash was known for gouging out the right eyes of men. We do not need much of an imagination to realize what he and his ilk did with women. The setting is very clear.

1. We have an enemy who is terrifying.

The Dead Sea Scroll that I referenced, also said that 7,000 Israeli troops had retreated to the city of Jabesh-Gilead. This city was the last stronghold in the area that had not fallen under the

control of Nahash. It is likely that there were plenty of other men in that city whose right eyes had been gouged out. These men were maimed, marred, marked for the rest of their lives as being defeated by Nahash and the Ammonites. The hatred would be deep, but the fear by others, deeper. Verse 1 is a nightmare. Nahash surrounds the city of Jabesh-Gilead. He holds the power. The inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead are merciless. They have no hope of being able to hold out and rather than try to defend themselves and risk making this maniac even more angry, they attempt to waver some sort of peace.

“Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you.”

How do you strike a deal with your enemy when he holds all of the cards? Nahash says, “I will make a treaty with you. I.e. I will spare your lives only if I gouge out all your right eyes so that I can bring disgrace on all Israel. The men in the city are desperate. Nahash’s desire to humiliate all of Israel, ironically gives them the only shred of human hope they can grab. He wants to humiliate all of Israel. So, let’s try to buy some time and see if any of the tribes will come and help us. Nahash may be willing to wait if he thinks that he will have an opportunity to have an even bigger victory. Besides, who knows, maybe some will come. At least it will give us a few days and maybe we can come with something else.

As far as Nahash is concerned, this is turning out to be even better than he could have imagined. He has obviously been able to terrorize these people without any consequences so far. Therefore, he has no reason to believe that anybody else in Israel is going to come to the rescue of Jabesh-Gilead. And, obviously, their new king is a joke and here is a great opportunity to humiliate him and in fact, the entire nation. Besides, there is nothing like the anticipation of terror to stoke fear and render your enemy and prisoner even more powerless under your control. What is seven days? It is time to find sick and twisted delight in watching your enemies come completely unglued under your control. It is an opportunity to feel like a god who holds the lives and fortunes of other people in the palm of your hand. What does Nahash believe about the people of Jabesh-Gilead? He believes the same thing that Satan wants you to believe. “No one loves you. No one cares about you. No one will come for you. No one will risk their life for you. You are alone. You are forgotten. You don’t matter. You are mine. You have no hope.”

I do not think that the men of Jabesh-Gilead had much hope and when you read the response of the people in Gibeah, where Saul was, the people responded with despair because, they had no hope either. The answer to the question of, “how can this man save us?” was assumed to be, he can’t. We have no hope. Now, imagine that we could peel back the curtains of the natural world and peer into the command center of the universe in heaven. Everything on earth is known and observed including this scene. And let’s imagine that you are some celestial being who is in the command center and you and your buddies are listening to this conversation. As soon as Nahash says, “and thus bring disgrace on all Israel” you guys look at each other and go, “oh that was a really bad idea.” Nahash really shouldn’t have said that. It’s over. Right there it’s over. Nahash has just slit his own wrists. God knows how to take care of his own. No one loves you? No one cares about you? No one will come for you? No one will risk their life for you? You are alone, forgotten and don’t matter? We know better. We know what Jesus did. We know

that he died in our place and his death and his resurrection not only sealed our salvation it sealed Satan's doom. Sometimes we forget that. And down in Jabesh-Gilead it certainly did not feel hopeful.

What do people like Nahash do? They identify your vulnerabilities and they seek to exploit them for maximum effect. They know what your triggers are and they use these against you. It feels as if people like that hold the fate of your life in their hands. It is as if they own you and they delight in holding that over you. Some of you work for people like that. Some of you may even have a parent or a spouse or a child who is like that. You feel trapped and there does not seem to be any escape. Let's say that you crave approval by your children or even your grandchildren. If they know that, and they are less than honorable, they will exploit that and use it against you so that you will end up doing things that you know are wrong, but you feel trapped. Let's say that you crave the approval of your spouse or a parent. You fear that if they do not approve of you, then something is fundamentally wrong with you and they can use that as a power over you. Want to know what is worse?

2. We can be that enemy.

When we want something so badly that we are willing to sin in order to get it or keep it or sin when we don't get it, we are capable of going to some really bad extremes. Has it ever been said of you that "you have control issues"? Control is not the problem, worship is. The person with control issues is a person with a worship problem. They want to be God and they want life to bow down and worship them. Life is not going to do that and the worst thing would be if it did. Because then, you would be Stalin and find out at the end of your life that even you cannot stop death, and will stand naked before God without anything or anyone to hide behind. Dads, moms, there is a huge difference between teaching your children to respect you, which you should do and demanding their unquestionable obedience in such a way that they fear you. Your kids may fear you. But, if that is all they do, then when the inconsistencies of your life are revealed, which they will be, what do you expect your kids to do with that? If you do not give them space to ask questions, and have reasonable conversations, then, you may get their fear, but that's all. Are you willing to settle for that? Fear doesn't fuel love.

Why is Nahash like this? It is simple. He is vulnerable. He knows what his fears are and he seeks to exploit in others what would strike fear in his own heart. What is the most terrifying thing that a person like this could imagine? They fear being found out that deep down, they are a coward, a fraud, an impersonator who only pretends to have it all together. Can you imagine being Nahash, and standing naked before God. What can you say? What can you do? Where can you go? Only to have the eyes of God look right through you and expose for all to see the tiny, little weasel you really are (with apologies to weasels, of course). Think about this. We will all stand, every single one of us before God. On that day, you will either be clothed with the royal robes of the righteousness of Christ and be next to him and he shows his hands to the Father on your behalf, or you will stand alone with absolutely no excuse, like Nahash. When I stop to think of that day, then I don't fear Nahash or people like him. I pity them, they have no idea of what they are facing.

We all fear because none of us measure up. What do we do with that? We can either admit the truth about ourselves and turn to Christ or we can attempt to cover it up and exploit our world in an attempt to compensate for our own failures and needs. What happens when you turn to Christ? What happens when you admit your sins, failures and needs and trust in Christ because his death paid for our sins and his righteousness is ours? What happens? We are declared righteous. We are made his children. We are adopted. We are loved. We are saved and we are saved, which means that we are safe – forever. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing.

3. We need a savior.

The children of Israel had no confidence that Saul would be able to rescue them. But, they at least understood this much. They understood that they had a problem that they could not solve. They knew that they needed a savior because they could not save themselves. They understood something that some of you do not yet understand. You cannot save yourself. Your good is not good enough. You cannot earn God's forgiveness or pay for God's favor. You don't have that much. You are vulnerable to the ultimate Nahash (Satan) who is scheming to destroy your life and damn your soul. He hates you. But don't take it personal, he hates God and seeks to destroy every person because this is how he wants to inflict maximum pain on God. He attempts to make sin look appealing and enticing in order to enslave you and destroy you. Sin is not your friend. Sin is the lie of the sworn enemy of your soul. Satan will seek to maim you in order to bring disgrace upon God. We need a Savior. But our problem is that every savior ends up abusing us. That is what the gods and saviors of this world do. Saul delivers the people from Nahash and in a few short chapters he starts acting like Nahash. So, I need to finish the sentence. We need a savior who is unlike the saviors of this world. We need a savior who will not exploit us, but who will love us. We need a savior who does not use us in order to try to keep hold on power, but who is power and uses that power to empower us. In short, we need Jesus.

The theme of 1 and 2 Samuel is: Who should be the king? We need a king who can deliver us. That's very clear. But what will also become clear is that we need a king who can deliver us, but who does not need to be delivered. Once again, I have good news for you. There is a king like that. His name is Jesus. I want you to know Him. He would love to meet you. But, in order for you to know him as savior, you have to admit that you need to be rescued. You have to see that you are like the people of Jabesh-Gilead. You are a sinner who stands condemned by your sin and without hope. You cannot save yourself. You have to be rescued. Only Jesus can do that.