

Title: Didn't See That Coming
Text: 1 Samuel 11:5-15
Theme: The surprising salvation of God
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmtnt: God loves to save in surprising ways.

Read Text:

Why do you think so many people are infatuated with weather forecasts? My theory is that it is one of the areas of life, where we think we can know the future. We love to know the future and we love to believe that we can predict it. Look at the insanity of sports gambling. People love to believe that they can predict the future and are willing to risk billions of dollars on it.

At the end of chapter 8 Samuel told the people that God was going to give them a king. No one would have predicted that the king would come from Benjamin. If they did, no one would have predicted that it would be Saul. After his disastrous coronation, expectations of his leadership were not high. Israel wanted a king because they feared the Philistines who humiliated them and subjected them to slave status for so long. Samuel helped free them from some of that, but they feared what would happen when Samuel died. But they had another enemy; the Ammonites. Their capital was Rabbah which will factor prominently in 2 Samuel. The Ammonites were usually at war with Israel. (Judges 3, 10 and 11.) They are back and they have a particularly cruel king named Nahash. Last week we noted how much this guy looks like Satan. He has been able to have a growing influence in the Transjordan area successfully terrorizing the tribes of Gad and Reuben. Now, he has surrounded the city of Jabesh-Gilead and has given the terms of peace to the men of the city. I will spare your life at the cost of your right eyes.

The new king, Saul, lives in Gibeah. Gibeah is about 20 miles east of the Philistine border and 40 miles west of the Ammon border. Israel is not yet unified. She has no standing army, or central government. She is a loose confederation of tribes who cannot always be depended upon to take care of one another. So, with the Philistine threat occupying Israel's attention to the west, and with a less than impressive king ascending to the throne, this sounds like a prime opportunity to take some land, herds, people and riches. Which is exactly what Nahash does. Chapter 10 ends with some of the people asking this question of Saul. How can this man save us? This is not theoretical for the people of Jabesh-Gilead. This was a matter of life and death. The big idea of verses 1-4 is clear. We need a savior and when we read in verse 5 that Saul was out plowing the fields behind some oxen, we understand why even the people of Gibeah were so despondent. How could you expect a guy like this to go up against a guy like Nahash?

The end of chapter 10 says that some worthless fellows were the ones saying, "How can this man save us?" We all know that there are always people like that who are miserable and are consistently destructive. But you hate to admit that they are probably right. After all, if Saul is going to run and hide amongst the baggage at his coronation, can anyone seriously expect him to face someone like Nahash. This is going to be a disaster! What happened?

1. **God's Spirit is powerful enough to change a person.** (5-7a)

There is one God and this one God is made up of 3 persons; Father, Son and Spirit. The Son, Jesus is the physical manifestation of God. He is God who can be seen, felt and heard. The Holy Spirit cannot be seen because He is spirit. But what the Spirit does can be seen, felt and heard. You don't see the Spirit, but you can see the evidences of the Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3, that the Spirit is like the wind. You can't see the wind, but you see what it does. So, while you cannot see the Spirit, the Spirit leaves the fingerprints of God. Those fingerprints give irrefutable evidence of the presence of God in this world. This is true particularly for the church.

In the OT, we see what the Spirit does so that we will have a greater understanding of his work and ministry in the NT. The Spirit was at work in the OT, but what he did in the OT is done more completely, more fully in the NT. For example, in this text we see how the Spirit of God is powerful enough to change Saul from a shy and backward farmer, to a decisive, convictional authority who in one moment commands the attention and obedience of the nation. As big a change as this is, and it is, in the NT, the Spirit is described as regenerating sinners. Here the Spirit changes Saul's demeanor. But the Spirit change our very identity in the NT.

When Saul heard why the people of Gibeah were weeping, the Spirit of God "rushed upon Saul." This is the same phrase that is used in 10.6, 10 when the Spirit of God came on Saul and he prophesied. This is similar to what happened when the Spirit came upon Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson in the book of Judges. These men were capable of doing things and influencing others in a way that they hadn't been able to before. Something supernatural was at work on them and it was noticeable.

God did this. The Spirit gave irrefutable evidence of the presence of God in this world and it was not what we expected. Based on the Saul we saw at his coronation, we would assume that Saul would panic and at the very least send someone to get Samuel. But what happens? He is lit up! "*his anger is greatly kindled*" (v.6) He reacts the way a good king ought to react when he hears that his people are under attack. He is genuinely concerned for them and by his reaction, he appears to be way more concerned about them than himself. That is wonderful! That is how a king should respond. Look at verse 7. He destroys a perfectly good pair of oxen! He doesn't care what his dad thinks of that. But while he is angry, he is not out of control. This is a decisive, convictional, and determined action that sends a very clear message.

Job number one of a king is to protect his kingdom. In order to do that a king has to be able to: 1) Conscript an army and 2) levy taxes. The army protects the nation and the taxes pay for the needs of the army. So, far, Saul has done neither. This is the moment when he begins to act like a king. This is the moment when Saul rises to the occasion and it is awesome! He orders that all of the men of the nation who are able to fight to come immediately or else their oxen will get cut into pieces. He cut his oxen into pieces and sends the pieces by the hands of messengers to the various tribes so that they will understand that this draft is not voluntary. Uncle Sam is not

just wanting you; he is demanding you to come. This is exemplary leadership. There is no time to call for a committee to study this and respond at a later time. Saul does not ask for permission to do what a king needs to do. This is an emergency and, in this moment, this man does exactly what has to be done. This is good, godly, powerful and humble authority! What a beautiful thing! This looks like Christ.

Let's stop the story right here and enjoy this moment because in a world where we see and experience so many bad examples of leadership and so many failures, it is wonderful to see a man empowered by God and used by God to do something right, good and obviously helpful. Has God blessed you with some good examples of authority in your life? The Spirit of God rushed upon Saul and in this occasion, Saul responded to the Spirit and was used by him for good which meant that he was used for the benefit of others which advanced the fame of God's name. Now, go back and look at verse 7 again. Did you notice what Saul told the messengers to say? "*Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel....*" Saul is clearly not threatened by Samuel. He shares the authority with Samuel. I think that this is another beautiful part of these scene. Saul is clearly in charge but he is still humble about it. When someone is decisive and humble it is such a sweet combination. This is really good. But it wasn't just Saul that God empowered.

2. **God's Spirit is powerful enough to change a people.** (7b-8)

"The dread of the LORD fell upon the people and they came out as one man." Who is they? 330,000 men came out as one. That is not what anyone would have expected at the end of chapter 10, right? Just as it would have been very easy to assume that Saul was incapable of leading, it would also have been easy to assume that these people were incapable of coming together and being led. But, here it is. What changed? God. "The dread of the LORD fell upon" them. That dread was the work of the Spirit that moved many of them into doing something that they would not have otherwise done.

Why should I risk my life for Reuben and Gad? They are on the other side of the Jordan. Judges 12 tells us about how much hostility existed between the tribe of Ephraim on the west side of the Jordan and the tribes of Manasseh, Reuben and Gad on the east side. They went to war with each other. It would be very easy to assume that Ephraim for sure would not show up. But that's obviously not the case.

We can get really cynical about leaders and leaders can get really cynical about people. But leaders and people do not have to have a love/hate relationship. What kind of a relationship are we going to have with God in glory? It is going to be fabulous. We are going to trust him perfectly and we are going to be perfect. We are going to love and delight in one another. We are going to be completely conformed by the Spirit into being like Christ. Our lives now, as followers of Christ, are to be a preview of that.

Years ago, I handed out little spoons one Sunday morning to everyone. Some of you may remember that. You may know that one of my spiritual gifts is eating ice cream. And when you go into an ice cream shop, they often let you sample the flavors with a little spoon. Do you know that we are the flavor of heaven? When people interact with us, they are to get a taste of what heaven is going to be like. We are to delight in one another, trust one another, love another, affirm and encourage one another because of Christ. Obviously, we are not there, yet. But we are headed there and when we live in view of where we are going, then our lives provide a taste that is out of this world.

Oh, he'll never change. She will never change. Have you ever said that? Have you ever thought that? Has anyone ever said that about you? It is true that a lot of people do not change, but it is not categorically true that people cannot change. God's Spirit is powerful enough to change a person. There is no other explanation for the change in Saul than this is what God did. There is no other explanation for the change in the people than this is what God did. This ought to encourage you to pray for others and it ought to encourage you to cooperate with the Spirit's work in your life. God really is that powerful!

One of the reasons why God calls his followers to be part of a church is so we can display the work of the Spirit to others and so we can see the work of the Spirit in others. When I look around this room on Sundays, it just flat out lights me up. I know so many of your stories. There is no other explanation for the change that is in your life than God. There is no other explanation for the joy, love, faithfulness, tenderness, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, sacrifice, generosity, helpfulness, encouragement, steadfast commitment than God. You are an answer to someone's prayers. God overruled your will with his Spirit and changed your life. That is the hope that we can have toward others. And that is the hope that we ought to have toward others.

3. **God's Spirit is powerful enough to flip the script.** (9-11)

We didn't see this coming in Saul. We didn't see this coming in the people. I don't think the people of Jabesh-Gilead thought this would happen. Nahash certainly didn't. This is where the text gets really fun. This is so good. Nahash is an evil punk. He is diabolical. At the beginning of the chapter he is in charge. Now, he is about to get smashed. This is wild. God is flipping the script. 330,000 is a decent army. When that many men show up and they show up as one man and they are all in, well, this is a force to be reckoned with and Nahash had no idea of what he was up against. He poked the wrong bear.

There are four groups of people. Let's talk about three of them. The soldiers of Israel, the messengers, the citizens of Jabesh-Gilead and the Ammonites.

A. **The soldiers who have come to rescue.** (9)

Saul sent his emissaries throughout all of the territory of Israel and the response to the command was from the entire country. This was the beginning of a new era for the nation.

Imagine that you are one of the soldiers. You and your brothers and your dad along with some cousins, and uncles leave your village and start heading toward Bezek. You get a few miles down the road when you meet up with some distant relatives that you haven't seen since a wedding 2 years ago, but they are going too. When you left your village, you were scared, but didn't want to admit it. You heard some bad things about Nahash and you heard some unflattering things about Saul, but in spite of that, you and a small posse are responding to his call. But this small posse isn't so small anymore. Others keep joining. Smiles, handshakes, hugs, pats on the back, along with plenty of "hey, you too?" are all encouraging. As you crest the next hill, you see another large contingent of soldiers 500 yards ahead. Eventually your group joins them and before the day is over, you are part of what looks to you to be a little army. Everyone is saying the same thing. We were afraid to come, but came anyway and now look around you. This is incredible. When you finally get close to Bezek, you are told to find the banner of your tribe. You have never seen this many people before in your life. This army is massive. Fear is replaced by anticipation of rescue and justice. If this is what it means to be a nation, count me in where we will take care of our own. In your heart, something has been awakened and you are so glad that your dad brought you guys here. He tells you that the messengers from Jabesh-Gilead were just informed of the plan. Tomorrow we attack. Tell the men of Jabesh-Gilead that there is no need to worry. We are coming for you – you will be saved.

B. The messengers who get to return and announce.

Imagine that you are the messengers who came to Gibeah five or six days ago. You left your wife and children back in Jabesh-Gilead. You were selected for this mission knowing that it would probably not work and that you would return to your death or disgrace. You feared the return, the disappointment, and then the humiliation, but now you are with Saul at Bezek and the men of Israel start gathering and gathering and gathering and gathering. They keep coming. And they are coming to rescue you and your family and your city. And they are all in. You just cannot imagine that they are really here for you. It gives me chills just imagining what these messengers got to see. A longshot has turned into a reality. Is this really going to happen? Then the leaders of the soldiers formally tell the messengers to go and tell the men of Jabesh-Gilead, "Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have deliverance." Tomorrow? Tomorrow! This is incredible. And now you and the others are heading back. What a change! You left a few days ago in despair and you are returning in excitement. You want to run. You want to shout. But, you have to play it cool and pretend to be disappointed so when you get back to the city, you don't give any of Nahash's scouts any clue as to what is going to happen. But, once inside, you and the others get to share the good news over and over and over.

C. The citizens of Jabesh-Gilead are saved. (9c)

For a little over a week, the Ammonites have laid siege to your city. You ran out of food two days ago and are about to run out of water. The 7 thousand refugees sleeping in the streets and market made the situation even more dire. You wonder if the messengers that were sent out several days ago would even return, but they have and they keep telling you that the rest of the

tribes are coming together for you. You cannot believe it. You want to hear it over and over. It is too good to be true. They tell you of the thousands and thousands of soldiers who had come and they try to describe how big the army is. At first you didn't believe, but now you do. This morning, the thought of tomorrow terrified you, now it cannot come fast enough. You are going to be saved. The citizens were so confident in their salvation, that they sent a message to Nahash that "tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you and you may do to us whatever seems good to you." They never had to. The next day, the army of Saul was so overwhelming in its size and strategy that Nahash and his army were so decisively defeated that the few who did survive were scattered so far that not even two of the enemy were found to be together.

Like Nahash, Satan pre-maturely danced on the grave of his enemy only to realize that the script that he wrote for his own glory had been flipped for his destruction.

We can each identify with the citizens of Jabesh-Gilead who are trapped by our own sin and condemned by it. We cannot save ourselves. We have to be rescued and we wonder, will anyone come for us, does anyone care about my soul?

It sounds too good to be true, that there is a Savior, a one-man army, one-man wrecking machine on sin and Satan who broke the power of sin by his death on the cross and broke the power of death by his resurrection. Christ has come. There is salvation. And this salvation is available to anyone who will believe him for it. This salvation is so certain, so secure, so complete that you do not need to fear anyone.

If you are a follower of Christ, you are a messenger. You get to announce to others that there is a Savior and his rescue is certain. Everyone who trusts in this Savior is saved from sin and its wages and given a home with Christ in glory. Everyone! Not everyone wants to be rescued. Many would rather die as a slave to Satan than become a servant to Christ who gives them life. But there are those who will listen and they need to know that salvation has come and it is theirs for the believing. We get to tell them. We have to tell them.

-Take time to thank God for good leaders in your life.

-You have a message of deliverance - - there is a Savior! Who are you praying for that you can share this message with?