

1 Sam 11v14

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together to 1 Samuel chapter 11 and verse 14.

Then Samuel said to the people, Come, let us go to Gilgal, and there renew the kingdom.

For the sake of those of you who weren't here last week, I said that we're going to begin a study on the lives of Saul and David. And we're going to begin with Saul because simply he was the first king in Israel.

We saw how the people had gathered and they had asked or they had demanded rather a king. And this was something which was new to Israel because up until that point, the people had been content to serve God and to know that God was their king and that that should have been enough for them.

And sadly, though, that wasn't good enough for them. They saw the way that the nations round about them behaved and they saw that they had a king and they believed that that move would be advantageous to them.

[1 : 2 6] But it wasn't motivated by right things at all. And God, he said to Samuel, Let them have what they want. And you'll find that account, of course, in chapter 8.

And after this had happened, we're introduced to Saul in chapter 9 of 1 Samuel. And we saw how God in his providence had a purpose and a plan for Israel.

God always had a purpose. No matter how many things go wrong or how much wrong is done in Israel, God still pledged himself to his people.

And he was determined to carry out his plan, which, of course, as we know, was eventually going to be to bring our Savior into the world. And that's exactly what happened.

Not a moment too soon and not a moment too late, Jesus came into the world to give himself for us. The Old Testament is the lead-up to that. The Old Testament looks forward to the coming of Jesus and gives us this quite remarkable account of all of these events and people and times and places.

[2 : 3 8] But every one of them in the right place, even the things that go wrong and that even when people do wrong, that didn't give them an excuse. That didn't make it right. Just the same as when we go wrong, there's no excuse for it.

And yet, God, in his mysterious providence, is able to work out his own providence and his own purpose in that. Now, we saw, of course, that Saul was a head and shoulders above everyone else.

We have that as a figurative expression for somebody who's superior in some way. And it's based upon this chapter where he's described as being a head, and he was literally a head and shoulders.

There was no question about him in terms of appearance. And we saw also how he had lost his donkeys, and he and his servant had gone to look for the donkeys, and by God's strange providence had come to ask Samuel the prophet.

And, of course, Samuel recognized Saul as the man who God identified as being the man who he was to proclaim as king over Israel.

[3 : 46] And after, I'm sure, becoming acquainted with Saul for a little while, he took a flask of oil. Chapter 10 brings that to us, and he poured it on his head and kissed him and said, Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over his people Israel, and you shall reign over the people of the Lord?

And there begins the life or the kingship of Saul. Remember, I made reference last week to the fact that it's not all encouraging.

As you read the story, you discover Saul's weaknesses. But we haven't really discovered that yet. We haven't come to that part yet. And I don't want us to color our understanding of chapter 10 and chapter 11 because we know what happens in the end.

It's strange, isn't it? Like I said last week, I don't want to spend too much time on this. It's strange, isn't it? God knows what's going to happen, and yet he still chooses Saul to be the king of Israel. Is it because he wants to humiliate Saul or because he wants to teach a lesson to Israel?

No, it isn't. God genuinely, if I can say this in good faith, he entrusts his kingdom to Saul, irrespective of the fact that Saul is going to, in years to come, he's going to let God down.

[5 : 13] Because the choices that we have are our choices. God was going to make sure that all the resources and all the background was there in place for Saul.

And that's what he did. And you can see that very clearly in these two chapters. In giving the kingdom to him, God was choosing a man who had all the qualities and qualifications to be king of Israel.

And by rights, he should not have gone wrong. All he had to do was obey the Lord. Everything else was done for him.

But again, we'll come on to that in perhaps a few weeks' time when we come on to chapter 13. Meanwhile, as a sign, by way of assurance to Saul that this was a genuine decision that God had made, three things were to happen.

And I didn't read about these three things tonight. I read about them last week. First of all, Saul, as he left Samuel, he was to meet two men from Benjamin, and they were going to tell him that the donkeys that had got lost, they were now safe.

[6 : 36] That was the first thing that would happen. The second sign by which Saul was to recognize his kingship was that he was to meet three men.

On the same journey, after meeting the two men, he was to meet three men. And they were carrying items of food. And they were going to give him some of these items of food. Then the third sign was that he was to meet a group of prophets coming from the high place, presumably where they had been worshipping.

And when he met them, the Spirit of God was going to come upon him. And he was going to begin to prophesy himself. Now, these were three signs by which Saul was going to recognize that his anointing was a genuine work of God.

But I don't believe that these signs were random signs at all. God doesn't do random. When God gives an indication of something, it's for our education.

He wants us to go away and think about what we've read and what's happened to us. And he wants us to reflect on it. And as Saul reflected on all these three groups of people who had met him, and exactly as Samuel had said to him, had happened to him, they didn't happen without reason.

[8 : 02] And I believe that there are three very, there were very important indicators. First of all, there were the two men that told him that his donkeys were safe. This was no trivial matter.

If your donkeys got lost, that was a disaster if you had a farm. There wasn't a lot of profit in having a farm. I guess that there are many farms today where there isn't a lot of profit either.

But even so, even more in those days where they were scratching a living. If your donkeys got lost, that was a major disaster. And so the donkeys were a major concern to him.

But these two men assured him that the donkeys had been found. In other words, God had sorted it out. God had seen to the original problem by which Saul had gone away looking for the donkeys and had met Samuel.

The original problem had been solved because God had it all under control. And that is a really important lesson. Not just for Saul, but for every Christian.

[9 : 05] That doesn't mean that everything's always going to work out the way you want it. But it means that God is in control. And if you're in the right place, as Saul was, if you're in the will of God, obedient to him, listening to his voice, and if you're in the place where God wants you to be, then whatever problems there may be, whatever frustrations that there may be, whatever's on your mind, God will eventually sort it out.

He'll either show you how to sort it out or he'll see to it that it will be sorted out. The question is for all of us, are we in the will of God?

Are we in the right place? God's message to Saul was, I'll take care of it. And I'll take care of your kingship. Whatever fears that you may have, I'll take care of them.

Because you're going to be king because not just because you're a head and shoulders above everyone else. That's one qualification, I guess, that people would look for, strength and might and bravery.

But because I want you there. Then the second thing was, how would he know that he was provided for? And here is God telling Saul, you don't need to worry about that either because I will provide for all your bodily needs.

[10 : 27] Here are these men and they just meet him on the road and they give him loaves of bread. They just give it to him. What was this but God's provision for him? And once again, God promises his people that if we are in the right place, a place of obedience, in the place where he wants us to be, doing what he wants us to do, following the Lord, whatever it appears on the outside, no matter, irrespective of how scary it is to walk on the water, that's what Peter did.

That's what every Christian does. Walks on the water, does something that is by faith alone. God promises that all our needs will be met according to his riches in mercy.

And then there was this third sign, a most peculiar passage, which raises all kinds of questions because as Saul made his way back home to his father and his uncle, he met prophets.

Now, we don't actually know much about who these prophets were and what they did and how they did them. We know what prophets did later on in the Bible, people like Elijah and Elisha and Isaiah and Jeremiah and the minor prophets.

We know a lot more about them, but this was a group of people who clearly were in a unique place. They had a unique job to do.

[11 : 56] God had called them into a unique relationship with himself. That's what a prophet was. A prophet, and this is very important actually, a prophet was not just someone who foretold the future.

We often think about prophecy as somebody who told what was going to happen. Well, that sometimes was part of prophecy. But it wasn't all like that.

Being a prophet was communicating the mind and the message of God to the people of Israel. And so they had to stand in the presence of God and God spoke to them and their job was to share that message with authority with other people.

Now, here they were and these group of prophets, they were prophesying. And as Saul came among them, he too, something happened to him. Something most peculiar happened to him.

A change came over him. A change in his behavior. And people recognized that. This is not the Saul that we used to know. He's completely different. This man is a new man altogether.

[13 : 02] Can't understand what's happened to him. And from that moment onwards, a new proverb was invented. Is Saul also among the prophets?

And that simply meant that something strange has happened. Something we can't understand. God has done something because only God could have brought about this change in Saul that we've seen today.

We know Saul. We know his family. We've seen him from when he was small and young. This is not him. He's not himself. He's another person. And that's because God was working in Saul's life to give him the character that he needed in order to fulfill the requirements of being a king.

We read in verse 9 in the previous chapter 10 when Paul turned his back to leave Samuel. God gave him another heart. You read that and again, be careful reading that because we read that and we think, well, that was him converted.

Not necessarily. We have to always remember we're reading in the Old Testament. It could simply mean that God reoriented, that he left behind.

[14 : 17] He was prepared now to leave his old life. And he was prepared now to be the person, the king, to do the job that God wanted him to do.

And what the sign that God gave him here was that what you really need to be my servant is my spirit. And that's what you and I really need this evening.

We, you and I, really need the presence and the power of God to do anything in his name. Everything that we need, whatever we do, whether you're a minister or an elder or a worker or an office worker or a manual laborer, we're doing all things in the name of the Lord.

If you're a housewife or a teacher or a fireman or whatever you do, we're doing it if you're a Christian, you're doing it in the name of the Lord and you need the Spirit of God to take you through every day.

But it is specially, it's especially for those who are called into special. work for God. And I've said this, I've said this before, I'm going to say it again.

[15 : 25] Could it be tonight that God is calling you into missionary service, into ministry of some, of some sort? I don't know.

But I think that if I was worshipping, and I hope we all are tonight, I'm listening, I should be listening out to the leading and the guiding of God and asking, is God saying something to me?

Is he laying something upon my heart? And I wonder sometimes when people become convicted of that, whether all kinds of fears come in and say, well, how am I going to get money?

How am I going to be able to survive? What am I going to do? How am I going to take the first step? God will take care of all that. Maybe these are the very thoughts that Saul was wrestling with at that time, and this was God's message to him.

What you need is my spirit for what you are about to do. You need to be filled with God. I wonder if we would ask the Lord tonight, whoever we are, to fill us with his spirit.

[16 : 35] Because, you know, when you think about it, it just doesn't get better than that. Paul says, we are to be filled with the spirit.

That's a command. You can't fill yourself with the spirit, but God can. And that's a prayer that God will answer when you ask the Lord to fill you with his spirit.

And if you're a Christian tonight, you should have no problem at all in asking that question. Even if it means having to face things that you are uncertain about, that's okay.

Because your life is in God's hands. And if you're filled with the spirit, you can't have any more than that. You can't be in a better place than to be led and guided and surrounded by the Lord.

But then, the passage becomes, it doesn't get less peculiar, it gets even more peculiar as the time comes in verse 17 when Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah and he said to the people of Israel, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians.

[17 : 55] And he then reminded them of the wrong that they had done in demanding a king to be ruler over them. And the people had to hear that because that was the voice of God.

So then Samuel brought out all the tribes of Israel and he went through this process of casting lots by which the tribes of Israel were eliminated one by one until the tribe of Benjamin.

Then all the clans, the subsets of the tribe of Benjamin, they were all eliminated one by one until the family of Saul was chosen. And then every person that belonged to the family of Saul, they were all eliminated.

And this was God working, proving to Samuel and to the rest of the people that this was the only person who he wanted to be king over Israel. And all the spotlight fell upon Saul.

You can just imagine this, can't you? Spotlight goes and there's an empty space. There's nowhere to be found. This must have really, it must have, it really must have got to Samuel.

[19 : 03] How in the world can this be true that I know who God has chosen and I know who he's going to be. It's only a matter of just final verification and then he's nowhere to be found.

So he had to ask the Lord one final time, where is Saul? And God told him he's hiding among the baggage. Now I have no idea why Saul was hiding among the baggage.

This is what you've got to be careful when you're trying to understand passages like this. You've got to be very careful that you don't read into a chapter what's not there. I don't know why he was hiding.

It could have been humility, a natural hesitation on Paul's, on Saul's part before taking on. It must have been massively daunting for him.

It must have been completely, it must have freaked him out. It's one thing for Samuel to pour oil over his head in private. It's another thing for the same man to have to face the entirety of the tribes of Israel and to be proclaimed their king.

[20 : 12] It may have been that he was conscious of his own weakness despite however high or however tall he was that he may have been deeply conscious of his own weakness. He was a farmer.

He wasn't nobility, whatever nobility was in those days. He wasn't an important person and yet he was going to, he was going to rise to the height of being king in a moment of time.

It must have really given him a thought and probably struck fear into him at the same time. But nevertheless, that was God's decision and that was a moment which was a milestone in the history of Israel.

Before that time, God was their king and God ruled through judges and through people like Samuel, Moses, Joshua, Samson, all these people.

He ruled through them but now, everything was going to change and from then on, throughout the entirety of the Old Testament, there was to be a king.

[21 : 19] Ah, you say, well, you're wrong there because when the people of Israel went into captivity, then there was no kingship. Be very careful before we, you have to be very careful before we misunderstand the Old Testament.

God said to David, he would always have someone on the throne and it wasn't that God took away the kingship when they went into captivity, it was that he put it on hold.

The kingship would eventually fall on Jesus because the kingship in the Old Testament, it signified and foreshadowed the king who was going to come into the world and rule over his people in justice and in righteousness and in gentleness and in forgiveness.

And he was going to be a prophet and he was going to be a priest. All of the three offices, all of the three functions combined in one person. A prophet to teach us, a priest to offer himself up as a sacrifice for us and a king to rule over us.

All of these three functions in the Old Testament, they looked forward to Jesus Christ, our ruling monarch who possesses the ultimate authority and love to be a king that draws people to himself.

[22 : 49] Well, let's just move on to the next chapter then, please, because I can see the time, as usual, is going very quickly. Can I move on to the next chapter? Because this is the test.

There's always a test. When God prepares someone for a particular job, he is going to test that person. And the test came in the standoff that takes place in chapter 11 between a man called Nahash who was king of the Ammonites and who went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead and all the people of Jabesh.

They tried to make a treaty with him. Now, this Nahash was a particularly nasty character. There were many nasty characters in those days. And they would think nothing of killing you by the most outrageous means, some of them.

It was awful. And Nahash the Ammonite, he had this was, he came up against Jabesh Gilead.

Now, Jabesh Gilead, if you know your map, River Jordan runs all the way down. And the land west of the Jordan belongs to Israel.

[23 : 57] That was the promised land, the land of Canaan, the land which God promised to Moses and Abraham and Isaac. And that was the land into which Joshua led the people of Israel in Joshua chapter 3.

That was their land. However, some of the Israelites, for the reasons best known to themselves, they decided to stay on the east side of the Jordan. And Jabesh Gilead was one of them.

There were other towns belonging to Israel. They were still just as much part of Israel as their brothers and sisters, their relatives on the west side. But they decided to stay on the east side of the Jordan.

The problem was that this placed them in a weakened position because they were pretty much half surrounded by enemy nations, like the Moabites, and in this case, the Ammonites.

And it seems that Nahash was the superpower at this time and he was in full flight. And he, another source tells us, other history sources tell us, that he had actually attacked other Israelite towns east of the Jordan and he had done exactly the same to them.

[25 : 12] Jabesh Gilead was the last stronghold. And his tactic was always the same. You serve us and all we'll do is we'll gouge out your right eye and we'll let you live.

Well, I suppose if you were faced with that kind of choice, I guess that the logical thing to do would be to just have to live without one eye. Apparently, the Dead Sea Scrolls tells us that he had done that to all the towns, Jabesh Gilead was the last.

Now, he doesn't just want to disable the people. He wants to shame them. He wants to disgrace them. And he wants them to live in fear because after all, if a king has a hold on you enough to be able to gouge out your right eye, the right eyes of every person in your kingdom, then you don't think about rebelling against that king.

This was a psychological maneuver, an expert maneuver in which he was able to gain control over his subjects. And of course, they were his subjects and they would be working for him and doing things for him and serving him and all the rest of it.

And so, he thought he was going to have the same kind of victory with Jabesh Gilead. And they tried to negotiate. They said, make a treaty with us. We will serve you.

[26 : 41] And then he said, no, in this condition, I gouge out all your right eyes and bring disgrace on all Israel. So, the elders of Jabesh said to him, give us seven days.

So, they sent messengers throughout the land of Israel pleading with them for help. Quite why the other towns and villages hadn't pleaded with the rest of Israel, I don't know.

Perhaps it was just this terrible lack of coordination and leadership that there was in Israel at that time. Perhaps they didn't even ask. I don't know. But when the people of Jabesh Gilead, when they asked and when they sent their plea out to the rest of Israel and Nahash knew this, Saul got to hear of it.

And he got to hear of it because all the people started weeping. And that was because fear spreads. Dread is a contagious disease.

And I guess the people on the west side of the Jordan, they would be afraid, they would be terrified that Nahash would come over the Jordan and do the same to them as he did to their brothers on the east side.

[27 : 55] And so the dread, it paralyzes you. Fear paralyzes you. It drives you to apoplexy and nothing.

Well, you can't turn this way or turn that way. And Saul, as he was leading his oxen, he got to hear of what was happening in Israel when he inquired why his reaction was entirely the opposite of the people's because he was furious with the right kind of fury.

You know, there's two types of anger. There's righteous anger and there's unrighteous anger. For the most part, when we get angry, it's unrighteous anger. But this was righteous anger because it was coupled with the Spirit of God rushing upon him.

Now, that's what happened in Samson's day. If you're familiar with the story of Samson, you'll know that the same thing happened to him. We read that the Spirit of God rushed upon him and gave him an overwhelming quantity of power and resolve and determination and stature and compulsion.

that's just what God's people needed. Do you see how God's working? This is not about Saul. This is about God redeeming and helping and delivering his people.

[29 : 11] The scholars tell me that in this chapter, the word save and deliver, it happens time and it occurs time and time again. This is God saving his people.

A king is neither here nor there by himself but in the hands of God as an instrument in God's hands. God can do great things and that is exactly what God is doing.

He got together with the rest of his history. You can read the chapter again later on. He gathered together 300,000 men, 30,000 Benjaminites, people from Judah and they came as one man, as one force and they descended upon Nahash and his army and wiped them out.

What a victory. What a decisive victory and what a mark of the power of God because like in all of these conflicts where there's an enemy, you read that many, many times, particularly in these books in the Old Testament where there's an enemy that decides to set itself up against God's people.

Standing behind that enemy is Satan himself. This was spiritual warfare. This was someone who was threatening the very survival and the future of God's people.

[30 : 38] And God was determined that whatever condition his people were, whatever wrongs they had committed against him, God was on their side. And that's the great thing about being in covenant with God.

That's why it's so important to understand that Israel was totally unique because they were in covenant. They were in that unique relationship, that special relationship with God in which he had called them to be his own people and in which he was on their side.

The other nations, they served their own gods. But these were gods who never did anything. They were figments of their own imagination.

Gods of wood and stone and iron. Sometimes they did the most horrendous things. People would do the most horrendous things in order to pacify and to even sacrifice their own children to some of these gods.

And yet these gods were lifeless. They never proved themselves. But the God of Israel was all-powerful. That's the same God you and I worship this evening, by the way.

[31 : 55] Now, God hasn't changed just as powerful today. He works in a different way. He works through the gospel, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

He works through the Bible and through you and I as we share the message of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He works by changing people's hearts and bringing them into a relationship with himself.

By bringing people to discover what kind of a God he is. Just as powerful as he was in the days of Saul and just as willing and loving towards his people.

And as a result of this decisive victory, the people got together and they recognized who was on their side. They recognized that despite how they had wronged God in the previous chapters and how they had strayed from God, God had acted for them.

If God is for us, who can be against us? Do you know one of the most encouraging things as a Christian? I've discovered it time and time again that even when I go wrong, going wrong as a Christian just brings misery, by the way.

[33 : 12] It brings confusion and misery. But when you go wrong, you discover that God hasn't stopped loving you. And that's our motive to coming back.

That's our motive. Look at what happened here. At the very end of this chapter, the people said to Samuel, then Samuel said to the people, come, let us go to Gilgal and then renew the kingdom.

This was a new dawn. Not just in the history of Israel, but in their relationship to God in which they now possessed a new, a fresh awareness of God, a fresh discovery of his grace and his commitment towards them.

This was not a God who was going to hold against them his anger and his wrath. That's what they deserve. That's what you and I deserve. But in Jesus tonight, you and I can be absolutely assured that we have a God who has never ceased to love us and has never, ever fallen from his commitment towards us as his people.

And so tonight may be one of those occasions that have been many in my life where we need also to make a fresh commitment to the Lord.

[34 : 30] That's what Israel did. Recognize, what does it mean to renew the kingdom? It means not just to establish a new day in having a new king, but it means to recognize that God is king and Saul is simply a servant of God.

And as long as Saul obeys, then the kingdom will be safe and secure. But if the people stray, then they cannot expect anything but God's chastisement.

Well, God has placed us in his kingdom tonight. If you're a believer, if you're a child of God, God has placed you in the kingdom. He's given us tremendous privileges. He's equipped you forever, whatever the future holds for you.

And he's given us the message of the gospel to believe and to live by and to share with others the God who uses his people as an instrument by which anything can happen.

I can do all things through Christ. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word and we pray that your word will remain with us and work in us and guide our thoughts and our commitment to you.

[35 : 57] We pray, Lord, that tonight, like the kingdom of Israel, as they faced a new dawn in their history, Lord, with all the uncertainty that there was and all the hopes and the optimism that there was.

We pray too, Lord, that as we ask that you will forgive us for all our wrongs, that you will come upon us and that you will forgive us and that you will lead us and guide us in your mercy and in your strength and give us most of all to discover more and more of who you are.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.