

Our confidence when we turn to God

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Samuel 11 is the chapter that we're on, and there's only 15 verses, so we'll read the 15 verses together, or I'll read and we can follow together.

So as you'll know, in the previous chapter, there's the anointing of Saul to be king.

The people say, long live the king, and not soon after that event, we're not quite sure what's happened, because chapter 11, verse 1 begins with the word then, which is confusing and we'll get to in a minute.

Then Nahash, the Amorite, went up to besiege Jabesh Gilead, and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, make a treaty with us and we will serve you.

But Nahash, the Amorite, said to them, on this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes and thus bring disgrace on all Israel.

[1 : 1 3] The elders of Jabesh said to him, give us seven days respite, that we may send messengers throughout all the territory of Israel. Then if there is no one to save us, we will give ourselves up to you.

When the messengers came to Jabesh of Saul, they reported the matter in the ears of the people, and all the people wept aloud.

Now behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen, and Saul said, what is wrong with the people that they are weeping? So they told him the news of the men of Jabesh, and the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled.

He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so it shall be done to his oxen.

Then the dread of the Lord fell upon the people, and they came out as one man. When he mustered them, Bezek, the people of Israel, were 300,000, and the men of Judah, 30,000.

[2 : 3 7] And they said to the messengers who had come, thus shall you say to the men of Jabesh, Gilead, tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have deliverance.

When the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, they were glad. Therefore, the men of Jabesh said, tomorrow, we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you.

And the next day Saul put the people in three companies, and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning, watch, and struck down the Amorites until the heat of the day.

And those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together. Then the people said to Samuel, who is it that said, shall Saul reign over us?

Bring the men that we may put them to death. But Saul said, not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel. Then Samuel said to the people, come, let us go to Gilgal, and there renew the kingdom.

[3 : 43] So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

Let's stand and sing to the praise of God before we come back. Come back in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 11, please. So we have made a long way, so far it would seem, through the book of 1 Samuel.

And we have seen the hand of God at work in multiple different ways, all the way back to Hannah's prayer, the rising of Samuel.

Now, of course, the mercy given to Saul. And one thing that this speaks to, especially in light of the previous couple of chapters, where the people have finally got what they wanted, we begin to see that it doesn't really matter how great the vision a nation might have for the future.

The future doesn't always turn out the way that you expect it to. In fact, the future is often very different than the way you think it's going to turn out.

[5 : 15] And therefore, much of the Christian life has to be prepared in order to respond to what we face, as well as building for that future ahead of us.

So I want you to hold those two things in mind because they go together. What does it mean to build in a certain way where you are ready to expect the unexpected?

And you think, well, the Bible doesn't actually teach us to do that. No, it really does do that. And at the heart of this chapter, at least, is that element of truth, that God's people ought to be confident whatever comes their way in the future rather than turn to despair.

Now, as we've made our way through, one thing should be clear, and that is that the Lord should not have to prove himself to his people. Nonetheless, God has proven himself to his people in the sense that he has delivered them, he has provided for them, he has protected them, he has given them victory, he has answered the prayers of Samuel.

You know, there's multiple things where the Lord has proven himself, not just in 1 Samuel, but up to 1 Samuel so far, beginning in Genesis. And one of the things that we begin to recognize or the conclusions that we should draw is the reason why we are told that as Christians is so that we have confidence as we read the past.

[6 : 55] In other words, if we could learn nothing from history, then there's no reason to learn the history. If we're not benefited by what we read, then there's no need to read it.

But in Corinthians, Paul tells us that those things which have happened in the past are given to us as examples to show us the way, show us how we ought to live before a holy and just God.

So as Christians, we ought to be able to trust God in the present because we have seen how God has provided for his people in the past. We ought to be able to trust God, whatever we face in the future, even if we don't know what it is, because we can look back and see how God has stepped in into multiple different situations and drawn his people out.

God provides, God defends, God protects, God produces, and his people are benefited. Or they benefit.

So while it's true that God doesn't have to prove himself, it is equally true that the past, evidence of everything that God has done, produces a confidence and a trust in the people of God that you would not have if God didn't do those things.

[8 : 15] Let me say that again. The fact that we have the Old Testament and we have these stories and we have these events produces in us a trust and a confidence in God that would not be there if those stories were not there.

Because now we're dealing with the character of God, the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But there's an addition here, and that is confidence is tied to understanding.

And that is your understanding of God, not just your knowledge of God, but your understanding of God, actually builds your confidence in him.

Therefore, it's not just important to know that God has done these things, but to understand why God has done these things, why his character remains the same, why he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Now you are helped by your understanding. And that understanding then builds your confidence in God. So let me try and put it a slightly different way, especially as we come into 1 Samuel 11.

[9 : 21] What if your turning to the Lord is, in times of trouble, is simply a turning back to the Lord? You know, what if that we live a fair-weather Christian life, where most of the time we are just living our own course, and turning to the Lord is not really a turning to the Lord in prayer, but really a turning back to the Lord, because we've gone so far down the road that we've got ourselves into trouble.

And now despair has come upon us, because we don't have confidence, because we're not close with God. And so we turn back to God to regain that confidence.

What if we are living that kind of way? Well, I want to suggest to you that that is exactly what is happening in 1 Samuel 11.

That what if one of the indicators that you are not as close to God as you think you are is that when trouble comes, your first reaction is despair rather than confidence.

Your first reaction is who's going to save us rather than God has saved us before. You see the issue.

[10 : 39] Out of everything that the people of God have been through, their first reaction should have been, I belong to God. But fear and dread came upon them.

They wept. Well, that's despair. So that doesn't tell you much about God. But it tells you a great deal about the fact that they have no confidence in God and where they are in their relationship with him.

And that's really how 1 Samuel 11 is structured. There is a problem. The people weep. The people are fearful. They look for someone to save them.

They can't seem to find anyone, it seems. Then they weep. The soul hears about it. The spirit of God rushes upon them. And suddenly God comes to the rescue.

But the point that I want us to see and not miss is that their first response to trouble is despair, not confidence.

[11 : 39] So here's the summary as we go through. Chapter 1 begins with the word then. And it kind of begins in such a way where as if we are missing information. Because it begins in the context of battle.

The Nahash, the Amorite, went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. In other words, it's put in the context of, well, is this really happening just after Saul, people shouting, long live the king?

Or is there something else that has happened in between? Is this from where we have left off? Or is it the case that something else has happened which we are unaware of?

Whatever the case is, the people of God have been met with this treaty. But the treaty doesn't look very good, verse 2, because what is required is that while a treaty wants to be made so that peace can be laid down, the treaty involves the gouging out of the right eye so that disgrace would be brought upon Israel.

One of the reasons, there's quite a few reasons why you would gouge out the right eye rather than the left eye. It is because you can't fight, you know, it's a bit different now, but back in the day when you went into battle, you would often hold your shield in your left hand and your sword in your right.

[13 : 04] And your shield would guard it here so you would look over the top of your shield or out to the side with your right eye. So if you render the right eye, if you gouge it out, then the men are no longer fit for battle.

So that's the type of disgrace that comes upon them. Well, there's the terms. We will make a treaty with you, but the terms are that the right eyes are gouged out thus to bring disgrace upon Israel.

Now, what is shocking, or perhaps even more shocking than that, is that they ask for seven days to consider the offer. Give us seven days to consider your offer.

That doesn't look like an offer that ought to even be considered. Then, of course, they look for someone to save them. You have messengers of bad news, verse 4, and in the end, when this message goes out, all the people wept.

And the obvious question to ask, which we have started to raise already, is why? You know, have Israel not got what they've wanted? Have they not got a king? Have they not got a king that they wanted to go out into battle like the other nations around them?

[14 : 22] You know, have they not got a relationship with God in such a way where they are confident that God will be on their side? I mean, the reaction, given that everything that Israel has been through, and given the fact that God has already defended them in battle, seems to suggest that these are people who have gone back, defaulted to doing what is right in their own eyes, and therefore no longer confident that God is with them.

Or else, why would you weep? Why would you despair? Doesn't seem to make much sense, especially when you've got what you wanted, a king. Well, Saul, verse 5, hears about this, and he wants to know why the people are weeping, and the moment you're told that, God tells us, or in his word, that the spirit of God rushed upon Saul to make the point abundantly clear that the victory and what comes after this is the Lord's work through Saul, and here's the mercy.

Because the people wanted a king, but the king cannot save them. Only God can save them. And so the spirit of God rushes upon Saul, and the promise is, to shorten it, is that salvation will be experienced by the people of God.

Samuel, sorry, Saul has this, he divides the oxen up to send it out as messengers, as a warning, a conditional warning, and then he gathers the people together, but it's in the context that salvation, victory, will be won by the Lord.

And this is important because salvation, the way that it is understood by the people of God here, is in the context of victory in battle, not the forgiveness of sins.

[16 : 16] So salvation, properly understood for the Christian, is much more than the forgiveness of sins. It includes victory over our enemy.

It includes victory in battle. What God gives us in salvation is far, far greater than often the narrow view that we have of it.

That what God has actually accomplished is far greater than what most of us actually understand. So in verse 9, Saul promises salvation, but it's really because the spirit of God has rushed upon him.

And then verse 11, that is exactly what they experience. Afterwards, Saul seems to be confirmed with some kind of confidence that he is now the king.

And there are others who come, you remember the end of chapter 10, they want to kill those who thought that Saul was not going to be a good king. But the point is, is that Saul didn't win the battle.

[17 : 21] God won the battle through Saul and through the people of God. That salvation has been worked in Israel because of what God has done.

And then Samuel calls the people of God together to renew the kingdom, verse 14. And then Saul is made king before the Lord and they sacrifice a peace offering, verse 15.

And so while it's true that in the past that Saul has already been anointed by Samuel to be prince over the people of Israel and the people of God responded to Saul saying, long live the king, the events that have actually followed this means whether or not the people of God had any confidence in him in the first place.

Why didn't they just run to Saul? Why are they looking for someone to save them and not turn to their king? So there's lots of questions here that don't seem to make a great deal of sense until you push the text, as it were, you push the events and see that here again God is stepping in on behalf of his people despite the fact that they are not turning to him.

So God remains faithful even when we are faithless. And so I really only have one point and it's this, or there is really one main point through this text, and that is, what do you do or where do you go when you're looking for help?

[18 : 53] When you need to be helped, where do you go? I mean, I love the fact that Genesis begins in the context of man with the need of a helper.

And a helper, properly understood, so God created man, then he created woman to be the helpmate. And the helpmate is not an assistant, it's not a position of weakness, it's actually a position of strength.

And I've said this countless times, but I'll repeat it because it's important, that when God made the woman to be a helper, God made her to have strengths that the man didn't have.

Because she couldn't help him if she could only do everything that he could do, she would be no help. But the very fact that she is a helper indicates to everyone who reads the text that she has been given strengths that the man doesn't have, hence why she helps him.

So now we have a perfect complementary union between man and woman. The man has his role, the woman has her role, both are able to help one another because their strengths complement one another.

[20 : 08] But when you need help, you need help from someone who can do something that you cannot do. So when God gave the woman to Adam, he was giving Adam in the woman strengths that he didn't have.

And so where do you go when you need help? Because you're clearly not strong enough for everything in your own capacity. So where do you go when you need help?

Well, what we see here is the people of God are fearful, they don't like the terms, but they consider the terms and they weep aloud. And then they go looking for help.

They are looking for someone who will save them. But they've got a history with God having saved them. And the issue that keeps occurring for me as I read the text and no doubt for you is why are they in despair rather than confidence?

Given the fact that God has already brought them through a battle, why have they turned to despair and looking for someone to save them and then weeping rather than having confidence with the trouble that has actually come their way?

[21 : 25] And this is how confidence works. That when you understand what God can do and you understand why God does it and you understand the fact that God is real today just as he was back there in Samuel's day, then there's no reason why you cannot look to God for all your needs in terms of help.

And that just dispels any sense of despair that you might have because your confidence is in God not in what you're lacking, what you are looking for.

So when Jesus told his disciples do not fear in the boat, you know, the wind and the waves are coming up and they wake Jesus and say do not care that we are perishing.

Well, if they're perishing, what does that say about Jesus? Is Jesus perishing? Think about it. If you're all in the same boat together and you draw the conclusion that I'm perishing and I'm in the same boat as Jesus, then you're saying you're perishing as well.

Do you not care that we are perishing? It doesn't seem to make a great deal of sense when you put it that way because it's not meant to make sense. But this is how Jesus speaks. So he gives us a lesson so that when we're in a boat and the storm comes, we ought now to be able to face the wind and the waves with great confidence.

[22 : 55] Why? Because we have an example in scripture that tells us that we can be in a situation similar and God is with us knowing that we can be confident in a situation when the wind and the waves actually comes.

And so there are plenty of examples and times throughout your life where your foundation is going to be tested over and over and over again.

And what's actually happening is you're going to be asking the question who's going to save me? Who's going to save me? And the answer should be abundantly clear.

You should not be looking for someone to save you. You should not actually be looking for someone to help you. You should already know that the Lord is your helper.

You should have the confidence that God is with you rather than the despair because despair causes you to look whereas confidence causes you to be calm exactly where you are.

[23 : 59] To put this another way, when we think about our relationship with God and we think about turning to the Lord in prayer, that is the right thing to do confidently. But sometimes we are turning back to the Lord because we have spent so long doing things in our own eyes and then trouble comes.

Things are not turning out the way that we expect them to and things are getting worse and we're so afraid of losing what we have because it was built on a rocky foundation in the first place that either we swing one way and depart from the Lord altogether or we are turning to the Lord in panic to hold that shaky thing together, whatever it may be.

Don't put precious things on unstable tables. You've got a precious vase, you've got a precious frame, you've got a precious... Don't stick it on something unstable.

And yet this is the very thing that people do all the time. And then wonder why God didn't stop it from breaking. And God looks down from heaven and says, well, why did you put it on a three-legged table with one leg shorter than all the rest?

I've given wisdom to show you that's not how you build. So when you actually get to the story, for instance, of build your house upon the rock, which I find a fascinating story, that you're building and you're building and you're building so that when the storm comes, the house that's built on the solid ground stands.

[25 : 31] And the reason the story is so fascinating is because the story is showing us that if you build it right, it can face the storm even before you've faced it.

So the idea about that is not that the story is not telling you to turn to the Lord in times of trouble, it's teaching you to build in such a way before the trouble even comes so that when it comes you're left standing.

That's what it means. Jesus is using the illustration of a foundation and a house to illustrate something that is true about your life. And so you can either build your life on a solid foundation so that you are confident that when trouble comes you can face it.

No need to turn to the Lord because your life is already built into him. You're already built and firm and solid on the foundation. There's no turning to the Lord here.

You're already with the Lord. Or, if you are turning to the Lord, is it the case that you've really not built on him as the sure foundation?

[26 : 36] And you're sort of turning back to him because you have no confidence, you only have despair. And that's really what is happening here in 1 Samuel 11.

The people are panicking. The people even consider this treaty of gouging out the right eye. And they look for someone to say to them, this does not look like a confident people, a people who are in the right relationship with God, a God who has already delivered them out of the hands of the Philistines, a God who has already proven himself in battle.

They seem to have no confidence whatsoever. And of course, the parallel to that, if we take the principle of the text and bring it over to the New Testament, is exactly the same as, are you building your house on the solid ground or are you building your house on the sand?

And the point is, depending on how you build and what you build on, okay, you will either be confident or despairing when the storm comes.

And that's really what that parable that Jesus told is speaking about. So while it's true that we turn to the Lord in prayer, we are not turning back to the Lord.

[27 : 56] Rather, we are not being presumptuous. We are not being cocky. We are not doing as if to say, well, I belong to God, therefore, I don't need to worry about a thing. Well, that's true.

You don't need to worry about a single thing. But we're not to be a presumptuous people. We're not to take the Lord for granted. This is a relationship.

We are not to be like the child who hasn't quite learnt that the food that they get provided with and the clothes that they have comes from somewhere. That it is provided somehow.

And yet, you know, the spoiled child who grows up, you know, who then has to go into the workplace and wonders why things aren't coming to him as it did when he lived at home. Well, that happens because of failure to recognize where that provision came from in the first place.

The sense of entitlement is there. So the reason we pray is so that we're not a presumptuous people, so that we are not taking the Lord for granted. It is not because we are acting out of despair, but it is rather because we are enjoying the relationship that we have with God and that is the right response of defining our faith in him.

[29 : 10] We are not turning back to the Lord as if we have done what is right in our own eyes for a period of time when it's been fair weather and no troubles. The sun is shining.

We are turning to the Lord daily. Well, here's the exhortation as we close. What we ought to notice in this chapter is the fact that the Spirit of the Lord has come upon Saul, which is another way of saying that Saul is not winning the battle, God is.

And God is being merciful to his people because even though his people wanted a king, the king cannot save them, God still has to save them. And instead of God leaving them to the decisions and the consequence of their decisions alone, he steps in and has his spirit rush upon Saul so that they would win the battle, so that salvation would be understood to be coming from the hand of the Lord and not from the hand of Samuel.

And so the question is this, how can I be confident when my natural reaction is to be despairing? How am I to be confident when my natural reaction to life is to turn to despair?

It's to say, I don't know what I'm going to do. And suddenly the worries and the fear rush in, overwhelming you because you're not building a way where your house can withstand that onslaught of the wind and the waves and the storm.

[30 : 45] That when you are facing an impossible task, just like Israel are here, how can you be confident rather than turn weeping in despair of wondering what you're going to do?

Well, the answer is very simple for the Christian, which is what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, that you are to build your life on the solid ground, which is another way is to send you to build your life in God.

That God is your refuge and strength. God is your peace. That God is everything to you. And therefore, you build your life in God. That is where your confidence comes from.

And when you understand that, your confidence is all the greater because you understand why you do what you do in your daily devotions to him. So to put it another way, this reminds me of a ministry going, this is taking me back in the day, and the ministry, it was a children's ministry called Third Pig.

Quite a plain name, I thought, and it confused me for ages. Why on earth would they call this children's ministry Third Pig? And they said because it was the only house that the wolf couldn't blow down.

[32 : 02] Got it? So when the wolf is coming, whose house do you want to live in? That's the point. When the wolf is coming, whose house do you want to occupy?

And that's really what 1 Samuel 11 is about, what it should be, what it indicates. That when we are faced with an impossible task, when the storm comes, when the wind and waves approaches us, and we don't know what to do, is it because we are not as close and clean with the Lord as what we thought we were?

or is it because of some other reason? Well, I want to suggest to you that confidence comes from a close and clean walk with the Lord and it disappears when you do what is right in your own eyes.

Why? Because salvation belongs to the Lord. Amen. Amen. Well, may you know that the Lord loves you and may you know that the Lord is not angry with you and may you know that your confidence can only ever be in the Lord.

Amen. Amen.