

# 2/19/23 - 1 Sam. 11:1-15 - "Context For The Christian Life"

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Date: 19 February 2023

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, so a reading from 1 Samuel, chapter 11. Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-Gilead.

And all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you. But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all of your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel.

The elders of Jabesh said to him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers through 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 Gibeah of Saul, they reported the manner 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.

[ 1 : 13 ] He took a yoke of oxen, and cut them into pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel, by the hands of the messengers, saying, Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it 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 at Bizek, the people of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand.

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 Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

[ 2 : 24 ] 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. There renew the kingdom. 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. Amen.

This is God's word. Thank you, Carmen, for reading. Consider yourself redeemed from last week. He made an inside joke at the beginning of the service.

And we all laughed. Even I did. So it wasn't that bad. But it is great to be gathered around God's word, to hear God's message to us, to dive into God's message, to till the soil of his word, and not just disconnected, like these are just merely just another book, another thing that might be on our bookshelves.

[ 3 : 47 ] But these are words of life, living, active, breathing words for us. And so this is God's word in 1 Samuel chapter 11. And the passage today is such an odd twist of events, isn't it?

When we weigh what's going on in chapter 11 versus everything else that we've already gone through in the previous episodes, kind of should baffle us and confuse us a little bit. Like, what is going on? I thought Saul was the bad guy. In other words, context makes our current chapter out of place.

It makes us question, what is going on without context? Looking at the previous episodes, the nation rejected God's rule. God granted their request.

He gave them a king. They want to dethrone God. All right, here you go, God says. And they chose superficial Saul, the guy with the jaw aligned, the strong arms.

[ 5 : 04 ] I know it's very, very weepish of a situation. They chose Saul, the guy who just apparently made sense in man's eye.

And all the context leading up to this point would indicate that this nation is being defeated. But the passage today, isolated from its context, would indicate victory.

Or so it would seem. What in the world is actually going on? Well, the saying is trustworthy, I believe, that context is key.

Context is key. Context grounds the most uncomfortable arguments in marriage because it makes us remember the vows that we pledge to each other upon a wedding day.

Context keeps us dedicated to our work even when we're discouraged and frustrated with our boss and our co-workers. We are remembering that time when God provided for us.

[ 6 : 27 ] Context anchors the Christian life amid hardship and suffering because context helps us to remember God working all things out for our good.

Context is key. Without it, all God's work in our lives can be forgotten and we drift away wavering in our faith.

Context is the vital, under-emphasized instrument of God that He's given to us and we fail to use context time and time again.

Today's passage will remind us of this and encourage us to remember when we are most prone to forget. So what I have today is a sermon titled Context for the Christian Life.

And I'm going to have three points today. Imagine that. Three points.

[ 7 : 36 ] Not sections, but points. I'm just going to lay it out for you with the context of the Christian life in three points. And I want to do this before, I want us to pray before we do this.

So let's pray. Father, Father, we come to You today thirsty for You to speak, hungry for the bread of life.

Nourish us at this time through Your Word and the message by Your Word. We praise in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Context is key.

We're going to see our emotions need context. We clearly see this in the passage. In verse 1, you have this debacle between Nahash and all the men of Jabesh.

The people of Nahash have surrounded Jabesh. God's people are surrounded and about to be attacked.

[ 8 : 49 ] they've surrounded their land. And get this, God's people of Jabesh were basically freaked out to the point, whatever you want, we will be slaves to you.

Isn't that interesting? For God's people to be so quick to defeat in the name of comfort, being in trouble, having a little hardship that they're facing.

This is God's people. And who's surrounding this nation? It's the Nahash man. His name is actually means snake.

They're surrounded in this man known as a snake. And we meet the leader. The nation of Israel wanted to be like all the other nations.

We meet the guy of all the other nations. Quite a wonderful fellow. I bet if you get to know him a little bit. Quite a winner. Here's my treaty. We won't destroy you yet, but I'll make a treaty.

[ 10 : 03 ] Let me take your right eye, rip it out of its sockets, and thus disgrace all of Israel. I'm a nice, nice king. Right. I mean, it won't be the left eye, right?

This is the leader that the nation of Israel wanted to be like. We meet that leader in the man of Nahash, that snake.

And this eye gouging, it's kind of weird to us. I think, I don't know if you've ever used that threat against your enemy, but it's a common barbarous mutilation back in this time period that would render military force completely powerless.

Their peripheral vision would be all thrown off. They'd basically just be useless. They would be indeed slaves. And Nahash is saying, well, if you want to be slaves, you're going to be slaves in my way.

I'm going to make sure you never turn upon me. What a great leader, right? Trust me, you know, once you get to know him a little bit, well, you won't be so bad.

[11:07] And in verse 3, the men of Jabesh filed for this continuance before the case hits the trial. They filed for this continuance.

If we can't find someone to save us, then we concede, and then the messengers returned, and Israel turned around and wept aloud. This message finally reaches our royal king Saul.

What's he doing? Farming. What a guy. Not organizing troops, not providing military support, or thinking about the next play of security for a nation.

He's out with ox in a field, but he had the jawline, right? Sort of like Gideon hiding in a wine press. Really doing his kingly duty for this nation.

It kind of like pulls this R.C. Sproul rebuke. What's wrong with you people? Why are you weeping? Right? Why are you messengers weeping?

[12:20] What is going on? And this was all until an unthinkable moment happened. At the reception of such a threat, Saul was stirred.

He was stirred up, the text says, and there arose a glimmer of hope. Verse 6, the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon Saul, similar to how it rushed upon Samson in Judges, and he butchered an ox right there in the field, sent bloody pieces through all the territories in Israel, and said, come join my army, essentially.

Quite a military draft, right? Oh, look, we got this message from Saul. Oh, it's a leg. Wonderful. Let's go join the army. And if they don't believe Saul, because he's a little bit of a bonehead, if they don't believe Saul, let's put in the message, let's add Samuel in there, the man, the leader of Israel, let's add him in there, maybe that will persuade them, right?

God's people were weeping. They were filled with dread of the Lord.

And this isn't a reverent dread, this is a wrong, reverential fear of the Lord. They had dread, a fearful expectation, even at Saul's commissioning, even at all this occurring.

[13:54] God's people weeping, they're in dread, and I gotta tell you, church, our emotions are terrible masters and lazy guides.

It's often we're like emotionally compelled to make money, so we play the lottery. We want our healing, so if we maybe double our tithe and offerings this month, maybe something will happen. We want to have peace in our land, so we just double down in the political realms and legislation through Congress. Church, do you see the emotional disconnect of this nation who has been brought out of the land of slavery, who has been brought through the Red Sea, who has been brought through the Jordan, and they are perceivably hopeless?

hopeless. Their emotions are unchecked, emotions are unhinged from the reality of God's redemption and seem to have forgotten how they got to this place in the first place.

You see, emotions need context, gospel context, lest they prove to be unchecked and unhinged from the truth of the gospel.

[15:18] We often have a problem, I believe, of looking upon the narratives of Scripture and sort of scoffing at the failure of others. It's almost like we're bullying the people upon the pages, as if we would, if we were in the story, we wouldn't have done that.

Yeah. Thanks for admitting your pride in the matter, because yes, you would have done that very thing. We are not the heroes, and this is just nonsense and a reality of our own pride that we struggle with.

Today, Satan runs wild among Christians whose emotions are unchecked and unhinged from the gospel of Jesus Christ. A church gets so filled throughout the week with anxiety.

And speaking from personal struggle with anxiety, it's often debilitating at times on really bad days. It renders myself useless. It renders us as useless.

Or even having fear of man over fear of God. Or being devastated in the face of hardship. How could this happen to me?

[16:30] And so on and so forth. Satan runs wild. among Christians whose emotions are unchecked and unhinged by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You see, when our emotional states are rooted in the context of the gospel, we are reminded of where our confidence and anxiety come from, where our fear of God comes from in intense situations, and where we find the strength to endure our hardships.

You see, when our emotions are responsive to the redemption of God in our lives, not a single threat against us will stand against us.

Context is key. But we have something else developing in the passage, not only emotionally speaking with this nation, but our unity needs context.

Christ. And we see that in verse 7. Look at what happens. The leg and the toes are sent all throughout Israel, that oxen, and interestingly enough, maybe we should try that for the next party invite as a church.

[ 17 : 51 ] Come join the potluck. They came out as one man. I don't think you understand what is going on here to its fullest extent.

They came out as one man, and if at one man, the same priorities, the same heart, the same mind, the same action, they were united.

This was a point of reversal for this nation, isn't it? Because not long ago in Judges, the only Hebrew words that were put next to each other in the Bible were found of cut and sent of the Levite's concubine throughout the nation, which actually represented the division and the dispersion of the nation, and complete division, void of unity.

It seems like there's a reversal going on in this passage. And Saul, as flawed as he was, was able to stir up, muster up a staggering 300,000 men of Israel.

And not only that, church, you might miss it in the text, and 30,000 men of Judah. This dates the book because the two nations were divided.

[ 19 : 20 ] Saul had great power, even great power to unite two divided nations. between Israel and Judah. This was huge unity.

I could imagine all of us, even as we're reading it, we're like, is this chapter actually belonging here? Geez, you were really hard on Saul last week.

But this is promising. Saul is even uniting a divided kingdom, and not only that, but the men of Jabesh make a treaty of loyalty. There is absolute unity and things are good.

So they sent out in verse 11 to set out in three companies. This is a military strategy so that if one company is attacked and defeated, the other two would still stand.

And it was at the early morning of that day, the third shift, we'll put it, at the morning watch, that's 2 a.m. to 6 a.m., and they wipe out their enemy all the way till the heat of the day of battle.

[ 20 : 32 ] And if the enemy wasn't killed, they were scattered. They were rendered powerless. But none of Israel was scattered.

And don't you sense that reversal? I think you should within biblical theology of the story of the Bible. Many of us could probably scratch our heads in this matter.

I've spent a lot of time this week scratching my own head over the passage. Things seem pretty good. Good things are happening.

And the facts, in that facts, left isolated from its context of the nation's rebellion and God's judgment upon them from the previous episodes, this nation was unifying.

This would be a sermon for a pep rally of rallying people to serve God. If you want to take the passage out of context, yeah.

[ 21 : 36 ] We cannot forget chapter 8, 9, and 10. You see, context indicates that this was not true unity.

True unity is achieved through God's lordship. God did work amid their rejection, but by no means was this true unity, because this nation was in rebellion.

union. What distinguishes this nation's unity from any other nations of unifying for battle? Maybe the other nations would chop an oxen up and send out an invitation to join the party too.

What distinguishes this assembly of troops and military than any other nation? After all, all the nations assemble the same way and they have a strategy of three companies just as well.

What's different? I've got to argue what distinguishes a church from any other social club. After all, social clubs are really, really good at attracting people.

[ 22 : 51 ] Maybe a church might be able to adopt some evangelistic methods, right? But what's different? You see, unity is established apart from the context of the gospel is an absolute facade.

Unity established apart from the context of the gospel, the life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, and the coming again of Jesus Christ. The gospel of repentance, of restoration, of rebellion of man, and faithfulness of God.

Unless any unity is established in a church, outside of that reality, it is a facade. Because when you're unifying according to the gospel, Christ is Lord, and He reigns.

Church, we can unite all we want around our causes in life, but numbers rally around a cause does not necessarily mean that we're rallying around the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

We can unite all we want around a cause in life, but numbers rallying around any cause other than a cause for Christ is simply numbers of people who agree with each other and find a common interest with other people's cause, not numbers that agree with God or find interest in Him.

[ 24 : 26 ] And so with point one, our emotions are terrible masters, they're lazy guides. And to this point, numbers, statistics, church growth, all these attractional things, we could put a carnival in here and we could get the people coming, but we will not be united in Jesus Christ and the gospel.

That's a facade. It's pragmatism. It's vain. It's empty. Unity needs context, gospel context, lest it prove to be unchecked and unhinged from truth that we find in the gospel.

And the last context we need here within the passage is from verse 12 and on, that leadership qualifications need context as well.

You see, kingship in this day was a process of not only being commissioned by the Lord, that's very important within the nation. Any form of leadership was commissioned by the Lord.

They operated not in a democracy but a theocracy, and God appointed men to leadership. But it would also be confirmed, the icing on the cake was to be confirmed in a military victory.

[ 25 : 51 ] So not only called by God, but actually they'd have to prove to be a leader worth victory. So they would achieve a victory. In verse 13, Saul was a man who promoted peace in this nation.

I mean, this guy's showing promise. He calmed the rough waters of inner turmoil and this church member saying, you know, who was against Saul? Let's go get him, grab his head, and get off with him.

Right? And he made peace. He calmed the inner rivals. He said, not a man shall be put to death this day. Man, he's doing pretty well.

Saul was a man in verse 13 who gave credit to God. He not only promoted peace, but he actually gave credit to God and rejected any self-worship. He did better than Gideon did for the Lord and for Gideon is how Gideon stated it in his troops.

Saul says, today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel. in verse 15, in 14 and 15, the kingdom is renewed at this conquering defeat.

[ 26 : 59 ] And Saul officially became king in Gilgal. God's people sacrificed peace offerings known as thanksgiving offerings, and Saul and all the men rejoiced greatly.

And what a pep rally that would be. You know? This would be something I'd take to the football locker room, get them pumped up, saying, who fights for you?

Who gave you that win? But it's all taken out of context. Things are not good at this time. Saul was a fraud.

For such a climatic narrative, it gives the reader sort of a blind eye to the following chapters. It kind of gives you a glimmer of hope.

Will Saul's humility last? If we didn't have the pages, if we were just going chapter by chapter without the following pages, we'd probably be left on the edge of our seat until the next episode.

[ 28 : 06 ] But the question leaves quite a bit of tension, I would imagine, for the reader, because Saul is indeed a fraud. God. Therefore, leadership qualifications need context as well, gospel context.

I don't know if you follow many podcasts in our day, but the rise and fall of Mars Hill, our church body was actually made famous in its previous name, Youngstown Metro, because our faithful church planter wrapped a motion at the SBC annual conference to thousands of rounds and put our name on the map, interestingly enough, and then we changed our name, so we fixed all the bad publicity.

But there have been churches similar to the Mars Hill with Mark Driscoll that broadcast the problem when man's competency outweighs their character, when people put what the man is able to achieve before who he actually is deep within his heart.

You can build a church, a massive church, based upon a competent individual with some skill, but if his heart is disconnected from obedience to God, what are you building?

Pride goes before destruction. The harder they rise, the greater they rise, the harder they fall. This has been a problem for so long, back to Saul's day even.

[ 29 : 50 ] And now, I don't want to disqualify something that I'm not saying, because God often uses frauds, like Saul, even in this passage, to bring about his sovereign purposes promises, according to his providential will, his decree.

Similar to how God empowers Saul here. However, this would be much more having to do with God's character than Saul's character.

You see that? That God's character is actually a thing that deserves the focus, not Saul's character. Saul's nobody, but it's God who's intervening, and that might be the point.

The German reformer Martin Luther once said that God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick. I love that quote. It's a humbling quote.

And despite, you see, despite Saul's flaws, God empowered him for victory. Similar to Samson, as flawed as Samson, after money, after just robbing his friends of their clothes, after chasing around women, God still used him.

[ 31 : 09 ] But a crooked stick is still a crooked stick. We can make excuses for people all we want, but that's why our leadership qualifications need context.

What context is needed within leadership qualifications for a church? We get them laid out pretty simply as prescribed in the New Testament in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, to be above reproach, husband of one wife, to be self-controlled, gentle, hospitable, not greedy, respectable, lover of good.

And you see, leadership qualifications need context, gospel context, lest it prove to be unchecked and unhinged from the truth of the gospel.

A leader can be right in our own eyes and make the most logical sense to us, and they can also be wrong in the eyes of God. And that is the truth and reality of this passage.

The history of the church is full of crooked sticks. Trust me, if you want to get down to it, I'm not boasting in my own efforts or my own holiness either. I'm a crooked stick just as we all are.

[ 32 : 27 ] We are all fallen short of the glory of God. And the history of the church is full of crooked sticks that were used to make straight lines. But by no means does that dismiss the context of calling to leadership, the importance of it.

The context of leadership qualifications cannot be minimized in the name of God's sovereignty, in the name of grace and the benefit of the doubt, nor can it be overemphasized of looking for this perfect Saul-like person who has all the boxes checked off in the name of perfection and holiness. You see, the godliest leaders in history are crooked sticks, if you want to get real. So, it is not whether we are flawed, it's how leaders strive in spite of their flaws.

They are given the measuring stick found in Jesus Christ, who observed it perfectly through his life, and that being the aim of every leader, because we are crooked sticks.

And for that, the passage testifies to hope in God's power to transform us into new people by the powerful working of his Spirit alone, God's kingdom. But only if we keep in mind, Saul was actually not the guy in the first place, and that's what context makes clear.

[ 33 : 55 ] God's kingdom has always been this militarily inferior assembly. They've always been the guys with, like, Gideon's army looked pretty promising at the beginning until it got down, whittled down to 300, just because people lapped some water rather than, or just because they got down and didn't lap the water, they were kicked out of the army, right?

And it's just interesting how they've always been this inferior military power, and their victory confused the world. And God's church today has a wake behind it in similar unlogical events.

The church today is existing in the wake of martyr's blood. The word that we have for us today was brought to us upon a sea of blood.

It makes no sense at all how the church is victorious today other than God's hand being upon us.

And our victory still confuses the world to this day. And let them be confused. God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

[ 35 : 22 ] And this will continue until the day that we all meet the Lord at His return. And so what a confusing passage. Don't you sense the confusion in this passage?

Odd development in chapter 11. This nation might wonder if God maybe with all this victory and all this good stuff happening, the massive army assembling, He'd probably look around.

It's like sitting down on the 50 yard line of the Super Bowl probably looking around like man, one guy called all this together? And that doesn't even scratch the surface of how many people Saul actually called.

Boy, you're looking around, maybe God forgot. Maybe the offering that we offered in the field with the Levites a couple chapters before, maybe that was sufficient and we're forgiven.

Praise the Lord. We got victory. Maybe He's forgotten about our rejection. But the truth of God's redemption in Israel and for us today is the cross being the context of our emotions, the context of our unity, the context of qualifications of leaders, the truth of God's redemption in Israel and for us today is the cross.

[ 36 : 51 ] God's means of redemption. This is what our emotions need. This is what our unity must be built upon.

This is what our qualifications of leaders need to be striving for. The context of the gospel roots us to feel rightly, to assemble rightly, and to choose rightly, all based on context.

why are Christians so anxious and discouraged? Why are the largest churches that exist in America doctrinally progressive and completely unorthodox?

Why are church leaders morally failing in another sexual abuse scandal and other disqualifying sins? We've lost context of the gospel.

people. So I have three exhortations for you today. May we force our emotional states to find hope in the cross.

[ 37 : 59 ] May we force our emotional states to find hope in the cross. Secondly, may we allow our unity to find its hope in the cross.

May we allow our unity to find its hope in the cross. And lastly, may our leaders find their hope in the cross. May our leaders find their hope in the cross.

When that context is found, the world will witness firsthand who the true King is.

The work of Jesus Christ is the context of our salvation and church, may that be the context of the Christian life.

Let's pray.