

Topic	Jephthah (The Outlaw Leader)
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I. Sin / Idolatry Leads to Slavery

In the book of Judges we see that the ancient Israelites are living in a pluralistic society and they are surrounded by all different kinds of other religions, they are surrounded by idols, they are surrounded by people who have differing values, different standards, different morals, different ethical conduct than they have or at least then they should have according to God's will, because God has called Israel to be a holy nation, to be a light to the people around them, but unfortunately when Israel was in this pluralistic society, surrounded by the other gods, surrounded by these other values, they tended to accept the values of the others and be influenced by the world around them, rather than remaining true to the one true God and sticking with his teachings and his values.

So that's why the Book of Judges is relevant to us today, because we too, we who believe in Jesus live in a world that surrounds us with competing values, other morals, other ethical standards and yet we are called to be true to God and to be a light. We are called to be his holy people. So, like the ancient Israelites, we are tempted to turn our back on God and conform to the world, but we can learn from them and unlike the Israelites, through the grace of God, maybe make some better decisions than sometimes the people of Israel did.

The Book of Judges does deal with a very dark time in the life of Hebrew people and this was marked by a cyclical pattern of rebellion against God, oppression by the enemies and then deliverance from God and we see that pattern here. Israel will disobey God then because of that Israel is oppressed by neighboring people as God punishes them, then Israel cries out to God in repentance, God raises up the deliverer, so then Israel is delivered by the action of God through this judge then Israel enjoys a brief time of peace and then during the good times they forget God, turn their back on him and the cycle begins all over again. It tends to be a downward spiral, each judge seeming to get worse than the other.

We see the first two parts of this cycle, Israel disobeying God and then being oppressed by the neighboring enemies. In the first part of our text today, verse 6 we see

Judges 10:6 The people of Israel **again did** what was **evil** in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they **forsook the LORD** and did not serve him.

So in response, they were crushed, they were oppressed by the enemies that God gave them into their hand. So, in these verses, we can see that sin or idolatry does lead to slavery. There is the word again in verse 6, the people again did what was evil. Again, they served the Baals and Ashtaroath and the gods of five other people groups. Again, they forsook the Lord, again they did not serve the Lord. Through Israel's brief history, they had already forsaken the Lord many times. They had repeatedly done evil in God's eyes and repeatedly they had reaped the consequences of turning their back on God. You think they would finally learn their lesson. Finally, realize that yes there are consequences to sin, sin brings oppression, it brings suffering, it brings death, sin has an addictive power over us and it can bring slavery.

In chapter 2, God had warned them that the gods of the enemy nations, false gods and idols, they will be a snare to you. These gods will trap you. It is like a net or a hook that can take the freedom away from a fish. These gods, these idols, they will take away our freedom as they entrap us and ensnare us and hold us tight, not letting us go. Because sin veils an invisible but very strong power over us. It can be addictive, like a drug addict craving more drugs or an alcoholic craving the next drink or compulsive gambler hoping to gamble just more one time and he is going to win it big and we just can't seem to resist the addictive power of sin. So be careful, sin can be attractive, it will seduce you but then it will entrap you and hold you. Now, not everybody is tempted by every possible sin. There are some sins included what we will look at the end of our text that we consider to be operant repulsive, but there are some sins that we don't find so repulsive. Think in your own mind, what temptations really tend to have a pull on you, what sins are attractive to you? What sins or desires or actions continue again and again and again to surface in your life. Jesus said that anyone who sins is a slave of sin. That's a harsh reality but it is true, Jesus said it. Another translation phrase is that anyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. Yes, sin or idolatry does lead to slavery. Another place in our text that also shows that idolatry leads to slavery is when we get down to verse 7. Here we see that after the Israelite people had forsaken the Lord and refused to serve Him, then in verse 7 it says, that the Lord sold them into the hands of the philistines and into the hands of the Ammonites.

Now God had earlier redeemed his people from slavery in Egypt. Redeemed carries with it the idea of purchasing, buying back. It is as if God had bought or purchased the people, so now they belong to Him. When He freed them from Egypt, He brought them to Himself. He said, they would be his treasured possession and He promised them many wonderful blessings, many wonderful privileges, but now the people rebelled once again and they say, no God, we do not want you to be our master. We do not want to be the kingdom of priest that you want us to be. We don't want to be that holy nation. We want to be like everybody else, we want to serve their gods, we want a different master, we want to serve the gods of the philistines, the gods of the ammonites. So, God says, okay, if that is what you want you can have what you want. You want to be like the philistines and the ammonites, okay. You want to serve their gods, go ahead. You want to let their gods be your master instead of me, I will let you do that if that's what you want. God would say to them, I bought you but if you don't want me, I will let you have a new master. I will sell you to the philistines, to the ammonites.

So, God had freed the Israelites from slavery but now they are going back into slavery again by their own choice, because their idolatry is taking them back into slavery. You see we become controlled by what we worship. We are owned by what or who we worship. It is like we become a slave to whatever it is that we worship. So ask yourself, what idols are trying to claim your highest allegiance. Who or what is more important to you than God and His way and His will or ask who or what tends to control your thoughts, your desires and your actions. Because everything that we do not surrender to the lordship of Christ, is an idol, so think what is that you do not want to surrender to Christ. Anything that derives our desires and values more than God and His will and His word, is an idol. So be careful, those idols want to control you. They want to hold onto you and they will control you if left unchecked. Sin and idolatry lead to slavery. Be careful what you desire, you might get it.

The idols that you think you might want to adopt, can lead to slavery, can lead to oppression just like what happened to the ancient Israelites. They wanted a different god, so God let them have their way and it turned out to be a disaster. Listen to the psalmist as he is writing about the history of the ancient Israelites. God is speaking

Psalm 81:8 O Israel, if you would but listen to me! 9 There shall be no strange god among you; you shall not bow down to a foreign god. 10 I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

So God is reminding them of His covenant, of his great love, how he is redeemed and he will give them blessings if they remain true to him, but God says,

11 "But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. 12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels.

These are scary words, they wanted something and God gave it to them and they found out it is not what they wanted.

13 Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! 14 I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes.

That's exactly what Israel wanted but they had turned away from the only one who can provide that deliverance. They got what they wanted, some different exciting gods to serve but then they were oppressed greatly by these gods. So when they were deeply oppressed then they cried out to God back in Judges chapter 10 verse 10

Judges 10:10 ... "We have sinned against you, because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals." 11 And the LORD said to the people of Israel, "Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? 12you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand. 13 Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore, I will save you no more. 14 Go, cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress."

The gods they had chosen to worship gave them plenty of opportunity to sin, gave them many opportunities to conform to the standards of the people all around them but when trouble came, these gods cannot deliver them, because idols lead to slavery, not to salvation or to deliverance. We can have faith in a lot of different things, but idols cannot save us, rather than saving us they will enslave us because sin and idolatry lead to slavery and there is no deliverance from the slavery except through the grace of God.

II. God's Grace Provides Deliverance

Throughout the history of Israel people up to this point, God's grace has been evident many times and even in the Book of Judges, we have already seen several examples of god's grace in the life of the people. Way back in the beginning, God had called them to be his chosen people, his treasured possession through whom he would bring blessing to all peoples of the earth, through this people he would give the law, he would send his prophets and most

importantly, he would send the Messiah, the promised savior, Jesus, to bring salvation to all peoples. So, they have experienced God's grace over and over again. Now yes over and over again we see God judging their sin but when the people repented and called out in faith God delivered them because of his grace and in our text today we see once again, God's grace as we continue reading further

Judges 10:15 And the people of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day." 16 So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD, and he became weary of Israel's misery.

Another translation reads, 'God could bear Israel's misery no longer. We will see in the next chapter that God then does provide deliverance for the people of Israel, deliverance from their enemies because of His grace. Now of course the people did not deserve God's grace, nobody deserves God's grace, but that's what grace is, unmerited mercy, favor, love, expressed towards those who don't deserve it, because none of us deserve it. We can be grateful if it is expressed towards us. Nobody can earn God's grace, the idea that some religions have that somehow your good deeds can either balance out or possibly outweigh your bad deeds, that shows a very faulty understanding of sin. People do not take the seriousness of sin or its deadliness serious enough if they think that anything they do good can possibly outweigh the bad. The view that you can earn God's grace also shows a very low view of God. It shows a total misunderstanding of the holiness of God. The Israelites did not deserve God's grace, they could not earn God's grace yet God in his love and mercy offered it to them and he brought about their deliverance, but we do see that the Israelites did not experience God's gracious deliverance until they truly repented.

They people of Israel confessed to God that they had turned their back on him, they sinned. The people confessed their sin earlier too, but the first time God said, I am not going to deliver you. The second time we see God is moved and he can bear their suffering no longer. It seems like the first time, the Israelite people said the correct words, they said the right words but it appears that they did not truly repent and God knows our hearts. He knew their hearts. It is possible for us to say the correct words and our heart still be far from God. It is possible to go through correct religious rituals and do Christian things, whatever they might be, but still be serving idols, letting something else be the ultimate controller of our lives. The actual words of confession from the first time to the second time didn't change, so it appears that what it changed was their heart. It appears that they had truly repented because we see in verse 16 along with their words, this time they put away the foreign gods and they serve the Lord. Now a change of heart

is necessary before the change of action will do any good. Otherwise, your actions just serve as an attempt to try to bribe God. But if indeed there has been true repentance then it will be evident in our lifestyles. It appears, this time the Israelites had truly repented, had experienced the change of heart.

We need to be aware of an attitude that tends to take God's grace for granted. Don't take God's grace lightly. It is dangerous to think, it doesn't matter what I do, I can sin anyway I want and when I come to God he will forgive me. If that is your attitude, it could be that when you ask for help, you might hear God tell you, what he told his people, go cry out to the gods that you have been serving. Go let your idols take care of your needs, let them save you in your time of distress, but you will experience God's grace when you call on him in true repentance.

In our text, we will also now see God's grace in the life of Jephthah. He is introduced to us in chapter 11, after the background to his work as a judge is presented. Jephthah had a bad start in life and it was not his fault. His father had an affair with a prostitute and he was the result. Undoubtedly, he grew up hearing people calling him ugly names because he was an illegitimate son and he grew up hearing people insulting his mother. He was rejected by his family, they forced him out, they didn't want him to have any of the inheritance, so he was sent away penniless. His brothers obviously hated him, they rejected him, they were jealous of him, afraid, he would get too much money, so they just threw him out. He came from a very dysfunctional family. He suffered because of the sins of other people, yet God decided to use this rejected mistreated person in his service. God was gracious and used a person that nobody else thought fit for anything. An interesting point is, that the difficulties that Jephthah had to face, the experiences that he suffered through probably helped to prepare him for the service that then God used him in. Undoubtedly, his experiences helped him to make him strong, made him a mighty warrior. This can be encouraging for each one of us. We see that our background does not have to determine our future. Our background does not prevent God from working in our life, changing our lives and doing great things through our lives, that's good news. God's grace can break into your life, no matter what is in your past. God can and wants to use each one of us in his service, to advance his purposes and it is also encouraging to realize that sometimes the difficulties we go through can later help us. They help us to be strong, they help us to face additional challenges that come in life and they can also help us to help other people, just like Jephthah was able to help other people, partly due to his background, because the Lord's grace came in and was evident in his life.

When Jephthah was forced away from home, it seems like he became a great warrior and he led a group of men who were basically scoundrels or outcasts,

one translation calls them adventurers. More than likely, it was an armed gang that survived by going on raid parties into the enemy territories and so they got their fighting skills. So, Jephthah had quite a colourful past. You could call him an outlaw. He was like a mafia boss. We do see that God's grace was evident in Jephthah's life and the fact that God chose somebody with such a bad background to bring about deliverance for his people.

We see that the leaders of Israel from Gilead went to Jephthah and asked him to be their commander, to lead their army, to go against the Ammonites who were oppressing them, who would come in and invade their land and Jephthah responded to them, did you not hate me and drive me out. Why are you coming now to me when you are distressed? They wanted him to be their leader they told him, so then Jephthah said,

Judges 11:9 "If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the LORD gives them over to me, I will be your head." 10 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say." 11 So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah.

So, Jephthah realizes, if he is victorious it is going to be the Lord's work and he is speaking these words before the Lord. They agreed, they will make him their leader. So, Jephthah sends his word to the Ammonite king.

Judges 11:29 Then **the Spirit of the LORD** was upon Jephthah, 32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and **the LORD gave them into his hand.** 33 And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a great blow. So, the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

So we see that God's grace does provide deliverance.

III. Faith, in response to God's grace, is to lead us to devotion to God (not to ourselves)

Faith is to be focused on God, His greatness, His will, His kingdom, not on us, our will and our desires. Unfortunately, in the text and also in our lives we see that the attempt just to focus our faith on ourselves and we often try to use faith as a means to advance our cause, we try to exercise faith with the hope of it accomplishing our will and it appears in the Book of Judges, to the Israelites, God was more of a God of convenience than a God they were committed to. It

seems like, they wanted God only when God would give them something they wanted, such as a miracle, a favor or deliverance.

A lot of times we are in a transactional relationship with God. This relationship is not based on love, not based on his mercy, not based on him but rather centered on what is in it for me. How can I get God to do what I want him to do. It is not really not faith at all. It is usually expressed like this, God if I do this then I expect you to do that. If I say the correct words and quote the sinner's prayer, then God you have got to take me to heaven. We can also express it this way, God if you will do this then I promise I will do the other. It is like we are trying to bargain with God, like somebody that works down at the fruit stand and at the market and you are trying to bargain to get a good price and unfortunately it appears that is what Jephthah did in this passage. You see when I read this verse earlier, I left out two important verses, 30 and 31

Judges 11:30 And Jephthah made a **vow** to the LORD and said, "**If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 31 then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.**"

A terrible vow, a rash vow, something that had not been well thought out, possibly made because of a lack of faith. God's spirit had already come upon him and given him the power to defeat the enemies, but for Jephthah that wasn't enough, he thought I'd better secure this deal with God. I am going to make a bargain with Him. God if you do this, then I will do that. That's exactly what Jephthah did. He had a transactional approach at this point in his life to faith and it brought about tragic results. We worship God because He is God, pure and simple. We worship God because he is God, He is the only one worthy of our worship, the only one worthy of being the center of our affection and holding our ultimate devotion. We don't worship God just in order to get things. Faith focuses on God, it is centered on God and not us. So, when we respond in faith to God's grace, this is to lead us to devotion to God.

IV. Even People of Faith Get Things Wrong

This is the tragedy that we see at the end of chapter 11. We've already seen that Jephthah had made this vow that if you do this, then I will give you whatever comes out of doors of my house to meet me, I will make that and devout it to the Lord, I will offer it up as a burnt offering and when Jephthah comes home, his daughter comes out to meet him. He is broken-hearted because he has made this vow, he will sacrifice as a burnt offering whatever comes out of his door. He said, he cannot take his vow back and his daughter also says, no you should not

take your vow back but let me mourn on the fact that I am single, that I have never married, I am virgin, I will never have children that our family line will not be able to continue. He lets her do that and after two months she comes back and it says, her father did to her according to the vow that he had made.

Tragic ending and I think that it shows that even people of faith, even people whom God has used in a mighty way can still get things terribly wrong. That's probably why we don't hear this story very often because of this tragic ending. It is disturbing to us to see that people of faith, that God has anointed and used in a mighty way can still do horrible things. The scripture reminds us, we are all sinners. The scripture reminds us of the insidious nature of sin, how terrible it is, and that we have the capacity to do terrible things.

Looking at the vow that Jephthah made, we remember the expression that he expressed when he saw his daughter, and the easiest way to understand this vow and the way God carried it out, was that Jephthah did indeed offer his daughter as a sacrifice, a human sacrifice. Now the law of Moses explicitly prohibited this. Now the people of Israel have been ignoring the law of Moses for years, they were surrounded by people who practiced other religions and in their religion it included human sacrifices, so being surrounded by these other people, they will just say normal. Everybody is doing it. Now to be fair on the treatment of Jephthah, there are a few commentators and they are in minority, there are a few that want to try to make this text have a happier ending and so they will take that word and make it into an or, whatever greets me first coming out of the door, I will devote to the Lord and/or I will offer it up as a burnt offering.

In other words, if whatever comes out of the door first is a human then I will just devote this person to the Lord, may be to serve at the tabernacle for the rest of their life or if it is an animal I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering. The problem is this is not exactly what the text says. There attempts to try to make this have a happy ending.

It appears that Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter. It seems like the reason the people don't want to accept this is two premises, one we have the world view that judges like Jephthah and other heroes of the faith, they are good guys and so the good guy always does good, but that is not the reality. If you accept these premises that good guys always do good and judges are good people, then probably Jephthah did offer his daughter to tabernacle service or in another view if they do good things they could say, when Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice that was good. I don't see how can anybody come to that conclusion, Jephthah did the right thing, he is the man of his words. He kept his vow to God. I think there is something wrong in this explanation.

Either way, Jephthah was violating God's law. He is either going to be breaking his vow or he is going to be offering a human sacrifice, either way it is going to be wrong and when you only have two choices and they are both bad, go with the least bad of the two. So, I reject the premise that judges are good people and so everything they do is good. I think it shows us that even people of faith can mess up. They can do horrible things and they can get things wrong. We might ask why did he do this?

I already mentioned lack of faith, a transactional view of faith, trying to buy God or manipulate Him. How could a man of faith get something so wrong, how is that possible. One reason, not only for him but for us today why people get things so wrong is ignorance of the truth.

Possibly Jephthah was not well schooled in the matters of the faith. Another example would be an incomplete understanding of biblical truths. Sometimes we just choose to accept one passage of scripture and ignore another. We are so often influenced by our culture, by the lifestyle of those around us, rather than being a light to the world we let the world influence us and the world will hold us fast and take over. Sometimes we are not even aware of where the problem is, that might have been Jephthah's case. He might have had a blind spot to the fact that human sacrifice is not acceptable to God, because he saw it all around him. We are also having blind spots in our lives. We are closing our eyes to so many of God's commands.

How do we respond?

1. Don't put people on a pedestal, they will disappoint you.
2. Don't put yourself on a pedestal, scripture says be careful everyone can fall. Pride goes before fall and that's possibly what happened with Jephthah. We need to not use this as an excuse as everybody does it, but instead when we realize there is sin in our life, we need to repent and when we repent that brings us to the last thing.

V. We All Need A Savior

The Book of Judges shows the inadequacy of human judges. Jephthah in his talk to the ammonite king had even said, the Lord is the judge and the Book of Judges in salvation history shows us that they were trapped by sin. We see corruption of the judges, we see that in those days, there was no king in Israel therefore everybody did what they wanted to. This is leading to the fact that since there was no king, there was the need of the king and we see God anointing David, but David also was inadequate as a leader, he failed. David's kingdom

was pointing towards the Messiah, the messiah that would bring a new covenant. The Book of Judges show the absolute inadequacy of people, the absolute sinfulness of people, the tendency of us to do things as right in our own eyes, but in the Book of Judges we see the holiness of God compared to the sinfulness of man and we realize that Judgement must come upon our sin, but we also see God's grace and His mercy. That's is as if these two things in the book of Judges are held intention; God's holiness, his justice, his judgment, his punishment on sin, His grace, His love, His desire to deliver and this tension remains throughout the Old Testament until we see it resolved in Jesus on the cross. On the cross, we see God's holiness, his justice served as sin is paid for with a horrible penalty of death, but we see Jesus as the one paying the penalty which shows us God's great love and through faith in Him, we can experience God's grace.