

No Turning Back

Judges 11:29-40

September 5, 2009

Intro

We come now to Judges chapter 11 and the story of Jephthah of Gilead. Jephthah's story is a story both of victory and tragedy. The story unfolds for us on the east side of the Jordan River. He was a member of the tribe of Manasseh. Perhaps you remember that the tribe of Manasseh was divided so that half of them lived on the eastern part of the Jordan River and the other half-tribe lived on the western side of the Jordan River.

The Ammonites had gathered together to attack those in the area of Gilead and so the sons of Israel in that area also gathered together, but they had no leader over them. Jephthah was then called to be the deliverer and the Lord used him to bring about a great victory for those tribes of Israel on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

The tragedy of his story is that early in his life he was rejected by his brothers. They all shared the same father, but Jephthah was the son of a harlot so they drove him out so that he would have no inheritance among them.

However, Jephthah is most famous for another tragedy in his life. After he was placed as head over the men of Gilead, he made a tragic vow unto God. That vow becomes a central theme to the text we are studying today. In fact, the victory over the sons of Ammon is almost insignificant in comparison to this vow that Jephthah made to the Lord.

What had happened was that Jephthah made a vow that if God would give the sons of Ammon into his hand, then it would be that whatever came out of the doors of his house to meet him when he returned in victory, it would be the Lord's, and he would offer it as a burnt offering.

I. God Makes Men Great

- 1 The beginning of verse 29 makes it clear that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah.
- 2 That was all he needed.
- 3 One of the things that is important for us to observe in the Old Testament is that the Spirit of God came upon those that God would transform into great men or women.

A. Don't doubt God's power to transform

- 4 If we go back to verse one, we see an important key to what made Jephthah a valiant warrior.
- 5 He was the son of a harlot so his brothers drove him out so he would have no share of the inheritance in their father's house.

- 6 Apparently, Jephthah fled from his brothers to the land of Tob where other men who had been rejected gathered themselves to Jephthah. It would appear that this group became a bit like David and his group of misfits that the Lord used to protect towns and villages.
- 7 It's also important to see that though they rejected him, he did not reject God. We can see this in verse nine where he clearly says that if he has victory, then it was the Lord that gave it to him.
- 8 There is a theme that runs through much of the Bible; God seems to delight in taking the outcasts, the misfits, or the "nothings" of the world and demonstrating the greatness of his glory in transforming their lives.
- 9 We saw this in the story of Gideon, and we see it in David, in Jeremiah and in many others.

Illus –even in the story of Moses where Moses was raised in great privilege, he was brought back from the tragedy of failure to see the greatness of God's glory on his life. Joseph was Jacob's favorite son but that position of favor was of no advantage. It was only when great tragedy came upon his life that we then saw the greatness of God's glory upon him.

- 1 The point of application for all of us is that we should never doubt the power of God to transform. Your background or your pedigree does not limit what God would do to use you in greatness for the Lord.

Psalm 147:10 -11, He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness.

B. You don't need to make a deal

- 1 Jephthah made a vow unto God as a way of making a deal in the hopes of getting God to do what he wanted.
- 2 The application for the New Testament believer is that you don't need to make a deal in order for God to bless your life. He's already promised to bless you far more than you can ask or even think.

Ephesians 3:14 -21 He is able to do far more beyond all that we ask or think...

- 3 Scripture tells us that he has already given us every spiritual blessing.

Ephesians 1:3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

- 4 He has already made us his son or daughter through adoption and so he has promised to bless us as a father would bless his son.

Matthew 7:11, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

- 5 So Jephthah made a vow unnecessarily.
- 6 Today, there are those who make vows to try to get people to do great tasks.

Illus - when I was in high school we had a coach with a famously hairy chest and he promised to have his chest shaved if the team won the homecoming game. Personally, that wouldn't be much motivation.

C. God takes the initiative

- 7 When people make a vow to God in order to make a deal, they are trying to get God to respond to them. But God doesn't bless our lives because we made a vow, he blesses our lives out of the love that he has for us in his heart.
- 8 This is also an important theme that we must understand from the Scriptures. God takes the initiative and we respond to him; not the other way around.
- 9 We don't worship God in order to obtain his favor. We worship him because he has already placed his favor upon our lives.

1 John 4:19, We love, because He first loved us.

- 10 Contrary to what can be seen on many Christian television stations, we don't give to God out of our finances so that he would bless us tenfold. We give out at the first fruits as recognition that he has already blessed our lives.

II. Our Whole Heart is Better than Anything

- 1 There is a lot for us to understand in the story of Jephthah. First, let's look carefully at the text and understand what actually took place.
- 2 In verse 3, he made a vow that whatever came out of the doors of his house to meet him when he returned in victory shall be the Lord's. The next word is key to proper interpretation. The word "and" in Hebrew that is used here is used in many places as "or" in the Old Testament. In other words, he will give to God what comes out of his house either as dedication, or as burnt offering.
- 3 The whole purpose of such an offering is that it should represent his heart that he is giving to God.

A. The daughter served God

- 1 First, let me state clearly that I believe that the daughter was not offered as a burnt offering. There are several reasons that we should believe that:
 - The Law of Moses strictly forbids such a sacrifice and from the previous chapter we can conclude that he was familiar with the Law of Moses.
 - No priest would have officiated since it was unlawful.
 - You could be released from a difficult vow.

Leviticus 27:2, Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “When a man makes a difficult vow, he shall be valued according to your valuation of persons belonging to the Lord.”

- 1 Burnt offerings had to be male.
- 2 She was mourning her virginity not her death. This is because she was Jephthah’s only child and he could receive grandchildren only through her.
- 3 We see another example of a woman who was wholly dedicated to the Lord at the Temple and the book of Luke.

Luke 2:36-37, And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.

B. No turning back your heart

- 3 In verse 35, Jephthah was deeply grieved when he saw that it was his daughter who came out first from his house. I believe he was grieved because he then realized that his vow would be fulfilled at a great price - his daughter would have no husband and he would have no grandchildren.
- 4 But he does become an example of a man who makes a commitment and keeps it.
- 5 God offers us eternal life by paying the price for our sin on the cross at Calvary and we receive that eternal life when we receive Jesus Christ into our lives. But what does God ask from us?

Mark 12:30, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

- 6 That's what God desires from us as a response to all that is given to us in his son Jesus Christ.
- 7 And to that we should say, "No turning back." When we give God our heart, soul, mind and strength we have given him everything. We are completely His -- no turning back.
- 8 However, if your heart does fall away, God will be waiting for you to return to your first love.

Revelation 2:4-5, "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first;"

Illus - in Judges chapter 10 we read that the sons of Ammon oppressed Israel for 18 years before they cried out to God. Why did it take so long?

God remembers the love you once had...

Jeremiah 2:2, "Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, 'I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your following after Me in the wilderness, through a land not sown.'"

C. Commitment cures complacency

- 9 If we look back on our lives we will find that the times of greatest commitment to the Lord were the times of greatest fulfillment.
- 10 There are times when keeping our commitments comes at great personal sacrifice, but God will bless the heart that is steadfast toward him.

Illus – One of the great examples in the Old Testament of unwavering commitment was one of David's mighty men by the name of Shammah. He was told to hold the line at a lentil field as the Philistines were attacking. Everyone else fell back but him, and the Lord brought about a great victory.

Illus – Keep the fire in your heart. If you stop drawing near to God your life will lose steam spiritually.