

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #16

Judges 11:1-28

I love stories of some down and out person who didn't appear to be much of anything who rises up to become a champion or a hero. Years ago there was an English boy who was called "Carrot Top." His childhood was unhappy and he hated school. Some of his teachers at school said he had very little chance of ever succeeding at anything. He was ranked as the 3rd lowest in his class. One of his teachers wrote these words: "The boy is certainly no scholar and has repeated his grade twice. He seems to have little or no understanding of his school work. ... At times, he seems almost perverse in his ability to learn." Old Carrot Top would grow up and prove everyone wrong, because he became a man who held most of the high offices in Great Britain; he was a Member of Parliament for sixty years and he served twice as Prime Minister. His name was Winston Churchill.

I love stories like that because it gives the rest of us hope that even though we don't come from the elite background of the rich and famous, or don't have the Ivy League education or don't come from some highly respected family background, we still can be greatly used by God.

God can take boys and girls, men and women who come from the checkered past of a loser and turn them into a great champion winner. One of the most amazing stories from biblical history of this reality is a story inspired by God. It is the story of Jephthah. His story is a real rags to riches story. He overcame emotional scars and handicaps of a terrible background and became one of the great leaders for God. The lesson to see here is this:

GOD USES PEOPLE FROM TERRIBLE BACKGROUNDS TO ACCOMPLISH WONDERFUL THINGS WHEN THEY TRUST HIM AND HIS WORD.

The book of Judges certainly teaches us that there is no such thing as a stereotype hero for God. Many believers live life with some inferiority complex, thinking God could not use them for much of anything because they are worthless. Nothing could be further from the truth. God is in the business of saving people and using people who do not "fit the mold." This is the story of Jephthah. To most in society, Jephthah was a social misfit, an unacceptable loser. Most wrote him off and some ran him out of town. He came from a totally dysfunctional family. But he was God's choice and he would become God's champion.

REALITY #1 – Jephthah was a man nobody wanted, not even his own family. **11:1-3a, 7a**

It is interesting how **verse 1** begins; "Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior." That is what he will become. That is what God will do with him. But the path will not be easy for him.

We learn from **verse 1** that Jephthah's father was Gilead, but his mother was a prostitute. Talk about a degrading background and childhood; this is about as bad as it gets.

According to Numbers 26:29-30, Gilead was the grandson of Manasseh, and the great-grandson of Joseph. According to Hosea 6:8, Gilead was a city of “wrong doers” and it became a rendezvous place for wicked men.

When you have a city known for wickedness, you will have prostitutes and Gilead hooked up with one of them and a son was born whose name was Jephthah. It wasn't the child's fault, but as it is so often, the child grows up with the stigma of the sin of his or her parents. The father did not marry the mother and the child grew up feeling like a second rate nobody.

According to **verse 2**, Gilead must have had only one wife and Gilead's wife bore him several legal sons. Gilead apparently did take Jephthah in and supported him, but as they grew up those sons “hated” Jephthah (**11:7**). They made fun of him and they told him he would never get any of their father's inheritance and they actually chased him out of his own home (**11:3, 7**).

Think about this for a moment. You are young boy and nobody wants you. Think of the stigma of this on this young boy. This was the only home Jephthah had known. This boy had no one who loved him or cared about him. He grew up in a family who made him feel inferior and they didn't even want him around. Jephthah ran away and left. **He was all alone except for God and God's grace.**

Now when you read this sad story you would never think that God's providential sovereignty is in every bit of this. When you see a story like this, you would never dream that God's mysterious sovereign will was actually being worked out. But it most assuredly was. Jephthah will become God's “valiant warrior” even though for many years he looked like a loser.

We must not ever minimize any baby ever born. Don't you ever make a little child feel inferior because he doesn't come from a nice Christian home or family. I don't care if the mother was a prostitute and the father was a drunken derelict. **Never think lightly of a little child or treat lightly a little child, because you do not know what God sovereignly intends to do with that child.**

One of the most influential preachers and biblical scholars from Scotland who became pastor of the largest and most influential church in the early 1900s was a man named Alexander Whyte (1837-1921). When he preached on Jephthah, he preached with great passion because he was born an illegitimate child in Scotland. All of his young life as he was growing up he was, as Gary Phillips said, the object of whispers, scorn, and rejection (*Judges*, p. 186). His mother committed her life to Jesus Christ and even though he grew up poor, he grew up with a mother who taught him to love Jesus Christ and serve God. He became one of the great Bible teachers in the world. You just never know what God intends to do with a child that no one wants.

REALITY #2 – Jephthah moves to Tob and becomes the leader of worthless men. **11:3**

Jephthah was not accepted in the high society social norms of his family, so he moved to Tob. The precise location of this is not known, but it was somewhere within the vicinity of Gilead.

Jephthah became the leader of some “worthless” men. As one writer said, he became a “desperado.” He became the leader of a militia of mercenaries. This word “worthless” is exactly the same word that was used to describe the thugs that had been hired by Abimelech to kill the sons of Gideon (9:4). The word means these men were vain, empty, wicked men (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 761). These were men with no morals or scruples. As one writer said, this was a group of “lawless rabbles.”

It must be that Jephthah developed somewhat of a reputation as being a bad and tough guy who had leadership qualities, because these criminal types were drawn to him. He probably survived by some form of predatory thievery. I like something Gary Phillips said, Jephthah’s reputation was somewhere between that of a Robin Hood and Al Capone.

Before we move on, let me say that you may know someone in your family right now who hangs out with those you would consider to be losers and fools. You may have a son or daughter or other family member who is running with the wrong crowd. Don’t ever give up on them and don’t ever stop praying for them because you may never know what God intends to do with them. God was actually developing Jephthah in this bizarre environment.

REALITY #3 – The Ammonites were fighting against the Israelites . **11:4**

The Ammonites were picking this fight with the Israelites. When Judges 10 ended, the Ammonites had camped in the region of Gilead, and Israel was looking for someone to lead them (10:17-18). They had faced their sin and had put away the idols and they were hoping God would raise up a leader. Obviously to this point it hadn’t happened.

Some time had passed, and things had intensified and the Ammonites were fighting Israel, and Israel knew they needed a leader and God, in His sovereignty, has just the right man of His choosing. The timing of every bit of this is controlled by God.

REALITY #4 – The Israelites go to Jephthah and ask him to be their leader. **11:5-6**

The elders of Gilead, some of whom were his brothers who had hated him and kicked him out of the house, now go to Jephthah and ask if he will lead them. They ask if he would be willing to become their chief leader. They traveled all the way to Tob to track him down. More than likely, word had spread that Jephthah was a tough man surrounded by other tough men.

Jephthah has not filled out a resume looking for this job. He had not applied for this job. He had not solicited this job. He had not negotiated for this job. **This job opportunity was coming to him straight from the hand of the Sovereign, Almighty God. God was doing every bit of this.**

I am totally convinced that no one saw the hand of God in Jephthah’s leadership of “worthless” men, but you may be certain God’s sovereign hand was there. I believe God’s sovereignty is involved in every aspect of a person’s life; the good and the bad. You cannot blame God for a person’s sin choices, but you cannot remove God’s sovereignty even when sin choices are made.

Sometimes we can view our pre-conversion days as a “vast wasteland” that means nothing. However, even when we are living life in a wasteful way, God is still sovereign and he can mold us and oversee things in such a way that He can eventually use them for His glory. He took Jephthah’s leadership skills over worthless men and was about to put him in charge of Israel.

REALITY #5 – Jephthah wants to know why they want him to lead them. **11:7**

Jephthah forces them to face the truth – they had hated him and they had driven him out of his own father’s home, and now they want him to be the leader and he wants to know why.

REALITY #6 – Israel’s leaders tell him they need him to lead them and fight for them. **11:8**

This is mind boggling. Of all of the potential candidates to lead Gilead, God had sovereignly turned their minds to go after Jephthah. These brothers are humbly asking him to fight for them and lead them because they need him. They needed his leadership; they needed his skills. What an amazing turn of events.

I have a pastor friend who lived in a community and he was considered to be a bar brawling loser. He would go into bars on weekends and get drunk and get in fights and often end up in jail. God saved him and he went to the Grand Rapids School of the Bible and Music and he got a theological education, and then the people of his community wanted him to come back and pastor a church. Some of the same policemen who locked him up in jail now want him ministering to people in jail. What an amazing turn of events.

There are people in this world who will jump at the chance to help if only someone would need them.

REALITY #7 – Jephthah agrees to go if God is in it and all the people agree. **11:9-11**

Now what stands out about Jephthah here is he had some deep spiritual convictions about God. Even though he had come from a bizarre background, either his mother or father taught him something about God. Jephthah says if I go and God gives me victory, will I become your leader (**11:9**). The elders said, the Lord is our witness and you will become our leader (**11:10**). So Jephthah went back to Gilead and the people made him their leader, and Jephthah spoke all of his words before the LORD (**11:11**). He realized this was all of the sovereignty of God.

REALITY #8 – Jephthah sends word to the Ammonites asking them why they want to fight for Israel’s land. **11:12**

I am convinced that probably most of the people of Gilead believed that Jephthah would immediately take his troops and go to war as a ruthless bandit. However, this is all being led by God and first he would try solving this another way. Jephthah was no arrogant hot-head, and before Jephthah goes to war he will try diplomacy.

Good leaders will always try to negotiate peace before they declare war. Jephthah was not afraid to go to war, but he did not want war. But notice in the presentation of this message Jephthah makes it clear that the land is “my land.” He will not promote a peace at any cost solution. Israel needs today the same resolve as Jephthah; Palestine is Israel’s land. God gave it to her.

REALITY #9 – The Ammonites send word to Jephthah that it was originally their land and Israel had taken it from them. **11:13**

Here is a very important point to see. Had not Jephthah known biblical truth, it would have been his opinion against their opinion. But Jephthah knows biblical truth and he is not about to back down from it. Leaders of nations today need knowledge of biblical truth because biblical truth will lead them to the right course of action.

REALITY #10 – Jephthah presents a series of arguments to show the Ammonites do not belong in Israel’s land. **11:14-27**

Jephthah was a brilliant man with a brilliant mind. We must assume that when God sovereignly directed him to lead Israel, God enabled him to lead Israel. There are four major arguments presented by Jephthah as he tries to negotiate some peace settlement. Jephthah does not argue probability or possibility, he argues reality.

Argument #1 - The argument of secular history. **11:15-22**

Jephthah says check your history books. Israel did not take any land from the Moabites or the Ammonites. Israel captured this land from Sihon, the king of the Amorites (Numbers 21:21-31). Israel left Egypt and specifically avoided violating any territory rights of the Edomites, Moabites or Ammonites. We did not even fight when they were hostile to us. He said we requested safe passage through Amorite lands and they attacked us and God gave us this land.

Argument #2 - The argument of biblical theology. **11:23-25**

Jephthah says the only reason we had victory is because God gave us victory. Jephthah is very careful to give the credit to God for victory. God is the one who gave us this land, and we are not and cannot surrender the gift He has given to us. Just as you live in land given to you by your false god “Chemosh,” we live in land given to us by the true God. Even Balak, the son of Zippor, the king of Moab, who represented Chemosh did not attack Israel over land disputes.

Argument #3 - The argument of chronological history. **11:26**

For over 300 years we have lived in this land in these cities and never once did you try to recapture it. So to claim that you have some “native land claim” on this area is ludicrous. The statutes of limitation have long run out. If you really had some claim on this land you would have been after it years ago.

Argument #4 - The argument of personal integrity. **11:27**

We have not sinned against you, but you are sinning against us. God will judge who is right and who is wrong.

Jephthah is standing his ground on biblical truth. This is exactly where the believer needs to always stand his ground.

REALITY #11 – The king of the Ammonites rejects Jephthah's message. **11:28**

It is becoming evident that war is inevitable. When you are standing for God's Word, conflict cannot be avoided.

Parting Thoughts:

- 1) We need to treat every baby and every child with love and respect regardless of their situation or their background, because God is sovereign in that child's life and we do not know God's plan for that child. In this church, we need to treat any child that ever comes here as a special child. Make him or her feel welcome and important because we don't know what they are living with and we don't know what God will do with that child.
- 2) No matter what your past background you may be greatly used by God. You may have a past background that is bizarre and you think God can't use me for anything. Think again. You purpose to know God's Word and obey it and watch what God will do.
- 3) God's sovereignty has existed in everything of your life, including the bizarre things and if you will put Him in charge of your life, you may see why God let you experience the things you did.
- 4) As believers we must always stand our ground on the Word of God and never back down when threatened. We are at war with this world and the Word of God is not designed to tickle ears; it cuts open hearts.