

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #17

Judges 11:29-40

There can be absolutely no doubt that one of the greatest men of God, one of the greatest theologians ever raised up by God, and one of the most impacting men in the history of the Church was John Calvin.

John Calvin was sovereignly saved by God in 1533 at the age of twenty-four. He broke from the Catholic Church; he carefully studied every book of the Bible and wrote his famous theology “Institutes” in 1536, at age twenty-seven. He spent much of his life on the run from the Catholic Church that was trying to hunt him down and kill him. He eventually ended up in Geneva, Switzerland in 1541 at the age of thirty-two, where he would spend most of the rest of his life as a key leader of the Protestant Reformation. He wrote commentaries on most books of the Bible and he made the Scriptures come to life for the people. God’s hand was truly on him.

But after Calvin had been so greatly used by God, at age forty-four he made a really bad and stupid decision, which haunted him for the final ten plus years of his life. There was a notorious critic of Calvin, a Spaniard, whose name was Michael Servetus. He came to Geneva and he opposed Calvin’s teachings and doctrines, so John Calvin denounced him and played a major role in having him arrested and burned at the stake. In a letter he wrote to his friend William Farel, a week after Servetus was arrested, Calvin said this: “I hope that sentence of death will at least be passed on him...” Servetus was burned at the stake and this act haunted Calvin until the day he went home to be with the Lord. For one brief moment in history, Calvin took his eyes off some Grace Age instruction and was involved in a stupid decision.

If godly people take their eyes off of the Word of God, they can do some really bad things.

Godly men, even men who have been greatly used by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit can do stupid things. Never is that point more evident than when you come to this text in the life of Jephthah. What we see in this passage is:

GOOD GODLY MEN WHO HAVE BEEN SELECTED BY GOD AND GREATLY USED BY GOD CAN MAKE SOME VERY BAD AND STUPID DECISIONS LATER IN LIFE IF THEY STOP CAREFULLY FOCUSING ON GOD’S WRITTEN WORD.

This passage is a warning to every believer, including those who have known the Lord for years. We need to stay focused on understanding God’s written Word until the end of our lives or we can get sidetracked into doing and believing bizarre things. The truth is some of the greatest problems people have in their lives are due to the fact that they are ignorant of God’s Word, so they make ridiculous decisions.

Last time we saw that Jephthah tried to diplomatically negotiate a peace settlement with the Ammonites, but they didn’t want it (11:28). So **verse 29** says that the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah and he headed out to go to war. **The purpose of the Spirit coming upon someone in the O.T. was to accomplish some major service for God. It was not so much to promote holy living like it is in the N.T.**

Now all a leader needed for victory is the Spirit of the LORD on him. If God is for you, no one can stop you. But Jephthah's theology is warped and there are six realities that show us that:

REALITY #1 – Jephthah makes an unbiblical vow to the LORD. **11:30-31**

Verse 29 says the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah and what these verses teach us is that one with the Spirit of God can believe and do stupid things. Jephthah decided to make a ridiculous vow to the Lord. It was a very reckless vow to make. He did not think it through at all. Jephthah does not have to do this and is not obligated to do this, but he decides on his own to do this. He does not simply trust God, but he decides to make a bargain deal with God.

Now Moses gave instruction concerning vows in Deuteronomy 23:21-23. **No person was under any obligation to make a vow, but if one did make it, he was under obligation to keep the vow.**

God warned never make a vow rashly (Prov. 20:25). God said it was far better never to vow anything than to vow something and not pay it (Eccl. 5:4-5). Jephthah decided to make a vow.

He basically vows that if God will give him victory over the Ammonites, when he gets home he will offer the first thing that comes out of his house as a burnt offering (11:30-31).

Now frankly there is no other way to view this than to assume he is promising God that he will offer some form of human sacrifice. It would seem that he is specifically thinking about some type of human sacrifice and not an animal sacrifice for three reasons:

- 1) Cattle did not live in the house. Animals were not kept inside, but outside, so they would not walk out of the house.
- 2) It would be a total mockery to God to promise the sacrifice of the first animal he would see as an offering and not the best animal he had as an offering.
- 3) The word "burnt offering" refers to a blood sacrifice, which does mean something dies (Judges 13:16).

So it would certainly appear as if Jephthah is vowing to God some human sacrifice. If this is the case, he probably assumed that someone from the legal sons of Gilead, who had initially run him out of his house, would end up being the sacrifice. They never cared about him when he was growing up so he thought one of them could pay the price for that.

This is a ridiculous vow that Jephthah is making here. The Bible over and over again forbids offering a human as a sacrifice to God (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5). In the famous Ten Commandments, God says "you shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13). **In fact, the Scriptures teach that a human sacrifice is an abomination to God and He absolutely hates it- Deut. 12:31.**

Why would Jephthah make such a stupid vow? The answer is, he did not know what the Word of God said and neither did those who were around him. **Jephthah loved the Lord, but he did not know the Word. Jephthah had zeal and sincerity, but he did not have knowledge of God's Word and that led him to do something evil.**

There was a period of history in the church called “The Crusades.” There was about a 200 year span (1095-1291) when the Catholic Church sent out Christian crusaders to the Promised Land to retake it and kill Islamic Muslims. In fact, they called this their “holy war.” During this time both Muslims and Jews were killed. It is almost as if all the crusaders stopped listening to the Scriptures and they ended up doing just the opposite of what God would want them to do.

Jephthah made this stupid vow because he lived in a pagan culture that made these kinds of vows and sacrifices and he was ignorant of God’s Word.

REALITY #2 – God gave Jephthah great victory over the Ammonites. **11:32-33**

God gave Jephthah an amazing victory. He destroyed twenty Ammonite controlled cities and took back a major amount of the Promised Land. God gave Jephthah this complete victory. God gave him His Spirit and gave him this victory.

Jephthah never needed to make any vow to God in order for God to give victory, because that was His plan. That is why He raised up Jephthah in the first place. In fact, according to Hebrews 11:32, Jephthah was a faith hero for going into battle. It was a sweeping victory. God slaughtered the Ammonites through Jephthah, and the sons of Israel had their cities and land.

REALITY #3 – Jephthah comes back home and the first thing he sees is his daughter .
11:34-35

Jephthah came back a hero and the people were joyful and the first thing he saw when he came home was his own daughter dancing and laughing and excited because her father was home. She came out of the house to meet him and greet him. This was Jephthah’s only child and she was a wonderful daughter.

This daughter is an amazing girl. She has incredible character. As Jephthah saw her, his heart sank because of the vow and promise he had made to God. There should have been joy here when he saw his daughter. Israel was safe, his family was safe, and he was home. Jephthah never dreamed that his daughter would be the first to come out of his home to meet him. But when he sees her, he is crushed and devastated because he doesn’t understand grace and he does not believe he can get out of this vow. The reason he thinks so goofy is because he does not know the Scriptures and he knows nothing of grace.

I believe that many parents have ruined their children because they did not know the truth of God’s Word. They did not understand grace. As a result they were rigid and legalistic and instead of helping their children blossom in the things of God, they ruined them. The parents had a zeal for God. They had sincerity, but they lacked knowledge of God’s Word. None of us can turn back the clock and fix the dumb stuff we have said and done. For some it is too late to pick up the pieces. But we can blossom in grace from now on. We can understand and defend God’s Word the rest of the way through life.

REALITY #4 – Jephthah’s daughter asks her father for two months to which he agrees.
11:36-38

This girl could have run away, but she didn’t. She knew her father had made a promise to God and he needed to keep it. She knew God had given him a great victory. She had great loyalty to her father and to God. So she took some of her friends and they went into the mountains for a couple of months to grieve the fact that she would never have the privilege of having children. This would really be another blow to Jephthah because this would mean that he would not have any grandchildren to leave behind.

REALITY #5 – Jephthah fulfills his unbiblical vow by sacrificing his daughter. **11:39**

Now there is a major debate among Bible teachers about whether or not Jephthah actually killed his daughter when she came home, offering her as a dead sacrifice or whether he demanded a life long virginity of his daughter when she came home, offering her as a living sacrifice.

In **verse 31**, there is a grammatical uncertainty as to whether the Hebrew should read “it shall be the LORD’s **and** I will offer it up as a burnt offering” or “it shall be the LORD’S **or** I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”

Some have taken the position that this was not a real human sacrifice, but a sacrifice to remain an unmarried virgin dedicated to Tabernacle service. There is a major emphasis on the fact that she was a virgin (**11:37, 38, 39**). Many believe that since his daughter mourns her virginity and not her death, the vow had to do with some promise of celibacy.

One problem with this view is the fact that it was a burnt offering and a burnt offering always meant a death sacrifice, even if it were human (Gen. 22:2). When God told Abraham to take Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering, he was a real human.

Having read multiple pages on this matter and delving into the Hebrew grammar, I agree with the conclusions of Dr. George Bush, that after studying “all the labors of the learned, nothing satisfactory has yet been produced...which should exclude the idea that a human sacrifice was either intended by the vow or might be its unintended result” (George Bush, *Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Judges*, p. 157).

REALITY #6 – Jephthah’s daughter was remembered and honored by all the girls in Israel.
11:40

Jephthah’s daughter should be honored. What an amazing girl. She so revered God that she would not allow her father’s ridiculous vow to God to remain unpaid when her own life was on the line. You don’t see too many girls or boys or women or men reverence God at this level.

You know, there is a very interesting text of Scripture that warns us all to be very careful what we say before God. Jesus said: “And I say to you that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37). This warning and this passage behooves every one of us to be very, very careful about what we say before God.

But what makes this Jephthah story even more tragic is that had he known God's Word, he would have known about God's grace that is available when we do and say stupid, sinful things.

It has been a few years since we did an exposition of the book of Leviticus, but if anyone in Israel had accurately known the Word of God, they would have known about Leviticus 27. **In Leviticus 27, God gave a gracious way out of a vow.** A payment could be made to God that was acceptable to relieve the burden of a vow. If the vow concerned a daughter between 20-60 years old, that vow was redeemable by a payment of thirty shekels (Lev. 27:3), and a vow concerning a daughter between 5-20 years old was redeemable by a payment of twenty shekels.

Do you grasp this point? Had someone known God's Word, this whole bizarre situation would have ended differently.

I will always do my best to carefully teach you every book found in the Word of God. I will do my very best to accurately expound these books of the Bible in the way that is accurate to the grammatical text and proper theology. However, the authority is the Bible. We must always stick to the Bible. If I should ever say anything that is not consistent with the Scriptures, you must always stick with the Scriptures.

PRACTICAL LESSONS:

- 1) Not knowing all of God's Word is very dangerous.
- 2) When we promise God something, we better take it serious.
- 3) If we have not followed through on what we promised, we need to go to Him and appeal to His grace.
- 4) As we age, we need to stay focused on carefully understanding God's Word so we don't end up doing and believing crazy things.

There is only one human sacrifice that pleased God and that sacrifice would be born of a virgin. It is this sacrifice that makes it possible for people like us who have thought, said, and done sinful things to find the grace and forgiveness of God.

If we had time, we could go around this sanctuary tonight and prove that all here are vile sinners. There is no getting around this truth. But the amazing grace of God teaches us that God will give us a way to get out of our vile, sinful condition. It is all found in the real sacrifice of the God/man. If you have never believed on Jesus Christ, believe on Him right now and you will have life. If you have believed on Him and have done something that makes you guilty before God, go to God and confess it.

God offers complete forgiveness and complete grace, so do not overlook it or you'll end up as miserable as Jephthah.