

Hebrews 11:32

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, **Jephthah**, of David and Samuel and the prophets.

We have spent a lot of time in ***Hebrews 11*** learning about our God: who He truly is; how He is so different from the gods of our ancestors; and how He is faithful even if we totally blow it and are extremely unfaithful.

This has been such a crucial education as most of us do not really know our God but only shadows of Him that fade in and out depending upon our circumstances. I have to tell you; it is imperative that you get to know Him as a person. You must learn as much as you can about His character and nature for it will give you understanding as to why you can trust yourself to Him. Let me warn you, the danger of not knowing our God, as this story of Jephthah reveals, is so great it is staggering.

The story of Jephthah dives into the dark, dark consequences of doing things “for God” as a result of your ignorance of Him; doing things you think will please Him which actually don’t. It dives into the dangers of syncretism, where different religious systems are combined and erroneously treated as if they are the same—the blending of gods. We see that a lot in Boulder where there is no actual “truth” and everyone just makes their own god concoction by taking a little of this and a little of that and calling it god.

We are going to jump to the tragic end of the story first and work our way back to the beginning. As you would expect, Israel had once again completely turned their back upon the Lord and had defiled themselves with pagan idolatry. So the

Lord handed them over to the Philistines and the Ammonites who oppressed them for 18 years before the people of Israel sought the Lord for relief.

For those of you who may not have been here through the other teachings, we have seen that God uses the oppression by other nations as a way to get Israel to realize that He is their God and they really do need His help to make it through the difficulties of this world. He uses oppression to evoke repentance and incite the Israelites to return to Him. And, as we know, there is nothing quite like pain to accomplish this in our lives.

Now God raised up Jephthah to be a judge and a leader of the people and empowered him accordingly. He would lead the fight for freedom against the Ammonites. But not knowing much about his God, Jephthah made a very stupid vow to the Lord.

Judges 11:29-31

At that time the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he went throughout the land of Gilead and Manasseh, including Mizpah in Gilead, and from there he led an army against the Ammonites. And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord. He said, "If you give me victory over the Ammonites, I will give to the Lord whatever comes out of my house to meet me when I return in triumph. I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

As with most of us, who do not really know our God, we think that we must always barter with Him to gain His favor, to get His blessing, or to get from Him

what we want. Essentially, Jephthah's concept of God was what I call a classic "if/then" god. In other words, if Jephthah commits something up front then god will do his part. If Jephthah makes him happy by promising some sort of service or sacrifice, then god will come through for him with his request.

Sadly, this is the same god that many of you have served and in some regard still serve. This is a hard god to shake. We don't really trust him or believe that he will be there for us; so we try and barter our way into His graces. We promise to do something, to change something, or to be something that we think he wants and we use that as leverage to try and get something from him. We also have so much fear that every time we sin or do something bad we think we have to make it up to God by doing something for Him to get back into His good graces.

But this is not our God. That is a false god. Sure this false god has been around for a long time and many people have followed him (in fact the majority have followed him), but it is not the God of the Bible. I know at times it seems that way when you read certain stories, but I assure you that if you read the Bible from end to end, in order to really understand the character and nature of your God, you will see that He does not work that way.

Look at **11:29**, God had already provided for Jephthah before he made the vow. The Spirit of the Lord had come upon him. He already had all he needed to gain a great victory over the Ammonites. He just did not realize what he had because he did not know his God; so he made his stupid vow.

In the same way, God has already provided us everything we need for life and godliness. Which is why I think it is so sad that too many of us sit in our pain and our want and we ask god to fix things, to change things, to make us different, to

take away the things that do not please him, and we beg him and beg him to no avail. We barter with him, we plead with him, and we pout before him, all the while just hoping he will do something—anything. The sad thing is that we don't even realize we are praying to a false god; an impotent god who cannot help.

You see we fail to realize that, as in the case of Jephthah, the one true God has already provided for us everything we need. We just have to learn how to access it, through faith, and let it be our truth and let it flow from within our lives. Look at this passage in 2 Peter, it is amazing:

2 Peter 1:1-4

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

He has given us everything pertaining to life. This means that when it is all said and done we can have victory over all the issues and struggles in this life; we just have to appropriate—through faith—His provision for our lives. You see, we do not have to live according to the legacy which has been handed down to us by our

ancestors—a legacy of fear and selfishness. Instead, we are free to live this life according to what God has already given us.

As we have studied, appropriating this for your life means a lot of hard work whereby you have to understand all the reasons why you do not trust yourself to the Lord and all the reasons why you play god over your own life. And, as we know, those reasons are all imbedded in pain and disappointment accompanied with wrong belief and unbelief. And it is only when we reconcile the things in our life which have caused the pain and disappointment with the true God, who loves us and is (and has been) completely sovereign over our lives, will we be able to practically walk in and experience this life which He has promised can be ours.

In addition, what He has given us is sufficient for everything and anything that this life (or the enemy) can throw at us. When it comes to dealing with this life as believers, we want for nothing; we have been given everything we need to make it. We just have to be willing to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and do the work of undoing our unbelief so we can instead trust the one true God.

He has also given us everything pertaining to godliness. So for those of you who think it is impossible to live as a victorious believer continually enjoying the fellowship of God, having successfully escaped the corruption of your flesh, you are wrong and you believe a lie.

He has given you everything you need to be in relationship to Him and to please Him. He has given you the Spirit of God to live in you (**Romans 8:9**). He has given you a **new nature** that has been made in His image righteous, holy and true (**Ephesians 4:24**)—a nature which allows you to partake and daily experience the divine. He has given to you a measure of faith (**Romans 12:3**) so you are able to

choose to put your trust in Him regardless of what you might think or feel or even want. In fact, you were made very specifically to only find peace and rest when you put your trust in God and not in yourself or in the things of this world.

Now, this is all appropriated through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence—a knowledge of His character and nature. You see if you don't really know Him, as a person I mean, you will never let go of control and never *really* trust yourself to Him. There will be no reason to as you will always be afraid of Him. If you don't know how much He loves you and how everything that He allows in your life is an expression of His love for you, it will be almost impossible to stop protecting yourself and let Him be your God. If you don't know His glory and excellence you will still project all sorts of ugliness on to God and find all sorts of reasons for not trusting yourself to Him.

If you still filter your view of God through your experiences with your Dad, Mom, Grandparents, family, or other important people in your life, you will know only shadows of Him, and your experience with God will be wanting.

That is why the Spirit has been relentlessly pounding into our heads that the character and nature of God is first and foremost faithful. He will always be to us who He says—our God (our I Am); the one who loves us and has done everything to make it possible for us to know Him and to love Him in return. He has made it possible for there to be true mutuality in this relationship. He has made it possible for us to moment-by-moment experience His divine nature; but, again, it is all realized through the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. If your view of God is all distorted you will end up serving a false god who is impotent and you will always be chasing the promises and always end up frustrated wanting more.

Imagine, by His own glory and excellence He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises: promises of peace, rest, love and joy where His burden is light and His load is easy. Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But as I have said each week, all of those promises are aspects of Jesus' character; it is part of His nature. Therefore, they are only experienced as you trust more and more of your life to Him and He is literally able to freely live inside of you without restraint.

You see when you know the truth about God, believe the truth about God, and then bet your life on what you say you know and believe (which is the definition of faith), then and only then will this **New Nature** consume you. And in so doing you will also escape the corruption that is in the world by lust. Let me explain.

There is a place in our *Old Sinful Nature* that always wants more and more and more and more and is always seeking to stuff something else in the hole to see if it satisfies. However, all our attempts to find satisfaction fail for God is the only one who satisfies. He says that if we trust ourselves to Him, love Him with our entire heart, mind, soul and strength, we will hunger no longer (**John 6:35**).

So the point I am making is that we have been given everything we need. Thus, there is no need to barter with God. There is no need to beg for change; the change has already happened and exists within your **New Nature**. You just have to learn how to trust yourself to Jesus in those deep recesses of your soul in order to appropriate that change. You have to stop playing god.

So, back to our story, the Spirit came down on Jephthah; thus, His vow was absolutely unnecessary; again, he already had everything he needed to go and fight the Ammonites and secure victory for Israel. He was fully provisioned. So why do you think he felt he needed to make a vow? The answer comes from the

introduction to the story of Jephthah in **Judges 10**. It deals with this issue of syncretism or the blending of religions. The passage goes as follows:

Judges 10:6

Again the Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight. They served the images of Baal and Ashtoreth, and the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia. They abandoned the Lord and no longer served him at all.

I don't even understand this. They gave up the one true God in order to be like those in the world. But they exchanged Him for what? Clearly none of the other god's could satisfy their lust; so they had to adopt a whole cornucopia of gods (sounds a lot like Boulder).

This is why Jephthah did what he did; this is why he made his tragic vow. He worshiped other gods who demanded vows and sacrifices before they would grant any favor. Now we know that according to **1 Corinthians 10:20**; **Psalms 96:5**; and **Psalms 106:37** they were not really worshipping gods but just demonic spirits. This is why these gods could demand and demand but never satisfy.

What strikes me is that Jephthah had become so unfamiliar with the one true God who chooses to work merely because of His own glory and excellence; the God who will grant favor even when it is not asked for (as in the case of Samson) and even when it is not deserved (as in the case of Jephthah). Jephthah really did not know God. He thought God had to be like the gods of the nations; he had

become confused for he had presented himself to darkness and instead of learning the ways of the one true God he had learned the ways of demons.

It is clear that the teaching of the Word of God had been absolutely neglected and abandoned in Israel and so everyone did what was pleasing in their own sight. This resulted in a generation who did not even know the very basic things about the God who loved them. Again, that is why we focus so much on being in the scriptures and understanding our God so we do not make critical errors out of ignorance and neglect like Jephthah. Let's see how this played out for him.

Judges 11:32-40

So Jephthah led his army against the Ammonites, and the Lord gave him victory. He crushed the Ammonites, devastating about twenty towns from Aroer to an area near Minnith and as far away as Abel-keramim. In this way Israel defeated the Ammonites.

When Jephthah returned home to Mizpah, his daughter came out to meet him, playing on a tambourine and dancing for joy. She was his **one and only** child; he had no other sons or daughters. When he saw her, he tore his clothes in anguish. "Oh, my daughter!" he cried out. "You have completely destroyed me! You've brought disaster on me! For I have made a vow to the Lord, and I cannot take it back." And she said, "Father, if you have made a vow to the Lord, you must do to me what you have vowed, for the Lord has given you a great victory over your enemies, the Ammonites. But first let me do this one thing: Let me go up and roam in the hills and weep with my friends for two months, because I will die a virgin."

"You may go," Jephthah said. And he sent her away for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never have children. When she returned home, her father kept the vow he had made, and she died a virgin. So it has become a custom in Israel for young Israelite women to go away for four days each year to lament the fate of Jephthah's daughter.

Ok, how horrible is that? That is simply terrible. God gave this man a huge victory over the enemy and he comes home and apparently sacrifices his one and only daughter to the "lord" because he made some stupid vow. She became his burnt offering of thanksgiving. I know; this is sick. ***But this is how dark things can become when you don't know your God.*** You may even find that you do things demanded by these demons who pose as gods. ***You have to know your God!***

Now just so you know, child sacrifice was a total abomination to the Lord and it is strictly forbidden in the Law. ***Leviticus 18:21-22; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31 and 18:10-14*** all make it clear, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that child sacrifice is never allowed. In these passages God specifically addresses the Canaanite nations and instructs the Israelites to not follow in their footsteps by offering children to Milcom or Molech.

But it does not seem to even cross Jephthah's mind that this was an abomination. Furthermore, the Law, in ***Leviticus 27:1-8***, also provides an out (or redemption) for someone who made a stupid or reckless vow. It provides that they could offer up silver coins according to the value of the person based on age. In this instance, Jephthah would have had to have paid only 10 Shekels which

would be in our terms about 100 dollars. So the price of redemption of his daughter was not exorbitant and completely affordable.

But again, his knowledge of the one true God had been lost on him and in its place he had substituted the character and nature of the gods of the lands.

It is clear that the Canaanites offered up both animals and children sacrifices in an attempt to find favor with their gods. We see examples of this in the Bible. There is a very strange story in **2 Kings 3:21-27** where the Israelites were defeating the Moabites and in a desperate attempt to secure victory, the Moabite king offered up his son to his god. Then in **Jeremiah 7:30-31** the Lord condemns his own people who have built the high places of Topheth (literally the place of burning or a roaster) to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire. An act which He says He did not command nor did it did even come into His mind to command such a thing.

In various excavations throughout Canaan, they have found burial urns which bear decorations alluding to child sacrifice. They have found commemorative wood and stone slabs with inscriptions expressing their vows to their deities. And the urns underneath these slabs contain the remains of children who were cremated as described in the inscriptions.

Moreover, the osteological evidence (from evaluating the bones) reveals that most of the victims were children two to three months old, though some were as old as five. In addition, the skeletons do not show any signs of pathological conditions (or diseases) that might have caused death. These were healthy children deliberately killed as sacrifices in the manner described both in the Bible as well as in other classical historical texts. Some of the non-biblical authors

describe human offerings received in the outstretched arms of a brazen statue as grimacing victims are consumed by flames.

Molech (also known as Milcom), a chief among the Canaanite gods, was believed to be imaged a lot like the devil where the fire would be burning inside the altar and his outstretched arms would be brazen red from the heat and then the child would be placed upon those arms and the victim was consumed in pain, fire, and smoke. It was horrific.

I cannot even imagine, but this is the god Jephthah knew and so that is what he believed the God of Israel, the one true God, must also be like. And so he tragically kept his vow. Again, this serves as a great warning to us regarding the dangers of not knowing our scriptures and not knowing our God.

I want you to know, as we get close and closer to the end of days you will see a rise in syncretism or what has also been called in religious circles ecumenicalism. This is an attempt to merge all religions under an umbrella notion that we are all really just serving the same god, just each in our own unique ways. People will attempt to convince us that our religions are more like each other than we realize and we just need to coexist. This notion will set the stage for a one world religion which the Bible tells us will be adopted by the masses and will be ruled by the Antichrist.

So the moral of the story is that you must know your God—fully understanding His character and nature—and you must know the scriptures. You cannot be caught off guard or be led astray by some idea, philosophy, or religious construct (no matter how Christian) that stands in opposition to the one true God.

Now one thing we know about God is that He is absolutely sovereign. He is the Lord God who knows all things. Did you think about that when you read this story? God knew exactly what Jephthah was going to do; yet, He still gave Jephthah the victory. Why would He do that?

You see God does not force anyone to worship Him. He does not force anyone to know Him. He does not force anyone to be in relationship with Him. He does not force anyone to follow His ways. Rather, it is His character and nature of **divine love** that moves Him to merely offer it to us. If we want relationship with Him we will have it; but, if we don't, He will let us walk our path of personal destruction. He will, however, be doing so many things along the way to convince us otherwise, but He will not force us off the path that we have chosen.

In this case, there is no excuse either for Jephthah or the rest of the Israelites who had abandoned their God. Especially since they knew what they had done; they knew they had volitionally abandoned their God to seek their own pleasures.

Judges 10:9-16

The Israelites were in great distress. Finally, they cried out to the Lord for help, saying, "We have sinned against you because we have abandoned you as our God and have served the images of Baal." The Lord replied, "Did I not rescue you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites, and the Maonites? When they oppressed you, you cried out to me for help, and I rescued you. Yet you have abandoned me and served other gods. So I will not rescue you anymore. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen! Let them rescue you in your hour of distress!"

But the Israelites pleaded with the Lord and said, "We have sinned. Punish us as you see fit, only rescue us today from our enemies." Then the Israelites put aside their foreign gods and served the Lord. ***And he was grieved by their misery.***

Despite all their rebellion, the Lord was still grieved by their misery. Did you get that? His capacity for mercy is unparalleled and unbounded. This is our God—the one true God. Despite their purposeful rejection and their feigned “repentance” (which, by the way, had nothing to do with their feeling sorry for grieving His Spirit or for abandoning their relationship with Him, but was only about their pain), He still had mercy for them. And that is why He worked things out to raise up Jephthah to be their judge and lead them in victory. He loves His people and is willing to be faithful to help them despite their continual rejection and rebellion.

Now a little bit about the story of Jephthah from ***Judges 11***. He was the son of Gilead, an Israelite, but his mother was a prostitute, presumably a Canaanite (so he was a half-breed). Gilead had other children through his Jewish wife and they rejected Jephthah and kicked him out of the family not wanting a son of a prostitute to get any of their Dad’s inheritance. So he fled from his brothers to live in another land where he became a great warrior and had a large band of rebels following him.

About that time the Ammonites began their war against Israel and the leaders of Gilead sent for Jephthah and said: “Come be our commander! Help us fight the Ammonites!” So these people were totally users. They repent to get God to get

his help and they repented to Jephthah to get his help; but they really care about neither. They are all about the “Me.”

Jephthah knew this so he told them in **Judges 11:7**: “Aren't you the ones who hated me and drove me from my father's house? Why do you come to me now when you're in trouble?” Then they bargained with him just like they had tried to bargain with God. They said, “because we need you,” the elders replied. “If you lead us in battle against the Ammonites, we will make you ruler over all the people of Gilead” (**Judges 11:8**).

So Jephthah decided he could play the game. He made them swear an oath in the presence of the Lord. This implies that he called for the High Priest and perhaps made them swear before the Ark or before the Tabernacle. In **Judges 11:10** they said: “The Lord is our witness, we promise to do whatever you say.”

Now if I was Jephthah, I am not so sure I would have taken the promise of these leaders even if they did swear before God. They did not know God; they were self-serving and would say anything to get what they wanted. But nevertheless he accepted their pledge.

Now what is interesting is that Jephthah did not just run out to war and engage the Ammonites. Instead, he sent a letter to their king asking why they were being attacked. The king of the Ammonites responded and said: “When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they stole my land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River and all the way to the Jordan. Now then, give back the land peaceably” (**Judges 11:13**).

So this king is reaching back over 300 hundreds years trying to claim rights to territory taken by the Israelites when they first invaded Canaan. Jephthah

responded by saying that when Moses led the children of Israel up to the borders of Canaan that the king of Edom would not let them pass through their land so they went around Edom. Similarly, the king of Moab would also not let them pass and so the Israelites went around Moab. But then when they asked the King of the Amorites for permission to pass he decided to not only say no, but also to attack (which neither Edom nor Moab had done). But the Lord, the God of Israel, gave His people victory over the King and they took all the land of the Amorites who lived in that region.

Judges 11:23-28

"So you see, it was the Lord, the God of Israel, who took away the land from the Amorites and gave it to Israel. Why, then, should we give it back to you? You keep whatever your god Chemosh gives you, and we will keep whatever the Lord our God gives us. Are you any better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he try to make a case against Israel for disputed land? Did he go to war against them?

"Israel has been living here for 300 years, inhabiting Heshbon and its surrounding settlements, all the way to Aroer and its settlements, and in all the towns along the Arnon River. Why have you made no effort to recover it before now? Therefore, I have not sinned against you. Rather, you have wronged me by attacking me. Let the Lord, who is judge, decide today which of us is right—Israel or Ammon." But the king of Ammon paid no attention to Jephthah's message.

Now what this response tells me is that Jephthah had no excuse for serving foreign gods; he could not blame anyone but himself for the path that he chose to walk. He had known about the Lord God and yet he purposefully chose to abandon Him. He knew about the great things the Lord had done for Israel, but still he chose to worship demons and present himself to darkness. How sad!

Sure the Lord gave him a great victory over the Ammonites, wiped them all out, but even that victory was short lived. His daughter was dead and that was his own fault. He chose to present himself to darkness and the impact was horrific. He would never be able to love on his little girl ever again. And it was not as if he had any other children. She was it and she was gone; he literally killed her.

I want to warn you. I know that many of you have chosen to present yourself to darkness in various ways because you do not think there is much of an immediate consequence to your actions; but please don't be so foolish to really believe that lie. Don't look at temporary victories in your life and allow yourself to be deceived into thinking that you can do whatever it is that you want to do.

For example, most of you who indulge in pornography, or any other sexual means of obtaining pleasures of which God has not approved, believe that it is not all that bad since no one seems to be getting hurt. It is how you have justified your actions. But that is simply not the case.

You are twisting your mind with darkness, you are twisting your soul with darkness, and that will have some drastic consequences on the people you love. Maybe not today, but eventually the piper will demand its payment and like with Jephthah it will be in ways that you had never imagined and real people will get

hurt. The very people you love the most will suffer because you have insisted on prioritizing your wants and your desires above those of the Lord.

The long-term risk is not worth the very temporary pleasure. Instead, learn to trust Jesus with your desires and with the reasons you reach for some sort of twisted comfort in sexuality, and in so doing share in His divine nature, and I assure you, I promise you, He will satisfy. That is His promise.

Now we know that God allowed Jephthah to have the glorious victory over the Ammonites and the pleasure of being the ruler over the people, but when he returned to his land **Judges 12** tells us that the tribe of Ephraim mobilized its army and came after Jephthah. They sent this message to Jephthah saying: "Why didn't you call for us to help you fight against the Ammonites? We are going to burn down your house with you in it" (**Judges 12:1**)! That is a pretty drastic reaction, don't you think, just for not being included in the war party? We have seen this kind of reaction before in the story of Samson. What is with this burning fixation?

Those from Ephraim had also presented themselves to false gods; they were probably motivated by power, glory, and greed as they would have wanted to enjoy the spoils of war. They simply could not rejoice in what the Lord had done for Israel. They were only thinking about themselves. Well, they ended up going to war against each other—Israelite against Israelite—brother against brother—and guess what happened. God gave Jephthah the victory. And this was after he had sacrificed his daughter. How can that be? Jephthah committed a terrible sin; he murdered his own child. Yet, God still protected him and provided for him.

We must remember the truth we have come to understand in our study in Hebrews: ***God does not deal with us on the basis of sin but on the basis of His***

faithfulness and His purposes for our life. God granting Jephthah the victory in no way says that He approved of the sacrifice, for as we know it was a complete abomination, but He had chosen Jephthah as a judge and as we studied last week, “the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable” (**Romans 11:29**). So the Lord was faithful to His word and He would not let the jealousy, greed, and selfishness, of the people of Ephraim prevail over his chosen one.

So again, the point of this study in Hebrews **Chapter 11** is that God is always faithful. Faithfulness is intrinsic to his character and nature. Faithfulness defines Him. And even when we are faithless and even find ourselves doing horrific things, He will still be faithful to us and will always be our God for we (those of us who have asked Jesus to be our Lord and Savior) are His people.

He does not require us to first get it all right, He does not require us to barter with Him or to promise some great act of service or sacrifice, and He does not require us to do anything but to trust ourselves to Him so He can live His life in and through our bodies. That is what He desires; willing vessels of His love.

He is our God and He wants us. He loves us so much and has so much mercy and compassion on us that it is unfathomable. He really does want us. And He wants us to realize the depth of His love and passion for His people. In addition, He wants to be known; He wants us to discover everything about Him. He says that if we seek Him we will find Him (**Proverbs 8:17; Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 7:7**). And, He wants us to be fully convinced that He, and He alone, is good.

Let's Pray.