

Lesson 7: Jephthah

Scripture: Judges 10:6 – 11:11, 29-40

Thesis: God desires our true heart, not petty acts of worship or sacrifice.

ICEBREAKER:

- Have everyone share a time when they broke a promise. (It does not need to be very personal, for example you promised your kids ice cream, but then changed your mind).
- Discuss what you believe the difference is between a promise, your word, a vow, and an oath.
- Is there ever an appropriate time to break your promise/word/vow/oath?

REVIEW: Read Judges 10:6a

Then the Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

- Are you tired of this verse?
- How many times do you think you have seen this verse in this study? Why do you think it is repeated so often in the book of judges?
- What does this say about the people of Israel?
- Do you think this verse could be said about God's people (the church) today? Do you think this verse could be said about yourself?
- How do you think the next part of the story will play out?

THE CYCLE REPEATED (AGAIN):

Read Judges 10:6- 10

- How did the Israelites "do evil in the sight of the Lord?"
- What was God's response to this evil?
- How does this cycle's consequence compare to other cycles?
- Why did the Israelites cry out to God?

Read the first paragraph in "**Sold**" (page 110) and the first paragraph in "**I Will No Longer Save You**" (page 111) in *Judges For You*.

- What does it mean that God "sold" the Israelites into slavery?
- What does it mean that God "stopped protecting them" and what was the result?

Read Judges 10:11-16

- Why does God say that he will not deliver them?
- Who does he say they should cry out too?
- How is there crying out change in verse 15?
- Why do you think God's response change?

Read the remainder of "**I Will No Longer Save You**" (page 111-113) in *Judges For You*.

- Why does God not immediately forgive and answer the Israelite's prayer for deliverance?
- How does hearing that God may not immediately forgive re-shape your perspective of God?
- Keller suggest that their change in crying out is a "sign of real faith." How is that so? Why is that important to God?
- How is God's changing his mind a demonstration of the tension between his holiness and mercy?

- Have you seen this tension displayed in your life?

MEET JEPHTHEH: Read Judges 11:1-3

- What is your initial impression of Jephthah?
- What might be some similarities between him and Gideon and Abimelech?
- Does it surprise you that God would choose someone like Jephthah as his next judge?

For more on Jephthah, read the second paragraph in **“The Crime Boss”** (page 113) in *Judges For You*. You could also read Judges 11: 4-11 for more insight into his character and his relationship with other Israelites.

SERMON DISCUSSION: This week’s sermon was on Jephthah and the consequence of his vow.

- What are some things you learned through this week’s sermon?
- What are some questions you have or items you were confused about?
- What is your impression of Jephthah based on the sermon?
- How did this week’s sermon help you understand the cycle of sin and redemption in the people of Israel?
- What did you learn about the cycle of sin and redemption in your life?

JEPHTHEH VOW: Read Judges 11:29-35

- What vow does Jephthah make to God?
- How does this vow show that He does not have a true relationship with God?
- Do you think that God wanted Jephthah to fulfil this vow?
- Do you ever make vows like this to God, “If you do this for me, then I will do that?”
- Why do we make these types of vows?
- What does that say about our faith and trust in God?

In *Judges For You*, Keller suggests that this tragic story begs the following three questions. Take some time to answer these questions as a group, then read Keller’s answers (on pages 118-120) to gain additional insight.

1. Exactly what did Jephthah promise God?
2. Why did Jephthah promise this?
3. Why did he then keep his vow?

Keller suggests that Jephthah allowed his understanding of idol worship to shape his connection with God. “Jephthah thought the Lord needed to be impressed, bought, and controlled through lavish gifts” (page 119).

- How might we have a similar mindset when we approach God?
- How does this false understanding of God damage our relationship with God and our witness to others?

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Read Jesus’s words from the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5: 33-34, 37 “You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, ‘You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord.’ But I tell you, don’t take an oath at all... But let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no.’ Anything more than this is from the evil one.

- Is there a time to break your oath? Do you think Jephthah should have broken his oath?
- Jesus suggests making no oath at all. What does he mean by this? How are making these kinds of oaths “from the evil one?”
- What does he mean by letting our yes mean yes and your no mean no? Is this something you find easy or difficult.
- How might being direct with “yes” and “no” help you avoid pitfalls like Jephthah’s?

Instead of making bargains and oaths with God, He wants us to our true selves to him. Come to him with your yeses and nos. John Stott writes, "As Christians, our simple answers should carry all the weight needed to convince people that we are honest and reliable, that we will follow through on what we promised. People should be able to trust us because of our character rooted in Christ."

Prayer Request: How can the group be praying for you this week?

Close in prayer: Spend time praying for each other in the group.