

Series: Biblical Heroes and Zeros – week 11

CDOBC – beginning on 10/17/10

Title: **“Jephthah – From Victim to Victor”**

January 30, 2011

Judges 10:6-12:7; Hebrews 11:32

OBJECTIVE: To help

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- "Mommy and Me" on Sunday? The kickoff is Feb. 4th, 10:00 am and they'll be meeting in the 2 and 3 year old room.
- Needed: Volunteers and tools for the Grand Prix workshop – Feb. 5th 9:00 – Noon
- Rodeo-Fest! Feb. 20th
- Golf Outing – March 19th @ The Views Golf Club

Opening prayer

We love a story where the underdog becomes the victor – where the rejected and outcast becomes the leader and the hero.

It's all over our literature – Cinderella,

Hollywood is in love with this kind of story also. Rocky, Karate Kid,

We love to root for the underdog in sports – and we love to see the Cinderella story in the NCAA basketball tournament – the team nobody expected to win, making it to the sweet sixteen or the elite eight.

The bible is no exception. Within the pages of Scripture, we see various stories of the underdog rising to great heights – the rejected being blessed by God.

We see Joseph rise to be a ruler in Egypt.

We see David defeating Goliath.

We see Deborah, Gideon, and Samson defeating enemies who were much more powerful.

Today, we're concluding our series, “Biblical Heroes and Zeros”, and we're concluding with a hero –one of the great underdogs in Scripture. Jephthah went from a victim to a victor. He was rejected by his step-

brothers – even by his entire town – and was banished to find a life on his own. However, God saw great value in this man, and used him to save the nation from a powerful enemy – the Ammonites.

We read about Jephthah in the ‘Hall of Faith’ passage - Hebrews 11:32 - 34 “And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.”

This morning, I want us to learn about Jephthah – and what made him a Biblical hero. Why is he included in Hebrews 11 – the chapter in Scripture dedicated to the great heroes of our faith.

To find out...turn to Judges 10:6.

In this passage, we see the cycle of sin that the nation of Israel had fallen into. It’s not unique to them...in fact, it’s a cycle of sin that we see repeated all around us – and possibly in our own life. It goes from enjoying God’s blessing...

to making an idol out of the blessings...

being defeated and held captive by our sins...

crying out to God for help and deliverance...

God delivering us...

we once again enjoy the blessings of God.

Read 10:6-18

Israel’s sin and eventualrepentance10:6-18

- Israel failed to separate from sin.
- Israel was slow to repent (vs. 8 – *eighteen years!*)
- Israel’s repentance was insincere – their heart was still committed to their sin (vs. 10-14)
- Israel repents with no guarantee from God (vs. 15 – “Do with us whatever you think best...”)
- Israel’s spiritual bankruptcy – no leadership (vs. 17-18)

God uses an outcast to lead Israel^{11:1-11}

Chapter 11 introduces Jephthah. He had what seems to be a very difficult childhood. Upon his father’s death, his half-brothers rejected him because his mother was a prostitute. His ‘crime’ was no fault of his own! He was a victim of his parent’s sin.

So, he flees from his brothers and from the town he grew up in, and he settled in a very remote area, east of the Jordan River.

In vs. 3, we’re told that a group of “adventurers gathered around” Jephthah and followed him (I envision a Jephthah as the leader of a biker gang).

In the Hebrew, this word “adventurers” means “to make empty or to be reckless” (Be Available, Commentary on Judges by Warren W. Wiersbe, p. 95) and refers to people who have nothing – and they have nothing to do and they are simply those who cause trouble. Later, David would gather around himself a similar group (1 Sam. 22:2).

You would expect that someone who had been so mistreated would have grudges and nothing but revenge on their mind and in their heart. However, Jephthah is a very level-headed person.

The elders of Gilead (vs. 5) went to Jephthah to convince him to come and be their leader in the fight against the Ammonites.

Notice that Jephthah is not driven by his emotions here – although I’m sure his emotions were cranked up. His answer to the elders was to ignore their initial request, and first clear the air about the

past. Before moving forward, the past had to be acknowledged for what it was.

Read vs. 7 – A question God could ask us also!

Jephthah was wronged in a severe way, and before he hitches up his wagon to these people, he needs to see if they are truly repentant from their past treatment of him.

Forgiveness does not mean forgetfulness

Many Christians are confused with the forgetfulness side of this issue. We are to forgive – and forgive always. There should be no limit to our forgiveness. If you fail to forgive someone, you not only harm them, but you harm yourself as you become bitter, angry, revengeful, and look at them with malice and hatred. Forgetfulness is different. God forgets our sins, but this is not related to His memory, but to His judgment. He promises not to remember our sins because of our faith in Christ.

In our experience, we need to forgive when someone sins against us, and we should forget in the sense that we don't hold their sin over them. We don't continue to bring it up as a way to have the upper hand in the relationship. However, when you forgive, God never expects you to put yourself in danger again. God commands us to forgive one another, but He also wants us to use wisdom in how we relate to one another, and make sure we aren't putting ourselves in harm's way on purpose.

Their answer in vs. 8 to Jephthah's question about their past rejection of him is an admission of guilt about their past behavior and attitudes. I believe their offer of making him their leader – even after the battle – is proof of their repentant posture.

Their history with Jephthah was an embarrassment to them – probably what they feared most about the position they found themselves in of needing to go to Jephthah in the first place, but if Jephthah was going to lead them, the past needed to be cleared up and confessed to.

We can learn a great lesson here of how to deal with people in our life that have wronged us in the past.

- Be open to *talking* with them.
- Deal *directly*, but *graciously* with past sins/problems.
- Don't let *emotions* guide the discussion.
- Look for *sincerity*, not empty words.

Jephthah is satisfied with their commitment to him, and his first action as their leader is to gather them together and dedicate their agreement to the Lord and seek His guidance and blessing (vs. 11). At some point in Jephthah's life, he was taught about the God of Israel – Yahweh – and he knew the history of the nation – and he was faithful to give God the credit for the blessings and the victories in life.

After he was placed in 'office', he began dealing with the crisis before them – the Ammonite threat. Once again, we see Godly wisdom on how to deal with conflict.

Always seek a peaceful settlement^{11:12-13}

Read vs. 12-13

Instead of going right to a military solution, he first tries to find peace through political negotiations. Once again, Jephthah gives us a great template for how to deal with conflict.

Rom. 12:18-19 "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord."

However, his attempts at a peaceful resolution are rejected, and Jephthah gives a thorough justification for his position.

Vs. 14-28 are a brief history lesson of Israel's interaction with the surrounding nations. Jephthah knew his nation's history and how God was faithful to them over the years.

Jephthah has the facts of history on his side, and he has the God of history on his side. What put Jephthah in Hebrews 11, the 'Hall of Faith', was that he was a man of faith who also acted on that faith. He knew the truth and didn't operate according to his own version of life.

"The circumstances of birth or family are not a handicap to the person who will live by faith." ([Be Available](#), Commentary on Judges by Warren W. Wiersbe, p. 98)

Have you ever used your background as a reason for your sins?
Have you ever used your background as a reason for your failures?
God can overcome anything in your life. He is greater than any tragedy and He is greater than any challenge. Your road may be more difficult than others...but it's important that you don't compare yourself to everyone around you! Look to God – look to His Word – and look to Him for your motivation and your security. You say, "But Steve, with my past, if I look to God He'll reject me! My sin is too great – God will reject me!"
You couldn't be more wrong. God's love for you is greater than any sins you can accumulate in your life. God never rejects those who come to Him in repentance. When you come to God and confess your sins and ask for His forgiveness, He will never turn His back on that request.

“He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9

Trust the Lord in desperate times 11:29-33 – Read passage

The Holy Spirit indwells Jephthah, and enables Jephthah to lead Israel to a mighty victory.

Jephthah is clearly dependent upon the Lord for the military battle before him, but he makes an unnecessary vow. He is listed in Hebrews 11, but that doesn't mean he was perfect in life.

Later in the text (vs. 34), it is his only child – his daughter – that comes out to meet him first.

There is some debate as to whether or not Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter, or if he dedicated her to serve in the Tabernacle for the rest of her life. My point this morning is not to concentrate on that issue, but the larger issue of our attempts to help God by striking a deal with him!

Have you ever said, “God, if you will do this for me, then I will _____.”

Expressing your devotion to God is one thing, but trying to manipulate Him is quite another!

God is not swayed by our offers.

Look at it from this perspective...

He has already commanded our faithfulness.

He has already commanded our obedience.

He has already commanded our generosity.

He has already commanded the attitude of our heart.

He has already commanded that we give Him everything.

When you realize these things, what do you have left as a bargaining chip that God hasn't already called 'dibs' on?

We have no need to lobby God with our offers. Trust that He is faithful to His promises and commit yourself to following Him in all areas of your life.

This is the most we could ever offer, and He has already called us to this level of dedication.

“...in all your ways acknowledge him...”Prov. 3:6

“...`Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind...”Luke 10:27

12:7 – Jephthah led Israel for six years before his death.

Application

What makes you a Biblical hero is quite simple.

First, have faith in Jesus.

Admit your sins / Admit you're a sinner

Believe that Jesus died to pay the price for your sins – Believe that He died as a sacrifice for your sins.

Choose to follow Him with your life – Commit to living your faith.

Second, put your faith into action.

If you've been a Christian for awhile, but have never given your life completely to Christ, then make a new start today!

Close in prayer