

Judges 11:29-40
Jephthah's Rash Vow
Sermon Outline

Introduction: God gave us the Old Testament "to make us wise for salvation through faith in the Messiah Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). He does this at times, as here, by giving us a cautionary tale, in which we see the tragic place to which a wrong-headed view of God and a wrong-headed view of how to relate to him can bring us.

I) What was right with Jephthah's faith?

A) He kept his word

Much was wrong with his vow
But there was one thing that was right

B) Meaning for us: We have lost our sense of shame over broken promises

II) What was wrong with Jephthah's faith?

A) It had God all wrong

A vow in the name of Yahweh that ignored the Person of Yahweh

B) Meaning for us

To invoke Jesus is not to know him
Such a disconnect misrepresents him
His silence does not mean he doesn't care

We should get our theology right before we move to ethics

III) The tragic outcome of Jephthah's faith

A) Heart-break: vv34-36

B) Where was God?

C) Take away

We need to get our theology right

Conclusion: An incentive for ordering our lives around God's Word

Like Jephthah, God keeps his word even if it hurts him

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) Michael Wilcock writes, "What Jephthah did (the sacrifice of his daughter) is a thing all Scripture condemns; why he did it (in order to keep his word) is a thing all Scripture commends." Do an inventory of what comes out of your mouth. Do you mean what you say and say what you mean? Have you ever "sworn to your own hurt" (that is, kept a promise even though it cost you significantly to do so—Psalm 15:4)?
- 2) Jephthah made a vow in the name of the Lord (Yahweh) but he ignored the actual person of the Lord, for the Lord had vigorously forbidden child sacrifice (see Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5). It is possible, likewise, for us to use the name of Jesus Christ while doing things that Jesus hates. And the fact that he may not shout his disapproval is no guarantee that he is not furious at our behavior (he was silent in the case of Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter). How do we guard against taking the name of the Lord in vain in this way?
- 3) Reflect on the following: "It is easy to rush out and do something. It is much harder to ask, "Why am I doing this thing?" and "Whom am I serving when I act?" We may use God language to justify what we are doing, but who is our real God: cost-benefit analysis, comfort, fear, statistics, polls, money, power, some vision of America, some strategy for moving America in the direction of that vision. Jephthah acted "in the name of Yahweh." But what really drove him was the zeitgeist of his time, and it got him into terrible trouble." What, really, is the well-spring of your religious behavior?
- 4) Read over vv 34-36 carefully, taking note of the tragedy of it. What makes the story so sad? Why didn't God intervene (see Luke 16:29-31 for a possible answer)?
- 5) The sad story of Jephthah as a cautionary tale, told us by a God who loves us and does not want us to make the same mistake. By it God warns, "Get your theology right. If you are not a serious student of the Scriptures and of Jesus Christ, you will be serious students of something or someone else. If my Word does not drive you, then something else will. And that will hurt you. Taking my name in vain is not only wrong; it is harmful." Pray for help and make a plan.
- 6) The grief of Jephthah and the willing submission of his daughter give us a glimpse of the drama of Good Friday. What is different in the two stories? What is similar?