

Judges 11:29-12:15
Getting Salvation All Wrong
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 how to relate to him can bring us.

I) Jephthah’s faith was bargain-based

A) vv 30-31

If...then....

B) Why is bargain-based faith wrong?

- 1) Presumes that we can ever put God into a position where he owes us
- 2) It usually assumes that we can calculate what we really need
- 3) It takes an end run around God himself—using him for what we really want, which isn’t him

C) How bargain-based are we?

Resentment—a good litmus test

II) What do we do with this sad story?

A) Let it search us.

B) Let it push us past ourselves

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) Why did Jephthah try to strike a deal with God? What does this tell us about his view of God? About his view of himself?
- 2) Why is it wrong-headed to think that we could ever put God into a position where he owes us?
- 3) What is the difference between pleading for God to fulfill one of his promises and trying to make a deal with God?
- 4) When we bargain with God, we invariably aim in the bargaining at a particular outcome (“Lord, if you help me to pass this exam, I promise that I will....”). What can be wrong-headed about this? Is it wrong to ask for whatever is on our heart? Take note of Philippians 4:4-7 and Isaiah 40:12-15.
- 5) Reflect on the following: “The most pernicious thing about a bargain-based relationship with God is that it takes an end-run around God himself. It seeks to use him for whatever it is that we *really* want, which isn’t God, but rather something that God can provide. This is a violation of the first great commandment. It grieves God and it diminishes us.”
- 6) A likely symptom that we are bargain-based believers is bitterness about life. When we compare the outcomes of our lives to the outcomes of the lives of those who have not been as good as we have been, and grow bitter as we make the comparison, it is probably because all along we have been (perhaps subconsciously) bargaining with God. We have, for example, been saying deep inside, “God, if I stick with this difficult marriage, unlike Gertrude, you will owe me a better life than Gertrude’s.” Spend some time noting any bitterness in your life and praying over it in light of the possibility that you have been trying to make deals with God all along.
- 7) Reflect on the following statement by commentator Dale Davis: “Ammon is subdued. But there is the grave of Jephthah’s only child. And there are the lifeless forms of once-cocky Ephraimite militia. Whether for excessive zeal (11:30-31) or stubborn pride (12:1) tragedy overshadows the salvation Yahweh gave (11:32b-33). I would wager that the writer meant to paint it so. I think he wants us to see Yahweh’s deliverance tintured by human foolishness and human arrogance. It is as if even the winners can’t have a clean win. We have salvation here, but a marred salvation. The writer is suggesting that if we seek a perfect salvation we will have to look to One greater than Jephthah.” Think about the “unclean wins” in your life. Thank God for sending his Son to atone for them.