

Series: God is the Hero of this Story: A Study Through Judges  
Judges 11 – The Words We Speak / Ryan Patty / 6.18.23

Scripture reading: Isaiah 29:13

13 The Lord said: These people approach me with their speeches to honor me with lip-service, yet their hearts are far from me, and human rules direct their worship of me.

If you have your bible would you please open up to Judges 11. If you are visiting with us, welcome! We have been steadily walking our way through the book of Judges as we have seen God's covenant faithfulness to a forgetful and rebellious people time and time again. And today is no different. We have mentioned this downward spiral concerning the book of Judges and today will feel like rock-bottom. I have been wrestling with this passage all week and it is not easy. In fact it hurts. It's weighty. It is one of the darker scenes in all of Scripture and is even well-known by those who don't know the Bible at all. In fact, in talking with a brother here at CCC about the passage he frankly told me it's his least favorite passage in all of Scripture. And I get that. I do. And we need to feel the weight and darkness of it so that we see the beauty of God and his gospel all the more. Because God through His Word has something to teach us from it; I firmly believe that.

Part of the main emphasis from today's passage is on words. The words spoken are very important in this passage as they are the instrument of our particular Judge for both good and bad, for his rising up and his downfall. We have seen from previous judgments certain things/certain tools or instruments that have been used. **We can think of the tent peg and Jael.** We can think of Ehud and the hidden dagger. Even Gideon and the fleece. In the future we will see Samson and his hair. But today is Jephthah and his words.

And I don't have to tell you that the words we speak matter. Our God is a God who reveals himself through speech, through words, and has graciously given to His people His revealed words in the Bible. This is how we come to learn of Him, to know Him, to proclaim Him. And so, words matter. And here we will see from our text the truth of this as well.

This morning we have 5 points to see as we walk through our passage. 5 words if you will, with application given throughout. As I said this passage is all about words, so the points highlight this. Let me give you the five points up front so you can follow along.

1. Meaningless Words
2. Desperate Words
3. Foolish Words
4. Deathly Words
5. No Words

#### 1. Meaningless Words (10:6-16)

To see the meaningless words and to set the context of Jephthah, we must back up into chapter 10. Daniel taught us last week on the ruthless and ant-Christ king Abimelech. After his death, Israel has a few quick judges until we read in chapter 10 starting in verse 6.

6 Then the Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They worshiped the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Aram, Sidon, and Moab, and the gods of the Ammonites and the Philistines. They abandoned the Lord and did not worship him. 7 So the Lord's anger burned against Israel, and he sold them to the Philistines and the Ammonites. 8 They shattered and crushed the Israelites that year, and for eighteen years they did the same to all the Israelites who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites in Gilead. 9 The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim. Israel was greatly oppressed, 10 so they cried out to the Lord, saying, "We have sinned against you. We have abandoned our God and worshiped the Baals."

At this point in Judges, we are used to the pattern. God's people sin and rebel, they are judged, God brings about a deliverer. But chapter 10 inserts a wrinkle in the pattern if you will. God's people sin, as we read, but the response from God, as we will see, is not what you would expect.

V. 6 is the key. Notice how the writer of Judges includes *all* of their idolatry. He says they worshiped the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Aram, Sidon, and Moab, and the gods of the Ammonites and the Philistines. They abandoned the Lord and did not worship him.

As time has gone on, Israel, rather than being a strong light to the nations, (being a lighthouse to a dark sea of sin) Israel is now a broken flickering light that at little moments shines but for the most part only provides darkness. We have been repeating it these last few weeks, **but Israel has truly become Canaanized**. Israel has allowed the surrounding nations to infiltrate them. And notice here that their idolatry isn't just with Baal, it's with all the "gods" (hear demonic spirits) of the surrounding nations.

And so God gives them over to judgment from the surrounding nations for 18 long and weary years, until they come once more to their senses and cry out to God for forgiveness and deliverance. We see it in verse 10, "we have sinned against you. We have abandoned our God (notice the "our God" there) and worshiped the Baals. They know Yahweh is their covenant God. He is the God of Israel, they are his people. "Our God" they say..

And at this point you would expect to read once more, God relented, God forgave, God raised up a judge. But notice God's response. It's a little sarcastic. As the brits would say, it's cheeky. He's fed up and letting them know it.

Judges 10:11-14

Judges 10:11-14 – 11 The Lord said to the Israelites, "When the Egyptians, Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines, 12 Sidonians, Amalekites, and Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, did I not deliver you from them? 13 But you have abandoned me and worshiped other gods. Therefore, I will not deliver you again. 14 Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them deliver you whenever you are oppressed."

God says, "cry out to your other gods! You've been whoring after them, let them deliver you!" Yahweh is fed up. This isn't the God we are supposed to see in Scripture. He's always supposed to forgive... But keep in mind the pattern here. How many times before has Israel done this very thing? They are abusing the grace of God. Coming back to

him time and time again and promising to not give their love and devotion to another; Only to do it again! These are meaningless words.

**What we need to see here is that sometimes we can take God for granted.** We can take his grace for granted and end up abusing it. We can keep thinking that God is this safe God, this gentle elderly grandpa type figure who always tells us it will be okay and gives us a lollipop when we mess up. But that is not the God of the Bible. That is not the Holy one of Israel. His holiness burns against sin. He is safe insofar as you are found in His Son Jesus Christ.. But being found outside of him? He is not safe at all.

Christ has come inviting you and I to be reconciled to the Father, to be a part of His Kingdom, to be his disciples. That's in part the good news of the Gospel; that God is reconciling sinners to himself so that all who place their faith, their trust, in Jesus Christ His Son can be forgiven. You can do nothing in and of yourself to earn this salvation, it is "the free gift of God."

And so Christ comes declaring the Kingdom and calling on all to repent and believe. *But when he comes again, it will not be like the first coming.* He will come in judgment; judging the living and the dead, and all the earth will know what "the fear of the Lord" actually looks like on that day. And so Israel here gets a stern rebuke from their God. No, you go to your other gods. Israel thought that they could just keep coming back and never pay the consequences.

**Are you like Israel here?** Are you in a habitual pattern of sin, promising to not do it again and each time you come back to the Lord swearing that that was the last time. Never again! My friend, as we will sing in a bit, my sins they are many, his mercy is more. We are going to see that in this text in just a moment. But the fight for holiness has to be taken seriously. Seek accountability, open up to someone, fight like your life depends on it, and look to the cross of Christ, the savior who died for you, and trust that because of what He did you can, by the power of His Holy Spirit, conquer this sin that is entangling you. It is in His grace we are sanctified. Live in light of that grace.

So feel this tension here. Yahweh is so fed up with them. He knows how they are, he knows they abuse his grace. But look at this last section.

Judges 10:15-16 – 15 But the Israelites said, “We have sinned. Deal with us as you see fit; only rescue us today!”  
16 So they got rid of the foreign gods among them and worshiped the Lord, and he became weary of Israel’s misery.

Yahweh, our God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He became weary of Israel’s misery. Literally means his soul is short in Hebrew. In other words, most see this again as meaningless words. He knows that their heart is not in it. It is worship on the outside while their hearts are far from God. **This is a conversion of convenience.** They need God to save them from their enemies. They will say and do the right things but will end up right back where they were. Sure, we will worship him now, then he will save us!

So God is weary of Israel. Yet, he will still in some way bless their futile efforts to get a deliverer.

## 2. Desperate Words (10:17 – 11:28)

Look with me at the end of chapter 10 and going into chapter 11.

Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute, and Gilead was his father. 2 Gilead’s wife bore him sons, and when they grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, “You will have no inheritance in our father’s family, because you are the son of another woman.” 3 So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob. Then some worthless men joined Jephthah and went on raids with him.

4 Some time later, the Ammonites fought against Israel. 5 When the Ammonites made war with Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. 6 They said to him, “Come, be our commander, and let’s fight the Ammonites.”

7 Jephthah replied to the elders of Gilead, “Didn’t you hate me and drive me out of my father’s family? Why then have you come to me now when you’re in trouble?”

8 They answered Jephthah, “That’s true. But now we turn to you. Come with us, fight the Ammonites, and you will become leader of all the inhabitants of Gilead.”

9 So Jephthah said to them, “If you are bringing me back to fight the Ammonites and the Lord gives them to me, I will be your leader.”

10 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The Lord is our witness if we don’t do as you say.” 11 So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead. The people made him their leader and commander, and Jephthah repeated all his terms in the presence of the Lord at Mizpah.

Few things we need to note and understand.

The Ammonites call together their fighting men and encamp against Israel. And so the men of Gilead put **out a help wanted** sign wanting a military commander and the reward is that you get to be the president of the people. And no one in town wants it. They are too afraid. The Ammonites are showing they are about to attack and everyone is scared. And then we are introduced to Jephthah.

Jephthah is a valiant warrior **but he comes from the wrong side of the tracks**. His father had an adulterous relationship with a prostitute and he is the offspring. Eventually the sons of Gilead’s wife, his half-brothers, run him off after they realize they don’t want to share any inheritance with him. They would rather get a larger portion. So he flees to the land of Tob and some worthless men join him and they start raiding other towns, they are marauders preying on the weak and unprotected. And after some time, when Gilead needs a leader, no one in town steps up, so they get desperate, and they go to Jephthah, the bastard bandit.

And in their desperation they can barter with him. Come lead us and be our commander. Be our war leader in essence, our war chief. I think they are hoping to **not** make him ruler or president but he shoots back at them, “didn’t you hate me and drive me off? Why are you coming to me?” Lead us, they respond, and be our leader. The difference here between commander and leader is evident. One just leads the army. The other leads all the people. At first they want to just make him commander, but Jephthah is wise with words and Gilead is desperate. He will be their ruler. **The word implies the literal “head” of the people. They are promising him both, almost a form of kingship if you will. The old saying is true, “desperate times call for desperate measures.”**

Notice here the difference compared to the previous Judges. God is not present here. He will bless their choice as we will come to see, but unlike Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak, and even Samson, we don’t read the words “And

the Lord raised up Jephthah.” But instead in v. 10, the people made him their leader and commander, and Jephthah repeated the appropriate terms in the presence of the Lord.

And then in verses 12-28, **if I could summarize**, Jephthah deals wisely in trying to negotiate with the king of the Ammonites. He just tells the truth. And he does it historically and theologically. The Ammonites were driven from the land, Israel possessed the land, and this land didn't belong to Moab or Ammon. How could it be yours? It's not *your land*, quit making up and changing history. And then theologically, Yahweh did this. Our God drove you out and it was he who drove you out. Those are the verses summarized. And Jephthah does a great job with his words. But it's the desperation of the Gideonites I want to focus on briefly. How should we think about this?

Let me ask you this, when times are desperate in your life, who or what do you turn to? In your desperation, in your stress, in your heightened anxiety, what or who are you turning to? The Gideonites have an army camping at their door and are desperate for someone to lead them. They don't consult God, they don't turn to God, they don't pray to God. They take matters into their own hands. So what about you?

Do you medicate with something as your solution? Calm the nerves a bit? Do you turn to alcohol? Do you internalize everything and then blow up at some point? Lashing out at your spouse or kids? Or, Do you de-stress by looking secretly at something you shouldn't? When times are desperate, who or what do you turn to?

Anything or anyone other than God is a failed solution. It might provide a temporary reprieve but it will leave you longing for the deeper love and satisfaction only He can provide. This scene of desperate words here causes us to think of how we are in our desperation. Do we turn to God first? Or seek to take matters into our own hands?

I have found that my disposition is to fix it myself. To solve the dilemma, or my stress, or my worry, myself. In my flesh I want me to be the answer. It is to my shame that I often do not turn to God in prayer before considering how *I can best* fit it myself. Let us be a people who are quick to both turn to God first and encourage others to do the same.

### 3. Foolish Words (11:29-38)

We come now to what is the heart of the story and what everyone typically wants to get to. I think even the way the writer frames this story is heightening the suspense and leading us to this. Some of the most foolish and stupidest words ever spoken.

29 The Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah, who traveled through Gilead and Manasseh, and then through Mizpah of Gilead. He crossed over to the Ammonites from Mizpah of Gilead. 30 Jephthah made this vow to the Lord: “If you in fact hand over the Ammonites to me, 31 whoever comes out the doors of my house to greet me when I return safely from the Ammonites will belong to the Lord, and I will offer that person as a burnt offering.”

Words were the greatest skill of Jephthah. Words got him what he wanted with the Gideonites. Words were his first line of defense at seeking to sway the Ammonites. And now *words* are what Jephthah uses to seek to have God do his bidding. “If you hand over the Ammonites to me, whoever comes out the doors of my house to greet me when I return I will offer as a burnt offering. In the Hebrew, it is more “whatever” comes out of my house. But the CSB is right here, elsewhere that language is never used of an animal coming to greet someone as they return from battle. Only of people. So it is in these words (prideful words, stupid words, foolish words) that we see Jephthah’s fate being sealed. **For in his mind he will make this vow to the Lord in order to guarantee the outcome.** In a way he wants God to do his bidding for Him so he is sweetening the deal. God give me victory and I will give you sacrifice. He is sweetening the deal; sweetening it with death. And so in our sin, God gives us over exactly to the very thing we want, and Jephthah is going to experience that firsthand.

**We do this all the time with God don't we?** We subtly want to manipulate God. “Oh God! If you do this for me, then I will do this for you! If you give me a spouse, give me a child, give me that promotion, whatever else, *then* I will truly live for you, then I will know that you care, then I will, then I will, then I will. We barter with God all the time, not realizing that is a pagan way to live and to pray. Remember what we have been saying all along? Israel has become Canaanized. They are letting the surrounding nations influence them, shape them, and then worshipping their false gods. And God has given them over to it. And this is exactly what we see with Jephthah.



Pagan nations were always trying to appease their gods, always trying to perform vows, to perform sacrifices (even of children), to perform acts of worship so that the gods would be pleased with them and love them and care for them and provide for them. But that is not our God. Our God is not after rote acts of worship, mundane performances of religiosity just so that he might listen to us. He loves us so much more than that. He cares for us immensely, and rather than us trying to earn something, trying to barter for something, trying to sway him in some way, rather than all of that, He gives us everything through the sacrifice of His Son. You don't have to barter with God. It's a free gift that has been given, not to be negotiated for.

- When you are tempted to barter with God, tempted to try to offer more of yourself or your works so that he might do something for you, remember this story.

I think what is so striking about this foolishness is how un-needed it was. This vow never had to be said. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him; the next few verses aren't even needed. We would have been reading about the victory right away. But this is Jephthah's own doing, his own foolishness.

And so the narrator records the victory. It is a resounding victory. All the while we are wondering what is going to become of that vow. Verse 34.

34 When Jephthah went to his home in Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with tambourines and dancing! She was his only child; he had no other son or daughter besides her. 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "No! Not my daughter! You have devastated me! You have brought great misery on me. I have given my word to the Lord and cannot take it back."

36 Then she said to him, "My father, you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me as you have said, for the Lord brought vengeance on your enemies, the Ammonites." 37 She also said to her father, "Let me do this one thing: Let me wander two months through the mountains with my friends and mourn my virginity."

38 "Go," he said. And he sent her away two months. So she left with her friends and mourned her virginity as she wandered through the mountains.

A man of faith. A man whom God empowered by His Spirit to deliver his people. A man who sins so, so foolishly. We reach the breaking point of the text, as who is the one that comes to meet Jephthah after battle? It is his daughter. His one and only daughter. She's coming to greet her daddy and celebrate with him..

**I am blessed by God to have four little kids.** One boy and three little girls. And in this sweet season of life I am their hero. My wife would reluctantly admit that I'm the favorite right now. When I walk in it's "Daddy! Dad's here! Dad play with me first!" Jeff is always reminding the associate pastors to enjoy these years and so I'm trying to do just that. Outside of Christ and my wife, my children are my greatest delight. I *love that greeting* when I get home from work. I love it.

And so Jephthah's daughter wants to give her daddy a hero's welcome! He has delivered the Gileadites! Her daddy is the hero of the nation! So she comes out to greet her father with joyful tambourines and dancing! Wanting to celebrate with him. This scene reminds us of other faithful women of God, like when Miriam leads a celebration after passing through the Red sea in Ex 15 OR **when** the women of Israel were singing and dancing after David's defeat of the Philistines in 1 Sam 18. And so Jephthah's daughter wants to give her daddy a hero's welcome! We feel her joy, yet we feel the grief and sorrow all the well. The joy is about to turn to tragedy.

Two things to note from this scene:

1. Jephthah's pride

- a. His pride is undergirding so much of this. Jephthah wanted to be ruler of the Gideonites so much so that he would make this foolish vow. And then look here in the text. Even in his agony it is undergirded with pride. "No! Not my daughter! You have devastated me! You have brought great misery on me. I have given my word to the Lord and cannot take it back." He blames his daughter. He doesn't say, "what have I done? How could I be so stupid." You my daughter, you did this to me.
- b. **Such sorry words to say to your only daughter.** His ambition, his pride, the hope he had of leading and securing a future for his family, as his only daughter will be killed and thus any future offspring as well. In this scene, Jephthah is a sorry excuse for a man and a father.

c. On today of all days, what can we learn from this? First let me say, Happy Father's Day! (this text falling on today – I am always amazed at the providence of God). Fatherhood is a blessing and privilege and a high calling. We need good Fathers. And I'll be honest in wrestling with this text all week I have thought about fatherhood a lot. **My youngest daughter's birthday was Wednesday and I have had the backdrop of this text in my mind all week just thinking "how?"** How in the world could he do it? So Fathers, let me just offer a brief word of encouragement and warning.

- i. For encouragement, you are vital to the life of your kids. You set the tone in so many ways of the home. Even in the teenage years when you feel like your kids might not be all that interested, they need you. They need your attention, and your diligence in pursuing them. I could give you statistic after statistic about how fatherlessness and fatherless homes are the single greatest criteria for crime, abuse, drug-use, etc. So my encouragement to you is that your day to day faithfulness of following after God while seeking to love and lead your home well is infinitely important. The sacrifices you make to be with your family are always worth it. **But your family needs you, I'm reminding myself of this just as much as you.**
- ii. But also a warning. Jephthah was willing to sacrifice anything for the outcome he wanted. He needed the recognition, the position, the authority. What are you willing to sacrifice for your ambition? What are you willing to sacrifice for that dream job? For money? For recognition? May it never be our families. Let us not be so busy with work, with hobbies, with clubs or sports, that we are barely home where it matters. Are your wife and kids getting the leftovers of your time and energy? Sure you aren't physically laying them down on an altar like Jephthah, but emotionally and with your lack of physical presence in the home it's a sacrifice of them all the same. Jephthah is not the first nor is he the last father to sacrifice his child for a career. Let us feel the weight of that today.

## 2. His Daughter's Courage

- a. She is beautiful; this young woman is beautiful. I wish we were given more about her, because despite Jephthah's failings here his daughter is showing her beauty and grace and love for her dad in an astounding way. She's most likely in her teenage years, yet her maturity is shining forth in this text. MY father, she says, "it's okay. Do to me what you vowed because the Lord has given you victory. She's

trying to save her dad's integrity for him. Trying to save his standing in the eyes of others. Trying to honor him by honoring his vow. **It's hard to wrap our minds around because our culture is not an honor/shame culture, but she is showing more honor to her dad than he deserves in the moment.** And she is beautiful in doing so. Her memory, as the writer tells us, is celebrated by the young women for generations to come. But she was the victim of faithfulness to an unfaithful vow. In her we see all the "courageous daughters of abusive fathers." - Block. Her father failed her, yet she shows her love for him in a way he doesn't deserve. Rather than laying down his life for his daughter, he takes hers. This is fatherhood, manhood, pride, all at their worst. All corrupted by sin and the flesh. This is not at all how God intended or wants those things to be, yet it is a stark picture of where Israel finds itself.

#### 4. Deathly Words (11:39 – 12:7)

Two scenes of death I want us to briefly think on. Notice first the brief sentence, five words in Hebrew, conveying what Jephthah did to his daughter. Judges 11:39a – At the end of two months, she returned to her father, and he kept the vow he had made about her.

Hoping to secure a future for himself, he loses it all. Some understand this to imply that Jephthah didn't actually sacrifice her, but that she was devoted to service to the Lord. She was a virgin for the rest of her life and never got to marry. Maybe. But I think it highly unlikely. The plain reading of the text, Jephthah's vow to burn the sacrifice, and the fact that service to the Lord did not require not being married all lend weight to the other side of the argument in my understanding. Jephthah sacrificed his daughter.

And so the question comes, did Jephthah have to sacrifice his daughter? No. He didn't. The Bible is clear that God is against child sacrifice. Deuteronomy 18:10 for instance: **10 No one among you is to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire, practice divination, tell fortunes, interpret omens, practice sorcery.** He could have easily sacrificed his own integrity, easily sacrificed his own pride, easily sacrificed his rulership of the Gideonites, even as a Father I would venture to say he could have stepped in and taken her place. But he doesn't. He kills his own daughter.

The writer of Judges is trying to draw our eyes to the foolishness of sin here, and also, once more, how the nations have inhabited Israel. It is syncretism. Syncretism is the blending of religions and thoughts. It's what happens today when we try to import worldly ideologies and unbiblical thought and practices into the church. And here, at this time in Israel, syncretism is rampant. So much so that as other nations were sacrificing their children, so the leader of Israel does the same. Tragic in every sense of the word.

The second scene we must briefly learn from is the end of Jephthah's reign as judge. This takes us into the beginning of chapter 12.

The men of Ephraim were called together and crossed the Jordan to Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, "Why have you crossed over to fight against the Ammonites but didn't call us to go with you? We will burn your house with you in it!"

2 Then Jephthah said to them, "My people and I had a bitter conflict with the Ammonites. So I called for you, but you didn't deliver me from their power. 3 When I saw that you weren't going to deliver me, I took my life in my own hands and crossed over to the Ammonites, and the Lord handed them over to me. Why then have you come today to fight against me?"

If you remember at the end of Gideon's life his run-in with Ephraim, here we have them again. The prima-donnas of Israel who feel left out (even though they were invited). But they don't get the credit, they don't get the glory, and that's an issue with them. Notice how it ends.

4 Then Jephthah gathered all of the men of Gilead. They fought and defeated Ephraim, because Ephraim had said, "You Gileadites are Ephraimite fugitives in the territories of Ephraim and Manasseh." 5 The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim. Whenever a fugitive from Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the Gileadites asked him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he answered, "No," 6 they told him, "Please say Shibboleth." If he said, "Sibboleth," because he could not pronounce it correctly, they seized him and executed him at the fords of the Jordan. At that time forty-two thousand from Ephraim died. 7 Jephthah judged Israel six years, and when he died, he was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

Once more, the emphasis on words here. More precisely how they are spoken. This famous statement of shibboleth vs sibboleth has come to imply a belonging to the group. A way in of cultural acceptance. But here in the text it is simply a password. A password to cross the river and if they don't say it right they are dead. Deathly words are at play as the judgment against Ephraim for their pride and folly is executed. *42,000 countrymen killed.*

Deathly words in regards to Jephthah's daughter, and deathly words that the Ephraimites couldn't speak.

We have seen meaningless words, we have seen desperate words, we have seen foolish and deathly words, and now we think upon no words.

## 5. No Words

After the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Jephthah in 11:29, we have no other words or actions of the Lord. Sure the Lord's name is invoked. But there is silence from God. Thinking back to the end of Chapter 10 when we looked at meaningless words and the Israelites' empty repentance, Yahweh was weary, he was fed up, and while he graciously blesses their efforts of having Jephthah lead them, he is silent for much of this. Jephthah and the Gideonites in many ways take matters into their own hands... and God lets them.

Why does God not speak? Why does he not cry out "Jephthah stop!" like he did with Abraham sacrificing Isaac. Why does God not save the daughter? Why does he stay his hand?! **Surely words of judgment from Him here would be better than silence!** Yet, God has given these people to their own devices to their own sin. Child sacrifice was a feature of Moabite and Ammonite religions, and now that idolatry is being practiced by God's chosen people. When you replace God with a false god, you end up with demonic practices that degrade the image of God. This is rampant in our culture today.

Yet even in the comparison to Abraham there is a big difference: **Abraham was asked by God to do it, as a test.** Here it is just Jephthah who does this all on his own by opening his mouth and speaking those foolish words. And God is silent.

**Every believer at some point in their lives will struggle with the silence of God.** Will struggle with not feeling like their prayers are heard, struggle with wondering if God even cares. Those are normal in long walks with God and in many ways they grow us in the faith. But, In those moments it is vital that we remind ourselves of God's promises, that we look to the cross where God sent His Son to die for us.

**God is not ultimately silent, but at times it will feel as if he is.** Think of the book of Job. 90 percent of the book is Job and his companions either pleading with God, justifying decisions and actions to one another, thinking they know what is right or not speaking rightly of God, all the while God remains silent. Until at the very end he doesn't. He pressures Job with question after question until Job has nothing left to say but to worship God. This is his final response to God. Job 42:1-6

Then Job replied to the Lord: 2 I know that you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted. 3 You asked, "Who is this who conceals my counsel with ignorance?" Surely I spoke about things I did not understand, things too wondrous for me to know. 4 You said, "Listen now, and I will speak. When I question you, you will inform me." 5 I had heard reports about you, but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore, I reject my words and am sorry for them; I am dust and ashes.

In many ways not all of my questions about this text have been answered, but I have found comfort in Job's Words here.

So although God might not have any words recorded here in this text, this is not an isolated text. **He has spoken to us so much.** His words from all the rest of the book of Judges ring out for his people to repent and not follow after false gods. His words ring out from other books in the OT that tell us that God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. That he will not give his glory to another. That one day he would give his people new hearts that can know and fear him. His Words ring out from the NT and His Son Jesus who says, come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. His Words ring out from the cross when he says "It is Finished." Lastly, his words ring out from the end of time, when He tells us in Revelation 21:3-4 "Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. 4 He will

wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.”

God is not silent. He has spoken to us. We might not have all the answers yet, but one day everything will be clear. And in the midst of feeling as if God is silent we must press into what we know to be true all the more.

### **How should we apply this?**

There has been application throughout, but just two quick things.

#### 1. Our Words Matter

First, the story of Jephthah teaches us, in part, that our words matter. And our words to God definitely matter. Let us not barter with God. Let us not pray like a pagan and seek to strike a deal with God. Remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 6? 7 When you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. 8 Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him. It’s the same when we sing songs of worship. Are you mouthing the words, singing them half-heartedly? Or are you approaching God with reverence and joy that you get to worship him? And are our prayers pagan-like? May it never be so. Our Words Matter, especially to God. And the way we worship and pray matters as well. Our words matter.

#### 2. Learn from Jephthah’s Faith

I struggled to even write that statement. I don’t like what Jephthah did. In fact I hate it. And it’s hard to separate the man here from his actions. Yet, that is what the writers of Scripture do. And while I only want to focus on his failings they focused on his faith. It is often human nature that we tend to focus on the one big mess-up of someone’s life and we characterize them by it. We are slow to see any good apart from their failings.

In this time of living in a fallen world, faith is not always as clean-cut as we would like. It’s not always rainbows and butterflies, and smiling, happy faces. People are messed up. And our God is in the business of saving messed up people, like you and I. And so it is shocking to me when I read from Hebrews 11 (and the great hall of faith). That Jephthah was a man of faith. A man of faith of *whom the world was not worthy*. And so I struggle with it! What in the



world, God? Don't you mean his daughter?! No. Because Jephthah, like all of us, had immense failings, but he also had faith.

**I have been talking about how Jephthah knew the importance of words.** They were his first point of combat. Yet interspersed throughout the text is that Jephthah clearly knew much of God and his ways. Although somewhat Canaanized, he clearly had an understanding of the workings of God. All of his words about God weren't completely empty. Chapter 11:27 - "Let the Lord who is Judge decide today." The Lord who is Judge.

And so he was a man of faith. But particularly his faith is shown in keeping his vow. As horrendous as it is, he kept it. Hear me here clearly. What he did, in sacrificing his daughter, is something that all of Scripture condemns. But why he did it, is something that all of Scripture commends. (Pete Wilkinson). Frankly, he followed through with his Words to God. Is that true of us? Again, the act was horrible. But the why is what we are to learn from.

Jephthah knew that words matter. And he demonstrates this with his follow through. Does the Bible offer a worse role model for Godly behavior than Jephthah? Yet, according to Hebrews the world was not worthy of him. This should encourage us concerning whom God will call his own. If God can call Jephthah, then he can definitely call you and I. **The old excuse of "God could never save me in light of what I've done" kind of pales in comparison to this.** **He enshrined Jephthah as a hero of the faith.** That should give us the assurance that when we turn to him in faith, and believe in his son, he accepts us just as well. There are no sins that the blood of Christ can't wash clean. That is the magnitude of the sacrifice of God's Son. Despite our sin, despite our failings, his mercy is more to us. Praise God we serve a God who is in the business of saving sinners.

Let us pray.