

Re-Cycling Judges, Jephthah: Wounded Judges 10-11 (selected)



Teaching Notes...

I said at the outset of our considerations that Judges is not for the “faint-of-faith”. It’s disturbing. It often leaves us with more answers and less questions. It refuses to “photo-shop” the really ugly realities of our lives.

Although Judges records an era and events and people unique in human history, it exposes an all-too-familiar cycle of dysfunction:

Crisis: Literally, a “decision”. It’s a defining moment because of its potential to alter the course of your life.

Concession: the crisis finally awakens us to our need of help and we “cry out” (not until we are exhausted and have exhausted all our resources).

Intervention. God intervenes but not in some codependent way. He often allows us to experience consequences in hopes that it will evoke repentance.

Déjà vu (Fr. meaning “already seen”): Not in the eerie and unexplainable sort of way, but in the frustrating and the predictable way [“Ground Hog Day”]. Relapse.

Through Moses and Joshua, God has juxtaposed these (2) primary experiences of our world: blessing and cursing [Deuteronomy 28]. Blessing, the tangible experience of the goodness and good intentions of God, which is offered as the “framework” for all of life. Cursing, not as the angry retaliations of God, but as the inevitable consequence of refusing to live into the vision of God for your life.

If you are familiar at all with what transpires in the book, it’s an epic fail. The people become “Canaanized”. Instead of identifying “with” the culture, in order to influence it and become the means of its restoration, they are identified “by” the culture, assimilating its ways and values, most of which were identified as deceptive and destructive.

Some phrases that show up with some regularity...

“Again (you almost hear the exasperation), the Israelites did evil in the Lord’s sight...”

“... all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes”.

"After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel."

"Then the Lord raised up a judge (tribal chieftain) to rescue Israel..."

Jephthah is one of those whom God had uniquely called and empowered to accomplish such a purpose but he, like us all, was a bundle of contradictions. He flashed moments of brilliance and demonstrated the myriad of ways that we all tend to sabotage our own well-being.

Let's see if we can "MadLibs" Jephthah's storyline with some key events, people, and observations.

"Whoever attacks the Ammonites first will become ruler over all of the people of Gilead" (10:18). Jephthah is offered to us by way of a "flashback". Apparently, we are being offered the back-story of Jeb's life which, as we will discover, seemed to suit him for the role.

"Jephthah of Gilead..." - the city was named after his father. He apparently comes from some notoriety.

"... but, his mother was a prostitute" - conceived in public scandal. The plight for Jep included the fact that children of prostitutes were denied inheritance and social standing in the community.

He will forever wrestle with the (2) primary needs of the human person:
"significance" (knowing we matter) and **"security"** (knowing we belong) He was "illegitimate" (not right, unacceptable)

"... [he] was a great warrior" - Jephthah was a 'fighter'.

"... Jep fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob. Soon he had a band of worthless rebels following him" - Tob was an area to the north that was sparsely populated, mostly by others who had been marginalized by their family or culture. The human heart always seeks out community--- a place to belong--- even if that community is "unhealthy". Tob was not only a place of acceptance, but isolation. Disconnected.

To be alive in this world is to be vulnerable.

No one remains unscathed. No one is exempt.

Some of the pain will be imposed upon us, involuntarily. Much of the pain will be self-inflicted.

"In this world you will experience difficulties (to crush like a grape). I told you!"
Jesus (John 16:33).

Rejection is one of life's most painful, most formative experiences. It's one of those wounds which does not seem to heal with time. In fact, it simply seems to 'take root' [Hebrews 12:14-15].

Every human person has an innate yearning for the fullest experience of God, ourselves, and others in a way that makes us feel most alive. When we don't experience the appropriate level of affirmation and protection, we immediately get the message that we are not "worth it"--- that there must have been something dramatically flawed in me which prevented you from loving me.

Jephthah's is a story of "**rejection**". It reminds us that although the rejection may go back years (e.g. to a schoolyard, to a prom date, to a family reunion, the absence of a parent, to the breech of an intimate relationship), ***the wound is deep and real*** and the painful memories are quickly and vividly accessed.

"God loved us and chose us..." (Ephesians 1) Paul emphatically states. The Story begins, not with us choosing God, but God choosing us.

"Chosen"...what a wonderfully favorable notion, but often a difficult word to hear, especially for so many who have spent their entire lives either isolating themselves (convinced they were right) or attempting to *vindicate themselves* (prove everyone else wrong).

God names us "beloved". Rejection names us "undesirable". God calls us "son" and "daughter". The wound calls us "illegitimate". God says that we "belong". Abandonment says we're "alone"... on our own!

We all make vows out of our places of woundedness.

For most, denial/rejection is not the end of the story. We **will** be noticed. "Oh, *you'll notice me!*" "*You're gonna regret that you left me.*" "*No one will ever do that to me again, I guarantee it!*" Jep was used to leveraging people and circumstances to his own advantage. It's what people who feel powerless and unaided do.

"... *we need you (11:30). We promise to do whatever you say*" - I would suggest that these are the words that Jep has been waiting to hear his entire life.

Be aware of what's "fueling the fire".

Jephthah was driven by a wound of rejection. Anger and resentment seem to often provide some temporary energy and achieve some immediate results, but in the end, it will disintegrate your soul and all of your significant relationships.

Realize that in the end, if you are driven by a wound, the people you will hurt the most are the people you love the most [Jephthah's daughter paid the price for his inability to confront his wound and find healing for his pain].

"How does rejection show up in our lives?"

The pursuit of comfort. We are guarded. Critical. Jealousy. Self-deprecation. Defensiveness. Competitiveness (everything's a competition and we have to win.)

Drivenness... striving. Our culture calls it "**intensity**". The ones who love us most know it as "**insanity"! It is a driven-ness that often inadvertently sabotages every other relationship.**

In a world where the potential for pain and interpersonal conflict was so prevalent, Jesus knew that we needed a new way of “being with” each other. In a world of infidelity and betrayal and abandonment, forgiveness is our only hope for relationship.

Forgiveness actually brings the pain--- the wound, the offender--- front and center. To a place where they cannot be ignored. They must be confronted.

Forgiveness is the difficult work. It starts with the, "*I don't want to*". Forgiveness is not some emotional tactic we use to avoid/ignore the pain. It actually requires that we name it with some particularity ("*I forgive everyone who has ever hurt me!*") Those types of prayers are far too ambiguous. You don't have to see a face. Name a name. Say "no" to an injustice.)

Forgiveness itself is a form of suffering, but it accomplishes what hatred and retaliation could not: the potential for a change of relationship between victim and perpetrator.

Jesus says that we cannot say that we really "know" God's forgiveness and simultaneously be a people who keep lists.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you." Ephesians 4:32

"... make allowances for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." Colossians 3:13

When it comes to injustice...

... forgetting is better than remembering.

"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more". Isaiah 43:25

Forgetting comes naturally... remembering no more is a refusal to continue to rehearse past wrongs; to continue to use the wrong as "leverage".

... wholeness is better than brokenness,

... the experience of love is better than isolation.

What surprises us, here, is not the brokenness of humanity, but the response of God: "... and he was grieved by their misery" (10:16). **God hates what sin does to us!**

In Jesus, the suffering soul and the suffering God meet.

"He was despised and rejected--- a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief... by his wounds, we were healed". Isaiah 53

Jesus, rather than condescend with his cosmic list of our human failure, has actually chosen to be the 'reconciler'... to take upon himself all of the ways that we think God has offended us and actually engender a better response from us, based on his kindness.

We are to, then, assume our role as 'servants of reconciliation' (2 Corinthians 5), helping people find their way back to God as we demonstrate the wholeness of restored relationships in the ways that we are together in the world.

"Are you able to name a name? Can you identify an injustice that you suspect is taking root?"

"Are you able to identify any unhealthy response-patterns or emotions that may be connected to rejection?"

"Who needs today what only you can provide them: forgiveness?"