

Faithful Again

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 00] My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome to those of you who are visiting.

We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we are trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good.

They don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has for us in His Word. We're continuing our series in the book of Judges, and you'll remember that the book of Judges is about a number of things.

It's about the need for constant renewal and revival among God's people. It's about the need for a true and faithful king, a king who can do what no human can do, which is to change.

The hearts of men. It's about the power of spirit-filled leadership. And it's about God's mercy to hard-hearted people, people like you and me.

[1 : 09] This morning, we are beginning the Jethwa story. We're going to spend the next three weeks looking at this particular judge. And if you're familiar with the story, you know that this is one of the most challenging passages in all of Scripture to interpret, and even more than that, to understand.

And in fact, it is the most shocking story that we have seen so far in Judges. I won't say it's the most shocking story in Judges. That's going to be reserved for very late in the book.

But it is, in fact, the most shocking we've seen so far. And we find here a lesson, a warning of the danger of living in a pagan culture and playing with pagan idols.

A warning of what we saw Israel doing in our passage last week as we finish Judges chapter 10.

And so with that, I invite you to turn with me to Judges chapter 11.

You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

[2 : 17] And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now Judges chapter 11, starting at verse 1. Now Jethwa the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute.

Gilead was the father of Jethwa, and Gilead's wife also bore him sons. And when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jethwa out and said to him, You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.

Then Jethwa fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and worthless fellows collected around Jethwa and went out with him. Verse 4. After a time, the Ammonites made war against Israel.

And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jethwa from the land of Tob. And they said to Jethwa, Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites.

But Jethwa said to the elders of Gilead, Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress? And the elders of Gilead said to Jethwa, That is why we have turned to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

[3 : 42] Jethwa said to the elders of Gilead, If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites and the Lord gives them over to me, I will be your head. And the elders of Gilead said to Jethwa, The Lord will be witness between us if we do not do as you say.

So Jethwa went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And Jethwa spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah.

Verse 12, Then Jethwa sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, What do you have against me that you have come to me to fight against my land?

And the king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jethwa, Because Israel on coming up from Egypt took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan. Now therefore restore it peaceably.

Jethwa again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said to him, Thus says Jethwa, Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites.

[4 : 47] But when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom saying, Please let us pass through your land.

But the king of Edom would not listen. And they sent also to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. Verse 18, Then they journeyed through the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon.

But they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was not the boundary of Moab. Israel then sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Ammonites, king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, Please let us pass through your land to our country.

But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel. Verse 21, And the Lord, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them.

So Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites who inhabited that country. And they took possession of all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan.

[6 : 07] So then the Lord, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel. And are you to take possession of them? Will you not possess what Chemosh, your God, gave you to possess?

And all that the Lord our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess. Verse 25, Now are you any better than Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab?

Did he ever contend against Israel, or did he ever go to war with them? While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aror and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, 300 years, why did you not deliver them within that time?

I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The Lord, the judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.

But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jethpah that he sent to him. Verse 29, And the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jethpah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead.

[7 : 18] And from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. And Jethpah made a vow to the Lord and said, If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

So Jethpah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the Lord gave them into his hand. And he struck them from Aror to the neighborhood of Mineth, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-Kiramam with a great blow.

So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you again. And that you remind us not only of what's encouraging, but what's discouraging. You tell us the truth. You tell us what's good and what's hard. We ask that you would help us this morning as we look at this challenging passage, that you would speak clearly through your Word, that most of all we would see your grace, and we would see our Lord Jesus in his beauty, in his glory, and his mercy.

We ask all these things in his mighty name. Amen. If you were to rank the greatest rappers of all time, which I'm sure many of you do regularly, Tupac Shakur would be one of, if not the best, of all time.

[8 : 57] He's known for his tragic death at age 25 in 1996. And he had a hard early life. He was raised by a single mom with an addiction to crack cocaine.

And so he's known for these famous words. He says, Which is Tupac's way of saying that there are unfortunate circumstances that do really shape us.

And we might say the same thing about Jethro here in this passage. He didn't choose the outlaw life. The outlaw life chose him.

The first thing we find out in verse 1 is that he is a mighty warrior. This is going to prove important in this story. But he's not just a mighty warrior.

The other important thing we need to know is that he is the son of a prostitute. That helps us understand what happens next in verse 2 when he becomes an outcast. He's not without resources, though.

[10 : 01] We find out in verse 3 that Jethro has enough charisma and power to attract a group around him, even if this group is made up of worthless men.

In fact, we can combine verses 1 and 3 to see that Jethro is what we would call an alpha male. Jethro knows how to fight. He's clearly a leader.

He has this charisma and this power. He has his own gang, his own crew. If Jethro were to drive up 115 and walk into Vasa this afternoon to get in his workout, heads would turn.

Okay, Jethro is a leader. He's a fighter. And yet he has been cast out by his brothers out of their own greed, their own desire to have the inheritance of their father for themselves.

Things change quickly, though. Verse 4, the Ammonites come and make war with Israel. You'll remember from last week, chapter 10, verse 7, we were told God had sold Israel into the hands of the Ammonites and the Philistines.

[11 : 09] And so this is simply that prediction coming true. The Ammonites are now coming, just as God has said. He's sold them into their hands. Jethro is going to deliver them from the Ammonites.

And then later, we're going to come to Samson, who will deliver them from the Philistines. They perhaps begin to regret their decision to cast out Jethro because now what they actually need is a strong man.

And so in verses 5 and 6, the elders of Gilead, they go down to the land of Tob because they want to retrieve Jethro. They don't want to simply just retrieve him. They also make him this offer, you can be our number one leader.

They have this funny exchange in verses 7 through 8 where Jethro says, basically, why are you coming to me now that you're in distress? And their answer is, yes, we're coming to you now because we are in distress.

We didn't need you then, we need you now. The need is great, and what would be really good is if we had a mighty warrior.

[12 : 22] And so Jethro is presented with this opportunity, verses 8 through 10, to go from an outcast to be the head of all Gilead. And we're told all of this to underscore and underline one thing, hard times call for hard men.

And Jethro is nothing if not a hard man. Jethro is exactly who they want in this moment.

At the leader that he is, Jethro immediately jumps into action and he starts negotiating with the Ammonites who have come to come against Israel.

And he has this long land dispute in verses 12 through 28. We're not going to go into all the details of that land dispute because ultimately they don't help us understand the main thrust of this passage, except that they help us see that Jethro is a great negotiator.

He is not just good in strength, he's good with his words, which will turn to be his downfall. The main thing we need to know from the negotiation is that it fails, and so it is time for Israel to go to battle.

[13 : 42] Verse 28, the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jethro that he sent to him. And so, so far everything is going great.

Jethro has had this sort of background to prepare him for this moment in the history of God's people. Verse 29, the spirit of God comes upon Jethro, which is a fulfillment of the promise from Judges chapter 2.

Remember God says, chapter 2, verse 18, that when he chooses a judge, his spirit is going to be upon them. And so we should see only positive things at this moment as God is using the right man at the right time to come and rescue and deliver his people.

Until we get hit with verses 30 and 31. Everything is great for Jethro until he opens his mouth.

Jethro makes what he's most famous for, which is his fateful vow. And it's not clear at this point in the story. We're going to have to wait till next week to see how it all unfolds.

[14:55] But essentially, Jethro vows a human sacrifice. Hey, I'm going into battle. What do I need to make sure? What do I need to secure and guarantee?

Well, I need to secure and guarantee victory in God's favor. How am I going to do it? Well, I'm going to offer him the most valuable thing I can offer. I would be willing to sacrifice another person for God.

There have been various attempts by commentators to explain this passage away. You know, maybe Jethro intended it to be an animal that was coming out. Maybe Jethro was vowing he thought his favorite dog, you know, Fido, was going to run out to him to greet him on his way out. The problem, of course, is that's a very modern way of thinking about animals. The other problem is this. Verse 31 tells us what he vows. Then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me.

This is person language here. This is human language. Who comes out of the doors of a house to meet someone victorious in battle? Well, you're not keeping your sacrificial animals in your house.

[16:07] No, it's going to be the women who have stayed behind while you went out to battle. It is people, not animals, that come out of the house to greet the victorious warrior.

Verse 31 also, we can't get around this. He says, I will offer it up for a burnt offering. This is, again, sacrifice language. Jethro is thinking to himself, okay, how am I going to make this happen?

How are we going to have the victory that we need? How will I end up being head over all Gilead? I know I'll seal the deal.

I will make God an offer he cannot refuse. Of course, the problem is this. Deuteronomy chapter 12. God says, do not be like the other nations. Don't do the things that are an abomination like human sacrifice.

[17:13] This is the practice of the nations around you. It is not your practice. This is what the pagan people do.

It is not what my people do. And so there's a shock for us here as readers. What is going on here? Wasn't it just last week, right, that God's people had truly repented and turned back?

Remember, we were told they put aside the foreign gods and they worship the true God. Shouldn't everything be good now then? If they've truly repented, if they have made a heart change, if they've turned back, why is Jephthah suddenly making this move?

Well, in one sense, yes, they have turned back to the true God. Jephthah does not offer a human sacrifice to the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

He doesn't offer it to the pagan gods. No, he's putting this great offer for Yahweh, the one true God. So what's the problem?

[18:24] The problem is this. Jephthah relates to the one true God as if he was a pagan God.

Jephthah relates to the one true God as if he was one of the pagan gods. And so the point is this. Eighteen years of worshiping pagan gods cannot be undone in one day. Eighteen years of serving the nations around them has deeply affected the patterns, the mindset, and the lifestyle of God's people.

Yes, they are worshiping God and they are thinking like pagans. Yes, they have turned back.

And the residue of their former life is still on them. Their hands are still sticky from worshiping the gods of the other nations.

[19:45] The beliefs and the behaviors and the values of the world around them are pushing in on them. The way the world acts is the way they copy.

And so in the midst of this attempt of spiritual renewal, as they are trying to return to Yahweh, the true God, we cannot miss this complex of deep evil and corruption within Israel.

What is it that's happening in verse one, except that Gilead, presumably a leader here, is having a child by a prostitute. His sons then proceed to cast out their brother on basis of pure greed.

Verses five through 11, the people of Gilead treat Jephthah just like they treated God. We're only interested in you when we need you. And now this, the cherry on top, Jephthah thinks it's a good idea to offer a human sacrifice.

And so the warning for God's people here in the book of Judges is the same warning for us.

[21:04] Yes, we worship the one true and living God. And we are still tempted to live out the values of the pagan world around us.

Yes, we come on Sunday and sing God's praises. And Monday through Saturday, the world is calling us to live by its values.

We know that following Jesus means taking up our cross and following him. And then we turn around and live our lives as if they are primarily about pleasure and comfort.

Yes, God tells us that it's his glory that matters. And yet, we still hunger and work for fame and recognition and power and the thanks and praise of men.

Yes, we come on Sunday and worship the God of generosity. And then we have the same thirst and greed for wealth as the world around us.

[22 : 19] God tells us that our sexuality is something that's expressed between one man and one woman who are married to each other. And then we turn around and we use our sexuality in all other different ways outside of that.

We worship the God who tells us that people who stir up division in a community are an abomination. And we still choose the world's tactics of gossip and innuendo and lies.

Judges reminds us of the need for constant renewal and revival among God's people. Judges warns us that the values of the world are constantly pressing in on us.

That as we come back week after week to remind ourselves of what's true, we're also constantly being told what's false.

We live in a constant battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. And so you'll see this in the back of your worship guide from Kurt Thompson.

[23 : 45] We can imagine that once we are introduced to Jesus, he has us, and that's that. We forget that evil has no intention of permitting us to follow Jesus undisturbed.

And even though God is not at war with us, evil is. Jethro is still deep in the battle with evil.

He's still affected more than he realizes by the ways of the world around him. He still thinks that God is just another pagan deity.

And so that's why he heads towards human sacrifice in this passage. That's what the pagan gods want. That's what the one true God must want.

That's what works with the pagan gods. That's how you get victory from them. That's what must work with Yahweh. That's what must earn victory from him as well. And so he makes the mistake of thinking that God is a God who can be bought off.

[24 : 58] This is on page 9 of your worship guide. Jethro was not only infected by pagan moral codes, but also by the pagan works righteousness understanding of God's character. Human sacrifice was how you could buy off a pagan god.

And so Jethro has missed the logic and the goodness and the grace of the gospel.

In the gospel, the call is not for human sacrifice. The call is not that we would do enough that we could impress God, that somehow we could earn something from him.

No, the gospel provides human sacrifice. The gospel comes and tells us that God gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him will have eternal life.

God is the one who makes the payment for his people, not vice versa. When we pray to God, often you'll hear me say in a service, Hey, we can't earn anything from you or deserve anything.

[26 : 08] And so we simply ask this in Jesus' name. And we say that because it's true. We have earned nothing from God. We can buy nothing from him.

God does not ask Jethro to purchase his victory. He's already given it. God does not come for us asking for us to atone for our sins.

He atones for them. Jethro has forgotten. God's great grace. And that's the same grace we saw last week.

Remember, God's people turn away from their sins. And what does it say? It doesn't say God then had compassion on them as a result of their repentance. No, it says, He became impatient over the misery of Israel.

God had compassion on his people because he had compassion on his people. God remains faithful not because Jethro earned something or bought him off.

[27 : 18] God remained faithful because of God's promise and character. God remained faithful because of his steadfast love.

God's grace. God's grace. The steadfast love that the Jesus Storybook Bible calls his never-stopping, never-giving-up, unbreaking, always-and-forever love.

God's grace. God's grace. And so we see in this passage that very same grace. God's grace. Before Jethro makes this vow in verse 30, we've already seen it, verse 29, Then the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jethro, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh.

The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jethro. God had already given Jethro everything he needed for victory. God in his mercy and grace had already provided the strength and power that Jethro needed.

And then what do we see a few verses later? Verse 33, In the midst of Jethro's misguided and sinful vow, despite the deep evil and wickedness of his people, God is faithful again.

[28 : 56] Despite Jethro's foolishness, God shows up again. As things get worse in the book of Judges, and they will, God will show up again.

Christian, that is your hope as well. As the church struggles forward, stumbling as we follow our Lord Jesus, God's grace remains.

God continues to be faithful to his people. In fact, Scott already read it for us this morning in our New Testament reading on page 3, verse 13 of 2 Timothy 2.

Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we praise you that you are faithful and we are not. Oh, we thank you that you stick with us, your people, even though we don't deserve it.

[30 : 15] We thank you most of all for your provision in Christ, your son and our Savior, who is the sacrifice that earns everything for us. We don't come to you with bribes or better behavior, ways to impress you or to put you in our debt.

We know that we can't, we haven't, and we won't. Instead, we hope and hope alone in your son, our Lord Jesus. We ask these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.