

Renewing Our Minds

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. 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 if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're 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 to say to us in his word.
- We're continuing this morning 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.
- [1 : 0 9] And it's about God's grace to hard-hearted people. People like you and me. We're picking up this week in the middle of the story of the book of Jethwa.
- I told you last week that this is one of the most challenging stories in all of Scripture to both understand and interpret. And we began last week with Jethwa arising as this judge who was coming to rescue God's people from the Ammonites.
- And everything was going great until the moment that he vowed a human sacrifice to earn somehow God's favor. And so you'll remember we talked about the fact that 18 years of serving foreign gods can't be undone in one day.
- The tragedy unfolds again this week as we see the conclusion. And once again we are faced with the necessary, the essential reality for God's people to constantly be formed and transformed by his word.
- And we're reminded of a tragedy that happens when we're not. So with that I invite you to turn with me now to Judges chapter 11.
- [2 : 2 4] We're going to start at verse 34. 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. And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.
- And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 34. Then Jethwa came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances.
- She was his only child. Besides her, he had neither son nor daughter. And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, Alas, my daughter, you have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me.

For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow. And she said to him, My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord. Do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.

[3 : 37] So she said to her father, Let this thing be done for me. Leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.

Verse 38. So he said, Go. Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains.

And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again that you haven't abandoned us.

You haven't left us as orphans in a merciless universe, but instead, you come as a good father. You instruct us and guide us in your word. And we ask that you would do that very thing this morning, and that you would pour out your Holy Spirit here in this room on us in a special way, and that as we look at your word, you would open our eyes, that we would be able to understand it, to see it, to believe it, that you would use it to shape us, to form us, to change us.

[5 : 07] And most of all, we ask that you would show us Jesus, that we would see his beauty more and more, and that that would cause us to change, to look more like him.

And we ask all of these things in his mighty name. Amen. Now, last week, we left off the story of Jephthah with a little bit of a cliffhanger.

You'll remember in verses 30 and 31, Jephthah made this shocking vow that he was going to provide God with a human sacrifice, a burnt offering, if God would simply give him victory against the Ammonites.

The tragedy, of course, is that God's Spirit was already on Jephthah when he made this promise, and so it reminded us of this fundamental misunderstanding that he had of God and his ways.

Now, as we return to the story, the question that's looming is this, who is going to greet Jephthah? Remember, his vow was that the person who came to greet him would be the sacrifice.

[6 : 12] And so the tensions, in a sense, could not be higher for us. We're meant, as readers, to be on the edge of our seats as Jephthah returns home from his victory against the Ammonites.

And we don't have to wait long to find out what happens. We're met with this dramatic irony, this contrast between the stakes of the story and the joy that we see from his daughter as she comes out.

She's coming to greet him, this is verse 34, with tambourines and with dances. And so she thinks there's this great moment of celebration, but what she doesn't know is what we of the readers are already tracking with.

She is going to be the one to be sacrificed. As if that was not bad enough, the narrator ratchets it up again for us.

It is not simply that it's Jephthah's daughter who comes out to greet him, but it is his only daughter. We're told that not once, but twice to drive it home.

[7 : 15] She was his only child. Besides her, he had neither son nor daughter. We discussed last week the fact, some commentators point out, who would we expect to greet Jephthah but the women of his house who are coming to applaud him for his victory.

They're grateful he's returned, right? And so Jephthah, maybe he's hoping that this is going to be some sort of servant. Maybe he's hoping that the stakes are going to be low. Instead, they're as bad as they could be.

And so I want us to pause for a moment and not miss the tragedy that this is. We were set up in verses 30 and 31 that something, someone was coming.

Someone from Jephthah's household would be the sacrifice. And in the gamble that he's made, Jephthah could not lose more.

Now, as modern people, we might immediately turn to sentimental reasons that Jephthah's filled maybe with love for his daughter and this sort of fatherly affection for her and that's the great loss that's confronting him.

[8 : 34] But we cannot overlook the greater issue that's at play here for him, which is this. It's the issue of bloodline. Why is it so tragic that it's not just his daughter, but his only daughter?

Jephthah's future has just been erased. Why is Jephthah so upset?

Well, we're told multiple times that his daughter is going to grieve her virginity. In other words, Jephthah will have no grandchildren.

Jephthah's line is going to stop with him. Seeing that tragedy helps us understand the way that he behaves in verse 35.

Of course, Jephthah tears his clothes. What could be worse? Why is it that Jephthah seems more upset for himself than for his daughter?

[9 : 44] He seems kind of selfish here. Verse 35, he almost is blaming her, right? You have brought me very low. You have become the cause of great trouble to me. Jephthah's more upset for himself than for his daughter because his future is no more.

Remember the promise he was made last time. Look, if you're victorious, if you're able to conquer the Ammonites, you're going to be the ruler of all of Gilead. And all of that is for nothing.

What is it worth to be the ruler of Gilead if there's not a next generation? What is it worth to have power and influence and control when there's no one to share it with?

What is it worth for him to have a great reversal from the one who was cast out because his mother was a prostitute if there's no one to pass it down to?

And so there's this tragic irony in Jephthah's story. We're reminded of the Old Testament principle that the punishment does indeed fit the crime. Jephthah is looking by this vow to somehow convince God to help him so that he can secure his future, his reputation, and his power.

[11 : 12] And that very future reputation and power is what he has just lost. None of it is worth anything if his daughter is dead.

Amen. The story continues in verses 36 and 37. His daughter simply tells him, look, you've vowed it, so I guess you have to do it.

I just have one request. Can I have two months? Can you stay the execution for that long so I can grieve with my friends? Now Jephthah says yes, and so she goes, and we're told specifically she is mourning her virginity, which is a way of saying that her dream that she might have had of having a family is never going to materialize.

Jephthah's grieving the end of his bloodline. We could say that his daughter is doing the same. And then verse 39, it happens.

Jephthah told us, he told God he was going to have a burnt sacrifice. We're told in these very simple words, verse 39, Jephthah did with her according to his vow that he had made.

[12 : 31] And so we're left as the reader to sit in how bad things have become in Israel. And in case we've missed the point, we're told one more time, verse 39, she had never known a man.

In case we missed it, Jephthah's line is over. Everything that he fought for and sacrificed for is for nothing.

And so as the readers, Israel coming to this, we're just left sitting here. The narrator doesn't provide any further explanation. There's a real lack of detail and suddenly we just move on to the next part of the story.

There's this tragedy here that meant to speak for itself. The question we're left sitting with is this. Why?

Why did it have to end this way? Why is this the path that the story took? It seems senseless, irrational, unnecessary.

[13 : 51] I mean, just basic things from the Old Testament should have stopped this. We talked last week about Deuteronomy chapter 12, which says human sacrifice is an abomination.

God hates it. That's what the pagan nations do. That's not what his people do. Now you might come back and say, well, God also hates someone not keeping a vow. But then we see Leviticus chapter five provides a way out.

It says, hey, if you break a vow, here's how you can make sacrifices to atone for it. In other words, there's a clear path out of this for Jethro. He doesn't have to proceed with the sacrifice.

There is a way for him to escape. Breaking a vow is bad. It's nowhere as bad as sacrificing your daughter. Jethro could easily have turned a different way.

Why did he not? The fundamental problem is this. Jethro did not know God's word.

[14 : 58] Jethro was shaped more by the nations around him and their gods than by the true God.

And as big as a problem as that might seem, there's an even bigger problem. No one around Jethro knew God's word either. His daughter's out mourning for two months, right?

That's plenty of time for counselors and advisors and priests to come to Jethro and say, look, you don't have to do this. It doesn't have to end this way.

God hates this. He's provided a way out. And so the silence is deafening. This is how bad things have gotten in Israel.

This is how far away God's people have moved from God's word. It is possible to return to God, to truly want to worship him as Israel did.

[16 : 07] Remember, the end of chapter 10, and yet be so fundamentally ignorant of his ways.

It's possible to have a sincere desire to serve God and yet not know the way he calls us to walk.

A friend of mine who's a pastor told me a story of his from a few years ago. He was visiting his brother and his sister-in-law, and his sister-in-law had just become a Christian, and she was so excited about what she was learning about Jesus and about her faith that she was just eager to share it with her whole community and her friends.

And since her brother-in-law was coming to visit and he was a pastor, she thought, I'm going to ask him for some advice. How can I do better at sharing the gospel? Because it just, it seems to be so challenging.

And so my friend asked her, he said, okay, tell me about some of the challenges that you're facing. And she said, well, it was just hard to share the gospel because it was so loud.

[17 : 19] Because we had all gone out together to the strip club. And so just the volume was so high, you know, it was hard for me to share. And it was also hard because it was late at night, it was 2 a.m., and like I was trying to formulate thoughts to share with them, but I was also a little drunk, you know?

And so it was hard for me to kind of speak clearly and get the thoughts out that I wanted. So my friend's sitting there, right, like, what do I say? Yeah, I can see how being at the strip club and being drunk would make it hard to share about Jesus.

On the one hand, right, he wants to come in. Wow, there's this great zeal for God and his ways, right? You're learning about Jesus and what he means for you, and you want to share it with others.

Like, I want to champion that and praise that. And on the other hand, you have so much to learn about sin, about what God calls us to, the way of life we're supposed to walk in.

That there are parts of the old life that still have a hold. Now, you'll see this on the back of your worship guide talking about Satan's devices in taking out the believers.

[18 : 35] It tells us this, Satan knows that a saint without a knowledge of the gospel is as vulnerable as an army without ammunition. Christian, do you have the ammunition you need?

Are you shaped by God's word? Are you shaped by the world outside? Knowing God's word is an element of what we've been talking about as the theme of Judges, this constant need for spiritual renewal and revival among God's people.

Why is it that we return every week to hear what God has to say to us in his word? Why is it that we gather as small groups in Bible studies throughout the week? It is this, because it shows us the path to life.

why do we pay careful attention to what God has to say to us? Because it protects us from great danger. Why do we listen?

Because the philosophies and the values of this world are not harmless. Learning from God and his word is not some sort of theoretical exercise that we do so we can be pleased with how much more we know.

[20 : 07] No, it is the way that we walk in life. It is the way that God protects us from horrific things that the world says are normal.

It is the way we prevent ourselves from drinking poison and pouring it out on others. The pagan culture around him has told Jethpah that death and destruction are normal and necessary.

Brothers and sisters, our culture tells us the same thing. Our culture also tells us that death and destruction are normal and healthy and necessary.

we have not moved beyond human sacrifice. Of course, it takes different forms in our world.

It could be the human sacrifice of abortion or euthanasia or assisted suicide. It is the mutilation and chemical castration of children that reminds us our culture is not that different.

[21 : 21] All those things to appease the gods of this world, the gods of convenience and ease and independence and autonomy. In fact, if you look at paganism, it always requires human sacrifice.

The more pagan the culture, the less sacred life is. God's word protects us from many other lies as well.

It protects us from the lie that the good life is one of consumption and pleasure and peak experiences. It protects us from the lie that we are autonomous and independent and we can redefine ourselves in whatever way we want.

it protects us from the lie that whatever we want is always more important than the community. It protects us from the lie that our identity and our peace comes from how we use our sexual organs.

we have to constantly push back on the world around us with the truth of God's word.

[22 : 42] It's why we read already from Romans chapter 12. John read it for us. This is on page 2 of your worship guide. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

we are constantly being told by the culture and the world around us what is good and bad, what is true and right, what is healthy and unhealthy.

And so we have to stand constantly with the truth of God's word. You'll see this on page 7 of your worship guide from C.S. Lewis.

Good philosophy must exist if for no other reason because bad philosophy needs to be answered. And if you live in this world, you know bad philosophy constantly needs to be answered.

That's why we talk about here at Shine Mountain the importance of robust discipleship. We want that to be a key focus for us as a church. how else are we going to be transformed by the renewing of our minds?

[24 : 02] How else are we going to walk in the path of life? How else are we going to know what is good and true and right? In John chapter 10, Jesus tells us two things.

He tells us he's the good shepherd and he also tells us he's the door. In other words, he's the one who protects and guides his sheep. He's the one who keeps them far away from danger and tells them where good things are.

In fact, he says this in verse 10, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

What do we see in the story of Jethpah if not the enemy coming to steal and kill and destroy? How is it that we have life and have it abundantly?

We find it in God's word. And of course, ultimately, we find it in our Lord Jesus. He's the one who says, I am the shepherd. I am the good door.

[25 : 10] 1 Corinthians chapter 1 tells us that Jesus is the wisdom of God. God in his word teaches us everything we need to know to have life.

He protects us from great danger. Christian, he protects you from great danger.

Will you be transformed by the renewing of your mind? God in his book, All the Light We Cannot See.

Anthony Doerr, the author, won the Pulitzer Prize in 2015. And in this book, he tells the story of two children living during the same years leading up to and during World War II.

One of the children is this young girl. His name is Mari Lohr. Marilor and her father. She lives in Paris and her father is a single parent. He has many challenges as many parents do.

[26 : 16] He has a particular challenge though which is that Mari Lohr is blind because of cataracts. Now her father wants her to know how to get around the city of Paris and how to navigate the world but of course that's challenging right because his daughter cannot see.

He loves his daughter though and so he wants to figure out a solution. How can I give her the tools that she needs to survive despite this challenge that she has? And so he comes up with the solution.

He builds this small detailed model of the streets of Paris around their homes. And he tells his daughter you need to run your hands along the models of the street so that you can learn how to find your way around in our neighborhood.

And so for months Mari Lohr is running her hands along the model that her father's built trying to learn every curve and corner of the streets around them.

Her father takes her out to practice. He'll move her around and then try to help her get back to their house so she knows how to return. At first she has little success but as they practice more and more she is able to navigate her way around the city of Paris.

[27 : 33] Brothers and sisters, our heavenly father has given us a model for how the world works. He means for us to run our hands over and over again so that we can find our way home.

Let's pray. Our father in heaven we do thank you and praise you that you give us life in your word. We ask that you would grow our love and our knowledge of it not for the sake of intellectual exercises or pride but that we could be protected from great evil and that we could follow you in great life.

We thank you that this life doesn't come through anything we've done, anything we've earned or deserved, but instead it comes through our Lord Jesus. So we ask these things in his name. Amen.