

“Hot Dog Faith: Jephthah” // Judges 10–12 // Broken Saviors #7

Introduction

For all you **type-A people** that have been obsessing about “*What happened to Judges? We weren’t done...*” — we are coming back to finish it up this summer.

- (By the way, if you’re in that category, **don’t ever worry**; I’m extremely type-A on that... I have to finish things... They say that Mozart was a perfectionist who had to have things finished... so his dad, who was something of a prankster, would wait until he son was in bed and he would go to the piano and start playing one of Mozart’s pieces and get right up to the end, and then leave off with some unresolved chord... because he knew Mozart would have to get up and go downstairs and finish it before he could go to sleep. I feel a little bit like that with sermon series, so... we return to Judges.

Judges 10... a lot of the stories in the book of Judges people know... Samson; Gideon; maybe even Deborah... Almost nobody knows the story of Jephthah here in Judges 10. **Because it is terrible.** I mean, terrible. It’s going to leave you feeling deeply unsettled. Disturbed.

- **Sometimes at night as Veronica and I are putting our kids to bed** I’ll start in on some story... not necessarily a Bible story, could be something from my past... and I’ll look over at Veronica and she’ll be shaking her head “no...” (We have different filters for what is appropriate for our kids at various ages...) Well, this story will not make for a great bedtime story for your 7 year old.

But 1st, I want to tell you about **hot dogs**... *Americans can eat them some hot dogs. On the 4th of July* alone, Americans consume 150 million hotdogs... they say that **if you lined them up end to end**, they

would stretch from where I’m standing to Sydney, Australia. Frankly, we love them.

If you have ever looked on the package where it tells you the contents of a hotdog, however, the first component you’ll notice is **“mechanically separated turkey,”** which the USDA defines as “a paste or batter-like poultry product manufactured by forcing turkey bones with attached edible tissue through a sieve under high pressure, a process called ‘advanced meat recovery.’” Mmm... *Advanced meat recovery.* Other ingredients include corn syrup, beef, salt, sodium phosphate, sodium erythorbate, sodium nitrate, and maltodextrin.

Now, that surely makes your mouth water... *I actually like hot dogs—the coaches at ITF have tried to get me to stop eating them, but why work out if you can’t eat whatever you want?*—but the point is: a hot dog is not pure meat, and many would say that is not good for you.

Many Americans build their faith like a cheap hot dog. They take a little bit of something from this, and mix it with a little bit of something from that, and the result is a concoction that you can hardly call Christian... which is more than simply bad for you; it is spiritually toxic.

That’s what you’re going to see with Jephthah today... he’s got a little bit of the meat of Christian faith, mixed with a whole lot of the sodium nitrate and maltodextrin of his culture.

Jephthah: Judges 10–12

10:6 The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him. If you were counting, **7 gods** are listed. That’s the **number of completion** in Hebrew, which is to say that Israel has *completely* abandoned God. This is the lowest they’ve fallen thus far!

7 So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites, 8 and they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year.

- Now, this is a familiar pattern—the Israelites serve false gods and they end up in slavery. **But here the author presents a twist:** the Israelites cry out for deliverance to the very gods that have enslaved them.
 - The Ammonites are the ones who enslave them, and they are crying out to the gods of the Ammonites to save them!
- Here's what is being taught: *It's not just that idolatry leads to enslavement; enslavement leads to more idolatry.* When sin enslaves you, you often try to find deliverance by going harder after the very thing that enslaved you in the first place.
- **Now, let me stop for a minute...** some of you think, *"What does that have to do with me? I don't worship any idols. And I'm not anything's slave."*
 - **Great question... This is a really important point:** an idol in the Bible is not just a statue to which you bow down; an idol is whatever you anything to for **power and joy and significance** apart from God.
 - For e.g... some people think, "If I have **success...** then I'll have power and security and safety and joy."
 - If I **achieve some academic** recognition...
 - Or **because I have some talent**, or gift (like my intelligence)... or **money**; or beauty... or maybe it's in being athletically fit...
 - And you think, *"This is what gives me power and joy and significance."*
- Those **things are all fine in themselves**, of course, but when you **look to them instead of God** for power and joy and significance, they enslave you...
- And **what do I mean by that?**
 - You feel like you **can never be happy until you have it...** so you'll do anything to get it...

- Or you **obsess about not having it...**
- And when and if you do get it, you **never feel like you have enough...** or you are **always worried** about losing it...
- And so you **make really destructive choices** to hang on to it or get more of it... **I need more money**, so I'll work until destroy my family... or I'll cheat... I need a **satisfying relationship**, so I'll leave this family to find another... I **have to be beautiful** to have power and significance and joy so I'll starve my body to reach a certain size and hate myself when I'm not there...
 - William James, postmodern philosopher... "Success is a b**** goddess... no matter what you give her, she demands more."
- **Have you ever stopped to consider, maybe the idol itself is wrong?** Maybe you have chosen the wrong thing in which to find power or joy or significance?
 - **Maybe the reason you are unhappy in love** is not because you haven't found Mr. Right, but because ultimate happiness wasn't found in him anyway.
 - **Maybe the reason your spouse complains** that you're not the same now that you are successful... that she doesn't enjoy being married to you even though you make lots of money... is because **you have become its slave** and it has changed you!
- **Jer 2:13**, "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."
 - Clearest description of sin in the Bible. Sin is two-fold. **Rejecting God, and then replacing God.**
 - Life becomes about desperately digging another cistern! This new **relationship**. This **SAT score**! This **achievement**. This **level of income**. This **size church**.
 - Dig, dig, dig. Deeper deeper deeper. There's got to be permanent water here somewhere. IT'S THE WRONG WELL!

10 And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, “We have sinned against you, because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals.” 11 And the Lord said to the people of Israel... “You have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore I will save you no more. 14 Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress.”

- For the first time in Judges, God says “no.” Why?
- It’s **one thing for the wayward prodigal** to come home in repentance (God will always receive someone like that.) But imagine a wife who is serially unfaithful pleading for her husband’s security and provision just until she finds someone else to take her on.
- These people don’t want God for God; they are just in pain and want somebody, anybody, to make it stop.
 - There has been **no change of heart toward God**; this is a ‘let me **use** you to get out of trouble.’
- **Very important:** It is possible to come to God in an idolatrous way...
- You have to evaluate: **Are you using God, or are you worshipping God?** What happens... you get in a jam, you get scared, you call out on God... danger passes.
 - People say, “What happened to his faith?” It was never real to begin with!
 - You weren’t worshipping God; you were using God, like the unfaithful wife who uses her husband’s security so she can seek other lovers.

15 And the people of Israel said to the Lord, “We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day.” 16 So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord...

- Well, believe it or not, they get it. *See how different what they said in vs. 15 is from what they said in vs. 10?*
 - In vs. 10, they say, **we want peace from you.**

- In vs. 15, they say, “**We want peace with you**, even if it continues to mean trouble for us here.... (We’d rather not have trouble, of course, but having you is the essential part.)”
- **That’s true repentance.** I don’t care if life gets easy or hard; I just want you.
 - Some people talk as if when you come to Christ **your life gets easy**... my marriage turned awesome; my boss gave me a raise; I discovered oil under my house... That’s not always, or even usually, the way it works.
 - **In Scripture, God routinely lets people go through trouble as they are coming back to him** (a friend calls it ‘TRAIN WRECK’ conversion)¹ **to see if they really want him for himself**, or are just trying to use him they way a prostitute uses a man for money.

Well, they genuinely repented, **...and the Lord became impatient over the misery of Israel.** I love that phrase. It shows you how God feels about his people... He hurts with them. He says enough, and Jehovah rises to his feet.

Chapter **11:1** Now Jephthah was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. Gilead, Jephthah’s father, had many other sons. 2 And when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, “You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of a prostitute.” 3 Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out with him.

- Jephthah was a rejected man; driven out by his own brothers.
- Flees to a far away land and worthless men (thugs) gather around him. where he becomes a kind of crime boss, a land pirate.

¹ Rosaria Butterfield

4 (but) After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. 5 And so the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah back, and said, "Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites."

- This reminded me of 24 where they go back to Jack Bauer and say, "We don't really like you but we need you to fight the terrorists!"

7 But (So Jack Bauer) Jephthah 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?"

- Jephthah responds just like God did: "You don't really want me. You just want to use me."

And so, vs. 8, they say, "No, no. We're really sorry this time! If you come home, you can be in charge. You can head of CTU, or president, or whatever you want."

And so Jephthah **agrees** and says, "I'm taking my talents back to Cleveland."

At first, **he tries diplomacy** with the Ammonites. He **says to the king**, "Why are you attacking us?" The King of the Ammonites says, "Because you took my land." Jephthah responds to him with **3 points of reasoning**, which are all pretty good.

1. It was **actually the Amorites' land** that we took, not yours... your name was never on the title deed, so get off your high horse...
2. And, #2, **we were simply responding to their aggression** against us when we passed through their land. **They attacked us** and we kicked their tail and so we kept their land, because God had given it to us anyway (11:14–19)
3. **If this land is really a gift from your god Chemosh**, then why don't you use his power to come over here and get it? (11:24)

And they said, "OK, we're coming."

30 And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 31 then whatever comes out from the

doors of my house to greet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the Lord gave them into his hand.

34 Then Jephthah 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. 35 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."

36 And she said to him, "My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; so 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." 37 So she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me first: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions." 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. 39 And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made.

- Some of you just thought... did *Game of Thrones* plagiarize this storyline? Whether or not you should be watching Game of Thrones I'm not going to address in this sermon. The answer is "no."

Sometimes commentators try to soften what happened here. They say ...

1. **Well, Jephthah must have expected an animal to come out first.** (But animals wouldn't have been kept in the house, so that wouldn't make sense; and the word "greet" he uses (in vs. 31)

definitely connotes a human encounter. He was thinking human sacrifice.

2. Or they say that **Jephthah didn't actually kill his daughter**, sacrificing her just meant that she had to stay unmarried for the rest of her life. Well, if that is true, why the two month hiatus? That makes no sense.) He **obviously intended and carried out** human sacrifice, he just expected the first one out of his house to be one of his many servants or comrades-in-arms.²

A couple of questions I want to consider. First: Why did Jephthah make this vow? 2 reasons

1. **This is how you pleased pagan gods.** You offered sacrifices to gain their favor, and the greater the sacrifice, the greater favor you could earn from your god!
 - God never, ever puts this out as a requirement to get his attention or favor. In fact, he downright forbids it in Deut 18:10, *"There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering..."*
 - (You say, "What about Abraham?" That was a test of his faith and obedience; this is an attempt by Jephthah to pay God off... to negotiate with him. Totally different).
 - Here is what has happened: *Jephthah has mixed all kinds of sodium phosphates and poultry paste into his faith and come up with something that looks like the meat of faith but is really not it at all.*
2. **Because he was desensitized to violence...**
 - This was **just the way they did things**. Human life was **cheap** when it came to the idol of military dominance.
 - This seems **unspeakably horrific** to us, but that is just because violence is no longer our idol of choice.
 - Now, before you and I shake our heads in bewilderment, we commit similar excesses with our idols... and we don't wince nearly as much... For example...

- A **woman can tear apart her family and devastate her kids** because... *she finally realizes she married the wrong person and she needs to find true love and we say, "Well, she's just being true to herself."*
 - Let me talk about this... **our culture idolizes romantic and sexual fulfillment** to the point that anything you can sacrifice for it is ok so long as you fulfill that.
 - **For example, if I, an evangelical pastor,** decided I preferred sex with men, and left my wife and kids for another man... or that I wanted to become a woman... **I would be celebrated** as a national hero. I'd be on Ellen and Oprah... He's just being true to himself. It's the price you pay for true love. **That I just devastated my family** would be insignificant.
 - **What if true love means it's not about me anymore?** You can't wrap up self-idolatry that destroys other people and call that love.
- Or, **in another sphere, a man can neglect his wife** and kids in order to get ahead and we say, *"Well, that's just what it takes to survive in this business. You'll never succeed in the finance world unless you work till 9 every night and don't take days off."*
 - It's been **easy for me to justify the sacrifice** of an awful lot on the altar of ministry success... like Jephthah, I'm not doing your work, God... and if my relationships; family; integrity... has to pay the price. Well, I've got to do your work.
- Or, **someone in our culture gets pregnant at an inconvenient time** and so they eliminate the child in an abortion and we say, *"Well, only you have the right to determine what shape your life will take, and if having a kid right now will mess up your life, well... that's ok."*
- Before we shake our heads in bewilderment at Jephthah, we should realize that we're probably not as advanced as a culture as we think we are.

² Tim Keller, *Judges for You*, 118.

2nd question: Why did Jephthah keep his vow? Maybe you could excuse him for, in his zeal, saying something stupid... but after he saw it was his daughter? For 2 months he sat there and considered it and then went through with it...

- **He kept it for the exact same reason he made it.** He has no concept of the grace of God.
- **He felt like he had to earn God's favor,** the way you earn a pagan god's favor, by making sacrifices that guarantee it; and now he feels like if he doesn't keep his horrific vow, God will punish him.
- **But God doesn't give victory or favor or salvation** because we earn it... **"Not by works of righteousness** which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us." **He bore in his own body** the price for our peace, by his stripes we are healed.
- **Should Jephthah have kept his vow?** No! he should have said, "God, you never said you'd give me victory only if I sacrificed something... no, you give your people victory as a **gift of grace**... So instead of fulfilling this wicked vow in which I thought I could purchase your grace, I repent of making it in the first place; I repent of thinking there was something I could do to earn your favor, and I receive your grace for what it is, a gift!
- This is the gospel: You never have to make promises or sacrifices to God to earn his favor...
- You see, some of you come in here and say,
 - "OK, God, I'll give you this amount of money and then maybe you'll approve." And you throw your lunch money in and hope that buys you a little favor.
 - Or, you sit in here and make vows to God... I will never do this again...
- God's favor is GIFT! It's like the favor I give to my son or daughter. They don't earn it; they just receive it.
- **There is only one way to please God. Only one. Faith.** Faith in his grace, his lovingkindness toward you.
 - Eph 2:8–9. Not of works... not of your sacrifices!
 - We don't have to negotiate with God.

- There is only one deal God will ever make: His righteousness for your absolute surrender.

That is the pure "meat" of the gospel, with no poultry paste or maltodextrin mixed in.

Well, as tragic as this story is already, Jephthah's family troubles are just the beginning.

12 The men of Ephraim (his own countrymen) were called to arms, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house over you with fire."

- Jephthah, who had tried diplomacy with the Ammonites, isn't going to do that with his own people. He immediately calls his men to arms.

4 Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim.... 5 And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me go over," the men of Gilead said to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" When he said, "No," 6 they said to him, "Then say Shibboleth," and he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it right.

- Different parts of the Israel spoke with different accents. People from Ephraim couldn't make the Sh sound so saying "Sibboleth" was a sure sign they were from Ephraim.
- (Like us saying, "Say the word, 'Jesus.' If you say it in two syllables we know you are from the city. If you say it in four, Je...sus, we'll know you are from the countryside."

Well, when the person said it wrong... Then they seized him and slaughtered him there at the Jordan River... At that time 42,000 of the Ephraimites fell. *Jephthah killed 42,000 of his fellow countrymen.*

7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years. (Only six years. They had been oppressed for 18; this is the first time in Judges the deliverance is shorter than the oppression!) Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in his city in Gilead.

4 lessons:

1. We are far more influenced by our culture than we realize.³

- Jephthah didn't realize it, but a lot of his outlook on God and life were as shaped by the culture he was in as God's word... he ends up with a concoction of faith that was not Christian at all... a hot dog instead of a pure steak... and it ended up hurting a lot of people.
- **Where have you done this?**
- Christians tend to take different approaches to culture...
 - **Integrate uncritically...** like Jephthah
 - Others **reject altogether:** How I grew up... hair/dress/our own movies and music
 - **Enter, but critically...** affirm what we can; rebuke what we must.
- **And in order to do this...** you have to know the Word of God more than you know your culture.
 - Jephthah didn't know it, but he was more shaped by the pagan culture around him than he was the teaching of the Word of God... and it cost his daughter and 42,000 Israelites their lives.
 - Not **knowing your Bible... not being in small group...** has devastating effects... not just for you and your children, but everyone whose lives they will touch.
 - **Ps 119:105**
 - Bruce's book, *Every Square Inch*, at Next Steps...

Which leads me to...

³ Points 1 and 3 follow Tim Keller, *Judges for You*.

2. Our idolatry has devastating effects on those around us.

- The impurity of Jephthah's faith cost a lot of people, including his daughter, dearly.
- **My wife and I realize:** my idolatry effects you... and my kids
- **The idolatries we cherish in this country** have effects as devastating on others as Jephthah's was on his daughter...
 - Today, **1 of every 3 children grow up** in single parent homes, and only a fraction of those are the result of the death of a parent... most are because one of the parents, or both, decided their desires were more important than what was best for the family
 - In Wake County, there are 23 abortions every day
 - Our appetite for pornography has created a sex industry, where the average age of the girl who enters it is 13 years old.
 - In our country, 30 million, mostly teenagers, have been diagnosed with anorexia or bulimia, which happens, in part, because of how highly we have exalted the idol of a perfect figure⁴
- ***I say it again:* We are not as sophisticated as we think we are**
- **Practically: You should be as zealous for God to work in you as you are for him to work through you.**
 - You need to ask God to help you see the idolatrous blind spots... and know the word of God! Ps 119:105.
 - Because your idolatry, your blind spots, are going to end up burning those in your own household!
- **Yes, I ask God to use me.** But just as importantly, I ask God to keep revealing to me where idols have replaced him because the greatest gift I can give you is a heart fully devoted to God.

3. God's grace is a hard thing to grasp.

⁴ <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/107-children-in-single-parent-families-by#detailed/1/any/false/36,868,867,133,38/10,168,9,12,1,13,185/432,431>; <http://firstchoicenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Talking-Points-and-Statistics-1.pdf>; <http://www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/>

- Luther: hardwired... Gift righteousness.
 - Where I see it in my life... *When I come into church, I still think God accepts me more because of my righteousness!*
- **Religions in the world are divided** as to the best way to motivate people... Some choose the carrot/stick
- **That's hard to grasp...** Every religion in the world teaches... Obey/accept
- Though that doctrine is simple, it's hard for us to get... but it is life.
 - **CITY PROJECT: Martin Luther: "The law says 'do,' but it is never done** (not even when you've given up your own daughter; weariness); **the gospel says 'believe,' and it is already done** (joy; freedom)."⁵
- Where do you **not get this**? Where have you **added the sodium nitrate of works** into the **pure meat** of God's grace... that he receives you as a gift?
 - I **didn't have to offer my life, or my daughter's life**, on the altar to earn his favor, for he had already taken that spot.
- Jesus **didn't take us to the river Jordan** and threaten to kill us if we didn't say "Shibboleth" right; he took us to the cross and pronounced shalom and *salvation* over us.⁶
- **Jephthah believed we could only find favor with God through extreme sacrifices**; Jesus offered favor with God as a gift free to us, because the price had been paid by God himself in Christ.
 - Kid's definition: G-R-A-C-E
- Jephthah... was a savior of Israel, but a broken savior; and so he, like all the other judges, **points us to Jesus, the perfect Savior who was broken for the broken.**

The meat of Christianity... is the grace of God received as a free gift.

4. We need a better Judge

- A recurring theme in the book... **Jephthah was a savior, but a very broken savior**, and not the true Savior Israel needed. But **he presents to us a picture** of the true and better Judge that was coming...
- Like Jephthah, you see, **Jesus was driven** from his brothers. "He was despised and rejected of men."
 - But **unlike Jephthah**, we didn't have to call him back to come help us; **he ran back to save us** when he could bear our sufferings no longer.
- Jephthah **started his deliverance with diplomacy**, but when that didn't work he was not afraid to fight—killing not only thousands of Amorites but fellow Israelites as well, and even his own daughter.
 - Yet with Jesus, **when pleading did not work**, Jesus took the war into himself.
 - When it **came time to die, it was his life, not ours**, he took.

CONCLUSION

Faith in the grace of God is **the only way to health in Christianity.**

It's gospel all the way through. Faith in the finished work of the gospel is what Peter calls the pure milk and meat of God's Word...

God's acceptance is given as a gift... not as a reward for perfect righteousness, not as a response to our extreme sacrifices, but as a gift of righteousness from God for all who will simply admit how badly they need it and receive it for what it is, a gift of grace.

⁵ Martin Luther, Heidelberg Disputation

⁶ Special thanks to Jen Wilkin for her insight on this!