

Unity And The Example Of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Please turn with me to Judges 11 and verse 29 through 40. I begin with the question, how far would you go to save your children from danger and death?

How far would you go to save your children from danger and death? A car weighing over a ton falls onto a young child.

That child's mother, in her heightened emotion and sheer panic, does the physically impossible and lifts the heavy car up to free her child.

That God-given instinct to do whatever we can to protect our children from danger and death is one of the reasons we struggle so profoundly with the story of Jephthah's vow in Judges 11.

This is a shockingly tragic story. A father sacrifices his loving daughter on account of a thoughtless and frankly stupid promise.

[1 : 18] If we aren't shocked, appalled, unhorrorified by this story, we're either not reading it right or we're not capable of any human emotion.

Judges 11 doesn't make pleasant reading. But the thing is, it's not meant to. It's here in the Bible to shock, to horrify and to appall us.

That's how God wants us to react to it. He wants us to read the passage with a kind of sick feeling in our stomachs and the haunting question in our mind. Why, Jephthah?

Why sacrifice your own child? The Old Testament's full of stories like Judges 11, which seem so far away from the New Testament that they leave us scratching our heads in confusion.

This passage is a million miles away from Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. But then, could it be that we often read the Old Testament wrong?

[2 : 30] If it's true that we cannot understand the New Testament without the foundation of the Old Testament, then it's equally true that we cannot understand the Old Testament without the fulfillment of the New Testament.

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in other words just as Jesus is the focal point and center of the whole Bible we must ask of any story in that Bible Old Testament or new what does this teach me about Jesus when it comes to Jephthah's vow in Judges 11 if we read it in the light of Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of the Old Testament then the light of a fuller understanding begins to shine on this tragic episode and we begin to understand why God chose to include it in the Bible because this passage is above all things a messianic prophecy both in its positive and negative aspects let me suggest at least two aspects from this story which help us to glean a fuller understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ first of all a father's offering and secondly a foolish oath a father's offering a foolish oath now why is this sermon important for us today it's important not just because it gives us confidence in the word of God and because it stops us from being embarrassed by the trickier parts of the Bible to interpret like like this one but because ultimately this passage brings the gospel right up close to every one of us personally and removing it from mere intellectualism engages our hearts in loving and being loved by our Lord and

Savior Jesus Christ first of all then a father's offering a father's offering the story of Jephthah's vow is shocking it's appalling it's horrifying it's meant to evoke these emotions within us we can't coat it with sugar Jephthah having made his foolish vow sacrifices his daughter on the altar of his pride we meet it in verse 34 and she strikes us as utterly delightful she she loves her father she rejoices in the safety of his of her father and his victory over the Ammonites she runs out to meet him with tambourines and with dances she's so full of joy she's so full of the of the life of youth when she hears what her father has vowed as we read in verse 37 she dedicates herself to obedience and having spent two months with her friends submits to her father's sacrifice and in verse 39 we read at the end of two months she returned to her father who did with her according to the vow that he'd made and there comes a point at which we can't believe what we're reading frankly that a father never mind the leader of God's people should kill his own daughter it beggars belief it so it should this story spawned a custom in Israel that the young woman of Israel would spend four days every year mourning for the daughter of Jephthah the Geneva Convention would preclude us from treating enemy soldiers the way Jephthah treated his daughter he killed her he murdered her he sacrificed her he treated her the way that he would have treated a bull or a sheep or a goat that he was sacrificing now much ink has been spilled trying to deny that Jephthah carried out his oath but for all our denials it really does seem that he did kill his daughter his delightful child and you can't read this story but take a sharp intake of breath and have a sick feeling in your stomach it's so inhumane so unnatural during the reign of terror the Islamic State imposed upon many parts of Syria if civilians stepped out of line the job of executing them was often handed to a family member stories emerged of Syrian ISIS recruits shooting their own fathers and mothers and when we heard of these things in the media we were more determined than ever to get rid of the Islamic State and started to call it the death cult and rightly so but behind the tragedy of Jephthah's tragic vow there's an even deeper tragedy if the death of Jephthah's daughter at her father's hands shocks us appalls us and horrifies us as it should should the death of God's son at his father's hand not shock appall and horrify us even more the greatest tragedy in human history isn't that men driven by religious fanaticism can commit inhumane acts against one another but that the sacrifice of the son of God at the hands of his father should leave us so cold and apathetic that while the story of Jephthah's daughter should make us sick to the stomach we look at the death of the son of God upon the cross and we don't feel a

thing that's the line we're meant to draw from the story of Jephthah's daughter a line straight to the cross on which God the father sacrificed his own son a line that should sicken us to the core and cause us to recoil in disgust what on earth would motivate Jephthah to kill his own daughter what on earth would motivate God to kill his own son mothers lift cars weighing over a ton to save their infant children from being crushed but while Jesus was dying upon the cross God didn't lift a finger to save him in fact as we've read in another part of the Bible it was God the father who was doing the crushing Jeremiah who was the writer of the book of lamentations he asks a painful question is this nothing to you all you who pass by as if we're walking at the foot of the cross and looking up at Jesus is this nothing to you all that pass by what truly sickens us about the cross isn't the physical suffering Jesus was enduring but the fact that behind the suffering lay the crushing hand of the father he loved and Jeremiah says is this nothing to you all who pass by if the tragedy of Jephthah's daughter shocks us if it turns our stomachs then surely the tragedy of Calvary should shock us and horrify us even more for Jephthah in this story read God the father for Jephthah's daughter read Jesus it is here in Judges 11 where light is shed upon the gospel of God's love and grace toward us in

[10 : 39] Christ Jesus Calvary is the story of a father's sacrifice how awful we say how inhumane we say and again rightly so Judges 11 is included within scripture to evoke these emotions these emotions within us of recoil and repugnance of sorrow and anger which of us have we lived back in Jephthah's day we'd not have tried to stop him fulfilling his vow because the very thought of it turns our stomachs but over a thousand years later on a small hill outside the city of Jerusalem God the father did exactly the same to his son as Jephthah did to his daughter you know we all love Suraj Kasula or those of us who know him you can't know him and not love him our dear brother working for Christ in Nepal during his time with us as a student he accompanied me on a pastoral visit to a family where in his evangelistic zeal and you know how zealous

Suraj is he was talking very straight about the gospel to someone and trying to explain it and I'll never forget what he said he said at the heart of the gospel is the story of human sacrifice the heart of the gospel is the story of human sacrifice but shocking as it may seem Suraj was absolutely right at the heart of the Christian gospel we believe is the story of a father who sacrificed his only son on Roman cross what is there in this world that could cause us greater grief than the thought of the suffering of the son of God upon the cross if the story of Jephthah's vow makes us feel sick should not Calvary sicken us even more the bread and the wine of the communion are far from the cozy symbols of a safe religion they are the living reminders of human sacrifice and as such we cannot take them in without that sense of sickening tragedy being stirred up within us again against the backdrop of judges 11 with reference to the cross on which our beloved savior was crucified we want to ask Jeremiah's question is this nothing to you all you who pass by a father's offering but then secondly we have a foolish oath a foolish oath why did Jephthah make this vow to the Lord as we read in verse 30 if you will give the Ammonites into my hand and whenever 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'll offer it up for a burnt offering what did what did Jephthah think would be the first thing to meet him by coming out of the doors of his house a friendly cow a happy sheep a joyful goat was Jephthah thinking at all about what he was saying or was he just being a thoughtless fool only a human being and one close to him at that would want to come out of the doors of Jephthah's house to meet him on his return and again if Jephthah had been thinking surely he'd have known it would be the person happiest to see him upon his return his daughter yet he swore the oath regardless of its consequences why did he make that vow?

perhaps it was religious fanaticism because as we see only too tragically in our world today religion can be a force for good but it can also drive a man absolutely stark raving mad and make him do inhumane things I rather think it was a mixture of this religious fanaticism but also personal pride listen to the vow again if you will give the Ammonites into my hand there's ego here there's pride here the Lord giving the Ammonites into my hand upon which altar did Jephthah sacrifice his daughter upon the altar of personal pride and ego and what makes the oath all the more foolish is we're told in verse 34 that she was his only child beside her he had neither son nor daughter with the death of his daughter was the death of his line Jephthah had no descendants he sacrificed not just his daughter upon the altar of his foolishness but every potential descendant he may have had

Abraham was in the same situation in Genesis 22 when called to sacrifice Isaac if Abraham had sacrificed Isaac he would have had no godly descendants his family line would have come to an end and when it comes to Jephthah we have to ask the question who told him to make such a vow it wasn't God God never told him to make a vow like this this is the kind of practice the Ammonites against whom Jephthah was fighting engaged in they used to sacrifice their children and perhaps we can say Jephthah wasn't just motivated by personal pride and religious fanaticism but also by copying the religious practices of the nations around him because he certainly didn't get this oath or vow from God at every level we conclude Jephthah made a desperately foolish vow with desperately tragic consequences now while we can draw a direct positive line between Jephthah's sacrifice and Jesus' death we can draw another negative line as it were between Jephthah's vow and Jesus' death because the death of Jesus was the result of no foolish vow on the part of God the Father but it was the carefully considered and eternally loving plan of the Holy Trinity

God the Father Son and Holy Spirit before the universe was created the stars began to shine by oath God the Father promised salvation to his people and God the Son offered to be the sacrifice for their sin before the first human drew breath the Son promised to endure the curse of our sin and to suffer the righteous judgment of the Father to be crushed in our place to offer himself upon the cross to save us from our sin and shame hear the words of our Lord in John 6.38 Jesus said I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me and this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose none of all those that he's given me again hear the words of Jesus in John 10.17-18 for this reason the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again

[18:16] I have a thought no one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord I have authority to lay it down I have authority to take it up again this charge I receive from my Father and we ask Jesus what was your Father's will for you?

What charge did you receive from your Father? And it was that of his own accord Jesus the Son of God should voluntarily lay down his life for the sheep for his people for us see salvation's plan what the older theologians call the covenant of redemption made between Father and Son in the council of the Trinity that God the Son should by his death upon the cross earn salvation and win life for the people God had in his infinite eternal and unchangeable love chosen from all eternity to be his Jesus laid down his life not as a result of a foolish vow made in the heat of the moment but as the result of God's eternal and loving plan to save his people from their sins and adopt them as his children remember the old gospel hall hymn oh the love that draw salvation's plan oh the grace that brought it down to man oh the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary the cross was God's eternal salvation plan the loving grace of God that spanned the gulf between our sin and his holiness and the application here is very powerful

God must seriously love us if he was willing to give his one and only son to save us from our sins God must seriously love us if he was willing to crush his son on the cross to release us from the condemnation we deserved and adopt us as his sons and daughters the story used to be told of a man who worked on a railway bridge over a river and his job was to stand in the control box and to lift or lower the bridge with a lever one day he was told by radio that a train packed with people was approaching the bridge so he'd have to lower it and he thought nothing of it he'd done it hundreds of times before until he looked out of his control box and he saw a horrifying thing his infant son his only son was playing on the bridge and he knew that if he lowered the bridge his infant son would be crushed by the mechanism but if he didn't lower the bridge hundreds of people on that approaching train would be killed and so with tears in his eyes he pulled the lever and watched his son being crushed but all those people on the train were saved from death now this story is probably apocryphal that never happened but you get the point

God the father sacrificed God the son because he loved us so much let's think of who we are on the inside who we really are on the inside all the things we think all the shame and then realize it was for us God gave his delightful son and the son agreed to give himself for us what is our response to this astonishing and infinite love of a father like this again we go back to Jeremiah and Lamentations is this nothing to you all who pass by is the sacrifice of God the father nothing to us or is it enough to provoke faith and trust in his love for us well as we close there's one more feature of this story that deserves our attention it's that in

Hebrews 11 which contains the list of all the faithful including Abraham and Moses Jephthah is included we can hardly believe that such a foolish man should be included in a list containing the other heroes of the faith until we realize none of these heroes were any better than he was Abraham repeatedly passed off his wife as his sister Moses was a murderer and had a problem with anger David was another murderer an adulterer and a liar to boot Samson liked his woman too much Gideon had a tendency toward cowardice none of them were perfect they were all deeply flawed individuals Jephthah as we can see was a deeply foolish man to have made such a selfish and proud vow to God and a nasty to have carried it out here he is in Hebrews 11 he's in the list of faith and on one hand this shows us that the Bible unlike any other holy book in the world is true to life because every one of its main characters with the exception of Jesus is presented warts and all they're all sinners but on the other hand it shows us something even more wonderful it shows us the incredible grace of God

[24 : 41] God accepts and values fools and murderers liars and womanizers not on the basis of their works but on the basis of their faith in him because that's the point is it not for all of Jephthah's foolishness and pride he trusted in God and God counted it to him as righteousness God did this not because he didn't care about sin and unrighteousness and not because God's willing to overlook murder lying pride and anger as sins but because but because on the cross God laid all these sins on the shoulders of his son Jesus Christ who by an eternally wise and loving agreement bore God's judgment upon them God sacrificed his own son for our forgiveness forgiveness God sacrificed his own son for our forgiveness faith in Christ is the means by which God transfers the sins of our hearts onto the shoulders of

Christ and transfers the righteousness of Christ into our hearts that cross on which an infinitely loving father sacrificed his son is at the same time the most tragic but also the most transforming of all events it may bring a tear of grief to our eyes to realize that it was for our sins that Jesus Christ was dying there but it may also bring a tear of joy to our eyes to realize by faith we are forever forgiven by faith we are forever forgiven you see it's faith that makes all the difference Judges 11 with its tragic story of Jephthah's daughter drives us to the cross on which Jesus died it calls us to stand before that cross and look up at the figure of our master there and it asks us all a question is this nothing to you all you who pass by is it nothing or is it enough for us to put our faith and trust in the God who loved us so much that he gave us one and only son that whoever should believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life we have to put our means that we have to have to happen let's hope to go for

I know I can't show you well