

# Sins of the Father

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, if you will remember back to last week, the exchange between God and Israel in chapter 10, verses 6 through 16, it left us with a bit of a cliffhanger.

God had seen through the false repentance of Israel, and he declared that he would deliver them no longer. But then the author states for us in his commentary in verse 16, at the end of it, he says that God was growing impatient with Israel's misery.

Cluing us in, giving us a glimmer of hope that the Lord would still be gracious to his people. Now, that section leads us to anticipate, as we move forward, that God will indeed save his people from their enemies, though it may be from a position of silence.

And that's precisely what happens here. Israel, particularly the Gileadites, they have to address the fact that the Ammonite army has a mast near Mizpah in their land, and they're forced to act.

They can't just let that go, but God's been silent. And they're forced to act in these moments in the midst of God's silence. But there's an important thing for us to remember here, and we're going to have to recall this as we get into this story, and it's this.

[ 1 : 19 ] Just because God is silent does not mean that God is absent. And we've just spent some time praying together and thinking of certain needs.

There are times, just as a side note, this is for free for you to take with you today. There are times where we go through our lives, and we deal with struggles in our lives, and we carry burdens in our lives, and it does feel as if God is silent.

But we must trust that he is not absent, and he proves that to us in his word. He is not absent in this case. He used the actions of the Gileadites to raise up Jephthah.

And through the work of Jephthah, his empowerment of Jephthah, he will win victory for Israel. They will subdue the Ammonites.

At the same time, he's going to expose their sins. He's going to continue to do that. And he's going to allow their consequences to run their course in really quite a tragic way. Verses 1 through 11 of chapter 11, they give us a little bit of Jephthah's story, a little bit of his origin story.

[ 2 : 25 ] If you're into superhero stories and movies, there's always an origin story. There is an origin story with Jephthah as well, and it tells us a little bit how he became Israel's next deliverer.

He was known as a mighty warrior, we're told in verse 1, making him the ideal candidate to lead the nation in battle. The only problem was that he was an outcast.

He was the son of a prostitute, and his brothers didn't take kindly to that. So when it came time to divvy up the inheritance, they cast Jephthah out. He's an outcast. He's living in the wilderness in the northern part of the territory, and he's collecting around him worthless fellows.

He becomes this leader of outcasts and outlaws. He had been driven away by the very people who were now pleading for his help.

And there are some parallels here. The way that the Gileadites interact with Jephthah is exactly how Israel as a nation interacted with God in a previous chapter.

[ 3 : 28 ] They have abandoned God, and yet when they're in their moment of need, they try to run back to God to get some favor from him. Now we see the Gileadites doing the same exact thing with Jephthah.

They mistreat him. They sin against him. They cast him out. But now that they really need him, they go and find him, and they try to bring him back. But one of the things we find out is Jephthah is not only a mighty warrior, not only an outcast and an outlaw, he's also a shrewd negotiator.

He's a schemer, and he agreed to lead in battle against the Ammonites, but only on the condition that he be welcomed back home, not as a citizen, but as their ruler, a pseudo-king, so to speak, over the people of Gilead in particular.

And the Gileadites, they have no leverage in this negotiation. So on that condition, they make a covenant before God. Jephthah, the outcast of Gilead, becomes Jephthah, the ruler of Gilead, and it seems, at least for a little while, that the people willingly follow him in the process of that.

There's a particular type of genre or particular genre of drama or stage play that's known as a tragedy. Tragedy is a drama that does not have a happy ending.

[ 4 : 52 ] Instead, the plot, it builds up to some eventual catastrophe in which the main protagonist of the story died.

And all of the buildup, all of the anticipation of what you would expect to turn into a happy ending in a heroic moment actually does the opposite. In Judges chapter 11 and 12, we read the record of a real-life tragedy.

And the weightiness of this story, really, it's only rivaled by the final story that we'll get to in the book of Judges.

This is a heavy text. It's a tragic text. We're introduced to Jephthah as a mighty warrior, but that's not how we're going to remember him in the end.

We're going to remember Jephthah for his sins as a father. Sins that lead to the death of his one and only daughter. And the immense slaughter of 42,000 Israelites.

[ 6 : 04 ] Now, the general synopsis of the book of Judges, as we've come to understand, is that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Jephthah is another example that the judges themselves weren't excluded from that.

As the stories continue to unfold, we actually see this progression where the judges themselves seem to get worse and worse. As the nation spirals into deeper and deeper apostasy, it seems like the judges do the same thing.

They continue to show their propensity for acting apart from God's ways. And what we find is that the deliverers themselves need a deliverer. That's the point of the book, isn't it?

That none of these people can actually do what truly needs to be done. They themselves need redemption. They themselves need salvation. They themselves need to be delivered.

Third, there's a, as I said, a real heaviness to this narrative that I want you to feel as we move along through the story. But I only want you to feel the heaviness so that we can understand the real gospel hope that also comes through this story, at least particularly through Jephthah and what we come to know of him.

[ 7 : 20 ] Three things I want to point out to you in the story. The first thing is this. Faith leads to salvation. Faith leads to salvation.

Back to our story. Jephthah's first order of business here as Gilead's leader was to attempt to settle the dispute with Ammon through diplomacy.

And we can't blame him for that. This is actually the wise choice. Israel is not prepared to fight this battle. Gilead is not capable in and of themselves to do what needs to be done to defeat the Ammonites, who have now oppressed them, according to chapter 10, for 18 years.

And they've oppressed them so severely that they've even been allowed to cross the Jordan River in some cases and begin these maybe perhaps guerrilla assaults against the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin and Judah.

Well, little old Gilead is out here on the outside, on the east side of the land, and they're facing this army that has a mast to come in and to take their land.

[ 8 : 27 ] And Jephthah knew that a diplomatic solution was the best option, at least in that immediate moment. They weren't prepared to fight. So he sends messengers to the king of Ammon before he initiates an attack.

Look with me at verses 12 and 13. Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, What do you have against me that you have come to fight against my land?

And the king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, 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.

So the first thing that Jephthah does is he sends some messengers and he says, What's your problem? Like, what's going on here? Is there a solution that we can find?

And what it comes down to is there's a dispute over the land. This king of Ammon believes that Israel has unjustly taken this land, and he has taken it upon himself to recover it.

[ 9 : 31 ] Now, it's in response to that, that we see Jephthah the negotiator at his finest. And that's what really follows all the way until we get to verse 28.

In fact, this little section here is the only real clue that we have regarding Jephthah's true spiritual condition. Up to this point, he looks like nothing more than a mercenary.

And that's really the way that he's behaving for the most part. But as we get through this, there is language that he's using. There are actions that he is taking that reveals to us that he does seem to have a personal commitment.

As a worshiper of God, a worshiper of Yahweh. And he argues Israel's right to the land in three ways. We're not going to read all of these verses, but I'll point them out to you, and you can read them later.

The first way that he argues is this. He argues historically. He argues historically. That's verses 14 through 22. Let me just summarize it for you. The first thing that he says to the king of Ammon is this land was never Ammonite land or Moabite land to begin with.

[ 10 : 40 ] He gives them a bit of a history lesson here. He says this was never your land. This was Amorite land. So you're not recovering something that used to belong to you. It never belonged to you.

Second point historically, he says, is that the only reason that Israel possessed it was because Sion, the king of the Amorites, declared war on them.

He made war with Israel when all they wanted to do was pass through the land. Now, if you want to do some further reading on that, it's recorded for us in the book of Numbers. Numbers chapter 21. You can read all about it. And essentially what had happened is the Israelites coming out of Egypt, they're wandering in the wilderness. They're trying to get to the land of promise. They tried two different times to go into, to cut through the Moabite land and some other land in order to get to Canaan.

They weren't trying to invade. They weren't trying to possess it. They just wanted to walk through. And everybody was telling them no. So they send word to Sion, king of the Amorites, who at the time possessed the land that Gilead was now on.

[ 11 : 50 ] And they said, can we cut through your land? We're not going to turn to the right hand or the left. We're not going to take your water. We're not going to kill your life. We just want to walk through. And instead of just saying no, like the Moabites and others had done before, Sion gets all of his army together and goes and wants to destroy Israel instead.

So what do they do? They fight. Why? Because this guy's come against them. They have no choice but to fight. So essentially, Jephthah says, look, you've got this all wrong. Number one, it was never your land.

Number two, Israel didn't invade to possess it. Sion came against them. And upon his defeat, they took the land because there was no body left to live on it.

So they took it. Okay? So he argues historically. Number two, he argues theologically. Argues theologically. That's verses 23 and 24. Let's just read those together.

So then the Lord, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel. And are you to take possession of them?

[ 12 : 53 ] Will you not possess what Chemosh, your God, gives you to possess? And all that the Lord, our God, has dispossessed before us, we will possess.

This is a theological argument now. So he credits Yahweh with Israel's victory over Sion and their subsequent possession of the land. They didn't take it, Jephthah says.

It was given to them by God. And then he gives this little sarcastic response to the Ammonites. And he tells them, basically, you should be content with what your God has given you.

And we'll be content with what our God has given us. Now, we don't need to be confused by that. I don't think that he's putting Chemosh in the place of Yahweh. I think he means this as an insult.

Because the Ammonites did not have the land that they wanted.

He said, look, our God gave this to us. You be content with what your false God over there has for you. And his theological position here, it reveals a bit of his heart.

[ 13 : 55 ] He seems to be a genuine worshiper of Yahweh, though a flawed one. And his theological position emphasizes God's place over all the gods of the land.

Which at this time in Israel's history was a minority view. So Jephthah sticks out to us now. He's not a very good man. But he does seem to be a worshiper of God.

So, historical argument, theological argument, and then the third thing is just simply an ethical argument. He argues ethically. Look at verses 25 through 27.

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 the 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. You have done me wrong by making war on me.

[15:03] Now we get a little bit of a clearer picture as to what's happening. This dispute that the king of Ammon is arguing over is 300 years old. Israel has been in that land for 300 years.

And Jephthah essentially says, Where have you guys been for the last 300 years? No Moabite or Ammonite leader has ever made this insinuation before.

In other words, you made this up. You're just trying to get more land for yourself. This is a power grab. So the negotiator, he's working his magic here. He's giving a history lesson.

He's arguing theologically. He's arguing ethically. And it becomes clear to us that Israel isn't actually in the wrong here. This is an issue with the king of Ammon. And anyone with common sense could have argued Jephthah's three points.

They're clear. They're not difficult to argue. But it's his final assertion in verse 27 that really shows his true heart. And that's where I want us to just park for just a moment.

[16:05] Look again at verse 27. Notice what Jephthah says in the end. The Lord, Yahweh, the judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.

So he makes his argument. He says, listen, we've got a historical argument here. We've got a theological argument here. We've got an ethical argument here. But none of that really matters because we're going to commit our cause to God.

He will be the judge between us. Now, this is a significant moment. In the end, he presented his evidence as if he's in a court of law.

And he made his ultimate appeal not to the king of Ammon, but to God, the true and righteous judge of all the earth. So it's not as if the king of Ammon is the judge presiding over the dispute. No. He's the plaintiff. Jephthah's the defendant. The judge is Yahweh. And Jephthah says, I don't care what you say. We're going to commit our calls to God.

[17:12] He will judge. Which reminds me of what Peter says of Jesus in 1 Peter 2. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return.

When he suffered, he did not threaten. But continued doing what? Entrusting himself to him who judges justly. And how did he entrust himself to him who judges justly?

Verse 24. Therefore, he bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds we have been healed.

We said this is a characteristic of godliness. That you make your peace, you say what you need to say, and then you commit your life, you commit your circumstances to the Lord.

And that's what Jephthah's doing here. Barry Webb says this. It is effectively a declaration of war. But it's also an appeal to Yahweh to rule in Israel's favor and rescue them.

[18:18] Here at last, Jephthah's belief in Yahweh's unrivaled supremacy shines through. And his willingness to stake everything on him.

By faith, Jephthah committed his and Israel's calls to the Lord. He acknowledged God as the true judge.

He cast himself on the mercy of God, leading to the subsequent salvation of God's people from the Ammonites. And it's just another example that we find here.

This pattern in the Bible that teaches that salvation is a gift of God's grace that is received not on our best efforts, not on our moral appeals, not on our greatest negotiating tactics.

It rests solely on the grace of God. And it comes by faith in the merciful God whose steadfast love endures forever.

[19:15] It is faith alone that leads to salvation. Not only for us, faith in Christ, but for Jephthah and Israel as they go against the Ammonites.

It is faith alone in the merciful God that leads to their salvation. And this faith of Jephthah, I'm emphasizing it so much right now, it needs to be acknowledged now and commended now.

Because here in just a moment, we're going to completely forget about it. And it's not going to seem like he's a man of faith anymore. And it's not going to seem like he has got any trace of godliness in

him any longer.

So we have to at least make the point here, as the text does for us, that faith leads to salvation.

Jephthah, at heart, had that faith that led to God's salvation for himself and for his people.

Okay? Faith leads to salvation. Number two, sin's sorrows can overshadow salvation's joy.

[ 20 : 14 ] Sin's sorrow can overshadow salvation's joy. Now, we have to be honest.

Up to this point in the text, God has been totally silent. No action has been explicitly credited to him.

Jephthah has spoken about God. Jephthah has spoken to God. But the Lord has not spoken to

Jephthah, at least not in the text.

Neither has the author indicated whether or not God is pleased to use Jephthah. So up until this point, at verse 28, we know nothing of God's involvement here.

All of that changes in verse 29, where it becomes clear that God was happy to use Jephthah as his chosen deliverer. That though silent, he was working behind the scenes to show his grace to his people.

[ 21 : 16 ] Look at verse 29. Then the spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah. And he passed through Gilead and Manasseh. And passed on to Mizpah of Gilead.

And from Mizpah of Gilead, he passed on to the Ammonites. So like with Gideon, the spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah and empowers him to gather an army that he will use to fight against the Ammonites.

And just follow that progression in verse 29. First, he's clothed by the spirit of God. Then he makes his moves, gathering his army, gathering his people together.

He makes his move step by step, getting closer and closer to where the Ammonites are. It's very clear what the author intends for us to take from this. God chooses Jephthah. He clothes Jephthah. And then God moves him towards Ammon. And the anticipation is that God is pleased to give victory to Jephthah over the Ammonites. Okay? It's clearly, that's what the author wants us to see there.

[ 22 : 20 ] That's what is intended for us to see. Now, what's clear to us in the text might not have been quite as apparent to Jephthah in the moment.

But even still, all the signs point to God mercifully granting him victory, which makes his next action totally unnecessary.

Verse 30. And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, if you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever, or you'll notice there's probably a footnote here with this word.

The translators make this a bit ambiguous. If we were to go strictly literal here, this is a whoever, not a whatever. Whatever, whoever 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 or offer him up for a burnt offering. So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them. The Lord gave them into his hand.

[ 23 : 28 ] And he struck them from the Aror to the neighborhood of Mineth, 20 cities, and as far as Abel, Karamim, with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

Now, we've already seen Jephthah the negotiator at his best. This is where we see Jephthah the negotiator at his worst. It's one thing to barter with the leaders of Gilead or engage diplomatically with the king of Ammon.

But God is not one with whom man can negotiate. We don't barter for his help. We trust him for it and ask him for it.

Now, before we move on, let's just get this clear. It is never, ever, ever right to say, God, if you'll do this for me, I'll do this for you.

It is never right. That is never commended in the scriptures. It is only condemned. We don't barter with God. We trust God.

[ 24 : 39 ] We pray to God. We cling to his grace and his mercy and who he is and his love. We do not try to barter with him. And what Jephthah did here was not technically a vow.

It was a bribe. If you, then I. And worst of all, it was an offer requiring Jephthah to sin.

The language is unmistakable. Jephthah was prepared to make a human sacrifice in exchange for God's favor in battle.

A foolish and ignorant notion. But again, God is silent. How can God be silent?

How can he not say, no, Jephthah, no? He doesn't do that. But we must not mistake God's silence for his absence.

[ 25 : 44 ] Neither can we mistake God's silence for his approval. He did grant Israel victory. He did not grant Israel victory because Jephthah's vow.

He granted Israel victory because he'd already planned to do it to begin with. Don't miss the order that the author puts these verses in.

The clothing of the Spirit of the Lord, the guarantee of victory comes before this vow. God's going to deliver his people. He's made his promise. He's going to do his work.

He doesn't give them victory because of what Jephthah said. He gives them victory because he was going to give them victory. Because he's gracious and merciful. And what follows in the text is entirely focused now on Jephthah's foolish vow.

That's part of the tragedy here. God delivers his people through a great salvation. And the text tells us almost nothing about it. Almost nothing.

[ 26 : 52 ] It's as if the author is hurrying himself to dispose of the Ammonites in order that he might actually get to this thing that Jephthah has done.

We should be rejoicing in salvation. Instead, we'll spend the remainder of our time mourning the tragedy of sin. And the structure reminds us that the sorrow of our ongoing sin can easily swallow up the joy of our salvation.

That's what the story does. Sorrow swallows up victory. Sorrow, mourning, swallows up joy. And if you're going to persist in sin as a believer, the sorrow and the mourning from that sin is going to swallow up the joy of your salvation.

God desires that we experience tremendous joy in his blessing. Often we ensnare ourselves in sin, producing a grief that quickly overshadows the joy.

Let's look at what he did. Verse 34. Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. Behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances.

[ 28 : 15 ] She's there to rejoice in the goodness of God. 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, Elias, my daughter, you have brought me very low.

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 mouth.

So Jephthah arrives home. It wasn't a servant who greets them. It wasn't an animal who greets him. It was his one and only child.

A daughter whom he seems to perhaps have loved more than any other individual. And immediately he remembers his foolish vow.

And he's crushed. He's crushed by the thought of following through with his beloved little girl. Now here's the thing.

[ 29 : 20 ] Jephthah didn't have to follow through with the vow. It wasn't necessary. He didn't have to double down on the bribe. He could have reversed course.

He could have borne on himself any potential curse from breaking the vow that he's made. And he could have simply pled for God to show him mercy.

That's what he should have done. That's what he could have done. But he didn't do that. In fact, God would have never been pleased for him to follow through with this anyways.

Let me just give you three reasons why. Number one, human sacrifices were forbidden by God.

They were forbidden by God, clearly. And this is not an obscurity in the Old Testament text.

This is explicit. Time after time after time, God equates human sacrifice and the sacrifice of children to distinctly pagan practices. And God warns Israel over and over and over, do not do this.

[ 30 : 24 ] He would not have been pleased by this to begin with. This was a sin. God didn't expect him to follow through on this. Number two, a human dedication in the Old Testament.

Always involved redeeming the individual with either a set amount of money or the sacrifice of an animal. We can see this in Numbers 18, Exodus chapter 13.

God tells his people, the first child that opens the womb shall be dedicated to the Lord. And what they would do is they would go to the temple or the tabernacle and they would take some money or they would take a sacrifice, a burnt offering, and they would redeem the son or the child with this other form of atonement.

That was God's method. No dedication of any children would have pleased God to have been sacrificed. God made many provisions in the law for escaping vows, particularly foolish ones, rash ones that are made in a moment.

God gave us outs for those. God said, write down these references. Numbers chapter 30, Leviticus 27. Numbers 30, Leviticus 27.

[ 31 : 57 ] And you can read all about God's perspective on vows. But I actually want to read to you Leviticus chapter 5, verses 4 through 6. It's on the screen if you want to see it, at least a summary of it is.

Here's what God says. If anyone utters with his lips a rash oath to do evil or to do good. Can we put Jephthah's oath in that category?

I think we can. This is rash and it's evil. If any person does this, when he realizes his guilt in any of these and confesses the sin he has committed, he shall bring to the Lord as his compensation for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat for a sin offering.

And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin. Jephthah didn't have to go through with this. God wasn't pleased with it to begin with.

So when he comes to his daughter and he says, you've made me, you've brought me low because I've opened my mouth to the Lord and I can't take my vow, it's not true. It's just not true.

[ 33 : 07 ] It wasn't right to begin with, but it wasn't true. But then it gets worse. Verse 36. 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 and on the Ammonites. The daughter accepts her fate.

Not because it was necessary according to God's law, but because she trusts her dad. Do you see that?

She literally repeats his language. Father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord. That's what he's just told her. She trusts her dad.

She doesn't chide him. She repeats his language. But she only understood what her father had taught her. And believing that she was being faithful to God, she became a willing victim of her dad's sin.

[ 34 : 24 ] It's tragic enough for Jephthah to even consider going through with this. It's devastating to consider how his daughter goes along with it on the basis of her love for him.

Her trust in him. She's innocent. But she's deceived. And she's not deceived by an enemy. She's deceived by her own dad.

She's a bad dad. She's a bad dad. Which makes this an appropriate time for us to pause and consider the impact of our sins on our kids.

They only know what we teach them. They only know to pattern themselves and their behaviors after our own and what we demonstrate to them.

Their love of and their trust in us will lead our kids to believe what we believe.

[ 35 : 25 ] To say what we say. To behave as we behave. And believing that they're doing something right before God.

They could be following us on the path of tragic sin. Perhaps even eternal death. Because we are the first.

We are the first line of teaching that they have. This is tragic. And it's playing out in families all around us.

All around us. You see it every day in the people that you work with. And the people that you get to know in your communities. And sadly you're going to see it as you get to know people in our church. And as our church grows and it continues to grow.

We're going to see it. It's going to happen. There's going to be parents who are careless. Who are foolish. Who are ignorant. And their kids are going to follow that path of sin. They're going to trust them.

[ 36 : 26 ] They're going to be innocent. But they're going to be deceived. Not by the enemy. But by the very people that they love and trust. What are your children learning from you?

What are they learning? Do your children know God better because of you? Do they care to be faithful to God because of you?

How do they view the word? Do they read their Bibles as much of it as they can manage? Because they see you reading your Bible as much as you can manage? Do they confess their sins because they see you confess your sins?

Are they faithful to the Lord and to worship because you're faithful to the Lord and to worship? What are your kids learning from you? What are the patterns that you're setting? Will they be innocent

victims of your foolish sin?

God help us. God help us. Verse 37.

[ 37 : 26 ] So she said to her father. Let this thing be done for me. Leave me alone for two months. I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity.

I and my companions. So he said go. And he sent her away for two months. He doesn't go with her. He knows what he's planning to do and he doesn't even go with her.

He sends her away with her friends. She departed. She and her companions and they wept for her virginity on the mountains. And at the end of two months she returned to her father.

She trusts him. She said go. She said go. 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.

Listen that kind of lament and mourning. We don't mourn over people who dedicate themselves to a lifetime of service in the temple and in the church. We don't mourn that. We celebrate that.

[ 38 : 33 ] There is a pattern of mourning for the people of Israel that is related to Jephthah's daughter being offered as a burnt sacrifice supposedly to the Lord. He had two months to come to his senses and repent.

But he doesn't. He carries out the vow. Was it pride? Was it pride that just caused him to fear being seen as weak that maybe others knew what he said?

And he thought it would be a sign of weakness as the new leader of Gilead if he didn't follow through with it even something so terrible as that? Is it pride? Was it just selfishness?

Choosing for his daughter to die so that he could live? Because if he had spared his daughter's life, he would have died in his mind. So is it just selfishness?

Is it blind ignorance? Not knowing enough of God's law to change course? Did he just not know his Bible? Either he was ignorant of God's word or just thought that his way was better than God's, more pious than God's.

[ 39 : 47 ] In either case, Jephthah did what was right in his own eyes. Not what was right in God's eyes. And whatever is at the heart of Jephthah's actions, it was sinful.

And it caused the sorrow of sin to overshadow the joy of God's salvation. Jephthah and his daughter and the people, they should have been rejoicing in God's victory.

Instead, we're told that they mourned. They mourned the tragedy of Jephthah's sin. And so it goes with the sins in which we willingly continue after Jesus saves us.

How foolish are we to rob ourselves of the joy of God's salvation by continuing in sin? Number three.

Sin often begets more sin. Sin often begets more sin, unfortunately. Look at verse 1 of chapter 12. The men of Ephraim 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?

[ 41 : 04 ] We will burn your house over with fire. And Jephthah said to them, I and my people had a great dispute with the Ammonites. And when I called you, you did not save me from their hand.

And when I saw that you would not save me, I took my life in my hand and crossed over against the Ammonites. And the Lord gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?

Number one, we don't know if that's true. Nothing in the text prior to this says that Jephthah actually went to the people of Ephraim. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't. It's his word against theirs at this point. We really don't know.

Verse 4, Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim. This is civil war. And the men of Gilead struck Ephraim because they said, You are fugitives of Ephraim, you Gileadites in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh.

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?

[ 42 : 11 ] And he said, No. And they said to him, Then say, Shibboleth. And he would say, Sibboleth. For he could not pronounce it the right way.

So this is such a bizarre thing, isn't it? It's all varying dialects. This would be equivalent to somebody from the south going to Boston.

And they're saying, Hey, we want to come into the city. And they say, Okay. Say, Where did you park the car? And you say, Well, I parked the car over here.

And they say, Ha, you're not from Boston. That's essentially what this is. It's so bizarre. And what would they do when they didn't pronounce it right? They seized him. And slaughtered him. Mispronunciation led to death.

And at that time, 42,000 of the Ephraimites fell. With the king of Ammon, we see Jephthah the negotiator at his best.

[ 43 : 13 ] With the vow, we see the negotiator at his worst. With Ephraim, he's neither shrewd nor diplomatic. He doesn't even attempt to negotiate anything anymore.

He's completely lost it. And put yourself in his shoes for a moment. He's hurt.

He's grieving. He's ashamed. He's angry. At himself, more than anything, probably.

And all of that contributes to a short fuse. You know what that's like. You know what it's like to have the pressure of the world on you and the pressure of your own sin on you.

And it only takes a little thing to set you off. That seems to be the picture that we get of Jephthah here. So when the men of Ephraim, as they always did, came to grind their axe and make their thread, Jephthah exploded in a rage.

[ 44 : 22 ] There's no negotiating here. There's no diplomacy here. There's no appeal to God here. Only more tragedy. Only more mourning. Jephthah leads Gilead in a civil war.

Leading to the needless and ruthless slaughter of 42,000 Ephraimites. His victory over Ephraim, if we can even call it that, it wasn't given by God.

In fact, as far as the text is concerned, God is not involved at all. And what do we find once again? Every man's just doing what's right in his own eyes.

Sin begets more sin. Verse 7. Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gilead died and was buried in a city in Gilead.

When we don't deal with our sins as God commands, they grow. They grow. They produce more sin. And sin eventually kills.

[ 45 : 35 ] That's James 1. And no man say when he's tempted that I'm tempted of God, for God does not tempt anyone. But every man is tempted when he's drawn away of his own lust.

And lust, when it has conceived, brings forth sin. And sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. Sin kills. It kills. Is it any wonder that Jephthah only lived for six years after this?

We all know how he died. And speculation is unhelpful. But it's unlikely that he was very advanced in his age. There's no indication that he was harmed in battle.

His battle only seems to have brought him victory and triumph. I imagine that the sacrifice of his daughter and the slaughter of Ephraim cost him his happiness and his health.

Which in some case may ironically be a sign of his initial faith. A believer in sin is almost certainly to be more miserable than an unbeliever who's in bondage to him.

[ 46 : 54 ] Before we come to Christ, we don't even understand our sin. We can live in the misery of its consequences. But we can't quite process and comprehend the sin itself and the fact of its sin.

It doesn't bother us to sin. All that changes after we come to Christ, doesn't it? Sin's not easy anymore. We may still commit a lot of it.

But if you know Christ, if you're in Christ, if you know God, sin is an easy thing. In fact, it's a miserable thing. And when sin goes unconfessed and undealt with, the misery, it only deepens.

And I think we might have some clues that show that that perhaps was the case with Jephthah. What we do know for sure is that sin is like a snowball. It just grows and it grows and grows until somebody stops it.

I want to conclude this way. I want to try to understand how to process the fact that Jephthah is included in Hebrews chapter 11.

[ 48 : 05 ] If you've studied the New Testament, you probably are familiar with this chapter. You can read it later if you'd like. Hebrews chapter 11 is this entire chapter. Some people call it the hall of faith.

Not the hall of fame, but the hall of faith. And everything that the writer of Hebrews says there, he lists that they are a cloud of witnesses that by their faith spur us along in our faith.

And clearly the author of Hebrews intends for us to view them as being safe in Christ. So how do we square Jephthah's inclusion in Hebrews chapter 11 with the extreme nature of his sin in Judges 11 and 12?

How do we square with that? And there's two things we need to note. First is this. At some point, we're going to have to come to terms with the fact that there's going to be people in heaven that we

think shouldn't be there.

We just have to come to terms with that. We talked about that a little bit last week in relation to Israel's false repentance. There's going to be people in heaven that we would have never expected or never even wanted to be there.

[ 49 : 23 ] And there's going to be people absent that we'd have thought for sure they made it. And I think Jephthah is just another example of that. But there's a gospel implication here.

Jephthah isn't included in Hebrews chapter 11 because he deserved it. Of course he didn't deserve it. But neither was his sin enough to exclude him from it.

Why? He's there because like Abraham, God counted his faith as righteousness. He was a vastly flawed, tragically sinful deliverer for Israel.

But his hope, like our hope, does not rest in something or someone better perhaps, greater than him.

That's where the hope rests. A perfect salvation requires a perfect savior. And there's only one of those. And that's Jesus.

[ 50 : 26 ] It's not us. And it's not Jephthah or Gideon or Samson or Barak or any of the other judges that we've been studying. It's not Saul. It's not David.

It's not any of the prophets. None of them. Our hope doesn't rest in what we do or do not do. Our hope rests in someone greater than us, in Jesus.

And the salvation that Jesus brings is so perfect. It's so complete that it covers even sins as terrible as Jephthah's.

Murder has been one of the themes of our service today, interestingly enough. And we take strong stands against it. And let's take something like abortion.

We take a strong stand against that. We condemn it. But it's not a sin that God can't forgive. There will be people in heaven who have followed through with abortions.

[ 51 : 28 ] Because it's not what we do or do not do that grants us salvation. Christ's salvation, his sacrifice is so perfect, so complete that it covers the worst of sins imaginable.

And to be sure, the sorrow of our sin, it can swallow up the joy of our salvation. But in Jesus, if that's where our salvation is, if it's in Christ, the hope of that salvation cannot be shaken.

The joy of it may be diminished in this life, but the hope of it cannot be removed. Because it's not ultimately on us. It is by his grace.

His work on the cross is a finished work, which is undone for no one who comes to him in faith.

Even those who commit tragic sin. Christ's death is enough. When he said it was finished, he meant it's finished.

[ 52 : 41 ] All of it. And he reverses that for no one. Which means, as we've said every week, Jesus is the real hero of the Bible.

Jephthahs will come and go and they will disappoint. Jesus will never disappoint. Jesus is the only one who has power over life and death.

He alone has divine grace and mercy to cover our sins. On the cross, he paid it all. And in his resurrection, he has granted us the power of life if we come to him in faith.

He's the hero. But that grace is only received through faith. And Jephthah's inclusion in Hebrews 11 is just another proof of that.

By faith, Jephthah did these things just like the rest of them. And I believe that he's safe in Christ because of it.

[ 53 : 45 ] You can be too. You can be too. You can be too.