JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

FIGHTING BETWEEN TWO REALITIES

Who God Says You Are When the Holidays Bring Out the Old You

> Many of us are caught between two realities: who God is making us and the personal history that still lingers. Going into the holidays, remember that God is working in your life, you are not what people say you are, and getting back up is part of the process.

MAIN TEXT
Judges 11:1-35

SERIES
Stand-alone message

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BY
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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Two realities. Judges 11:1 says Jephthah "was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute." Many believers are caught between who God is making them and a personal history that still lingers, and the holidays bring both out.
2. Everything touches everything. The way Jephthah's family treated him shaped his home life, his adult life, the places he went and the company he kept. Under the right circumstances your history starts making the decisions, so process it instead of hoping it stays quiet.
3. Relational meritocracy. Where relationships lack celebration and embrace, acceptance comes to depend on what you do for people. Jephthah's family wanted nothing to do with him until they needed a mighty warrior, and most of us long so deeply for acceptance that we will play the game to get it.
4. The warrior who became a beggar. With the Spirit of the Lord upon him and success already guaranteed, Jephthah made a vow God never asked for, out of a desperate need for his family's approval, and his only daughter paid the price. Be the gate that closes off family dysfunction: it stops with me.
5. God is working in your life (Romans 10:13, James 4:8). No matter what feelings, stories or accusations come up, if you have called on the name of the Lord, His work in you is real and present, and you are not who you used to be.
6. You are not what people say you are (1 Corinthians 1:2). Paul called the Corinthians sanctified before he corrected how they lived. Family can find the one sore spot, but you are what God says you are: a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10), and what you are by the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10).
7. Embrace the process (James 1:8, Romans 7:21-8:1, Proverbs 24:16). The fight between two realities is part of the life of faith. The goal this season is to get through, not to get everything right; the righteous fall and rise again, because God does the work, and when we are faithless, He remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:13).



WATCH IT PREACHED

youtu.be/Pola1Sl5b1k



READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/fighting-between-two-realities

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This message was preached the Sunday before Thanksgiving week, for people about to go home to families who only know the person they used to be. Most of the time is spent walking through Judges 11. The three points come at the end and are meant to encourage more than to instruct.

Tell the room early that you will be using a Bible word over and over: the ESV calls Jephthah "the son of a prostitute" (Judges 11:1). Say it plainly, use it as the text does, and then let it stand for the personal history every person carries.

Handle the end of Jephthah's story carefully. God did not ask for the vow. Scholars differ on what happened to his daughter, but the plain reading is that he sacrificed her, which God's law forbids. Say so without dwelling on it.

Introduction

Nothing brings out the variety of emotions quite like the holidays. The ups, the downs, the good, the bad. You find yourself buzzing with excitement one minute, and the next moment you're hiding and crying in the pantry.

For those of us who are experiencing the transforming power of God in our lives, this can also become the breeding ground for doubt and condemnation. Going back into familiar settings with people who, for better or worse, only know the person we used to be presents a new set of challenges and emotions.

In many respects, I would predict that at some point this holiday season, you're going to find yourself **fighting between two realities.** Today I want to give you some encouragement to help you survive the festivities and end the year strong.

Turn to Judges chapter 11. We're going to talk about a man named Jephthah.

> **JUDGES 11:1-3 ESV**
>
> [1] Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. [2] And Gilead's wife also bore him sons. 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 another woman." [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 is caught between two realities, two identities. On one hand he is a **mighty warrior,** and on the other he is **the son of a prostitute.** For a lot of us, it may not be this exactly, but we are caught between

being a mighty warrior and some version of the son of a prostitute. Something is lingering in the background.

Everything Touches Everything

Notice that because he is the son of a prostitute, his family treats him a certain way. The way he was raised shapes his home life and his early adult life. It determines the places he goes and the company he keeps. He ends up in the land of Tob, surrounded by worthless fellows.

Jephthah has a personal history. Every person in this room has a personal history. And you have to understand this about your personal history:

Everything touches everything.

It may not be flaring up today, but get under the right set of circumstances and the mighty warrior takes a back seat while the son of a prostitute starts making decisions.

Ashleigh and I are big supporters of counseling. We think talking to a counselor at least once is good for everybody, because there are things you need to say out loud that you can't say to other people. The more in control of it you think you are, the more you probably need to talk to somebody. **You need to process your personal history.**

Real Family Dynamics

> **JUDGES 11:4-11 ESV**
>
> 4 After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. 5 And when the Ammonites made war against
> Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. 6 And they said to Jephthah,
> "Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites." 7 But 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?" 8 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have
> turned to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be our head over all
> the inhabitants of Gilead." 9 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you bring me home again to fight
> against the Ammonites, and the LORD gives them over to me, I will be your head." 10 And the elders of
> Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say." 11 So
> Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And
> Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah.

Notice Jephthah's question: "Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" (Judges 11:7). Anybody ever had that conversation? Somebody hasn't talked to you in forever, and all of a sudden they need a little something with cars.

Often in relationships where there is a lack of celebration and embrace, the thing many of us would call unconditional love, a thread of **relational meritocracy** develops. It means: "Whatever you can do for me

will fuel my acceptance of you." What I do for you determines how much you let me be part of your life. And the more we know acceptance depends on what we do, the more afraid we are to stop doing.

Illustration: NASCAR tickets. I'm not talking about having things in common. Commonality can fuel a relationship. If a dad and his son are both into NASCAR, that helps the relationship. But if the dad only wants anything to do with his son when the son shows up with NASCAR tickets, that's unhealthy.

That is what is going on in the story. Jephthah's family didn't want him to get an inheritance. They didn't want him at Thanksgiving. They didn't want him at their daddy's funeral. They wanted to pretend he didn't exist until things got tough and he was a useful resource.

These are REAL FAMILY DYNAMICS, and the Bible speaks to real stuff. Like Jephthah, most of us long so deeply for the acceptance of our family that we're willing to play the game to get it. Maybe we won't go all in like Jephthah, but we'll make the occasional gesture. If you don't know where that is in you, search your own heart. There is somebody whose acceptance you want badly enough to do whatever it takes.

When the Two Realities Come to a Head

In verses 12 through 27, Jephthah wisely seeks a diplomatic solution with the king of the Ammonites. But verse 28 says:

> **JUDGES 11:28** ESV
>
> [28] But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him.

Diplomacy fails. They will have to fight. This is where the fight between the two realities comes to a head for Jephthah. If he fights and wins, he has his family's acceptance. If he fights and loses, he is cast aside again. They want him because he is a mighty warrior. They do not want him because he is the son of another woman.

That is why we're talking about this now. Going into the holidays, both of them are coming out. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are both coming to Thanksgiving. Your personal history impacts everything, so much as you haven't dealt with it.

> **JUDGES 11:29** ESV
>
> [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.

This is the mighty warrior. The Spirit of the Lord is upon him. He's anointed. He's not just good at what he does; something supernatural has come on him. God is doing a work in him at the present time.

This is where many of you are today. The anointing isn't just for the preacher; it's for you. We have heard over and over in recent weeks from people who say they are closer to the Lord than they have ever been. **We're watching the overwhelming power of the gospel touch you and change you!**

But the holidays are upon us, and there's another reality still lingering around.

The Vow of a Beggar

> **JUDGES 11:30-31** ESV
>
> [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 meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

You see, the mighty warrior still has the son of the prostitute's inclinations.

With a desperate desire to be accepted and loved by his own family, Jephthah has hinged his acceptance on his personal and professional success. "If I can just win, then I can finally go home and be one with my brothers!" It seems so small, but it's an unhealthy and unrealistic desire. Even if he wins, at some point they'll find a reason not to have anything to do with him again.

And it causes him to shrink from the mighty warrior to a beggar. "God, if You'll just let me win this once, I'll give You whatever comes out of my door."

He has been running with worthless fellows, not in a discipleship process. His theology is funky, likely shaped by pagan influence, and he approaches the Lord the way pagans approached their gods: whatever it takes to appease You and make You be nice to me this one time.

It looks like what a mighty warrior would do. It isn't. That's the son of the prostitute talking. This is why we've been teaching the names of God: so that when you pray, you know His character, and prayer isn't about mustering up enough begging.

God didn't ask for the vow. In fact, he was already anointed and walking in power. **Success was already guaranteed!** But the son of the prostitute couldn't see it. "How could a person like me succeed? But maybe if I barter with God, He'll do something nice for me."

OPTIONAL: TWO KINDS OF PRAYER

The sitcom prayer always starts, "God, I don't ever ask You for anything." That could be the problem. When you don't know Him, you call on the Lord in a rash way and try to make arrangements with Him.

It Stops With Me

The story goes on. He wins the battle (Judges 11:32-33), and the first thing to come out of his front door is his daughter, his only child.

God didn't ask him to do it. He made the decision himself, under what is almost certainly pagan influence. Human sacrifice violates the law of God, which calls burning sons and daughters something "the LORD hates" (Deuteronomy 12:31). Scholars aren't sure what happened. Some say he sent his daughter into seclusion for the rest of her life, but the plain reading is that he sacrificed her, which is utterly profane and unrighteous. **When the son of the prostitute is in the driver's seat, all bets are off.**

> **JUDGES 11:34-35** ESV
>
> 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."

She came out dancing, excited he won, not knowing what it would cost her. He could have known better if he had known the Word.

If we aren't careful, the next generation of our family, our children and grandchildren, will pay the price for how we respond to the behaviors and decisions of the generation above us. We take the pain of our own history and put it on our children for no reason other than that we have not come to terms with it.

Illustration: the phone call. I did this for years. I'd get a phone call from my mother or my grandmother, and then I'd make my wife and kids miserable for the rest of the day because I let that conversation throw me into a mood. Christmas is fine at church, but wait until dinner at home, when Mom is in a mood because somebody put her in that space and she hasn't dealt with it.

But we must be the gate that closes off historical family dysfunction. Somebody has to say:

It stops with me!

I don't have it all figured out, but I'll suffer a little longer if I can keep it from going to them.

Three Thoughts for the Holidays

So: Happy Thanksgiving! Every person here is likely caught between some version of two realities. God is moving in your life. Some of you have never been this engaged with the Lord. But the son of a prostitute is still in there, and we are entering the season when he can get more control than we want him to have.

I want to share three thoughts I'd like you to carry over the next several weeks as we close out the year.

1. God Is Working in Your Life

You need to be encouraged. No matter what feelings, stories or accusations come up over the next several weeks, God is doing a **REAL and PRESENT** work in your life.

Somebody will bring up who you used to be. Some of you are planning not to do something your family does every year, and the moment you pass, the interrogation begins. You'll be reminded of what you used to be and of some things you may still be. You might even act more like you used to this time of year. But what God is doing in you is real. It's not fake and it's not put on.

How can a person be saved and not be perfect? We have doctrine on doctrine trying to explain it. You don't have to explain it. You need to know you are having a real experience with the Lord.

> ROMANS 10:13 ESV
>
> [13] For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Are you an everyone? Have you called on the name of the Lord? **Then you’re a born again, blood-bought child of the Most High God!**

> JAMES 4:8 ESV
>
> [8] Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Are you drawing near to God? **Then God is drawing near to you.** Some of you are experiencing a personal spiritual awakening right now. You’re closer to the Lord than you’ve ever been.

- Be encouraged. It’s real!
- Be encouraged. It’s not done!
- Be encouraged. You’re not who you used to be!

2. You Are Not What People Say You Are

If you’re born again, you’re not what people say you are, even if you are what people say you are. Our church is twice the size you think it is, because each of you is two people.

If you’re at all familiar with 1 Corinthians, you know the people in the Corinthian church were a mess. They didn’t act right out of church, in church, on the way to church or at the altar.

> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:2 ESV
>
> [2] To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Paul calls these people sanctified. That’s who they are. Then he spends the rest of the letter telling them, in the most explicit terms, how unsanctified they are. A man was living with his father’s wife (1 Corinthians 5:1). People were getting drunk at the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20-22). Two realities: one set forth at the cross, and one still showing up in their behavior.

The Bible calls the devil “the accuser of our brothers” (Revelation 12:10). You’re probably not going to spend Thanksgiving with the devil’s agents, no matter how you feel about your aunt or uncle. But the enemy will get on the frequencies of what people say. Your holiday people, God bless them, know how to discourage you.

Illustration: the Death Star. Remember in Star Wars when Luke had to hit that one small spot on the Death Star, and the whole thing blew up? Your family is going to find that one little spot.

Illustration: my grandmother. I knew through most of middle school and all of high school that I was going into the ministry. My grandmother made sure I knew, "Well, you need to make sure you find a way to make money." Years later, when we stepped out of local church ministry and started a business, the same woman said, "So you just don't love the church anymore?" Sometimes your family discourages you while they are trying to protect you.

But you are not whatever people say you are. **You are what God says you are!**

> **2 CORINTHIANS 5:17** ESV
>
> 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

> **EPHESIANS 2:10** ESV
>
> 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 15:10** ESV
>
> 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

I don't care what the son of the prostitute says. God is doing a work in you, and His grace toward you will not be in vain.

3. Embrace the Process

We're talking about fighting between two realities. Jephthah was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute.

> **JAMES 1:8** ESV
>
> 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

It's a double-minded man who is unstable. A lot of the instability in your character, and a lot of the victory in your life, comes down to that war between the two realities: who is winning at any given moment, the anointed warrior or the personal history.

My friends, that's part of the process. I'm not preaching "get it right this holiday season." I'm preaching "get through this holiday season." Some of you are new to the faith. Get through Thanksgiving without deciding you're so unworthy that you'll never go back to church.

There are preachers who would make you think it's "say this prayer and enter the world of sunshine and rainbows." But the reality is that **we're caught between the realities.** On one hand, the old has passed

away and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). On the other hand, Paul admits that "if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor" (Galatians 2:18).

> **ROMANS 7:21-8:1 ESV**
>
> 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. 1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

I'm a mighty warrior, but I'm the son of a prostitute. And there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Embrace the process. I'm not encouraging you to mess up, but you're going to mess up. Some of you will win the battles over the next several weeks, and some of you will lose some.

Jon mentioned this on Wednesday night:

> **PROVERBS 24:16 ESV**
>
> 16 for the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.

Seven is an interesting number to use there, because in some sense it says the righteous man is going to fall perfectly. My friend Tony Sutherland put it this way:

> "The righteous man is going to fall perfectly on his face."

But by the grace of God, you're going to get back up!

No matter what happens over the next few weeks, you're going to get back up. No matter what your mama or daddy say to you, you're going to get back up. No matter what happens when the son of the prostitute gets in the driver's seat, no matter how burnt the turkey is or how fractured the relationships are, no matter what people remind you of from your past, **you're going to get back up!**

Why? **Because God is doing the work!** "If we are faithless, he remains faithful" (2 Timothy 2:13).

Conclusion

Close by singing "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" together, and let it be the song people carry through the rest of the year.

Whatever you go through this holiday season, He is faithful. He's doing the work. It's not what people say about you. Embrace the process. When we are faithless, He remains faithful.



ABOUT

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