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SERMON NOTES & TRANSCRIPT

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.

PREACHED BY
Pastor Jason Mayfield

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Judges 11:1-35

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Sermon Transcript

Well, 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. And 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 gonna find yourself fighting between two realities. So today, I wanna give you some encouragement to help you survive the festivities and end the year strong.

So I'm gonna invite you at this time to join me in your Bible in Judges chapter 11, Judges chapter 11, and we're gonna talk about a man named Jephthah today, and the title of my message is Fighting Between Two Realities. Fighting Between Two Realities. So I'll give you a moment to turn there. And just so you know, I am gonna preach the Bible today, and if you have any problem with the things I'm gonna say or the words I'm gonna use, you can blame the Bible. So I'm gonna use some words in our service today, one word particularly quite frequently throughout the morning, but it's a Bible word. Everybody say it's a Bible word. It's a Bible word, but I think there's a principle in there that I want us to see this morning.

So Judges 11 starting in verse one, it says, "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute." That's what I wanna talk about. That's what I wanna talk about today. I wanna talk about this idea of being caught between two very present realities. For a lot of us in this room, we find ourselves in something similar. It may not be this per se, but we find ourselves caught between being a mighty warrior and being some version of the son of a prostitute. There's something that's lingering there in the background, and so I wanna explore this this morning. I'm gonna spend most of the morning walking through the text, and then I have three things I wanna give you at the end that are just meant to encourage you in this holiday season, 'cause I think you can make it. I think you can make it. When I was six years old, I didn't realize that the holidays were something you had to, like, make it through, but many of you know that they are.

So Judges chapter 11, we're gonna start back at verse one. "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. 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.' Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out with him."

> **JUDGES 11:1-3** ESV
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> [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.

I'm sure that you notice this right here as we start in the text this morning. Not a lot of jokes starting out this service. We're jumping right in. I'm sure that you can see that Jephthah was treated differently by his family because of details pertaining only to him. There was something about him in his family that caused the rest of his family to treat him differently. And because of that, this thing that he had there, he's a mighty warrior, but he's the son of a prostitute. That thing that is lingering over him has now caused his home life to be shaped a certain way, his adult life to be formed a certain way. It determines in great effect the places that he goes and the company that he keeps. He goes to a certain place. He surrounds himself by worthless fellows, all because his family was treating him a certain way based on something about him, something that he had going on in his background.

I need you to understand this this morning as we talk through this. What we're really talking about when we're talking about the mighty warrior who is also the son of a prostitute, what we're addressing with Jephthah is that Jephthah's got a personal history. Every person in this room has got a personal history. I need to hand this to you. Best Buy is delivering something to my house, if y'all were wondering. But good timing. Ordered that last night. Praise the Lord. So everybody's got some version of something in their background. It's a personal history. And this is what you need to understand about your personal history, is that whether you know it or not, everything from your personal history touches everything in your life. And it may not be flaring up today, but you get under the right set of circumstances and all of a sudden the mighty warrior takes a backseat and the son of a prostitute starts making decisions. Because everybody's got a personal history.

And I would just encourage you with this, Ashleigh and I are both big advocates for this, but we would encourage you to go talk to somebody. We think talking to a counselor a bare minimum of one time is good for everybody. Because there's just some stuff you need to articulate that you can't say to other people. The first time I went to a therapist she asked, she said, "Why are you here?" And I said, "Well, I've got some stuff I need to deal with, and I'd like to talk to somebody about it who I can sue if they share it." 'Cause I'm either gonna deal with this stuff or I'm gonna retire early, amen. But one of them's happening. But you need to process things. And honestly, the more in control of it you think you are, probably the more you need to talk to somebody. And your friend can't help you, your mama and them can't help you. You need to talk to somebody if you can in your life. And if you feel the need to do that, and you say, "I don't know how to make that happen," we will help you in any way that we can. The key word there is can. So that's why we have a miracle offering coming up, so we can serve more people and do more ministry. Amen.

Continuing on, Judges 11:4, picking up with verse 4 says, "After a time..." Okay, so he's been gone for a while. "After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. And they said to Jephthah, 'Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites.' 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?'"

> **JUDGES 11:4-7** ESV
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> 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?"

Anybody ever had that conversation with somebody? Oh, why you calling me now? Why you calling? You know, you do a little something with cars, and somebody ain't talked to you in forever, and all of a sudden you need a little something with cars. And hey, we all got that, and we all do that. I've got a friend, I love him dearly. His name is Isaac Ball. We never talk till I need to figure out something with building. You know, if it involves a screwdriver or a saw, you know, I'm gonna call Isaac for the first time in four years. We all got a measure of that. It happens.

Verse 8: "And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, 'That is why we've turned to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be the head over all of the inhabitants of Gilead.' 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.' And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, 'The Lord will be witness between us if we do not do as you say.' So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And Jephthah spoke all the words before the Lord at Mizpah."

> **JUDGES 11:8–11** ESV
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> 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.

You know, relationships that tend to lack celebration or embrace or what a lot of us would call unconditional love. And I wanna just say something real quick about that. We toss around unconditional love like it's just the easiest thing in the world. I want you to know God loves you unconditionally. The people outside of the Lord who love you unconditionally just love you more unconditionally than other people. But everybody's got a little something working there. But there's certainly a scale where some of us experience relationship dynamics where there's extreme conditions, and there's no celebration, there's no embrace. And when that happens, there tends to develop a thread in the relationship of relational meritocracy. In other words, what I do for you determines how much you let me be a part of your life right now.

I would imagine that the preacher is not the only person who has experienced this in his family. I imagine I'm not the only person in the room who has had this experience with some friends. I would imagine there are people in the room this morning who have experienced that, a relational meritocracy where if I do for you, then we're cool. And when my doing takes a backseat, we're not cool anymore. And I do find that the more we do for people and the more we know that it's contingent on that, the more afraid we are to stop doing. So there's condition there. Well, when that happens, it creates some unhealthy product in our life.

And let me just say this, there is commonality in relationships, right? That's cool. Some people are just gonna have stuff in common. That's not necessarily a meritocracy. That's not merit that's making your way. I think we're getting to the point where people are getting annoyed when me and Barry are in the room together 'cause we have a lot in common. We got a lot of history in common. There's a commonality. Well, that common interest and common experience, that stuff is good for relationships. Relationships can thrive off of that. But there is a difference between, you know, father and son both like NASCAR. I think that's one thing, that's a common interest. It takes on a different tone when dad

don't wanna talk to son until son shows up with NASCAR tickets. Do you see the difference? One is a healthy normal, and then the other one is taking advantage, and it's unhealthy expectation.

And I just want you to know the point I'm trying to make, that this is going on in the story because they don't want anything to do with him. They don't want him to get his inheritance. They don't want him to be a part of the family. They don't wanna see him at Thanksgiving. They don't wanna see him at daddy's funeral. They just kinda wanna pretend he doesn't exist until, you know, stuff gets tough, and he's a good resource to come make things better. Now, all of a sudden, we need Jephthah to come back. What I'm trying to show you is that these are, like, real family dynamics, and the Bible, like, really talks to real stuff. Amen? So this is real stuff. These are real family dynamics. And so like Jephthah, most of us long deeply for our family's acceptance. We long deeply for our friends' acceptance. And if you don't know where it is, just search your own heart and soul. There's somebody who you want to really, really bring you on the inside, and you want it enough that you would probably do whatever it took to get that acceptance, especially when it is conditional and when there's a relational meritocracy.

So I wanna keep moving through the process here. In verses 12 through 27, we're not gonna read them.

> **JUDGES 11:12-27** ESV
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> 12 Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, "What do you have against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?" 13 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." 14 Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites 15 and said to him, "Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, 16 but when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. 17 Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, 'Please let us pass through your land,' but the king of Edom would not listen. And they sent also to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. 18 "Then they journeyed through the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. 19 Israel then sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, 'Please let us pass through your land to our country,' 20 but Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory, so Sihon gathered all his people together and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel. 21 And the LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. So Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. 22 And they took possession of all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. 23 So then the LORD, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel; and are you to take possession of them? 24 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. 25 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? 26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer 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? 27 I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The LORD, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon."

I'm just gonna explain what happens. Jephthah goes, and he meets with the king of the Ammonites and tries to broker a diplomatic solution to the warring between them and Israel. And in verse 28, it says this, "But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him."

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

What that means is that ultimately diplomacy did not work. They have to go to battle. They're gonna have to fight.

So moving forward, we're gonna keep moving through the story. This is the point when Jephthah has an opportunity now to go and fight and win and have his family's acceptance, or go and fight and lose and no longer be accepted by his family, where the two realities, the two fighting realities of the mighty warrior... Keep in mind, they want him because he's a mighty warrior. They brought him back because he's a mighty warrior. He is a mighty warrior. They've at least seen that value in him. But also, he's fighting now against the son of the prostitute, who's afraid of losing this dynamic. He's afraid of being cast aside. He's afraid of being left out. He's afraid of this thing continuing to haunt him because they want him because he's a mighty warrior. They do not want him because he is the son of another woman.

The great antiquities, Josephus, in his writing, called her a strange woman. He was trying to be diplomatic right there. He says she's a strange woman. You know, he didn't feel like calling her a hooker. He says she's a strange woman. So they don't want him around because of that, so these two things are warring, and now he's gonna get involved in something that is gonna bring both of those personalities out in a very strong way. Why we're talking about this is we're going into the holidays, and I'm just telling you, both of your... they're coming out. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are both coming to Thanksgiving. They're both coming to Christmas. They're both going to the New Year's party. So I just need you to be prepared. That's why we're talking about this today.

This is where the fight between the two realities comes to a head. This is where your personal history starts to impact everything you do, especially so much as you haven't dealt with it. So Judges 11:29 says, "Then the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah." I'm talking about he's anointed. He's not just a warrior. He's not just good at what he does. There's some kind of supernatural something that's come on him. I'm telling you, I'm grateful to be an anointed preacher, but I'm grateful to be in a church where the anointing isn't just for the preacher. The anointing is for you. I've got anointed engineers and anointed realtors and anointed teachers and anointed engineers. We've got anointed people in the church. You're anointed. Somebody say, "I'm anointed." You might as well know that going into 2027, 'cause when you start praying and reading your Bible and things start happening at a rate that you've never seen before in 2027, I want you to know we warned you. You're anointed. I'll just dip out on this message right now and start running. Hallelujah. So you're anointed.

"The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah as he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead, he passed on to the Ammonites."

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

He's got the anointing. The Spirit of the Lord is upon him. God is doing a work in his life at the present time. That's where many of you are at today. God is doing a work in your life. And I would never be the preacher to get up and act like everything's sunshine and rainbows. But I'll tell you, we've been blessed over the last several weeks to hear it over and over and over again. We've had multiple families reach out just in the last few weeks and say that they are closer to the Lord right now than they have ever been in their history. We are grateful that God is doing some type of work in our church that is ministering to people on a personal level. And so a lot of you are there today. We've seen it. We're watching you be overwhelmed by the power of the gospel that touches and changes lives.

But again, the holidays are upon us. And when we go into the holiday season, there's just another reality that lingers around as well. On one hand, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and on the other hand there's this son of a prostitute, this personal history that's lingering. Verse 30 says, "And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, 'If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 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'll offer it up to you in a burnt offering.'"

> **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."

I want you to hear this. The mighty warrior still has the son of the prostitute's inclinations. There's a desperate desire in Jephthah to be accepted by his family. He wants to be accepted. And he has an opportunity to go and win that acceptance from them, and he is so desperate for it that he begins to make a vow to the Lord where he essentially says, "God, if you'll just do this, I'll do whatever." And honestly, he's making the vow from a place of... He's been surrounded by worthless fellows. So it's not like, even though the anointing is on him, it's not like he's been in a discipleship process. So he's got weird, funky theology. He's probably got a lot of pagan influence, and he's probably looking towards the Lord in the way that the pagans are looking towards other gods. And he's saying, "Look, whatever it takes to appease you and make you be nice to me this one time, God, I..."

You know, I always hear people pray this on TV shows, on sitcoms. You know, they get into a few seasons and then something serious happens. You know, they shoot Will Smith and they put Mr. Turner in a motorcycle accident, and Eddie Winslow has a bad day at school. He's offered drugs, and you always get into that. And whenever that happens, there's always like a scene where somebody prays, and in the prayer it's always, "Well, God, I don't ever ask you for anything." Okay, well that could be the problem. That could be the issue. But you get to a place where you start to call on the Lord in a rash way and make arrangements with the Lord, not because you're a mighty warrior. It looks like stuff a mighty warrior would do. Well, yeah, a mighty warrior would make a vow. A mighty warrior would ask... No, no, no, no, no. That was the son of the prostitute who was doing that. The son of the prostitute is going, "God, just one time, will you do it?"

That's why we've been teaching you over the last few weeks about the names of the Lord, 'cause I want you to know God's character so when you go to pray, it isn't about you mustering up enough begging. God's gonna do what God's gonna do because He's God. Amen. So the son of the prostitute starts to do this begging thing, and it seems small. It seems like it's nothing, but it's actually very unhealthy, and it's anchored in an unrealistic desire. 'Cause I'm gonna tell you right now, if Jephthah wins the battle, at some point they're gonna find a reason not to have anything to do with

him again. I believe in restoration in families. I want you to know that, but man, I'm a little too realistic. I want you to know I will sacrifice fixing my family in this direction if I can fix my family in this direction. I'll come back to that in a little bit. I can tell that hit the room. I'll give y'all some Bible here in a minute. Amen.

So this causes him to shrink from being a warrior to really becoming a beggar. God didn't ask him to do this. In fact, success was already granted. The anointing came on him as he went into battle. He's already anointed. Success is guaranteed. But because he's the son of the prostitute, he cannot imagine a person like him ever experiencing actual true success. But maybe if God will just, I don't know, look the other way this once and do me a solid.

The story goes on and he wins the battle. He wins the battle.

> **JUDGES 11:32-33** ESV
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> 32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the LORD gave them into his hand.
> 33 And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim,
> with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

The first thing that comes out of his door, though, is his daughter, his only child. God didn't ask him to do this. God did not require this of him. Every other place in the scripture where there's any inclination of something like this with a human sacrifice, God absolves it and reverses it and uses it really to show us a picture of the Messiah.

> **GENESIS 22:12-13** ESV
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> 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing
> you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." 13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and
> behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and
> offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

But in this situation, we're dealing with a person who has made a pagan vow out of an unhealthy place to a righteous God. 'Cause you can involve God all you want, you're still gonna do what you're gonna do. So you have to be mindful of that, because if you come to the Lord and it's the son of a prostitute just looking to be accepted, you'll do extreme things that are ungodly and they're unrighteous, and you'll think that that's what's gonna please the Lord. And ultimately, scholars really don't know. Some scholars say that he sends his daughter away to go live in seclusion. That's a possibility, but the text reads in a plain way that says that he ended up sacrificing his daughter.

Judges 11:34 says this, "Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah, and behold, his daughter came out and met him with tambourines and with dances." She's excited he won, not knowing what it would cost her. "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, 'My daughter, you've brought me very low, and you've become the cause of great trouble for me; for I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.'"

> **JUDGES 11:34-35** ESV
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> 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.”

And he could have if he’d have known the Word, because human sacrifice violates the law of God.

> **DEUTERONOMY 12:31** ESV
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> 31 You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

So he very well could have just gone, “Well, obviously this...” But when the son of a prostitute sat in the driver’s seat, bad decisions start to get made, and if we aren’t careful, the next generation of our family, our children, our grandchildren, will pay the price for how we respond to the behaviors and decisions of the generation before us and around us. If we aren’t careful, we take the pain of the experiences of being the son of a prostitute, and we put them on our children and our grandchildren for no reason other than we have not come to terms with our own personal history.

Most of my family has passed away at this point, but for years, I would get a call from my mother and my grandmother ‘cause there was no separating the two of them. That’s a package deal right there. Some of it just comes out. Y’all are cheaper than a therapist, amen. But I’d get a call from them, and then I’m making my kids and my wife miserable for the rest of the day because I’ve gotten the phone call, and it shifted me into a mood that I can’t shake. And we do this in these small ways, because we’re not coming to terms with what’s behind us or what’s around us. It might be a brother or a sister. And so you have these people around you who... There’s something that’s drawing out your personal history you haven’t dealt with, and now all of a sudden you’re putting it on your kids, and you’re making their life miserable. And Christmas is fine when we go to church, but just wait till we have dinner at home, and now it’s gonna be hell on Earth because Mom’s in a mood because she’s done talked to somebody who’s put her in that space ‘cause she hadn’t dealt with something. Do y’all hear what I’m saying?

And so we have to be careful of that. We have to be the gate that closes off historical family dysfunction that goes down into our children. This is just extra, by the way. I’m gonna talk about you. I’m not gonna put a whole lot of responsibility on you, but somebody has to say, “It stops with me. It stops with me. It doesn’t go to the next generation. It doesn’t pass through.” And I want you to hear this. I don’t have it all figured out, but one thing I’ve determined is that I’ll suffer a little bit longer if I can keep it from going to them, because it stops with me.

So we’re talking about this guy who’s got a personal history. He’s the son of a prostitute. So what am I trying to say to you this morning? Happy Thanksgiving. I mean, I think every person here is likely caught between some version of these two realities. God is moving in your life. You’ve engaged in a relationship with the Lord. You’re feeling things now that you’ve never felt in your life, personal freedom and victory, but nevertheless, you’re entering into a season, the holiday season, where that control can be handed over from the mighty warrior to the son of a prostitute, and you can find yourself flowing out of some behaviors and decisions that are just dysfunctional.

So I wanna share with you three thoughts before I close this morning that I believe are gonna help you as we go into Thanksgiving. If you're ready for them, say yes. By the way, this is my third year preaching messages like this around the holidays. The older I got, the more I realized I had to gird up for deviled eggs. You know, it's a high price to pay for cornbread dressing some years. So I think this is gonna help you.

So number one, this is the first thing I want you to hear, God is working in your life. God is working in your life. I want you to be encouraged with this because no matter what the feelings are when you walk in this year, no matter what the stories are that get brought up, it's amazing, you'll be in a moment in your life where God is doing more work on you than ever in your life, and somebody in your family will bring up the fact that you are the world record holder for the most beers you can pound before the turkey. Someone will bring that up. Someone's gonna do it. Some of you, God has made a change in your life, and there's something that your family does every year that you're planning on not doing this year, and you're gonna walk in there, and as soon as you go, "I think I'm just gonna pass," the interrogation is gonna begin. They're gonna wanna know why. "Well, why?"

And so there's gonna be feelings and things, but this is what I want you to know. You're gonna be reminded of some things that you used to be. You're gonna be reminded of some things you may still be. In fact, you might find yourself acting more like you used to this time of year than you normally do. And so there's gonna be some things, there's gonna be some accusations that are maybe thrown in your direction this year, and I just want you to know that God is working in your life. It's real. It's present. God's doing it. It's not fake. It's not put on.

You know, the hardest theology we try to sort through is how can a person be saved and not be perfect? And listen, we've got doctrine on doctrine on doctrine on doctrine to try to explain how somebody can be saved and not be perfect. We try to explain things like, "If God's a healer, why aren't you healed?" I don't know, but He's a healer. I'm not the proof text on what God does. God is God. I'm just me. I'm just hanging out. I'm just getting through. So you're gonna have some of that stuff come up, but you gotta know that you are having a real experience with the Lord.

Romans 10:13 says this. It says, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord

> **ROMANS 10:13** ESV
>
> 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

will be saved." I'm just wondering, are you an everyone? Are you an everyone? Have you called on the name of the Lord? If you called on His name, then you are born again, blood-bought, a child of the Most High God. God is working in your life. God's working in your life. James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God, and He'll draw near to you."

> **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 He's drawing near to you, honey. God is doing a work in your life. Some of you are experiencing a personal revival right now. But you're about to walk into a situation where that guy is not who everybody knows, and I want you to be encouraged. God's doing it. Be encouraged. It's real. Be encouraged. It's done. Be encouraged. You're not who you used to be. Come on. Somebody give the Lord a praise right there.

Number two, you're not what people say you are. You're not what people say you are. In fact, I've got good news. If you're born again, you're not what people say you are, even if you are what people say you are. Listen, you're fighting between two realities. There's two realities. There are two realities. Everybody in here, our church is twice the size you think it is 'cause each of you are two people. You are born again, sanctified, and yet... He's a mighty warrior. He's the son of a prostitute. And you get in the right situation, and that other guy flares up. It happens.

If you're familiar with 1 Corinthians, I'm gonna give you some good Bible context real quick to help you in your next read of Corinthians. If you're not familiar with 1 Corinthians, this would apply to 2 Corinthians as well. But if you're not familiar with 1 Corinthians, you need to know this, that the Corinthian church is full of some screwed up people. They make the worst people you know look tame. These are people that are dysfunctional. They don't know how to behave themselves. And these aren't people that don't act right when they're out of church. These people don't act right out of church. They don't act right in church. They don't act right on the way to church. They don't act right after. They don't act right in the altar call. They don't act right at all. These are some messed up folks. These are some messed up folks.

But I want you to see this. 1 Corinthians 1:2 says this. If you've never read 1 Corinthians, I'm gonna help you out with something. "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who are in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."

> **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 begins by calling the people in the Corinthian church, he says, "To those who are sanctified." These are sanctified people. Paul says, "You are sanctified," and then he spends the next 16 chapters telling these people how unsanctified they are. If you can think it, these people are doing it. And he says, "Hey, you're sanctified. But if you could stop sleeping with your stepmother, we'd really appreciate it." Y'all think I'm making that up. That's Bible. That's 1 Corinthians 5.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 5:1** ESV
>
> 1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.

They're like, "Guys, could you just..." You know, they take communion, and they get drunk. The communion elements are sitting there. They get hammered and then start the service.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 11:20-22** ESV
>
> 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

The pastor's done with worship. He's trying to move into the communion moment, and he goes, "If you..." Well, maybe y'all don't have any elements. You know? I mean, it's just messed up. These are people that when he tells them they're receiving an offering in Corinth... I kinda like this. We might do it on December 6. But he sends a group of people to observe them and make sure they actually give in the offering.

> **2 CORINTHIANS 9:3-5** ESV
>
> 3 But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you
> may be ready, as I said you would be. 4 Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are
> not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. 5 So I thought it necessary to
> urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may
> be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

This guy can't pass the buckets. These people don't know what to do. They're in there, they're taking, they're like, "Hey, that looks like a power bill to me. I'm going to Disney World. Amen. I'm glad the row ahead of me was generous." And you know, you can't trust these people. They're messed up. But nevertheless, he says you're sanctified.

Two realities. A reality that is set forth at the cross of Calvary, a reality that's just a reality. And you know, the Bible says in Revelations 12 that the devil is the accuser of the brethren.

> **REVELATION 12:10** ESV
>
> 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God
> and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses
> them day and night before our God.

And I want you to know this, that this holiday season, I don't believe you're gonna be interacting with the devil's agents when you go to Thanksgiving, no matter how much you may not like your aunt or your uncle. I don't think they're the devil's agents, but nevertheless, the enemy'll get on the frequencies of what some of the people in your family will say, and will have you feeling all kinds of ways. My experience is that your holiday people, God bless them, they gonna know how to discourage you. They'll find that little spot. And y'all remember Star Wars? When Luke had to fly and he had to hit that one little spot on the Death Star, and he hit that one little spot and that whole thing blew up? That's your first cousin, baby. She knows where that one little spot is, and she's gonna hit it. And so to have you feeling discouraged.

You know, years ago, I was called to the ministry relatively young and not long after I gave my life to the Lord. And so when I would talk about going into the ministry, I mean, I had full plans. I kinda knew, like, this isn't by accident, by the way, folks. This is all by design. And so I knew early what I was gonna do. And my grandmother, God bless her, 'cause sometimes your family will discourage you while they're trying to protect you. They do love you. But every time something with the ministry would come up, "Well, I'm gonna go into the ministry, I'm gonna do this," "Well, honey, you gotta make money. Well, Jason, you gotta make money. You gotta do something, make sure you got money." And every time ministry would come up, I'd need to do something, 'cause I was just gonna be broke, busted and disgusted. And by the way, if you wanna be rich, I really do not recommend this career path. Not great.

And so about 10 years ago, maybe a little more now, we stepped out of local church ministry, and we started our own businesses, and we had our own income coming in. I was still doing ministry. I stayed ordained with the Assemblies of God. I still had stuff going on, but I wasn't in local church ministry. And every time it came up that I wasn't in local church ministry... Now, we're making money finally. You know, we got money coming in. By the way, that was a great financial step. And I've got money coming in, and then my grandmother would always go, "So you just don't love the church anymore? You just are tired of the church? You're not gonna do that anymore?" And I'm like, "Man, I don't know. You told me when I wanted to go to ministry, I was supposed to make money. Now that I'm making money, I'm supposed to be a minister. I don't know. What do you want from me?" Luke. She gonna find that one little spot, and she's gonna drive it there.

My family, I'm gonna tell you, they'll find a way to get on you about stuff. My family, my mother and my grandmother, I'm gonna tell you, all things considered, you know, I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't chew, I don't go around with girls who do. You know, I'm the husband of one woman. Listen, if something's gonna come out on me, it ain't gonna be an affair. I'm gonna tell you that right now, and that ain't because I love the Lord. I'm scared of that woman right there. And I ain't messing around. Besides, T.F. Tenney, who was a great preacher, he used to say this. He said, "I don't have affairs for two reasons." He said, "God's against it, and they tell." I'm sleeping with an eye open. Amen.

And so I'm doing pretty good. I can sing, I can preach. I got some things going on. In terms of my career, I think I'm doing pretty good. I know a lot of stuff. I can do a lot of things. But I'm gonna tell you, I have an area of my life I don't have an extreme amount of mastery. It's not for lack of try. In fact, everything I try seems to work against me. I'm a little heavy. Now, I wanna just say this. I'm a little heavy. Okay? I am not huge. People talk about me sometimes on the internet like I weigh 583 pounds. You know? Every time I say something people don't like on the internet, they go, "Well, now, isn't gluttony a sin?" I'm like, "Man, I'm not eating that much." Yeah, I might have seconds on spaghetti, but I'm not having seconds on everything. Okay?

And so I'm a little heavy. Well, every time I'd go home to be with my family, my grandmother and my mother, whether I was there, but then they'd ask me on the phone too, "Well, how's your weight doing?" You know, and you wanna just go, "You know, Meemaw, I'm killing it at everything. But I had the four piece instead of the three piece. And if you could just back off and shut your mouth, that'd be awesome." Did y'all hear me this morning? I mean, Lord, give it a rest, you know? I mean, they make clothes that fit me. Ashleigh's not sewing stuff for me. I'm not wearing overalls 'cause that's all I can do. You know what I mean? So how many of y'all had a pawpaw that was in overalls all the time? My pawpaw was in overalls 'cause that's all that could go over it all, amen. You know? It's okay, I gotta get back to this message. I'm sorry. We're having fun.

But here's the reality. No matter what Meemaw says, or what Pawpaw says, or your mama says, or your brother says, or your cousin says, or Luke the Jedi says, you are what God says you are. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says this, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come." Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

> **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.

1 Corinthians 15:10 says, "But by the grace of God, I am what I am: and his grace towards me is not in vain."

> **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.

Listen, I don't care what the son of the prostitute says. God is doing a work in you, and it's not gonna be 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 they say about you.

> **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 care what God says about you. Amen. Somebody give the Lord a praise right there. Whoo, I feel like preaching.

Number three, embrace the process. Embrace the process. Embrace the process. We're talking about fighting between two realities. Jephthah was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. You know, James 1:8 says, "He's a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." I just want you to know that it is a double-minded man who's unstable, and a lot of your instability, it just comes from the double-mindedness, the fight between the two realities.

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

And a lot of the victory in your life is gonna be determined by who's winning at any given moment. Is it the mighty warrior, the anointed warrior? Or is it the son of the prostitute? Is it that personal history that's just getting up and making decisions in your life?

But my friends, I just wanna encourage you, I'm saying this to encourage you more than to instruct you. Let me tell you what I'm not preaching this morning. I'm not preaching get it right this holiday season. I'm preaching get through this holiday season. You know, some of y'all have realized, like in church, we have a lot going on on any given week, and I'm doing a lot of what we do. How many of you are thankful for Jeremy this morning? If for no other reason than I was shaking hands and worship was happening. I thought, "My Lord, I don't normally get to do this kinda stuff," you know? And so I'm grateful, because there's a lot that's happening, and what I've found is that when there's a lot happening, when there's a lot going on, you just have to get through it. So sometimes I come into church, and I'm not here to have a great experience. I'm not here to feel great. I'm here to get through the service, 'cause I got a lot going on.

When you got a lot going on, some of you, I just need you to get through the holidays. We are about to hit 2027 like a bomb in this church. But some of y'all are new to the faith, and you're new to God doing a work in your life. You just gotta get through Thanksgiving not making you feel like you're so unworthy that you just go, "I'll never go back to church, 'cause I'm an awful person." Or get through Christmas and realize, like, hey, guess what? You know what? As much as you wanna enjoy reading Luke 1 and Luke 2 on Christmas, you're still gonna like watching Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, okay? It's just gonna be what it's gonna be. I'm about to watch The Santa Clause over and over and

over again, okay? The greatest Santa Claus is Tim Allen, amen. And so I just want you to get through it, and I want you to embrace the process. I want you to embrace the process.

Yeah, there's a double-mindedness. It affects things, but that's just part of the process. And I know a lot of preachers preach in a way that they say, "Hey, if you'll say this prayer, everything'll be perfect. If you say this prayer, everything'll work itself out." And I just want you to know that on the other hand, you are a mighty warrior, but you're also... whatever you are. You've got stuff going on. You know, 2 Corinthians chapter five says that the old has passed away but the new has come. But then Galatians says that we are transgressors who rebuild what Christ has torn down.

> **GALATIANS 2:18** ESV
>
> 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

It's just two things that are at play.

Romans 7 verse 21 says this, "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, 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. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 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." I'm a mighty warrior, but I'm the son of a prostitute. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

> **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.

Some of you are gonna win the battles, some of you are gonna lose the battles over the next several weeks. You know, Jon mentioned this the other night. How many of you are grateful for that great message Jon preached on Wednesday night? But he mentioned Proverbs 24 that says this: "For the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity." You know, seven is an interesting number to use there because it says in some essence that the righteous man is gonna fall perfectly.

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

My friend Tony Sutherland, who I'm gonna have come preach one of these days, and he's just gonna rock your world with grace. He wrote in his book Grace Works, he said, "The righteous man's gonna fall perfectly on his face." At some point, we will all find ourselves face down, not because God is holy, but our feet are shoddy.

But by the grace of God, no matter what happens, you're gonna get back up. No matter what happens over the next few weeks, you're gonna get back up. No matter what mama or daddy say to you, you're gonna get back up. No matter what happens when the son of the prostitute gets in the driver's seat, you're gonna get back up. No matter what happens when you're arguing in the front yard with your sister, you're gonna get back up. No matter what happens when you make the wrong dietary decisions this... You know, I'm gonna eat all the deviled eggs. I just need to tell you, don't get me around them. You know, Miss Gina brought me a homemade chocolate pie the other day. And I'm telling you, I don't know if she did that because she loves me or she wanted to keep me big. But she blessed me the other day. And you know, I ate all of it. But that's my business. My family isn't alive anymore to ask me about it.

And so I'm just telling you, no matter what happens, no matter how many chocolate pies you finish, no matter how many things you overspend on, no matter how burnt the turkey is or how burnt and fractured the relationships are, no matter what people remind you of from your past, you're gonna get back up. You're gonna get back up. You're gonna get back up. The righteous man falls, but he gets back up. He gets back up. You're gonna get back up. And let me tell you why you're gonna get back up: because it's God that does the work. It's God that does the work in you. And 2 Timothy says this. It just says, "When we are faithless, He is faithful."

> **2 TIMOTHY 2:13** ESV
>
> 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

So I wanted to close this morning differently than I normally do. Will y'all bear with me? I don't know if it's gonna work, but I'm gonna try. I wanna sing a little song. And just let this be a song that you keep in your spirit through the rest of the year. Let me come back out here for a second. This might be the last time I see some of y'all till January. The holidays are crazy. I hope it's not. It ain't that hard to show up, amen? But I may not... That's why I wanted to preach this today. Next Sunday is Thanksgiving, like we're in the week. You know, them bookends, the kids are out of school. And so I just want you to know God is faithful. He's faithful. So you just keep this little song in your spirit. Just sing, [worship]

If I was to sing this in a service, I would stop right there. But our church is going through a lot of change right now because God is faithful. And He's faithful to see the work of His church continue to make an impact. But there are people in this room today who have loved the Lord, they've loved this church, they've loved every pastor who's been here including this one, and they've been gracious and kind, and they've sown into the soil of this property to see God do a great work in this community. And that means they have to come in here and listen to the drums, and the guitars, and the new songs, and I don't like them either. I don't like them, so I want some older songs, too. But this is what we do. So this morning, I'm not gonna stop there. We're gonna sing the next two verses as a church family and celebrate the Lord's faithfulness as we enter into this holiday season. Are you ready for that? All right. It's a great verse to sing when you're talking about moving into a season. [worship]

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

02

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.

03

Scripture List

Every passage read, cited or alluded to in the message, in the order it comes up.

Read

Read aloud in the message.

JUDGES 11:1-3

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.

JUDGES 11:4-11

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.

JUDGES 11:28

28 But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent
to him.

JUDGES 11:29

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.

JUDGES 11:30-31	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.”
JUDGES 11:34-35	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.”
ROMANS 10:13	13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
JAMES 4:8	8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
1 CORINTHIANS 1:2	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:
2 CORINTHIANS 5:17	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	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	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.
JAMES 1:8	8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

ROMANS 7:21–8:1	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.
PROVERBS 24:16	16 for the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.

Cited

Named or quoted along the way.

JUDGES 11:12-27

12 Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, “What do
you have against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?” 13 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.” 14 Jephthah again sent messengers to the
king of the Ammonites 15 and said to him, “Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take
away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, 16 but when they came up from
Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh.
17 Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Please let us pass through
your land,’ but the king of Edom would not listen. And they sent also to the king of
Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. 18 “Then they
journeyed through the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of
Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side
of the Arnon. But they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the
boundary of Moab. 19 Israel then sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king
of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, ‘Please let us pass through your land to our
country,’ 20 but Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory, so Sihon
gathered all his people together and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel.
21 And the Lord, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of
Israel, and they defeated them. So Israel took possession of all the land of the
Amorites, who inhabited that country. 22 And they took possession of all the territory
of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan.
23 So then the Lord, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his
people Israel; and are you to take possession of them? 24 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. 25 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? 26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer 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? 27 I therefore have not sinned against you, and
you do me wrong by making war on me. The Lord, the Judge, decide this day
between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.”

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is
not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife.

REVELATION 12:10	10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.
GALATIANS 2:18	18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.
2 TIMOTHY 2:13	13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

Alluded to

Drawn on without naming the reference.

JUDGES 11:32-33	32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the Lord gave them into his hand. 33 And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.
GENESIS 22:12-13	12 He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” 13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.
DEUTERONOMY 12:31	31 You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.
1 CORINTHIANS 11:20-22	20 When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:3-5

3 But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty
in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. 4 Otherwise, if some
Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated
—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the
brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have
promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.



Pastor Jason Mayfield

SENIOR PASTOR, CITYLIGHT CHURCH

Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, where he and his wife, Ashleigh, lead a church devoted to Building Lives on Jesus. His preaching is rooted in the Bible, full of hope, and grounded in one conviction: an incredible life is built on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

For more than 20 years, Pastor Jason has given his life to the local church. He has been credentialed with the Assemblies of God for 21 years and ordained for 14, and he has led revitalization in churches that went on to rank among the Top 100 Fastest-Growing Churches in America. He carries a deep conviction that the church can be both excellent and supernatural, and a passion for revival.

He is an author and the creator of Tear Up Your Bible and POWER 27, a daily rhythm of Bible reading, prayer and worship. His resources have helped more than 100,000 people go deeper in the Scriptures. Above every title, his greatest joy is seeing people meet Jesus, be filled with the Spirit, and grow into everything God has called them to be.

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