

"Think not that I come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." Matthew 5:17

Jewish Heritage Revival

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"And When he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" John 10:4

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Sermons by Rabbi Frank

BREAK THE CURSE

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Scripture: Judges 11:1-6

All of us enjoy reading or hearing of individuals who are able to overcome adversity to accomplish something great. When a person of humble means rises above the fray, beats the odds, and becomes a success story—it's motivating.

I was thinking of such an individual last week in reviewing the Haftorah from the book of Judges. Many things were very striking about last weeks Torah and Haftorah portions with respect to the current tensions in Israel. You have the same players fighting for the same land and posing identical arguments!

This family feud goes back into the early chapters of Genesis and remains front page news today! How can this be? The calendar may change and generations may come and go, but there are too many things that remain constant. Human nature has not changed. Our clothing and technology has changed but our flawed, rebellious nature remains essentially the same. The intents of men's hearts are still bent on doing his own thing without a second thought as to what God may say about a matter in the Torah

Another thing that does not change is God's sovereign choosing of the Jewish people to be His servant. He gave us a land from which to operate. God had chosen a people and had given her a land that she would be the envy of all the nations. Her mission from the time of Abrahams calling was to go into all

the nations and declare the oneness and universality of the God of creation over and above the polytheistic ways of the nations! God's purpose is to bring "Tikkun Olam," world restoration, through the people He had chosen.

With that Choseness also comes responsibility and fierce opposition. The nations will not receive your arrogant claims of one God who has a separate Law. Moreover too, just as there is a God, there are also spiritual forces of wickedness that are out to undermine and destroy all that God purposes. This is another major reason for the endless world wide Anti-Semitism that has prevailed on this earth from the time God called Abraham.

This morning I want to go beyond the Land issues of the text and make some spiritual observations of the lies we believe. I want to look at a man who is really an unsung hero. I'd venture to say that very few have ever heard of him but his story is worth our hearing.

Let's have a look at Judges 11:1-6

Jdg 11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, but he was the son of a harlot. And Gilead was the father of Jephthah.

Jdg 11:2 Gilead's wife 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."

Jdg 11:3 So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob; and worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him.

Jdg 11:4 It came about after a while that the sons of Ammon fought against Israel.

Jdg 11:5 When the sons of Ammon fought against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob;

Jdg 11:6 and they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our chief that we may fight against the sons of Ammon."

A couple weeks ago, long time UCLA basketball coach John Wooden passed away and the sporting public fondly bid adieu to a great man and a life well lived. From a humble Indiana farm house he pursued his passion and shaped the lives of hundreds of the young men left to his charge. But few people are more recognized, respected and loved than former heavy weight champion Muhammad Ali. Wherever he travels the world over, he is warmly received and there isn't a face more recognizable.

Born in Louisville, Kentucky he learned early the ugliness of prejudice and discrimination. His grandparent's legal documents read "free colored" and it was a stigma he fought hard to overcome. In 1960 he represented the United States in the Olympics and came home with a gold medal. In discouragement over prevailing racist attitudes he threw his gold medal into the river.

Our text this morning provides a wonderful example of a man who overcame the painful stigma of rejection. It wasn't just your "run of mill" kind of rejection; this man was shunned by his own family and told he was illegitimate and worthless. He had to endure the animosity, angst, and attitude of society for something he had no control over.

Yiftach lived with the pain of being the son of a harlot. He would be driven out penniless and having to fend for himself. Modern day sociologists and psychologists would give him license and excuse to go through life as a malcontent.

By the standards of society this man was a nobody but in the eyes of God he is a somebody. The thing that really attracts me to this unsung hero that very few, if any, ever cite, is this: that no matter who you are, where you are from, what your heritage is, how you came to where you are and whatever your background may be—there is hope in God to heal all the wounds of our past!

How can God use someone who's not a "pure bred?"

How did he survive rejection from family and community?

How could appoint him a judge in Israel when he has so much baggage? How can an illegitimate child be elevated to such a place in Israel?

The encouraging thing about Yiftach is that his name appears beyond the book of Judges; his name is forever enshrined among the all time greats in biblical history! His name is cited among the great in Hebrews 11!

Imagine that, a ‘son of a harlot’ born of shame to a heathen prostitute can really make a name for himself and get God’s attention! This should serve as a word of encouragement to everyone here who has bought into a false bill of goods that someone has sold us!

All of us, I don’t care who you are, have been the recipients of some hurtful messages. Directly or indirectly we are given messages that tell us “you don’t fit in,” “you don’t measure up!” You too fat, your too skinny, too short, too tall, too much cologne, not enough deodorant, big nose, big butt, big ears, bad hair, no hair, brainiac and dumb.....there’s no end to the insults leveled at us. It seems that we spend so much time and energy working to earn the acceptance of others.

Society viewed Yiftach in denigrating, disparaging and derogatory terms but the text tell us that God saw him as a “valiant warrior,” or a “mighty man of valor!” If this is how God saw him, I’d have to say that the voices that shamed him were the voices of liars!

When we come to know and understand the God who created man in His own image, who bestowed upon man gifts and abilities above and beyond all of His creation, when we consider the great lengths He went through to redeem us from our fallen, sinful state—we come to recognize a great truth—one that David wrote about:

Psa 139:13 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.

Psa 139:14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.

Psa 139:15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;

This is a comforting word that many need to be reminded of. Yiftach’s story is one that needs to be told more often, especially in a day when so many children are being born outside of marriage. Especially in a day that is experiencing such an increase in various cases of abuse!

Through no fault of his own, Yiftach was exiled and disinherited. How many victims of abuse go through life believing it was their fault? They go through life in fear, feeling unworthy and dirty—that if they “came out of the closet” they would be blamed for further discord in the family.

I can’t prove it and I haven’t researched any data on the matter, but I would say rejection is the most painful affliction one can endure. Medication can relieve physical pain, but what can remedy a bruised and crushed spirit? Proverbs 18:14 asks: “A man’s spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit, who can bear?”

Rejection is the most common and the deepest wound that the heart can endure. This is one major reason God hates divorce! It’s painful to the spouse being rejected and it’s painful to children and it’s painful to families. How many children live with the guilt that they were the cause of their parents break up?

The fear of rejection is what drives us to find acceptance at any cost. Why else would a young man choose to join a gang or to undergo the rigors of initiation? In the gang there is a sense of security and a feeling of acceptance.

Yiftach goes out and before long hooks up with a bunch of “tough guys.” The text refers to them as “worthless fellows,” guys that went out on raids with the intent to plunder and pillage. Isn’t that so typical? You see examples of this throughout the biblical text. Ishmael was cast out and ever since, his descendants have been at war with the sons of Isaac. Esau was overlooked and bypassed, his blessing went to Jacob and so he joins forces with Ishmael to spite the other side of the family.

Yiftach joins in with a bad crowd but it's within this bad crowd that his leadership skills come to the fore. People will follow leaders because they possess a relevant gift and it's obvious that Yiftach was a leader. It's also obvious, and although we're not given much detail, he had to be a man sensitive to the Spirit of God. He trusted in the God of his fathers—how else could one be appointed as a judge and has their name mentioned amongst the greats of the faith?

This too dispels another myth, another lie. Again, social scientists will say; “Your lot in life is determined by what's been done to you, you're a victim, people owe you, and society owes you.” That adversity in your youth will cripple you for life and you will never rise above the hurts of your past!” And this is always followed up with another expensive government program that produces little to no results!

The only effective programs have been proven to be the faith based programs that do not draw a cent of taxpayer money! When a person can see him or herself through the lens of Scripture and come to embrace God's acceptance and forgiveness—transformational changes occur! Rabbi Shaul expresses this thought as he writes:

2Co 5:14 For the Messiah's love has hold of us, because we are convinced that one man died on behalf of all mankind (which implies that all mankind was already dead),

2Co 5:15 and that he died on behalf of all in order that those who live should not live any longer for themselves but for the one who on their behalf died and was raised.

2Co 5:16 So from now on, we do not look at anyone from a worldly viewpoint. Even if we once regarded the Messiah from a worldly viewpoint, we do so no longer.

2Co 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is united with the Messiah, he is a new creation — the old has passed; look, what has come is fresh and new!

As things progressed, the dream of any man seeking revenge was at Yiftach's fingertips. The very people who hurt him and disinherited him are now begging him to return to Gilead. The Ammonites were threatening and they needed the kind of security and protection only Yiftach could offer. What an opportunity! What a great way to get even! A lesser man would find it opportune to join ranks with the Ammonites. For 18 years this man is in exile. For 18 years his rights were violated. For 18 years he suffered all manners of untold hurt! And now they want his help? To quote Jackie Gleason: “How Sweet it is!”

But that's not what he did, he took the high road and they came to a mutual understanding.

In closing, I direct your attention to verse 29

Jdg 11:29 Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon.

After all he's been through, how is this possible? Isn't he damaged goods? Isn't he tainted? Undesirable? Not according to God who sees not as a man sees but looks to the heart!

For all of the things that come at us by way of adversity, God can turn it all around for His glory and purposes. Even in so many secular stories that are so prominent in our daily news, we learn of individuals who after a bout with cancer, or losing a loved one through tragedy, have used that experience to lighten the burden of others who are going through that same crisis! Thus, we have ribbons and bracelets to raise awareness and money for particular causes. This principle is outlined in 2Cor. 1:

2Co 1:3 Praised be God, Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, compassionate Father, God of all encouragement and comfort;

2Co 1:4 who encourages us in all our trials, so that we can encourage others in whatever trials they may be undergoing with the encouragement we ourselves have received from God.

What you may have considered to be wasted and hurtful seasons, God can reverse and restore!

God honored Yiftach and endowed him with His Spirit! Yiftach refused to take vengeance on those who hurt him. His forgiveness and willingness to even hear their offer was significant!

He refused to blame shift or get bitter. He refused to give into the misnomer many have that the Lord can't anoint you with power unless the circumstances surrounding your life are perfect! That's just a legalistic, perfectionist trap.

It's impossible for anyone to be perfect, God only cares that we are willing and humble. When all was said and done, Yiftach had cultivated a pure heart in a pagan culture! Mired in a world of paganism and without direction, this man transformed himself and those with him from a brigand of marauders to be an army for the Lord! One man had made a difference to the group of men that were under his charge. In all of his dealings we learn that as tough as he was and as skilled a warrior he was, he always sought first to negotiate and try to broker a peace. Going to war was always his last option—doesn't sound like a man given to pillage and plunder.

From such humble and humiliating beginnings comes forth a man who by faith "subdued kingdoms, worked justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire.....out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

Are you weak and want to be made strong? Do you have a past that's robbing you of your future? Have you convinced yourself that there's no use in trying? Has your life been somehow altered because of the bitter pill of rejection.

Remember, that we serve a Messiah who also was despised and rejected of men.

From Isaiah 53:1 - 4

Isa 53:1 Who has believed our report? And to whom is the arm of Jehovah revealed?

Isa 53:2 For He comes up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; He has no form nor majesty that we should see Him, nor an appearance that we should desire Him.

Isa 53:3 He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as it were a hiding of faces from Him, He being despised, and we esteemed Him not.

Isa 53:4 Surely He has borne our grief's, and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

Yiftach's story is recorded for us to examine and learn from. His incredible testimony is proof positive that with God all things are possible.

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