

Judges

But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. (Judges 2:19 ESV)

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25 ESV)

The Rescue God Refuses

October 26th, 2025

Judges 10:1-11:11

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! Please keep your Bibles open to Judges chapter 10. Thank you, Lincoln, for reading for us.

When is the last time that you were really in a desperate place? Perhaps some of you feel that you are in that position right now. Those seasons of desperation – those times when we are forced to our knees – are terribly uncomfortable. But they are also moments of tremendous clarity. Aren't they? They force you to come face to face with what you really believe. When you come to the end of yourself, you are forced to cry out for RESCUE. That's what we see in our passage this morning.

There are two stories in our text this morning but, if you look closely, you might come to notice that they are really one. In chapter 10, Israel cries out to God for rescue while in the opening verses of chapter 11, Gilead cries out to Jephthah for rescue but there is a great deal of clear and intentional overlap. As one commentator notes:

The parallels between Israel's way with Yahweh and Gilead's way with Jephthah seem too close to be accidental.¹

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such A Great Salvation* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2000), 138.

Both passages are about a people in need of rescue. Chapter 10 states the lesson in plain terms. But in chapter 11 – where we will begin this morning – the lesson is illustrated in a story. It is a story of a cry for help.

The Story Of A Cry For Help

Let's begin by briefly setting the scene. The beginning of chapter 10 gives us an idea of the *timeline* for this story. There, we read that – following the reign of Abimelech – God sent Tola as a judge for his people, and then Jair after that. We're not told much of anything *about* these two characters. Their main function seems to be that of *time markers*. They serve to remind us that God has been *long suffering* with His people. We are now 45 years removed from the terrible story of Abimelech that we considered last Sunday, but the people of God are STILL a train wreck.

So, 45 years later, we zoom in on the region of Gilead. There, we learn the origin story of an unlikely deliverer named Jephthah.

The first thing that we learn about Jephthah is that he is a mighty warrior. He's the kind of guy that people fear and follow. Picture the strongest, toughest person that you know. That person would be scared of Jephthah.

However, the *second* thing we learn about him is that his mother was a prostitute. Being an illegitimate son meant that Jephthah would never enjoy the same rights and privileges as his brothers. Jephthah was strong, which made him a threat. Which leads us to the events of verse 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." (Judges 11:2 ESV)

Jephthah doesn't seem to put up much of a fuss. He moves on to the region of Tob where he very quickly makes a name for himself. The 'worthless fellows' of the region flock around him and before long Jephthah has become the leader of a ragtag gang of ruffians.

Jephthah's brothers had gotten what they wanted, and everything seemed to be ticking along smoothly until word came to Gilead that the Ammonites were making war with Israel. With a dangerous foe marching towards their door, Gilead needed to find a mighty warrior. At which point they remembered, 'Aha! We KNOW a mighty warrior!! Remember Jephthah? Let's go find that guy and ask him to come back and lead us!'

But Jephthah saw through their duplicity. He replied:

“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 11:7b ESV)

'You don't want me to lead you! You simply need help for *this battle!* When the fight is over, you'll cast me aside just like you did before. No, if you want my help then you must agree that I will REMAIN your leader even after the danger is gone.' That's what we see in verses 9-10:

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.” (Judges 11:9-10 ESV)

The author of Judges is telling this story in such a way as to highlight that this is EXACTLY the way that Israel had been treating God! Whenever they entered into a season of peace, they would reject God so that they could indulge all their sinful whims. Then, when their sinfulness inevitably led to terrible consequences, they would cry out to God. 'God, please come and rescue us!'

Now, let's step back and remind ourselves that God WANTS His people to cry out to Him! That is a GOOD instinct! In fact, throughout the whole book of Judges we are learning the lesson that – when God's people cry out to him for help – He will rescue them.

But here, in this passage, it's as if the author of Judges wants to zoom in on this cry for help and to clarify some things. There are some things that we need to remember as we cry out to God for rescue. That's what this passage is all about:

What We Need To Know When We Cry Out To God For Rescue

First, as we cry out to God in our desperation, we need to know that:

1. God will not be your part-time Lord

Consider again the story of Jephthah. His brothers only intended for him to lead them in the *battle*. But Jephthah refused to go before them until they assured him that would still be their leader once they again returned to peace time. In the same way, when Israel cried out to God for rescue in chapter 10, he replied:

“Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? ¹² The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand. ¹³ Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods; **therefore I will save you no more.** (Judges 10:11b-13 ESV)

They only called Him ‘Lord’ when they needed something from Him. Theirs was a ‘bombshelter’ religion and, as one commentator notes:

The theology of bombshelter religion teaches that - of course - God will help you in your need, that he is - helpfully enough - incredibly naïve and hopelessly soft.²

They weren’t ‘sorry’ for what they had done. They were ‘sorry’ that they had gotten caught and that they were suffering from the consequences. Whenever God would deliver them from their troubles, they would immediately turn their backs on Him and run back to their idols. This quote uses strong language, but I think it helps to capture the urgency of this passage:

There is a difference between a prodigal who comes to his senses and returns home and a whore who pleads for her husband’s security only until she finds someone else to take her on.³

Are there any of us who have been guilty of treating God this way? Maybe you find yourself in a season where God is just someone you call when things fall apart. Maybe – even though you say

² Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such A Great Salvation* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2000), 132.

³ Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such A Great Salvation* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2000), 133.

you love him – you have no desire in obeying what he has to say about your life. You want the saviour. But you don't want the King. To that person, God declares:

Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress.” (Judges 10:14 ESV)

‘This mess that you’re in is the result of your idolatry. You’re here because you rejected me. You thought that sin would give you a happier life. And you STILL believe it! You STILL love your old idols. So, why are you talking to ME? If that sin is so great – if that idol is so great – then let IT help you.’

Israel's problem was that they knew what they needed to be rescued *from*. But their hearts still didn't understand what they needed to be rescued *for*. Most people, if they are honest, want to be rescued *from* their present crisis *for* the purpose of going back to life as it was. That's what we see in this passage. ‘Save us Jephthah, but then leave us alone and go back to where you came from. Save us God, but then leave us alone so we can worship our idols again.’

Listen: Jesus' life, death and resurrection is the greatest rescue mission in the history of the UNIVERSE! God is in the BUSINESS of rescuing! But Jesus did not die on that cross so that you could go back to life as it was. He's not a get-out-of-jail-free card. He did not simply come to rescue you *from* sin and death. He came to rescue you *for* a holy life in relationship with him! Paul writes that Jesus:

gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:14 ESV)

Rescued *from* sin, *for* holiness. When you cry out to God for rescue, THAT is the rescue He is offering!

And to be clear, it's not as if a life of obedience to God is some kind of *burden* that you have to endure if you want to enjoy the rescue. This is the life that you were MADE to live! You are an image bearer! Submitting yourself to the God who made you – trusting that HIS way leads to life – conforming to the image of Jesus – *the greatest person who ever lived* – is where true joy and lasting peace is found!

When you cry out to God for rescue, you need to remember that He will not be your part-time Lord. Second, and flowing out of that, we are reminded in this passage that:

2. God will not be deceived by empty words

This is an important lesson for us to learn. Look again at verse 10 of chapter 10:

And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, “We have sinned against you, because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals.” (Judges 10:10 ESV)

At face value, this is a good step. Israel is saying the right thing. ‘We sinned. It was wrong. We are sorry.’ But, then God responds, and it doesn’t sound at all like what we would expect:

you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore **I will save you no more.** (Judges 10:13b ESV)

What are we to make of that? Didn’t God reveal Himself as the One who is abounding in mercy and steadfast love? Didn’t He tell us:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 ESV)

And yet, Israel is here confessing their sin and God is NOT forgiving them. This must mean, therefore, that when we cry out to God, He is concerned with MORE than simply the words that we say.

Because repentance is more than ‘sorry’.

This is the recurring problem in the book of Judges. There are so many ‘sorrlys’ – so many tearful apologies – but there is no real turning of the heart. A real apology – real repentance – will be evidenced by real CHANGE. That’s exactly what Jesus taught us. He said:

“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes

picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

⁴⁶ **“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:43-46 ESV)**

So, when you cry out to the Lord and say, ‘God, please forgive me for my alcoholism!’ You should then go to the fridge and pour the rest of those tall boys down the drain. And when you say, ‘God, please forgive me for my greed!’ You should then open up the budget and determine what needs to change. And when you say, ‘God, forgive me for being divisive!’ You should get in your car, and you should go apologize to the person you’re feuding with. When the tax collector Zacchaeus asked for forgiveness, he said:

“Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And **if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.**” ⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house (Luke 19:8b-9a ESV)

Zacchaeus models for us here what real repentance looks like. This is what it looks like when a heart changes. As you cry out to the Lord for rescue, you need to remember that He will not be deceived by empty words.

This passage is primarily a passage of WARNING. Almost every verse is heavy and severe. However, there is one last, encouraging lesson that we learn in this text. When we cry out to God for rescue, we need to remember that:

3. God will never turn away anyone who cries out to Him in faith

Look again at verses 15-16 of chapter 10:

And the people of Israel said to the Lord, “We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day.” ¹⁶ So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord, **and he became impatient over the misery of Israel.** (Judges 10:15-16 ESV)

Just so we’re clear, the ‘misery’ that Israel endured was 1,000% their own fault. At this stage in the book of Judges, they have reached a new low. Look again at verse 6:

The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. **And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him.** (Judges 10:6 ESV)

At this point, they're not just serving the false gods of the Canaanites anymore. They're serving the false gods of ALL the neighbouring nations! They are stacking rebellion upon rebellion – betrayal upon betrayal. Every time they adopted a new idol in their worship, a unique new brand of *suffering* came with it.

The same is true in our own lives. There is a particular set of consequences that come when you bow down to the idol of sex. There is a whole other set of consequences that come when you bow to the idol of laziness. Or the idol of greed.

At this stage in Israel's history, they are bowing to ALL of the idols and have therefore subjected themselves to ALL of the consequences. They are the ones who made this mess.

And yet, when they finally put away the foreign gods – when they truly repent – God becomes impatient over their misery. It pained Him to watch them suffer, and He could endure it no longer.

Like the father who took up his cloak and ran to his prodigal son.

Like the husband bringing his wife back after she's been abandoned by her lovers.

Like when Jesus said from the cross:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34a ESV)

Our God will NEVER turn away anyone who earnestly cries out in faith. There is a room full of people here today who have cried out to Him in our moments of desperation who have found this to be true.

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13 ESV)

As we conclude, as a minister of this amazing Gospel, I want to issue this invitation to the person in need of rescue: Come, repent of your sin, call upon the name of Jesus, and be RESCUED. But, as you cry out to Him, remember that He will not be your part-time Lord. Remember that He will not be deceived by empty words. Real repentance means renouncing your sin and making a decisive turn away from it. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains:

Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, and take up the cross and go after Christ.⁴

If you would be rescued, then THAT is where you need to begin.

And then, having renounced your sin, call out to Jesus in faith. BELIEVE that he has paid for your sin on his cross. BELIEVE that you are now forgiven and loved by your heavenly Father. One old pastor gave this invitation:

Own your sins with your head in your Father's bosom, weeping because of the great love that has forgiven you.⁵

Our God will never turn anyone away who cries out to Him in faith. This is the message of Judges 10. This is the good news of the gospel. And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 504.

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *Only A Prayer Meeting*, (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 42.