

I Cannot Go Back

I Cannot Go Back will challenge us to embrace unwavering faith and honor our commitments to God, no matter the cost.

This message tells the story of **Jephthah** (Jeff-tha), *a man born into rejection and hardship who rose to lead Israel* as its eleventh judge.

Judges 11:1-2 - 1 Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead; his mother was a prostitute. 2 Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when they were grown up, they drove Jephthah away. "You are not going to get any inheritance in our family," they said, "because you are the son of another woman."

Despite his troubled past, Jephthah became a beacon of faith and integrity,

Demonstrating that our circumstances do not define our destiny when we surrender to God.

This message centers on **Jephthah's (Jeff-tha) life-changing vow** to the Lord.

- He was bitter over the treatment he received from his half-brothers.
- He made a rash and foolish vow that was costly.
- We need to avoid making rash vows under heated emotions.
- They often lead to unforeseen, unwanted consequences.
- Be cautious about making promises to God you may not want to keep!

Judges 11:32 So Jephthah (Jeff-tha) advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and *the Lord delivered them into his hands*.

Judges 11:34-35 Jephthah's (Jeff-tha) Daughter - 34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and **she was his only child**. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! **For I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it.**"

After securing victory against the Ammonites, Jephthah (jeff-tha) returns home to face the heart-wrenching fulfillment of his promise:

- Sacrificing **the very thing he loved most**—his only daughter.

His declaration, “I cannot go back,” resonates as a profound **example of faithfulness**, even in the face of unimaginable sacrifice.

- It will challenge us as believers **to evaluate our own commitment to God**
- And inspire us to **honor our word with the same determination**.

Judges 11:34-35 - 34 When Jephthah (Jeff-tha) came to his house at Mizpah, ***there was his daughter***, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and ***she was his only child***. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! **For I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it.**”

The man who uttered these words **was born in shame but died with the highest honors** that could ever be given to a mortal.

- This man **won the heart of God** for he could not **lie to God or man**.
- With **the greatest discouragements** known to man, he rose above all and lived for God.

A person’s background **does not prevent God from working powerfully in their life**.

He who **cannot** lie to God **cannot** go back on God.

My appraisal of this man puts him as **the greatest character in the O.T.**

- **Abraham** couldn’t compare to him, for **God encouraged Abraham**, but not this man.
- **Moses** could not be compared to him, for **Moses was practically born with a silver spoon in his mouth** as angels watched over him, but not this man.
- **David** could not be compared to him, for **David embarrassed God**, but not this man.

So many noble traits, He is listed in Heb. 11 God's honor roll, Jephthah the eleventh king of Israel.... =====

1. Environment is No Excuse for Not Living For GOD

Many Christians turn back to their old ways and stop following God.

- With excuses like *their environment or surroundings made it too hard* to follow Jesus...
- They forsake *the pursuit of a relationship with Christ* and holy living.
- There are *fleshly environments that we must steer clear of*....

Jephthah reckoned that if he told God something, God took him at his word and there could be neither excuse nor sacrifice as great as his word.

Let us look at his background,

- He was the son of a harlot, and his father was a playboy.
- ***What a start in life!***
- His mother ***forsook him***, and his ***dad disowned him***.
- He was kicked out of society.

He knew neither the love of a mother nor the care of a dad.

- *He never experienced* a mom's caress, a good-night kiss or tucked into bed.
- Never would he know the companionship and security only a dad can give.
- Gilead was wealthy and even the city was named after him,
- Jephthah had neither claim nor inheritance.
- He was rejected by society.

Judges 11:3 - Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him.

- Like many people do, we hang around the wrong crowd....
- But this isn't the end of his story it is only the beginning!!!

The next phase of his life begins the first steps on Jephthah's climb to greatness.

- Often, the story ends when vain and wicked people come into our lives.
- But, from this point **Jephthah will make his own history**.

First, Jephthah purposes that he will lead and not follow.

This is a cardinal law in righteous conduct, and how he mastered it with no advice or example to follow, only makes this story an even greater miracle.

No greater degree can any person attain than *mastering one's own conviction against overwhelming odds and opinions*.

- *Only great people lead when character is at stake.*
- Jephthah rose up and lived for God.
- Who instructed him in righteousness?
- Who encouraged him to live for God?
- Who taught him Christian principles and ethics?

He rose and lived for God and commanded the respect of vain men toward his God.

Present day environments are creating more sportsmen than Christians.

- It is sad to see that *the environment of intellectuals brings no spirituality*.
- Every new achievement of science tends to slacken a person's hold on God.

We must admit our moral weakening in this last couple of decades.

- No greater opportunity is afforded by **those who would stand up with the integrity of Jephthah** than that offered today.
- You are not responsible for how you came into this world, but how you leave.

God's superior people will rise above their conditions in faith.

Tribulations make people, and from trials *great mothers are designed from Giddish girls* and *great dads are formed by broken-hearted boys*.

Many times, tribulation makes a person!

Struggling people may be aroused to strong convictions and strong wills.

- Great moral and spiritual leaders often come from parents who had little opportunities and many hardships.
- People brought up under disadvantages became people of great moral strength.

- This is the tragedy of today: **Youth with no real responsibilities, no struggles, and no trials is spoiled.** =====

2. Discouragement Is No Excuse for Not Living for God:

There was **no encouragement** for this young man who destined himself to be judge of Israel.

Discouragement lay continually across his path.

- **Given a broken heart** by being disowned by his family, he set out for,
- **The next opportunity** to become something among his friends.
- They all turned out to be **hypocrites** and kicked him out of society.
- Normally disappointment in a friend or loved one **can completely change the character of a person.**

What you do is more than what you say.

Confidence should be in the Creator and not the creature.

Jephthah lived for God and drew vain men unto him.

Either you influence those with whom you associate, or they influence you.

- **Discouragement** from without and **discouragement** from within, yet his faith did not waiver.
- Trouble on the outside and trouble on the inside, **yet he grew stronger physically and morally.**

This reminds me of the difficulties of the early church.

- Plagued with persecutions and tribulations from without and troubled with a broken confidence (Anannias and Sapphira) from within, it spread.
- ***Discouragement from within and without made it grow stronger in faith and power.***

Hardship & trials were no barriers to the growth of the church, they were helps.

- **Wealth and ease have become a menace to spirituality.**
- In those days it cost something to be a Christian;
- Now it is easy to be a Christian, so consequently it means little.

The church struggled for prestige and **when that was accomplished**, it slackened its reins; its strength seeped, and its power went away.

- If we have a low conception of sin, we will never have a high conception of grace.
- The proportion of our appreciation may be found in *our gratitude of putting our hand to the plow and not looking back*.

This mighty man of valor was from the beginning, expected to go wrong.

- This was a discouragement.
- When no one believes in you it is no problem to disbelieve in yourself.
- The beginning of a deception is with self.

You can become so low that any change must be upward.

- *Fate can take a twist when you* have nothing to lose but everything to gain.
 - Determination only moves forward and upward so Jephthah inclined with the first step of discouragement.
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3. Catastrophe Is No Excuse for Not Serving God

The noblest people are not satisfied with having attained the heights of self-advancement. This was true of Jephthah.

One morning he awoke to find the elders of Gilead seeking his help to save them from the children of Ammon.

Judges 11:5 - And so it was, when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob.

This day revealed the hidden sins of the elders of Gilead:

- Your sins will find you out. (Numbers 32:23) inherent consequences...
- This was a confession of guilt as to who was right and who was wrong,
- For the laws of God cannot be mocked. (Gal.6:7) God is not mocked.

Never doubt doing right even though the harvest is slow, it will come though! *Jephthah rises to higher heights for he has reached a new stature in God when he obeys the cardinal law of the universe: Forgive and Forget. Central Theme!*

- This law holds no grudges.
- There can be **no higher learning**.....
- No one holds a master's degree until he masters his own spirit.

They stood indicted for their wrong, but Jephthah found no place for revenge.

The condemning question at the judgment will be, "Who have you wronged?" not, "Who has wronged you?"

The men of Gilead have quite a company of ancestors living today.

- They can complement you and put on quite a show *when you can be of some use to them.*
- Let the need be reversed, however, and *they do not even know you.*

Try and accomplish something good, they were your secret critics and **would be one of the first to exile you.**

- *To many, life is a one-way street;* your presence can be tolerated if you are going their way.
- **A disappointing friendship is always the outcome!**
- And the cost in this case left a man's happiness in bankruptcy.

He agreed to help Israel fight the Amorites with this vow to God:

Judges 11:30-31 - 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, 31 then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

- **Jephthah went to battle, and God gave him victory.**

Returning home, his only precious daughter ran out of the house to meet him.

Judges 11:35 - And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those

who trouble me! For I have given my word to the Lord, and **I cannot go back on it.**"

Words will tip the scales one way or the other during the next fleeting moments.

- He tore his clothes well knowing that **the Lord is a God of knowledge...**
- **Nothing is hidden from Him** and **by Him actions are weighed.**
- Realizing **he contracted with God** alone, **he must not go back.**

Little did Jephthah know; **he was placing his name on God's honor roll...**

- Jephthah became **the judge of Israel.**
- **Tragedy had come; he looked for no excuse, he made no excuse, and he did not ask to be excused.**

As Children of God, **let us respect our word** as He respects His.

If your word is not good **your claim on life hereafter** is no good.

By your words you will be justified and **by your words** you shall be condemned.

Anyone and everyone **can serve the Lord when everything is in his favor.**

Storms of life can make a person; catastrophe can make them even greater.

- **There are storms of our own making and storms not of our making.**

This mighty man of valor, principle, ethics, courage, and determination **gave his all.**

Let us look closely at this man's sacrifice **in comparison to ours.**

First, He tore his own heart and nerves out by the roots.

Second, He sacrificed the only thing that ever loved him.

Third, He sacrificed the only thing in this world he ever loved.

It was his all!

If God demands the same from us, it must mean all our soul, mind, and strength.

Anything less is unacceptable.

As a child, he never knew of anything or anyone loving him, nor did he know the love for anything of anyone.

But for the first time in his life, he had the feeling of being loved by this precious daughter who would hug his neck and kiss him when he went out and came in.

- For the first time, sunlight shone across his dark life, and for once he knew what happiness and life was.
- She alone had set him free from the tomb of loneliness and sadness.
- Here in his arms for the last time, running her fingers nimbly through his hair, chattering away words of affection, were all his hopes, his love, and his world.

This day his world fell apart, castles tumbled, heavens shook; it was the end of his world. It did not have to be, Jephthah.

You could go back on God and avoid all this, and your little world would orbit as before. But not so, for -

This mighty man, feared God, lived for God, and kept his word.

His sacrifice was greater than he could bear, but it was not greater than his word.

God saw the father's faith and accepted the sacrifice.

- **No doubt** Jephthah took his daughter to a place of worship!
- **He left her as his sacrifice** and returned home never to smile again.

God honored Jephthah, and *the honor given to his daughter is still honored by the nation of Israel unto this day* for her spirit of obedience and encouragement.

She lightened the load and remorse of her father by saying unto him:

Judges 11:36 - So, she said to him, "My father, if you have given your word to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon."

Few Christians have the spirit of his daughter; fewer have the spirit of Jephthah.

Could you encourage the work of the Lord to go forward at any cost???

- Even the cost of yourself?
- Or do you dig in and **discourage others**?

Do you attempt to make the Kingdom of God to fit your plans?

This man's motives alone shall condemn generations, for he stands today as a monument of encouragement to those who will live for God, and a warning to those who treat their vows lightly.

CLOSE: The sermon centers on Jephthah's life-changing vow to the Lord.

After securing victory against the Ammonites, Jephthah returns home to face **the heart-wrenching fulfillment of his promise:**

- **Sacrificing the very thing he loved most—his only daughter.**
- **His declaration, “I cannot go back,” *resonates as a profound example of faithfulness*, even in the face of unimaginable sacrifice.**

Let's Evaluate our commitment to God and honor our word with the same determination.

This message may have been convicting and transformational, as it addresses modern-day complacency and calls us as believers to rise above our excuses.

It boldly confronts the tendency to prioritize comfort over commitment, urging us to stand firm in our faith, regardless of trials or challenges.

Jephthah's story serves as a timeless reminder that God honors those who remain steadfast and obedient, even in the most difficult circumstances.

“I Cannot Go Back” is an invitation to deepen our walk with God and to inspire us to live with purpose, conviction, and courage.

Let's forsake spiritual mediocrity, embrace the call to holiness, and *remain faithful to our commitments*.

Hopefully we have been Empowered with the lessons of Jephthah's unwavering faith and leadership.

Let's ignite revival in us and foster a culture of faithfulness and bold obedience.