

Judges: Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons  
*Faith Without Knowledge*

Jeffrey and Marci Beagley were found guilty in February of criminally negligent homicide in the death of their teenage son, who died of complications from an untreated urinary blockage. Each was sentenced to 16 months in prison.

Carl Worthington was convicted of criminal mistreatment for failing to provide adequate medical care last summer in the death of his 15-month-old daughter, who died of a blood infection.

The Beagleys and Worthington are members of the Followers of Christ Church in Oregon City, Oregon, a church that teaches that God always heals, and that if you seek out medical treatment you don't have enough faith.

The Oregon state medical examiner's office reported that during the past 30 years more than 20 children of church members had died from preventable or curable illnesses. The mortality rate for Followers of Christ children during that period is 26 times greater than the general population.

The problem at the Followers of Christ Church isn't that they don't have enough faith. They have plenty of faith. The problem is, their faith isn't grounded in truth. They have a very strong faith. But faith without knowledge is dangerous and even destructive.

All down through history there have been horrible things done in the name of one religion or another. But just because the perpetrators were sincere didn't make them right. To be right, we have to be grounded in truth.

We're in a study of the Old Testament book of Judges. Judges is a historical record of God's people from 1380 BC to 1045 BC.

The Bible is a historical book that takes us through the history of mankind from the divine point of view. In other words, God gives us a history of the world but He focuses on the things that give us the details of His redemptive plan. He gives us the people and events that eventually lead up to the focal point of all history, which is the cross of Jesus Christ.

Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden and right then and there God promised a deliverer. The Old Testament is the account of the people and events leading up to that deliverer. Today we know that the deliverer is Jesus Christ.

That's why in the book of Judges we have the details of people who lived 3000 years ago. These were the Jewish people through whom God promised to bless the world. Unfortunately they were a lot like we are. They had trouble staying on track with God.

In fact, God's people went through seven distinct cycles of sin, punishment, repentance, and restoration in the little over 300 years covered by Judges.

Each time God allowed their enemies to over run them until they turned back to Him. Then God would send what was called a Judge to deliver them.

**Open your Bible to Judges chapter 10, page 228**

*I. God Is Always Ultimately Faithful To His People*

**Read verse 6**

This is the 6th time in the book of Judges we're seen Israel rebel. The word Baals is the plural for Baal, the pagan god of nature and fertility. This is from the Westminster Dictionary of the Bible article 'baal.'

"... Baal worship apparently had its origin in the belief that every tract of ground owed its productivity to a supernatural being, or baal, that dwelt there. The farmers thought that from the Baalim, or fertility gods, of various regions came the increase of crops, fruit and cattle ... The worship of Baal was accompanied with lascivious rites, the sacrifice of children in the fire by parents, and kissing the image. Baal was often associated with the goddess Astoreth, and in the vicinity of his altar there was often an Asherah."

Of the goddess Astoreth the same dictionary says:

"... She was the goddess of sexual love, maternity and fertility. Prostitution as a religious rite in the service of this goddess under various names is widely attested. The identification of 'Ashtart with Aphrodite is evidence of her sexual character. Asherah refers to a wooden pole or mast which stood at Canaanite places of worship; originally it was, perhaps, the trunk of a tree with branches chopped off, and was regarded as the wooden symbol of the goddess Asherah, who like Ashtoreth, was a

type of fertility ... It was erected beside the altar of Baal.”

Any worship that doesn't honor the creator God of the universe is false worship. False worship steers people away from God and blinds people to the truth. Remember, faith without knowledge is dangerous and even destructive.

In this case the worship was immoral and evil and there was consequences.

### **Read verses 7-10**

Did you ever notice how people tend to turn to God in a time of trouble? God might have been the last thing on their mind until some calamity comes and all of a sudden they realize they're not in control so they call out to the one who is.

For many of us God had to use difficulty to get our attention. That's not a bad thing.

But I think God's answer here is really interesting. He doesn't say, "No problem. Let me get right on that."

Here's what He says, **Read verses 11-14**

Was God going to help His people. Of course. God is always ultimately faithful to His people. But God's got a higher priority than just getting us out of the messes we get ourselves into. That's what we want. we say, "God, just make all this go away."

God's priority is to build our character. We don't always like that because we want the quick fix. Character building stretches us. Sometimes it's kind of painful.

God's goal with His people was to draw them to Himself. So God says, "No problem guys. Just call on the gods you've been worshipping. They've been at the top of your priority list. I'm sure they can help you."

Sometimes God has to say to us, "I hear you complaining about how life's caving in on you. Why don't you just turn to the object of your worship." It might be money, it might be pleasure, it might be control, whatever. If we've been giving the idols of our heart that much attention, surely they can help us in our time of greatest need.

No they can't. That's the point that God wants to drive home with us. All these things we get caught up in are like pacifiers.

We have a 5 month old grand daughter and sometimes shes content just to suck on her

binkey. It actually pacifies her for a while. But that only works when she's not hungry. When she gets hungry and cries and you try to fool her and stick the pacifier in her mouth she just spits it out. Why? Because no milk comes out. It can't satisfy the real need that's in her life. Only milk will do that.

We try for these substitute gods of sex, money, accomplishments, possessions but they're like binkys. They can't meet the real needs of our heart. That's what God wants us to grab onto. That's what God wanted Israel to grab onto.

*I. God Is Always Ultimately Faithful To His People* Sometimes He holds back while we go through the learning process, but even that is part of His faithfulness.

*II. God Blesses Those Who Recognize His Sovereign Lordship*

### **Read verses 11:1-3**

Chapter 11 introduces us to Jephthah, the next judge in Israel. Unfortunately Jephthah doesn't have such a great beginning. Dad shouldn't have been hanging out with prostitutes but he does and one gives birth to Jephthah.

Gilead takes the boy into his home and raises him as a son but when his brothers were grown they booted him out of the family. Amazing how sin always seems to eventually bring confusion into our lives.

Here's Jephthah, a reject from his own people, a skilled warrior/leader attracting other rejects. So Jephthah puts together a possie of worthless men. The Message says, *Some riffraff joined him and went around with him.* The Living Bible says, *"he had quite a band of malcontents as his followers, living off the land as bandits."*

Jephthah led his band of misfits on raids of enemy territory, taking what they needed and living almost like outlaws in the old west. As his following grew and word spread of their daring adventures, Jephthah caught the attention of the elders of his old hometown.

So the Israelites go to him for help. Remember he was a *might man of valor*, verse 1. That's a phrase that means strong warrior and leader. Jephthah says "Wait a second! I thought you guys hated me? Wasn't I the kid you drove away from my father's house? "Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?"

They say "That's all in the past. If you help us now, you can be our leader for life." Jephthah says "All right. I'll do it."

But then, just to show you where Jephthah turns **look at verse 11.**

What Jephthah did, was humble himself before God. I believe that Jephthah realized that God was the real commander in chief of Israel.

### **Read verse 12-13**

Just in case you thought that middle eastern land conflicts were recent here's proof it's been going on for thousands of years. Here's events that took place over 3000 years ago between the Ammonites and the Jews.

Jephthah crafted a well thought out and through response to the king's demands.

### **Read verses 14-24**

He says, it wasn't us who picked the fight in the first place. You're ancestors wouldn't let us pass through peacefully. They fought us and we won. Your god gave you what you deserved and our God Jehovah gave us the land.

Then Jephthah goes on to argue that no Ammonite has challenged the legitimacy of Israel's land for 300 years ***therefore... verse 27***

God blesses those who recognize His sovereign lordship. Jephthah might have been a pretty tough guy. He might have been able to swing a sword. But he knew that all the skills in the world were doomed to failure if it was all about him instead of all about God.

Here's the thing. God uses people's skills. He's going to use Jephthah's. He uses our skills. But He's not limited to people with skills to get His job done in the world. Before anything else He's looking for a heart that's receptive to Him.

A lot of times we feel like we can't do much for God. You even hear that from people in the church. they say, "I can't preach a sermon, lead a Bible study, sing or play an instrument so there's no place for me to serve." If you're sitting back thinking that way let me challenge you.

We need help taking care of the grounds, ushering, running cameras, sound, doing building maintenance. We need people to serve in all kinds of areas. Some take skills, some you get on the job training.

I'd ask you this. What do you like to do? What's your interests? You may be skilled in something we've never even thought of using in the ministry here. We won't have that opportunity unless you come forward and tell us.

God's on the look out for certain things; availability, willingness, and a heart that says, "I just want to honor God with what I do."

Jephthah may have had some well developed abilities but the reason that God ended up using him was because he was a man who took God seriously. He refers to God as "the LORD" more than any other person in the Book of Judges. When Jephthah went to battle, the Bible says that "the Spirit of God came upon him." That's something you only read about three other judges.

*I. God Is Always Ultimately Faithful To His People*

*II. God Blesses Those Who Recognize His Sovereign Lordship*

*III. God Calls Us To Have Faith In The Facts*

Campus Crusade uses the illustration of a train to clarify how God wants us to live our lives. The engine is "fact," the fuel car is "faith," and the caboose is "feeling."

Facts are important, faith is important, and feelings are important. They all make up the train but in that order. Feelings are God-given. They're part of who we are. But feelings by themselves can't pull the train of our life.

Feelings change. Feelings can be influenced by any number of factors. One day I might feel close to God and another I might not feel so close at all.

If I'm going to go in the right direction in life feelings can't run my life. That's why so many people make a mess of life. They just do whatever they feel like with no parameters to guide them. But faith can't guide my life either. Faith is so important God says, *without faith it is impossible to please Him.* (Hebrews 11:6) But the faith God's calling for is faith that's rooted in truth.

In the early 1970's a man named Marshall Applewhite was recovering from a heart attack during which he claimed to have had a near-death experience. Out of that experience Applewhite claimed he was endued with special knowledge.

He started a cult group that eventually became known as Heaven's Gate. Heaven's Gate members believed that the planet Earth was about to be recycled (wiped clean, renewed, refurbished and rejuvenated), and that the only chance to survive was to

leave it immediately.

On March 26, 1997, in a period that a Comet passing the earth was at its brightest 39 members of the group committed suicide believing that they would be boarding a spacecraft by which they would gain entrance to heaven.

Applewhite freely quoted from the Bible and used it as a basis for many of his beliefs. The problem was he would pick and choose verses from the Bible to prove his points rather than letting the Bible determine what he believed.

Those 39 people had faith. Their faith was so strong they were willing to die for their beliefs. The problem was faith pulled the train. Faith without knowledge can be a very dangerous thing.

The Bible says, *The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.* (Psalm 119:160) Jesus said to His Father, *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.* (John 17:17)

The engine needs to be the facts of the Bible rightly understood. If you follow a few simple rules like reading verses in their context, paying attention to whom the passage was written, finding out what the words mean, and then checking the other verses that talk about the same subject, the basics of the Bible aren't that hard to understand.

Then, when we understand what a passage is saying we can trust God by faith that it's true, and then let our feelings be the follow up.

For example, if I want to know how to get to heaven I could go by my feelings. If I did I might say "I just feel that God is love, that's the kind of God I want, so everybody goes to heaven."

Or I could go strictly on faith. "I just believe that belonging to Faith Community Church will save me. I believe it with all my heart so how could it not be true?"

But now compare that with allowing the truth of the Bible to lead me.

The Bible says *there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.* (Ecclesiastes 7:20). It says *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23)

My feelings tell me I'm not that bad. Sin isn't such a big deal.

The Bible tells me, *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the*

*ungodly. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*(Romans 5:6,8)

The truth is we're ungodly sinners and sin is so serious it cost the life of Jesus Christ. *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.* (I Corinthians 15:3)

The fact is that we're all sinners. Some of us are more obvious in our sin, but we've all fallen far short of God's righteous standards.

But even with all that, my feelings still tell me that if I try hard enough God will forgive me. That if I'm sincere enough God will accept me.

Once again, the Bible tells me the truth. *Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.* (Romans 4:4,5)

The truth of the Bible tells me if I could earn my way to heaven then God would be indebted to me. He'd owe me. But God doesn't owe any of us anything. instead, it's when we trust Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross, we're justified.

We're ungodly but by faith God forgives and makes us part of His eternal family.

What about Jephthah? He's certainly been a man of faith. Where did he go wrong?

### **Read verses 29-31**

The Bible says, *When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed--Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.*(Ecclesiastes 5:4,5)

How about this? *When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you.* (Deuteronomy 23:21-22)

God takes vows seriously. That's why we say in a wedding where two people are vowing their faithfulness to each other it's not to be entered into lightly or unadvisedly, but reverently and discretely, with respect for God.

So Jephthah vows a vow to offer up what ever comes out of his door first when he

returns.

### **Read verse 34 & 35**

There's two ways commentators have gone in interpreting this passage. Some say Jephthah sacrificed his daughter because of his vow. Others say he dedicated her to God in some type of special service and a life of staying single and not bearing children.

### **Read verses 36-40**

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says this about Jephthah and his daughter.

Most of the arguments for or against Jephthah's offering his daughter as a human sacrifice can be used to defend either position and are therefore not conclusive.

If what he was doing was dedicating her to some kind of lifelong virginity, which would be a big sacrifice in itself (to have descendants was one of the most important things to any family and this was Jephthah's only daughter) he had a clear biblical way out.

Leviticus 27 gives instructions on how you could redeem someone from that situation with silver.

On the other hand, if what he was doing was vowing to literally make her a burnt offering, that was strictly prohibited by God's Word.

To quote the Bible Knowledge Commentary again, In the absence of any clear evidence indicating the girl's dedication to tabernacle service as a perpetual virgin, the more natural interpretation of the euphemism that Jephthah "carried out his vow with her which he had vowed" seems to be that he offered his daughter as a human sacrifice.

Either way, Jephthah is an example of someone who has a lot of faith but lacks the knowledge to give direction to his faith.

You say, "Man, would the guy actually have offered his daughter as a burnt offering to God?"

Remember this, Jephthah and his people have been surrounded by a totally pagan culture that had very skewed values. The less knowledge we have about God's truth, the easier it is to accept what's wrong as just natural.

In fact, the longer we live in a culture that has distorted values the more we can begin to incrementally buy into those values.

We need to know what God says in the Bible. There's only one way that's going to happen. We have to spend time with the Bible.

I've had a number of people tell me that they took up my challenge to read and reread Judges while we're in this study. If you're one of those who has taken the challenge you know what happened to the people of God over and over. One generation did alright for a while but eventually the next was drawn into things that should have been so clearly outside of God's will for them.

Listen, they knew it. They knew those things were anti-God but they very slowly let their guard down. As they let their guard down they spent less time learning God's truth until eventually God's truth was put on the shelf and every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

The book of Proverbs is a book of wisdom. In fact it uses the term wisdom 49 times. Proverbs 2:6 really sums up the Biblical view of wisdom. It says, *For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

God said, *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.* (Hosea 4:6) Whether it's the way of salvation or how to decide what is moral, the Bible is the standard for spiritual truth.

How well do you know it? What's your plan for learning it's truths?