

D GROUP LESSON

Jephthah: Stop Bargaining with God

Series: Dark Horses

Text: Judges 10:6–11:40

Main Character: Jephthah

Preached by Paul Gearhardt

Big Idea: God's favor is not something we earn or bargain for; it is given because of who God is and what He has done.

HOOK

Opening Question

What is the best bargain you have ever gotten?

Let everyone share a bargain they are proud of—something they got for much less than it was worth.

Then ask:

Why do people love getting a bargain?

We like the idea of **giving the least to get the most**.

But sometimes we approach our relationship with God the same way.

We may think:

- “God, if You do this for me, then I’ll do that for You.”
- “God, if You get me out of this situation, I’ll start going to church.”
- “God, if You heal my family member, I’ll serve You.”
- “God, if You give me what I want, I’ll be more faithful.”
- “God, if You forgive me, I’ll make it up to You.”

Transition

The problem is that **God is not someone we make deals with**.

Today, we are going to look at the story of Jephthah and discover what happens when we try to bargain with God.

LOOK

1. Who Was Jephthah?

Read Judges 11:1–3

Jephthah was a strong warrior, but he came from a difficult background. His father had a child with a prostitute, and Jephthah’s half-brothers eventually drove him away because they did not want him to receive an inheritance.

Jephthah fled to Tob, where he gathered a group of outcasts around him.

He was rejected by his own family, yet God would eventually use him in a significant way.

Discuss:

1. What do you think Jephthah’s rejection may have done to the way he viewed himself?

2. Why do you think we sometimes allow our past to determine how we think God sees us?
 3. Have you ever felt like someone was disqualified because of their past?
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2. God Can Use People We Would Overlook

Read Judges 11:4–11

Israel was in trouble again. The Ammonites were threatening them, and the elders of Gilead needed someone to lead them.

Who did they go to?

Jephthah—the very man they had rejected.

The people who once pushed him away now needed him.

Jephthah reminded them of what they had done and essentially made sure they understood what it would cost them to bring him back.

God was willing to use someone who did not have the background, reputation, or religious credentials that others might have expected.

Discuss:

- Why do we sometimes assume God can only use people who have a perfect past?
- What qualifications do we sometimes think someone needs before God can use them?
- How should this change the way we look at people in our church and community?

Key Thought:

God's ability to use someone is not based on their past or their qualifications.

3. Jephthah Tried to Bargain with God

Read Judges 11:29–32

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he prepared for battle.

But instead of simply trusting God, Jephthah made a vow.

He promised that if God gave him victory, he would offer whatever came out of his house when he returned home.

Jephthah was trying to secure God's favor through a bargain.

Ask:

Why do you think we are tempted to bargain with God when we are afraid or desperate?

We do this too.

We say things like:

“God, if You get me through this, I’ll change.”

“God, if You heal them, I’ll serve You.”

“God, if You give me this job, I’ll give more.”

“God, if You keep me from getting caught, I promise I’ll never do it again.”

The problem is that **God's favor is not something we purchase with promises.**

The sermon puts it this way:

“Good news—God's favor is not based on what we do, but on what God has done.”

4. Jephthah's Bargain Had Consequences

Read Judges 11:33–40

Jephthah won the battle.

But when he returned home, his daughter was the first person to come out of his house. The victory that should have been a moment of celebration became a moment of overwhelming grief.

The sermon notes that scholars differ over exactly how Jephthah carried out his vow, but the passage clearly presents the tragic consequences of his rash promise.

Discuss:

1. What does this part of the story teach us about making promises to God?
2. How can our attempts to bargain with God affect other people?
3. Why is it dangerous to think, "If I just promise God enough, He will give me what I want?"

Important Truth

Our relationship with God is not a business transaction.

We don't obey God so that He will owe us something.

We obey God because **He is God, He loves us, and He has already shown us grace.**

5. God Doesn't Want a Deal—He Wants Our Heart

The sermon gives three common ways we try to bargain with God:

"Buy Now—Pay Later"

We make promises during a crisis:

"God, if You will just fix this, I'll serve You."

But once the crisis passes, the promise disappears.

"Low Interest—Refinance Later"

We want our commitment to God to cost as little as possible.

We want God's blessings without the sacrifice of following Him.

"Lease to Own"

We tell God:

"I'll serve You as long as it's enjoyable."

But when following Jesus becomes difficult, tedious, or costly, we want out.

The problem with all three is the same:

We are trying to put God in our debt instead of recognizing that we already owe everything to Him.

TOOK

The Takeaway

Stop Bargaining With God.

God does not say:

"Do enough good things and then I will love you."

God's favor is not earned through religious performance.

We don't need to make deals with God because **His grace has already been given to us.**

Our response should not be:

"God, if You do this, then I will do that."

Instead:

"God, You have already done so much for me. How can I faithfully follow You?"

Personal Application

Give everyone a few quiet moments to consider these questions:

1. Where am I trying to bargain with God?

Is there something you have been saying:

“God, if You will _____, then I will _____.”

2. What am I trying to get from God?

Am I seeking His presence—or simply His blessings?

3. What would trusting God look like instead?

What would it look like to obey God **without attaching a condition to it?**

4. Is there an area where I need to surrender control?

Instead of trying to make a deal with God, surrender the outcome to Him.

D GROUP CHALLENGE

This Week: Trade a Bargain for a Commitment

Think of one area where you have been tempted to bargain with God.

Write down:

“Instead of asking God to _____ so that I will _____, I will trust Him by _____.”

Example:

Instead of asking God to fix my situation so that I will serve Him, I will trust Him by serving Him faithfully regardless of my circumstances.

Put that commitment somewhere you will see it throughout the week.

CLOSING THOUGHT

Jephthah’s story reminds us that we don’t have to bargain our way into God’s favor.

We don’t have to earn what God freely gives.

The greatest “bargain” isn’t getting something from God in exchange for something we promise to give Him.

The greatest gift is that God has already given us what we could never earn.

So instead of saying:

“God, if You do this, then I’ll follow You,”

we can say:

“God, because of what You have already done, I will follow You.”

PRAYER

God, forgive us for the times we have tried to bargain with You. We confess that we sometimes treat our relationship with You like a transaction, thinking that if we do something for You, You owe us something in return. Help us remember that Your favor is not something we earn. It is a gift of Your grace. Teach us to trust You, obey You, and serve You without conditions. Help us surrender the things we are trying to control and simply follow You faithfully. Thank You for what You have already done for us through Your grace and mercy. Amen.