

REJECTED, YET NEEDED IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

Judges 10:1-11-11:11 (Key verse 11:6,7)

"Come they said, be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites. Jephthah said to them, Didn't you hate me and drive me from my father's house? Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?"

Have you ever been rejected in your life, either by friends, family or even a bursary application or employment application? If you have then you know rejection is not a nice thing, most especially by family members. It is one of the most terrible things and brings all kinds of bad emotions within us. Yet in today's passage we will learn how the one who was rejected was the one who was greatly needed in times of trouble. Similarly, how often do we reject God? In this passage we will learn how we reject God and what it means to return to him.

After the time of Abimelek, Issachar the son of Dodo was raised to save Israel for a period of twenty-three years. After him Jair was raised who led for twenty-two years after which he died and was buried in Kamon [1-5]. There was peaceful time during the reign of these judges, Issachar and Jair. Yet after their time Israel moved further away from God. Look at verse 6-8, "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the Lord and no longer served him, 7 he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, 8 who that year shattered and crushed them. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites." Yet again Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord. The Baals were believed to be the gods of agricultural wealth. Since in those days source of income was through agriculture. They would then depend on the Baals for financial success. Israel believed in making more money in order to be happy. They idolized happiness through serving the Baals. Whereas the Ashtoreth was the goddess of fertility, associated with love, sex and romance. There was so many other gods Israel served. They just went with the flow in following what other nations served. Israel gave themselves to the gods of other nations. They completely lost their identity as covenant people of God.

For the first time we see God expressing his anger over Israel. And so, God sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites. As much as they were seeking success, happiness, beauty and romantic love, they ended up being shattered and crushed by the Philistines and the Ammonites. Here we can see that, success, happiness, beauty and romantic love comes from God. There is nothing in this world that can give us these things. Anything that we rely on for happiness, success, love and beauty other than God is an idol. And we will serve what we depend on for success and happiness, it is simply human nature. At the start of serving these other gods, it might have seemed all was going well. But in the end, they were shattered and crushed. We see so many people even Christians, living for money, success and romantic love. Many even show off on social media, which I think is a form of insecurity and poverty, a form of seeking validation from others due to loss of identity as a child of God. No matter how good and desirable these people may look, in the end we will be crushed, depressed and shattered. When we choose the created things or any other thing for happiness and success, we will be choosing to reject God. We do this many times, as students we idolize the job we hope to get after graduation for happiness and successful life. We may be coming to Church, studying the Bible and so on, however if we have chosen to rely on what God has created for happiness and success, we have chosen to reject God. Only God can give us happiness and success. He is the creator of what we need. In fact, God himself is who we need. We tend to focus more on what God has created Instead of on God himself.

In verse 9 we see that, after being shattered by the Philistines, the Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against, Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim which led Israel to be in great distress. Look at verse 10, "Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord, "We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals."" Only then did Israel begin to cry out to God. They realized that they had sinned against God and had forsaken God. Yet Israel was not repentant, they were still not willing to sacrifice their hopes and dreams in relying on foreign gods. However, look at verse 11-14, for the Lord's reply, "The Lord replied, "When the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, 12 the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you and you cried to me for help, did I not save you from their hands? 13 But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. 14 Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!" God reminded Israel of how he saved them from other nations. Israel had intentionally chosen to forsake God and serve other gods. So how come when Israel was in trouble, they did not cry out to the gods they had chosen? Perhaps that was the first thing they did, and then when they were still in same situation, they called on God as their last option. All they cared about was what they wanted as though God was a vending machine

and so the lord said, "...i will no longer save you." Usually God would raise a judge for Israel, however this time around, God acted differently.

Look at verse 15-16, "But the Israelites said to the Lord, "We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now." 16 Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the Lord. And he could bear Israel's misery no longer." Israel became so desperate for deliverance that they were willing to accept anything from God. They were basically genuinely surrendering before God. They showed a form of true repentance by getting rid of the foreign gods among them. Here we also see God's heart who could not bear Israel's misery any longer. Like a father who cares for his children when God saw Israel's genuine repentance of getting rid of the foreign God's and willingness to surrender before God, he could not bear any longer their misery. The Lord then raised a judge for them called, Jephthah.

Meanwhile the Ammonites army camped in Gilead while Israel camped in Mizpah [17]. It was decreed by the leaders that whoever will take the lead in attacking the Ammonites will head over all who live in Gilead [18]. There was no one found worthy to lead Israel in attacking the Ammonites except Jephthah. The elders of Gilead went to get him from the land of Tob [11:5]. In their desperation they asked Jephthah the Gileadite to be their commander in order that they may fight the Ammonites. Just as they did with God in desperation, they also needed Jephthah. Let us briefly look at who was Jephthah in verses 1-3. He lived in Gilead and was a mighty warrior. Because his mother was a prostitute not a wife of his father, Gilead, he was driven away by his brothers who were born from the wife of his father. In verse 2b his brothers said, "...you are not going to get any inheritance in our family," ... because you are he son of another woman." So he left and settled in the land of Tob where he led a gang of scoundrels [3]. This is who Jephthah was, a mighty warrior, a son of a prostitute and a reject by his brothers and people of Gilead. Yet in their trouble they called for Jephthah to lead them. Only in their desperate situation did they call for Jephthah.

Let us all read verse 6,7, "'Come," they said, "be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites." Jephthah said to them, "Didn't you hate me and drive me from my father's house? Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?" Did they suddenly started caring about Jephthah? Did they start feeling sorry over what they did to him? Of course not, as they were using God like a vending machine, they wanted to use Jephthah just to deliver them from their trouble. Jephthah reminded them of what they did to him, how they hated him and drove him away from his father's house. From Jephthah we can learn how the nation of Israel treated God. In Matthew 6:24, "'No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." It is not only that Israel rejected God to serve the Baal's and foreign gods. Just as they hated Jephthah, they hated God and loved the Baals. Just as God reminded Israel of how they rejected him while he had delivered them from other nations. Jephthah also reminds his brothers and the leaders of Gilead how they hated him and drove him away. Jephthah then asks them, "...why then do you come to me now when you are in trouble?" In fact, it is not easy to ask for help from someone you have shown hatred and rejection. Sin had made them to be so self-consumed. They thought about themselves more than they thought about Jephthah. It is like some of our so-called friends, who will only contact us when they need something, mostly money. Some of them you do not hear anything for many years then suddenly they contact you needing money. And many times, what they need is not some small amount. Yet expecting you to help them as though you owe them. Israel had become so selfish, self-serving and so self-consumed that, that doing whatever they wanted or as they pleased was ok. When they rejected Jephthah it was ok, now that they want him back that should also be ok. God saved them from many nations they choose to serve other gods and then when in trouble they choose to seek God for help. It is as though the world rotated around them. Does this remind us of ourselves before God? How we can love and rely on the things of the world for success and happiness? Yet when trouble comes, we run to God for help.

Look at verse 8 for their response to Jephthah's question "...why then do you come to me now when you are in trouble" The elders of Gilead said to him, "Nevertheless, we are turning to you now; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and you will be head over all of us who live in Gilead." They accepted that even though they had rejected him before, they are now calling him to fight the Ammonites for them. With a promise that he will be head over all of them in Gilead. This is similar to when Israel told God that he can do anything with them only that he delivers them from their trouble. They were showing true repentance that they would submit before God, making God their true God. We also find Jephthah re affirming what the people of Gilead promised. Look at verse 9, "Jephthah answered, "Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the Lord gives them to me—will I really be your head?" Jephthah asked, that suppose they win the battle through his leading and gain success, will they make him their head. In verse 10, they made a promise before God, that they will certainly do as he say. And this is how he agreed to rescue them from their trouble.

We can learn through Jephthah, that God's heart could be moved to save Israel, because they had accepted to make God their head. This required sacrifice on their part. They had to sacrifice their pride, their hope in other gods, for God to be their head. They had self-deny the temptation to trust in any other thing but God for success and happiness. Jephthah asked a very critical question, "...will I really be your head?" How many times do we reject God, believing that the things we hope in for happiness and success, will provide us a guaranteed stress free and happy life? How many times do we place our trust on what God has created for our happiness and success? Timothy Keller one of the Minister's and theologian in Manhattan New York, in his Book entitled, "Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters" wrote, "An idol is anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God." I think I can relate more with this. In this way the idol becomes the head or Lord over our lives instead of God. This is how we continue to reject God, if God is not the head of our lives then we are actively and intentionally rejecting him. And as we have seen in this whole passage, in fact since we started the book of Judges, without God as our head, the troubles of this life will overwhelm us as did Israel. Because no idol can save us but the one and only true living God.

This passage also reminds me of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom in our sin we hated, rejected and brutally killed. Yet, Jesus, was the only one whom we needed for our salvation. There is no one else who can save us from our sins. Like Jephthah asked, "...will I really be your head?" unless we accept Jesus as our lord, as our head, we then continue to reject him in our daily lives. We will then remain hopeless in the troubles of this life, we will remain shattered and oppressed by the circumstances of this life. I pray that we may repent and surrender to Jesus by accepting him as the head of our lives. Only Jesus can truly deliver us from the troubles of this life of which the Chief one is our sin problem.

From this passage I have realized that I do not reject God by telling myself that I am rejecting God. I am realizing that, I can be coming to Church, I can be delivering a sermon in His name, committed to having bible studies and all, yet actively rejecting God. The question is, who is the head of my heart? Where does my heart hope in for happiness and success? I am realizing that my hope for happiness and success, is misplaced. Just in this month I served in two staff promotion interviews for full professorship as a one of the faculty's committee members. The requirements for full professor are so high such that I felt it impossible for me to ever reach such levels. There is high requirements for regular publications in high impact factor journals, establishing big things for the school and being internationally recognized. I wondered if I will ever become a professor shepherd. I felt a sense of despair. I felt like I was in big trouble, because in the university, becoming a professor is a natural progression of an academic for new knowledge generation. It is what is expected. At the same time, I seem to be stuck in progressing in my life. Stress and sometimes depression has become my regular friends. I now live with a constant headache that was never there before. Probably because I think too much and rely on my efforts. I am realizing through this passage that, I too have rejected God by relying on my efforts for success and happiness. I have idolized my efforts and abilities and made them the head. God wants me to surrender and make him the head of my life. Instead of hoping in my efforts and understanding, I should hope in God for success and happiness. Please pray with me to sincerely repent, let go and trust and obey. I pray that God may be the head in my life. May I surrender newly to Jesus and pursue not happiness neither success, but Jesus himself who is greatest reward to the world.

In conclusion, before Jesus left this world, he said in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." It is clear that as long as we are in this world we will face troubles one way or another. It is just the way this fallen world is like due to sin. However, Jesus says, we must take heart for he has overcome the world. That only in him will we have peace. I pray that we may not reject Jesus by placing our hope in idols. Jesus is asking me and you today, "...will i really be your head?" I pray that our answer to Jesus is a yes. May we sincerely repent daily and accept Jesus as our head, to lead our lives as He see fit. Amen.