

# Jephthah: Deadly Ambition

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. My name is Alfie, and I help out with university students here at Watermark Church. And today I'm going to be talking to you not about child sacrifice, well not mainly, mostly about ambition.

See, ambition is a very interesting thing. It takes us into all kinds of places. Ambition gave us business class, and Facebook, and Wi-Fi, and lots of really great and convenient things. When people talk about ambition, they almost talk about it as a good thing, almost always. If you look at the newspapers recently, you'll see in the sports, the football team Arsenal has just hired a new goalkeeper, and they have ambitions there of winning a trophy. And maybe one day they will. Morocco is building a whole raft of five-star golf resorts, because they're hoping to bring people in, and their ambition is to be a tourist destination.

Nokia and Facebook are teaming together to bring the internet to two-thirds of the world that doesn't have internet, and the people say that is an ambitious goal, and it is a good goal.

[ 1 : 17 ] You know, the ambitions of NASA got a rocket from our planet Earth all the way to Pluto. And you see the picture of that, that's amazing, right?

Ambition does amazing, good things. And whether you call it drive or desire or motivation, you know, you'll find people saying good things about ambitions and people's goals and, you know, what they do in pursuing them.

European emperor, French emperor Napoleon said that great ambition is the passion of great character. But is ambition always good?

You know, right after saying that, Napoleon said, those endowed with great ambition may perform very good or very bad acts, and it all depends on the principles that direct them.

And the question I have is, is ambition good or is it bad? Or maybe it's just the effects of ambition. All right, ambition itself might be a good thing, but the results of it could be good or bad, depending on the person who has that ambition.

[ 2 : 28 ] I think as much as ambition does great things that we see in the news, it can lead to very disappointing things. You know, I've been following the story of a couple of Chinese tech companies who, after having been listed in the States for a while, decided that they would, you know, exit the U.S. exchanges and go and list in China, you know, only to arrive and to find the Chinese stock market collapsing.

You know, an economic analyst talked about Hong Kong and said that Hong Kong's ambition and drive to do more and do better is actually taking life out of its people, and Hong Kong is seeing skill and talent leaking out of Hong Kong into China, into the rest of Asia.

We see the ambitions of athletes destroy their bodies with drugs and eventually their reputations and their careers. We see conflicting ambitions causing tension between Hong Kong and Beijing. And not too long ago, we saw the ambitions of the finance sector bring, you know, the world economy to its knees. There's an author, David Foster Wallace, and in an interview he talked about his ambition and his desire for perfection.

And he said that his desire for perfection would kill him because he would never be able to be or write as perfectly as he wanted to be. The idea in his head would never make it onto paper.

[ 4 : 00 ] And he said he hated it because it killed him and it hurt the people around him. I think as much as ambition is a good thing, it can be a dangerous thing.

It can hurt those around us. It can kill us. And ambition is what we see that hurts Israel and hurts Jephthah in this story. So we're in the third week in a series we're doing in the book of Judges. And I don't like the book of Judges. I've hated it. I always hated it. I read it for the first time when I was in high school, and I was frustrated because Israel was so stupid.

You know, God would say, don't worship these gods, and they would go and worship those gods, and God would punish them. And they'd come and they'd repent, and God would save them. And you'd think, all right, they've got it. You know, the rest of Israel's history is going to be great. But they'd do it again and again and again. It's like watching a horror movie, right? You know, don't open that door. There's a guy with a machete behind it. But over and over again, they'd do it. I hate Judges because I'm frustrated with Israel.

[ 5 : 10 ] They don't seem to get the message. They don't seem to see that God should be their goal and not these other idols around them. But then I stop, and I realize that the book of Judges is about me.

All right? The book of Judges is about how I am a huge idiot, and I'm always running away from God to worship other things. You know? I think sometimes I've barely finished praying a prayer of repentance, and the next thing I know is I'm thinking about the next fabulous way I'm going to sin. All right? The book of Judges is about me and about how God continually comes to save me and rescue me, even though I really, at least my actions don't show that I want that.

When we started this series two weeks ago, Eric talked about this, this way that we talk about the gospel, two ways to live, and we have a diagram of it. All right? I'm going to run through it really quickly. All right?

And so it's a way to talk about the gospel. It's a way to show, you know, this is what the Bible story is about, and this is how God goes about saving us. All right? And I want to go through it and talk a little bit about how that ties into this story, how it ties into the story of Judges.

[ 6 : 27 ] So in the first picture, we see God who's represented by the crown, and he creates man to rule earth in his place. All right? And that's the good way that it's meant to be.

But in the second picture, we see that man rejects God's rule and gives itself its own little crown. All right? And it fails to take care of the earth properly. That's why it's off to the side and not standing on the earth.

And then we see that God won't let us continue to live like that, that God will judge us, that the consequence of this treason, this idolatry is death.

The good news of the gospel in that fourth picture is that God doesn't leave us like that. He doesn't leave us to sit there and just be dead. He gives us an opportunity for life.

He sends his son, Jesus, who did what we're supposed to do in the first place, who lived under God's law, who obeyed and did all the things that we would not do. And he died in our place.

[ 7 : 31 ] And now in the fifth picture, we see that Jesus is in heaven. He is raised up, and he is ruling over earth. And at the end, we have two choices, two ways to live.

Jesus can be our king, or we can be our own kings. Now, some of these pictures, I think, show the story of judges quite well.

There's the way that Israel is supposed to be, living under God's law. But they reject God, and God punishes them. Not with death. He sends some enemy to oppress them.

And they call out to God, and God sends a judge to save them. It's convenient. The birth letter J, Jesus, judge. And they're saved, but when it comes back to how they're going to live, they go right back to the beginning.

And they choose to serve someone else. And this goes on and on and on. By the time we get to the story in Judges, this is about the sixth cycle of them running away from God, and God saving them.

[ 8 : 39 ] It says that they go and they worship all these different gods, the Baals and the Ashtoreths. They worship the gods of Sidon and Syria and Moab and Ammon and the Philistines.

They worship seven different gods, a god for every nation around them. And it's interesting. If you look at what biblical historians have to say about Israel during this time period, it's amazing because we know Israel's there because people write about it.

The Bible writes about it. Other historical documents write about it. But if you were to look archaeologically, you would never know that Israel was a nation. Because where Israel was supposed to be, they didn't have the structures that would go around worshipping God.

They had all these other gods from these different nations around them. Their idolatry was so widespread and complete that if you went into an Israelite house in this time, you wouldn't know that they're Israelites.

You could usually mistake them for a Philistine or an Ammonite because those are the gods that they kept in their house. Those are the gods that they had around them. You know, through their

journey time and time again, God tells the people of Israel, this is not how I want you to worship. [ 9 : 52 ] You see these people and the way they sacrifice their children? I don't want you to do that. It says this is the right and proper way for you to worship me. So, when Israel goes and they worship all these different gods, he punishes them.

He sends the Ammonites and the Philistines to come and oppress them. And the people come and they repent. But when they go to God, they say, Save us.

But God is fed up. It says that he is weary of their misery. He's tired of their false repentance. He's tired of them coming and saying, God save us, we'll worship you, only for them to turn around and go right back to the gods that they had been worshipping before.

And God says, you know what? You chose these gods. Let those gods serve you. And for a moment, we think that Israel is going to go back to worshipping God because they say, you know, God, we'll worship you, do the punishment that you think is right.

And in this very same breath, they turn back and they say, Oh, and if there's anybody here who can save us, you know, you get to be our king. You get to rule over us. They don't get it.

[ 11 : 05 ] They come and say, we need someone to save us. God won't do it. So we're going to find our own way. And that's where we meet Jephthah. Jephthah was a mighty warrior, but he wasn't always like that.

He started off as a baby. He was born and his mother was a prostitute. When he grew up, his brothers hated him and they cast him out. And so Jephthah went off into the wilderness and he gathered a little gang around him and they would go around raiding villages, causing mayhem. And that's how he became a warrior. He became a warrior because if you're not living in a city, if you're not protected by the city, you need to know how to fight. And so when Israel is in trouble, they're trying to think, who is going to save us?

And they say, oh, right, you know that guy Jephthah? That guy we kicked out? I heard he's been raiding villages. He can fight. We'll get him to save us. And so they go to him and he says, no, I'm not going to just fight for you.

I don't want to be just a military leader. I want to rule over you. And Israel is desperate. They want their freedom. And they say, you know what? You can rule over us. You can rule over us if you save us.

[ 12 : 19 ] And so Jephthah goes to fight. Well, he doesn't fight first. First he tries to negotiate. He writes to the king of the Ammonites and he says, you know what? This isn't really your land to begin with.

God gave us to us. If you want a land, maybe your God can give you some land. He tries to negotiate, but he's not a very skilled negotiator. That or the king of the Ammonites really doesn't care.

And so he goes and we see for the first time God intervening in this story. We see God coming and he sends his spirit on Jephthah. Now, any other time in the book of Judges when we see God's spirit on a judge, they go to victory.

There's no question about that. But Jephthah isn't really concerned about God's victory. Jephthah is concerned about his own name.

He's been cast out of his community. He's been left by the side. He's been rejected. He wants to be restored. He wants to be a member of society in good standing. He doesn't want to be just the son of a prostitute.

[ 13 : 23 ] He doesn't want just to be a gang leader. And so he goes to God and he makes a vow and he says, God, you saving Israel isn't enough because I need to make sure my name is restored.

And so I'm going to give you something. I'm going to give you a little bribe so that you guarantee my victory. And he says, you know, the first thing that comes out of my house, I'll sacrifice that to you. See, I don't know what Jephthah was thinking would come out of his house. You don't normally keep animals inside your house. I don't think he was expecting two sheep and a bull to run out. I think that Jephthah intended to offer a human sacrifice.

If you look at all the nations around them and the way that they worship their gods, that's what they did. They would sacrifice their babies to their gods. And so I think that Jephthah thought, you know, maybe a servant will come out of my house and I'll offer that to God.

I think it shows just how much Israel was lost in their idolatry. Not only did they worship these false gods, they forgot the right way to worship God.

[14:30] They forgot the things that God said were good and the things that are not good. So Jephthah goes on and with God's power, he destroys the Ammonites.

He destroys their cities. And everything seems great because Israel has what they want. Israel has manufactured their own salvation. Right? They needed to be saved.

God wouldn't do it. So they found someone who would do it for them. Israel is happy. Jephthah is happy because, you know, he's been restored. He used to be the son of a prostitute, but now he's a ruler over Gilead.

He's a ruler over a part of Israel. And he has status and he has his name restored to him. He can now walk out in the city in pride because he has achieved something.

Israel can stand up in pride because they have achieved something. And everything seems to be great, but very quickly it all falls apart.

[15:29] Jephthah returns home and the first thing he sees coming out of his door isn't a servant. It's his own daughter. And he goes from the high of being a leader and he tells his daughter, you've brought me very, very low.

Because, you know, when I made a promise to God, I think you have to credit to Jephthah, he's a man of his word. And the thing that he says he will do, offer up his daughter as a burnt sacrifice, he does.

The next thing I find a bit strange, because Ephraim, they pick a fight on a guy who's just had to sacrifice his daughter. They come to him and say, you know, why didn't you take us to fight with you?

You know, we're great warriors. We're archers. We could have been very useful in your fight against the Ammonites. And they pick a fight with him and Jephthah isn't as diplomatic as Gideon was.

You know, Gideon also had an argument with the Ephraimites. And instead, 42,000 of the Ephraimites die. That's a lot of people, right?

[16:33] 42,000. Just because of a little squabble over who got to fight the enemy. See, this is a story of ambition gone wrong.

The ambitions of Israel to be a free nation, the ambitions of Jephthah to be a man in good standing. It didn't go wrong when he had to sacrifice his daughter. It didn't go wrong when Jephthah killed 42,000 Ephraimites.

It went wrong right at the beginning. When they said that my freedom, my reputation is more important than God. It went wrong when they made their idol the thing that would drive and direct their ambition.

Israel wanted to be free. But they weren't humble to do it God's way. They had to do it for themselves. Jephthah wanted to restore his reputation.

But he didn't want to do it God's way. He wanted to do it himself. I wonder what it would have been like for Israel to say, God, this is the punishment you're giving us, and we deserve it.

[17:49] And we're going to take it, and we're going to wait for you. We're going to wait for you to save us. I wonder what it would have been like for Jephthah to look at himself and say, You know what? I've been disinherited.

But I'm going to find my identity in God, and I'm going to get my salvation, my restoration God's way. I think the amazing thing is that despite Israel's sinfulness, despite Jephthah's pride, God saves Israel over and over again.

Even though they went about it the wrong way, God still used Jephthah to save Israel. Neither of these people, neither the Israelites nor Jephthah, was willing to be humble before God.

And that was their undoing. Because they looked and said that we want this. We want our freedom. We want our restoration. We want our names to be restored. And we're going to do it our way. We're not going to do it God's way. So I look at this story, and I think, what has this got to do with me?

[19:12] Because you won't find little idols in my home. You know? I wouldn't be so stupid like the Israelites to worship another God. All right? I would never turn away from God to worship something else. All right?

Maybe I do a little bit. Just a little bit. But when I do, I repent. I'm good at that. I'm very good at repenting. All right? And if God decides to punish me, he's God. He can do that. You know? I think it's great because my ambitions are not selfish. My ambitions are very, very godly. But, you know, I still need to take care of business. All right? I've got rent to pay. So I'm going to try and do that. Hong Kong's not cheap. And so, you know, where I try to get ahead, I'm justified in that because, you know, those are things that God would want me to do. But most of all, I would never, ever let my ambitions get in the way of worshiping God. I do. I do all the time. I think that I don't worship God the way I'm supposed to. [ 20 : 24 ] I don't let God drive my ambitions. I think I have far too many things that I want, that I desire. You know, I want to be an amazing dad.

I mean, I'm still quite aware from that. But if you look at the books that I read and you think, yes, that's a good ambition. But, you know, I also have this ambition of driving a 1988 Mercedes-Benz SL. It's my most beautiful car. I love it. All right? But, you know, every now and then I find that my desires are driven by those things. All right? I'm always looking in the newspaper to see if any of those, you know, that classic car is up for sale. All right? I'm always obsessed with how I can do things to make myself an amazing dad and a classic car owner. All right? And that definitely gets in the way of me worshiping God. [ 21 : 24 ] But, you know, I don't think ambition is a bad thing. You know, I think God created ambition. I think ambition is a good thing. If you look at the book of Judges, it talks about people who have no ambition. And it doesn't talk about them nicely.

Ambition is a good thing. And God created us to be ambitious people. To have high goals and big aspirations. But where we go wrong is when we put our own desires. And we make those things our driving ambitions. And we take our idols of reputation, of money, of wealth, of being a good parent or a good spouse. Or being good at your job. Being liked by people. And we make that the thing that drives our ambition instead of God. You know, I think that God sees that and God knows that. And I think we have a great example of good ambition. I think we look at Jesus and we get to see someone who was ambitious. Jesus had big aspirations and big goals. He wanted to save humanity. [ 22 : 28 ] And he pursued that. You look at the way that he spoke. He said, you know, I need to be going about doing my father's business. He said, I need to do these difficult things.

Because they're about honoring God and seeing God as the highest goal and my highest ambition. But when we look around, we see people who say different things about ambition. If you look at ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, they would say that ambition is inherently selfish. And that's not a good thing. And we see Christianity coming and saying that, yeah, selfish ambition probably isn't too good. And we need to respond to that with humility. But the Greeks say, no, no, no. Humility is for slaves. You know, we want some kind of community-mindedness. Some, what's the word, altruism. That should be what drives humanity. You look at people in Hong Kong and in China. 20% of books sold in China are about entrepreneurship and business. [ 23 : 30 ] People look up to, you know, Jack Ma and Li Ka-shei, and they say, those guys are great people. Their ambition is good. And we're going to buy books so we can figure out how we can be like him.

You look at some philosophers like Nietzsche, and, you know, they would say that actually ambition is quite neutral. And that it really depends on how you're using it. You know, I don't agree with Ayn Rand on many things, but she was spot on, I think, when she talked about ambition. She said that ambition is the dedication to improvement in pursuit of a goal. She said that ambition guided by an irrational standard does not lead to improvement, but it leads to self-destruction. She says ambition is not bad, but when your goal isn't quite right, it's not going to improve you. It's not going to help people around you. It's going to destroy you. It's going to hurt you. Right? And, you know, as Christians, we look at the Bible, and we say that, you know, this is God's word for us on how to live.

[ 24 : 41 ] Right? And if we believe the things that it says, then that has an impact on our lives. It says that God is a creator, and he created us for a purpose. He created us for himself, for his glory.

All right? The Bible says that when we live our lives, we should order it around pursuing God and his kingdom and his goals. And so, you know, as a Christian, if you take other ambitions, if you say that, you know, that's very nice, but I'm going to have other ambitions, that we're going to destroy ourselves, that when we have ambitions other than what God has created us for, we will be destroyed.

You know, I think that I don't really understand how much my ambitions destroy and hurt me, even the ambitions in the work that I do. You know, I think this past year, about a year ago, I decided that I would be good at my job.

I would be, it would be awesome if I could get just tons and tons of students into the university ministry, into Watermark Church, and it'll be great.

And so I went around and I tried to figure out, how could I be awesome? How could I, you know, do things that would help this university ministry look good and make me look good so that, you know, when I talk about what I do, I can talk about, ah, look at all these 150 students who come to our fellowship.

[ 26 : 13 ] Isn't that amazing? Aren't I amazing? And so I went and I knew a student who had lots and lots of friends, and I said, I'm going to make this student a leader so that this student will bring all of his friends to the university ministry, and it'll be great.

And I did, and what happened wasn't what I had hoped. I think what happened is I spent a lot of time being frustrated and angry because this student didn't get it.

He wasn't on mission. He didn't see that, you know, the gospel was important. It needed to be spread among his friends. I became really angry and bitter, and I spent a lot of time just trying to, you know, trying to get him to do the things that I wanted to do so that I would look good, so that I could come before the church and talk about how amazing the university ministry is.

But in the process, I neglected the other leaders. I neglected the other students who were there, who were concerned about God's things. You know, I think this past year in the university ministry would be very different if I was concerned about what God wanted and not about what would make me look good.

I think it's hard to figure out when our ambitions are good ambitions and when they're bad ambitions, when our ambitions are godly and when they're selfish.

[ 27 : 46 ] I think I don't realize often until it's way too late, until I've looked back and I see people who I've hurt and I see me failing to do the things that God has called me to do.

How do we figure out if we're following God? How do we know if we are like Jesus, if we're concerned about God's kingdom?

How do we know if our ambitions, good as they may be, are driven by idols? I think we can ask some questions.

I think that if you see yourself sacrificing your children, you probably have bad ambitions. But it could be something a bit less drastic.

What are the people that God has called you to reach out to? Are you doing that or is something taking you away from that? How do you relate to people?

[ 29 : 01 ] I think that when I am driven by my selfish ambitions, I only like to talk to people who are useful to me. I like to hang around people who will help me, you know, get my job done.

How much time do you spend with people who have nothing to offer you? As your wife ever told you, you don't listen to me anymore.

That might be a sign. Or your friends wonder where you are because they never see you. Or you're the last one in the library when all your friends have gone home. Maybe you're too busy or too tired to spend time with your family.

Maybe you're too busy or too tired to serve in your church. Maybe you notice that your kids stop calling your mommy and they call you by your first name.

You know, when you think about your job, when you think about changing your jobs, maybe you're given a promotion, how much of that do you think about, how's that going to affect my community group?

[ 30 : 23 ] How's that going to affect my family? How's that going to affect my ability to serve? What are the relationships that you will sacrifice to build other, more useful relationships?

You know, I think I can come here and I can talk to you about your work and, you know, what you should and shouldn't do and, you know, what jobs you should and shouldn't take. But, you know, that, I've got to be honest with you, I've never had to wear a tie to work.

I think every time I work late it's because I want to, not because my boss is making me. I think that I've had a very different story of work. But, you know, I know somebody who does have a good story about work and about ambition and about following God with their ambitions.

The story's about my dad. My dad came to Hong Kong in the mid-80s and by the mid-90s he'd met this guy and they started up this company together.

and they worked and they did lots of really cool things. They made stupid toys from McDonald's and that was really awesome for me as a kid because I had all of them. But, my dad would work and he would work hard because, you know, he needed to take care of his family.

[ 31 : 46 ] He needed to feed us and, you know, my brother and I eat a lot. He needed to pay for school fees and that's not cheap and rent isn't cheap in Hong Kong either. And so, he, he would work very hard and, you know, one day he woke up on a Sunday morning and he was exhausted and he couldn't get out of bed.

And so, he sent mom with the three of us kids to church and in the afternoon he woke up and he prayed and as he was praying God said, you need to change something because the way that you're living is not good.

It's going to kill you. It's going to hurt your family. So, the next day, Monday, he went in and talked to this business partner and they restructured the company a little bit so that my dad could have more time at home, more free time but, you know, it wasn't a couple more weeks before he was back to the same schedule.

And, it wasn't just that, it was other things, right? Because I stopped calling my dad, Daddy. Right? I never saw him. I called him by his first name. And, you know, he looked at his work and he looked at the people that were working for him.

He looked at his business partner and he realized that these were all relationships that were being broken down and were being destroyed. And so, one day he said, you know what? If I'm going to follow God, if I'm going to be obedient to changing things, I need to do something drastic.

[ 33 : 19 ] And so, without a plan, my dad quit. He had his partner, you know, say, this is all yours now, you run the company. And so, you know, that meant big things for our family.

It meant that we moved from, you know, our big flat, Poc Fulam, to a tiny flat in Taihang. And I didn't really notice it that much as a kid. You know, it meant that instead of, you know, walking all the way over there to get my toys, they were just like right here.

But for four years, for four years, our family struggled because my dad tried to, you know, get another business together. And, you know, my dad asked me to say that his wife was very, very important.

That my mom was very important in getting him, getting us through that. Just reminding him that, you know what, if what the Bible says is true that God can provide, if what the Bible says is true for pursuing after God, God is going to take care of us.

That he should be concerned about following God and not about trying to do all the right things and taking care of his family. That if he takes care of following God, that God would take care of it.

[ 34 : 31 ] I mean, it doesn't make it easy. It meant for four years it was tough. It meant that for, you know, for a couple of years, you know, we didn't pay school fees and the school let us, you know, defer those payments until we got to a time that could.

It was difficult. It was difficult for my parents and I didn't realize it until, you know, much later looking back just how much we sacrificed because my dad thought that following God was important.

I look back and I realize that my life could be very different. My relationship with my dad could be very, very different. My relationship with God would be very different.

I don't think that I would be standing here. I don't think that I would have my trust in God if I didn't see my dad making sacrifices of things that are really temporary like, you know, a nice flat and a stable job because I saw my dad making sacrifices of those things because he said his relationship with God was more important because he said doing things God's way was better than doing it my way.

You know, I think another way that we can tell if our ambitions are about God is the way that we pray. Tim Keller wrote a book about prayer and I really enjoy it.

[ 36 : 06 ] And in his book he talks about the things that we pray about. He says, in our natural state we pray to God to get things. We may believe in God but our deepest hopes and happiness reside in other things.

So we therefore pray when our career or finances are in trouble or when our relationships are in jeopardy. but when things are going well we don't pray.

You know, our prayers are pretty bland. Usually you're asking God for things and occasionally if you've sinned we'll pray a prayer of repentance but when our ambitions are not on God our prayers show that because our prayers are not about God and following him.

they're about God giving us things. Now I look around and I think that I don't know a lot of you as well as I would like to.

But I know some of you and I know other people around Hong Kong and I would say that ambition ambition for reputation ambition for wealth ambition to be a good parent ambition to be popular ambition to be a good student all those are almost definitely idols that that we face.

[ 37 : 37 ] All right I don't want to sit here and beat you up about your ambitions and tell you that you know you working your job is bad because it's not. I think it's good to work and to have a job but I think that it's not enough to just you know quit your job and go right it's not enough to move to the countryside and say that we're going to have a simple life because that's what it means to follow God.

Now I think that the gospel calls us to a big dynamic change it calls us to change the thing that we worship to stop worshiping ourselves and what we could be to stop worshiping our ideal that we have in our head of being a perfect parent or an amazing worker or a perfect student to turn our lives to to worship God not not not not with a part of your life not just on Sundays but with everything in the relationships that you have to worship God as you relate to your friends to worship God as you sit in the office to worship God as you look for a job it's not enough to reject worldly ambition we need to set our eyes on God we need to set our eyes on what he has set up for us you know we look at

Israel and we see that their ambition destroyed them because they were not concerned about God they were concerned about themselves even when they said God you know we're sorry they weren't sorry because they worship false gods they were sorry because they were being oppressed by this nation and they wanted to be freed we look at Jephthah and Jephthah is struggling with his reputation his the way he's perceived in the eyes of the people around him and the problem wasn't that being free was bad the problem wasn't that having good standing and community was bad their issue was that they worship those things above God I think that we should probably have a look at Jesus and see what his ambition looked like because we look at Jesus we see that his ambition was not an ambition of personal gain but an ambition of sacrifice it wasn't for a kingdom here on earth it was for a kingdom in heaven the way he lived his life wasn't about things that are here and now but he set his life on something that is for eternity you know

I think that Jephthah saw his reputation as something that would save him Israel saw their freedom as something that would save them but those are not good saviors they won't save us for eternity they'll make life a bit nice now but they aren't eternal things I think that when we transform our worship from ourselves and we turn it towards God that we have this amazing freedom because it means that we can be an amazing parent it means that we can be a good student it means that we can be good workers and we can do that well because our life isn't about being a parent or a student or a worker I think when we set our ambitions on Christ it means that we can fail we can drop out of school we can lose our jobs and we can still worship

God because our God is a God who promises to provide for us I think that having God as our ambition is a good thing because when God is our ambition when God is the center of our lives the center of our worship we can see that things are probably going to be difficult here but we know that we have an eternity that is secure we know that we may have to sacrifice some things here but we know that we gain something that we can never lose you know that I think Jesus is better than Jephthah because he doesn't just save us from our enemies here today to a freedom that we can lose but he gives us a freedom that lasts forever I think that Jesus gives us an ambition a pursuit something that we can chase after that isn't going to destroy us or hurt the people around us but that will put us in good standing with

[ 42 : 51 ] God that when we go and we face God we can say that my faith was in Christ and my life was about obedience to him it was about doing occasionally difficult things because God was the

thing that I was chasing Judges repeats this phrase in those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes what the Bible tells us is that we do have a king his name is Jesus and that he does give us things to do he directs our life and he says I'm not wanting you to do the things that are right in your own eyes I want you to do things that are good in my father's eyes I think he did that he showed us how to do that he wants us to do that too so ambition what are our ambitions are we ambitious for things here are we ambitious for

God's kingdom are we going to chase after security here or are we going to chase after eternity with God are we going to do the right things the wrong way or are we going to do things God's way are we going to do difficult things because it means obedience are we going to choose the easy way out because that's easier for here and now the Bible asks us a question it's a question that Israel and Jephthah never quite got right who is your king are you going to choose your own king or is God going to be your king am I going to be my own king or is my ambition and my life going to be centered around

Jesus am I going to let my ambitions be about God let's pray father father god I confess that I don't get it I don't get it right that I have set up so many things as gods before you that I love the idea of being seen as a good church worker more than I love obedience to you father I I pray for us as a church God that you would open up our eyes to see our hearts to split those motives to see where it is that we have valued something above you and we're worshipping something more than you God I pray that the story of judges wouldn't frustrate us but remind us that when we set our eyes on something other than you that you come back to save us over and over again father God I thank you for

Jesus and the example that he sent to live a life that is focused on you that is focused on your kingdom I pray for us I pray for our church that you would be our king that you would be the center of our worship and you'd be the direction that we set our lives we pray this humbly in Christ's precious name amen