

An unlikely candidate for greatness

Opening text: Hebrews 11:30-34

I am always fascinated by what God can do in people's lives and what people can do with God in their lives.

The same book of Hebrews exhorts us to imitate the faith of such people (Heb. 6:12). What that means is that you and I can do the same exploits if we move with such faith.

V.32 - And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets

Among some of those well-known Bible characters, we find one that is not so well-known: Jephthah. We find his story in Judges 11.

Judges 11:1-8

1. An unlikely candidate for greatness

V. 1 – *‘Now Jephthah was a mighty man of valour, ...* However, that is not how he started. In fact, he is one of those cases of someone who didn't have a great start in life at all. He was disadvantaged right from the start:

- His mother was a prostitute
- His pedigree was therefore considered imperfect and his birth inferior
- That made him illegitimate and second class in that family
- He was judged unworthy to inherit
- He grew up in a situation of extreme rejection and he was picked on by his half-brothers
- Jephthah experienced loss,
- Abandonment and displacement

He fled to the land of Tob, which means “a pleasant place” or a “good land”. However, the dark shadow of his imperfect lineage may have chased him and the only people he ended up associating himself with were “*worthless men*” or “*worthless rebels*” (NLT) – “*a gang of scoundrels*” as the NIV puts it.

In some ways, this is similar to what happened to David – the only people willing to associate with him was a band of distressed, in debt and discontented men (1 Samuel 22:2).

Jephthah was associated with a group of mercenaries, soldiers for hire regardless of the cause, hit-men.

For all these reasons, he was the most unqualified of men for the great things God was going to use him in. He was unsuitable for greatness and unqualified to be used. However, God turned his life around and became something he wasn't: a mighty man of valour, one worthy to appear in Hebrews 11, alongside some of the greatest heroes of the faith.

I am always fascinated by what God can do in people's lives and what people can do with God in their lives!

2. Unsuitable doesn't mean unusable

1 Corinthians 1:27-28 - *But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,*

Jephthah was a gang leader, Rahab was a prostitute and Paul a 'chief of sinners'. However, they are such great examples of God's redemptive grace and power. No one is a write-off in His sight.

3. The big break

Many look for their 'big break' in life. Jephthah looked for it in the land of Tob. However, Tob was simply a place of training and of acquiring the skills for the big battle he was to face against the Ammonites. It is so important to understand the purpose of each season in our lives and never get discouraged in them.

His big break came when he was asked by the very ones who had ostracized him and rejected him to be their commander and fight the Ammonites. However, he ended up not just becoming the "commander" (v.6) but "the head of the whole tribe" (v.8)

⁶ Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon." So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" ⁸ And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

I am always amazed at how God can turn things around! I am amazed at how God can turn even people and their opinions around.

Proverbs 16:7 - *When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.*

Gilead's adversity propelled Jephthah into his destiny just like Egypt's draught propelled Joseph into his. You never know when a situation or a need you were born to meet will release you into all that God has for you.

4. A need he was born to meet

Jephthah means "whom God sets free". Another scholar said that his name may also mean "the breaker-through". God had set him apart for freedom and breakthrough. That is what the Holy Spirit empowered his life to do

V.29 - *29 Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon.*

V.32 - *So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the Lord delivered them into his hands.*

There was an anointing for this in his life.

There is a need you and I were born to meet. Anyone who discovers his gift will become a desirable commodity. The world will make room for you. In spite of how Jephthah started in life, the gift he was born to give, made way for him.

Proverbs 18:16 says: *A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men.*

As I have said at the start, I am always fascinated by what God can do in people's lives and what people can do with God in their lives.

It doesn't matter how we've started but only what we can become in Him.

In Hebrews 11 we see this man among people who did extraordinary exploits for God. He is there because of his faith in God.

May your faith today rise today to believe in the God who changes our lives.