

5-26-24 The Book of Judges

Text: Judges 3.

Big Idea of the Message: God is always at work, even in the darkest of stories.

Application Point: No matter how dark or bleak our situation might be, God never stops working for the good of those who believe.

In the Book of Judges, you will recall there is a repeated cycle throughout the entire book – a cycle of sin, bondage, repentance, and devotion, followed by sin and bondage again. Israel would follow the Lord when there was a leader who reminded them of the ways in which they should walk, but with their death they again wandered off into idolatry.

In **Judges 3:1-6**, God tests the children (people) of Israel to see what they are made of. **Read verse 4, “they were left, that He might test Israel by them, to know (find out) whether they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.”**

God allowed the Israelites to live among different pagan groups to see what they were made of. If you remember back a few months ago I said God tests mankind, not because He doesn't already know the results of the test. But so that we would know how we will respond. Would they/we be like a coffee bean and change the environment around them or would they/we be like an egg and allow the environment to change them/us. **Read verse 6 & 7.** What was the result of the test laid out by God?

Before we look down on the children of Israel, how are we doing living in the environment God has put us in and tests us in? Are we serving other gods? If I were to be honest, yes, I struggle daily with serving other gods. Daily, Cecil struggles with the desire to sit on the throne of his life. You know what Cecil wants? He wants a god that only advises but doesn't interfere, unless it benefits him according to a set of criteria. He wants a god who answers him according to his wants. Kinda like a genie in a bottle.

God was so angry with the people of Israel that He allowed them to be taken over by their enemies. Sin, bondage, repentance, devotion, remember it is a cycle we can find in all our lives. God sends the first Judge, Othniel and he sets them free and rules over them for 40 years. And after 40 years the children of Israel lived for God and kept His commandments, right? **WRONG! Read verse 12.**

God allowed the children of Israel to be overtaken by Eglon king of Moab. The Moab (Oldest daughter) and Ammon (Youngest daughter) people are from the lineage of Lot, Abraham's brother, the father of the Jewish people. The Amalek people are from the lineage of Esau, the brother of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. King Eglon (Incest lineage) ruled over Israel for 18 years.

What happens next in the cycle of humanity? Sin, bondage, repentance, and devotion. **Read verse 15.**

Read verses 16-30.

Israel's conqueror is Eglon, and he is big! He's so big that when he sits around the house he sits around the house! Seriously though, Eglon is big! He's overweight! He's a big fat king! Picture him on

his throne. There he sits with all his blubber. He's got perfect control over the land, and every year the Israelites bring him their produce - and Eglon gets fatter - while they suffer through hunger! He's gorging himself on the produce of the promised land. He's rolling in it, indulging himself in it. Eighteen years of this go by; think about that for a minute - no one under 25 can remember things any other way.

God once again hears the cries, repentance from Israel and sends a Judge, Ehud, the southpaw. Ehud comes from the tribe of 'Benjamin.' - the smallest tribe. He's left-handed. In those days if you were left-handed, you were considered different, abnormal, deficient, broken or something. Benjamin means, "Son of my right hand." So, God chooses "son of my right hand" who is left-handed to bring deliverance!

Warren Wiersbe gives a different thought regarding Ehud. "*The text in **Judges 3:15** can be translated "a man handicapped in the right hand," which suggests that he was not ambidextrous at all but able to use only his left hand.*" He goes on to say that he believes that Ehud was a man with a disability, not able to use his right hand and that this story unveils a masterpiece of strategy. Ehud wears the dagger on his right thigh, if he couldn't use his right hand, they might not have checked his right side. Or if he was disabled, they might not have thought him a threat at all.

The Israelites sent Ehud with tribute to Eglon, providing him the opportunity for a daring, risky scheme. The pleased king may well have thought, "It's about time these Jews respected my office!" It was customary to make a lavish ceremony out of presenting gifts to monarchs, appealing to their vanity. The word "tribute" is an expression typically used for offering a sacrifice. Ehud came presenting an offering to Eglon, but the king unknowingly was the real offering; he was the "fatted calf"! Eglon fattened himself on the tribute he had extorted from the Jews.

According to scholars, Ehud's sword was a foot to a foot and a half in length. Ehud likely fashioned the blade appropriate to the size of Eglon, yet small enough to conceal. He then hid it in his flowing garments, giving the appearance of one unarmed. Ehud then devised a means of gaining a private audience with the king with his "secret".

Ehud quickly left and locked the door behind him. King Eglon's servants believed he needed his privacy while using the restroom. I wonder if this is where the comment "should we send a search party" when someone is missing for a long period of time in the restroom.

The servants eventually opened the door and found their King lying there dead. Three lessons that we can learn from Ehud.

1. Ehud wasn't afraid to confront the enemy.

- You can't read the book of judges without talking about sin. For instance, sin can grow to an obese state. We see this in Eglon, the king of Moab. If you let sin go unchecked, it just grows, and it can become terribly fat. And sin is ugly.
- I think the story of Ehud has tremendous shock value. We can try to justify sin, we can paint it pretty colors, we can deny its importance or relevance, but when we look at it for what it is, it's just plain ugly. And it is not easy to kill. It doesn't go away by ignoring it. It must be faced head-on - like Ehud takes on Eglon - even if it is gory and disgusting.

- We also learn in this story that people are content to stay enslaved for a long period of time. It took Israel eighteen years before they cried out to the Lord. WE must ask ourselves, why did they wait so long?
- Why do we wait so long when we become addicted to patterns of sin? We have a Redeemer, a Savior, a Deliverer whose name is Jesus, and he saves us from the dominion and power of sin in our lives. Whether it's been eight hours, days, months, eight years or 18 years, we can cry out to the Lord today. We can turn away from sin and He will begin to free us from our enslavement to patterns and addictions.
- Then we see the result of coming to Christ, of turning away from our idols and having him deliver us. The result is rest and peace. After Ehud judged Israel, there was rest in the land for 80 years.
- Paul writes, **“the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).**
- Sin makes us miserable; it robs us of our sense of joy and well-being. But God gives us new life in Christ and gives us rest from our enslavement to sin.
- We too must not be afraid to face our enemy. We need to remind it that we are under new ownership and our address has changed. We no longer live in that residence anymore. Don't stop quitting. Every day is a spiritual war, and we must engage in it. We must be intentional and purposeful; we wake up each day in a battle against sin. There is no staying neutral.

2. Ehud accepted his potential in God's eyes.

- Ehud was an unlikely hero; a man who was handicapped and not well known. He was an underdog, an obscure person, a man whom God chose to use to His glory.
- Ehud could very easily have dwelt on his disability and doubted his value to God. He could very easily have passed on the opportunity of taking tribute to Eglon and hence passing up the opportunity to deal with him. Ehud could have doubted and said, "How could God possibly use me?" But no, he didn't. Ehud accepted his potential in God's eyes. He rested in his value to God.
- We encounter these people all throughout the book of Judges. What we have here are underdogs, obscure people, men, and women whom God chose to use to His glory.
- A little bit later into the era of Israel's first kings and you read the story of David, an unlikely hero, who defeated Goliath. The prophet Samuel looked at all the brothers in the family, and David was the last one, but he was the one God wanted to use.
- Jesus was a most unlikely hero. Isaiah says,

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with[d] grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Isa. 53:2-3 ESV

- Yet Jesus accomplished the single most important act in history: He died for our sins, thus becoming the greatest hero of all. No one recognized him when he came upon the scene. There was no red carpet, no fanfare. An unlikely hero.

- Now here we are in Christ. We, too, might feel like underdogs; that we don't have the right credentials. Our family background is not good enough, we think. We feel we're too ordinary. But our text tells us that God can use us in amazing ways. This room is filled with possible Ehud's.
- It doesn't matter what your family background is. It doesn't matter if you're limited in some capacity. God sees you as very much more than ordinary. He takes each one of us from our different backgrounds, with our different talents and our different gifts, and he molds us uniquely into a representation of himself. We don't have to look alike. He uses us, each one of us, in unique ways. And God is excited about how he wants to use you!

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; 1 Cor. 1:27

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. 1 Thess. 5:24

- Sometimes it takes only one person to motivate many to righteousness. That's what happened in Ehud's case. He was willing to go on the attack first, but then he blew the trumpet and all of Israel joined in the battle, routing the enemy!
- It only takes a spark to start a fire. Anyone in this room, or on video can do miraculous things for Jesus, if they could and would be brave enough to step out. Many of you have told me that you would love to encourage someone to walk with Jesus. That you would like to be known as helping others take that next step with Jesus, or even that first step. Let me tell you something... you can and many of you are and maybe don't recognize it. For those that aren't, you can. You have the same Holy Spirit living inside of you that Paul had, that David had, that Jesus sent for us.
- Jesus knows the potential inside of you. He put it there and powers it. We must engage! Build relationships. Earn permission to share the gospel, to disciple others.

3. Ehud faith in God's plan set Israel free.

- What allowed Ehud to have the victory, to serve God and to be used by God? It wasn't because of or by his own strength, but his FAITH in God.
- What was it that Ehud said to Eglon? "**I have a message from God for you" (v. 20).** Certainly, this gained the ear of the king, but it was also something Ehud firmly believed in; the message was the sword, and the sword was God's swift judgment on Eglon and deliverance from the Moabites.
- But then listen carefully to Ehud's words to the Israelites when calling them to battle, **read Judges 3:28. "Follow me, for the LORD has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand."**
- Ehud did not take any credit for anything but gave God all the glory. He recognized and had faith in the ability and resources of God at work in his life.
- The thing that allows us to have victory in our lives, to serve God and to be used by God, is not our own strength, or our list of credentials, but it is our FAITH in God through Christ.
- In the church of Jesus Christ, we don't need more knowledge, more programs or more degrees. What we need is simple FAITH and TRUST in God.

- WE need to believe that God is alive today and that as we step out in FAITH, He, not us, will give us the power and strength to do what He want/desires to do!
- What God requires is faith and faith alone. This is why he chooses the weak and the limited because He won't use the proud. Did you hear me? This is why he chooses the weak and the limited because He won't use the PROUD! When we are weak, then we are willing to trust in him, and then He can use us.

Hudson Taylor once said, "God is sufficient for God's work...God chose me because I was weak enough. God does not do his great works by large committees. He trains someone to be quiet enough and little enough, and then he uses him."

Conclusion

Have you been set free from your sin bondage? (Picture of the three circles) If not, you can be!

"The people we speak to/deal with are not the enemy; they are victims of the enemy."

Our text this morning encourages believers in three ways:

First, we need to be willing to confront areas of sin in our lives, even if they are ugly. When we do this, we can enter into God's rest. What sin or sins have control over you? Where is it the Holy Spirit wants you to lean into rather than rejecting or doubling down on?

Second, we need to see how valuable we are in God's eyes. No matter how weak or limited we might feel, we are capable of great things for God. You are exactly who and what God wants. He loves you. Can I tell you something? God can do just as much in and through you as He did with anyone recorded in His book. If you are a believer, you have the power of God dwelling inside.

Third, we need to remember that it is unreserved faith in the strength and grace of our living God that will enable us to do what he wants us to do. We may be weak, but He is strong! We can't be scared. We are not given the spirit of fear. We are giant slayers! We have the Lion of Judah flowing through our veins.

By FAITH...

We are servants of God who build, trust and empower others.

We are servants of God who inspire others, and NEVER gives up on the hope we have in a better future.

We are servants of God who are faith filled, bold, risk-taking servants. We refuse to insult God with small thinking and little faith.

Next Week:

Maybe you know someone who has thought, wondered and even asked;

Does God care about us?

Does God really know what He is doing?

Will God take care of me?

Does God keep His Word?