

“Two unlikely heroes.” (3)

We looked at God’s lion, Othniel, the last time we were together and we saw that even though he was old, the Holy Spirit came upon him and God used him to deliver Israel from their enemies. Today we’re going to look at two characters from **Judges 3** but don’t panic my sermon won’t last twice as long. First of all, we’re going to look at the account of Ehud the assassin and a little later we will look at the account of Shamgar the farmer.

A husband asks his wife, ‘Honey, if I died, would you remarry?’ ‘After a considerable period of grieving, I guess I would. We all need companionship.’ ‘If I died and you remarried,’ the husband asks, ‘would he live in this house?’ ‘We’ve spent a lot of money getting this house just the way we want it. I’m not going to get rid of my house. I guess he would.’ ‘If I died and you remarried, and he lived in this house,’ the husband asks, ‘would he sleep in our bed?’ ‘Well, the bed is brand new, and it cost us £700. It’s going to last a long time, so I guess he would.’ ‘If I died and you remarried, and he lived in this house and slept in our bed, would he use my golf clubs?’ ‘Oh, no!’ the wife replies. ‘He’s left-handed!’

We’re going to look at a man named Ehud who just happens to be left-handed. As Ehud’s story is introduced in **Judges 3:12-14**, where we see that Israel’s evil-doing led to an enemy taking control. **Judges 3:12-14 ‘Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and because they did this evil the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms. The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years.’**

Eglon, king of Moab, was allowed to overpower and occupy the Jewish nation for 18 years, demanding a percentage of Israel’s gross national product. Moab, situated east of the Dead Sea, became the ‘rod of God’s anger’ to punish His people for their unfaithfulness to His covenant.

Eglon crossed the Jordon and took the ‘City of Palms’, but he did this to his own downfall. You see the ‘city of **Palms**’ is also called by another name and that name is Jericho. Now you might be thinking, **what’s so important about that? Well remember after Joshua took Jericho, remember what he said?**

Joshua 6:26 “At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: “Cursed before the LORD is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: “At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates.” Joshua uttered a curse upon anyone who might dare rebuild Jericho, which Eglon carelessly disregarded to his own peril.

Eglon’s name means a ‘**bullock**’ which is appropriate, considering his size and demise! And so after 18 years of being in subjection to Eglon, once again, Israel cried out to God, and an unlikely man named, Ehud became their deliverer. **Judges 3:15-16 “Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite. The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a cubit long, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing.”**

Now notice again what some may view as a handicap, God takes and uses for His purpose. Ehud came from the tribe of Benjamin and his right-hand was withered or deformed. We know that because the original text literally reads, ‘**a man restricted in his right hand**’. You see because his right hand was deformed, that would mark him out as a non-warrior, and one who could be safely left alone with the king.

And remember that left-handedness in ancient times was considered peculiar and unnatural. **Not too long ago here in Britain, if you were left-handed and went to school the teachers would try and force you to write with your right hand because it was seen as abnormal. The use of spiral staircases in medieval castles served as clever defence systems. They were almost always built with the spiral in the same direction, clockwise, when looking up from the bottom, so that the defending swordsman, who would either be coming down the stairs or backing up in reverse, could freely swing his sword. Equally, the attacking swordsman, ascending the stairs, would have his swing blocked by the wall.**

Judges 3:16 “Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a cubit long, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing.” You see loved ones, without being left-handed, Ehud would have never been able to smuggle his dagger into Eglon’s palace. The guards would have assumed that he was right-handed, and so they only checked his left side for weapons. According to scholars, Ehud’s sword was closer to a foot in length, not as the **NIV** translates, ‘**a cubit long which is a foot and a half**’.

Ehud likely fashioned the blade appropriate to the size of Eglon, who is described as a ‘**very fat man**’, yet the blade was small enough to conceal. **Judges 3:17 ‘He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab, who was a very fat man.’** It was probably more like a dagger or stiletto and the reason it was a double-edge sword was to ensure the fatality of a quick thrust. He then hid it in his flowing garments, giving the appearance of one unarmed.

And so the Israelites sent Ehud with tribute to Eglon, providing him the opportunity for a daring, risky plot. Now the king may have been thinking to himself, ‘**It’s about time these Jews respected my office!**’ But he didn’t suspect a thing and that’s because 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.

And so Ehud came presenting an offering to Eglon, but the king unknowingly was the real offering. In a sense, he was the ‘**fatted calf**’, and he had fattened himself on the tribute he was taking from the Jews. **Judges 3:18-19 “After Ehud had presented the tribute, he sent on their way those who had carried it. But on reaching the stone images near Gilgal he himself went back to Eglon and said, “Your Majesty, I have a secret message for you.” The king said to his attendants, “Leave us!” And they all left.”**

Ehud sent the tribute-bearers away, giving greater plausibility to his claim that he had a ‘**secret message**’ for Eglon’s ears only. The king may have perceived this as an oracle from the gods, since we’re told that Ehud was standing near the idols when he made his disclosure. The timing was perfect, and Ehud used the king’s pagan superstition and vanity to entice and ensnare him.

Eglon was flattered by Ehud’s willingness to share this confidential information and so he ordered everyone to depart, oblivious to the danger. His gullible pride dictated that he alone should receive this privileged message. You know it’s often said that ‘**knowledge is power**’, and so many people hold their information close to them, not wanting others to share the wealth.

You remember all the scandal and information which came out a few years ago through ‘WikiLeaks’. Countries all over the world were in turmoil because their secret information was now on display for the whole world to read and that compromised every country’s security.

Well in much the same way, Eglon expected to learn things that would increase his hold on the throne. **Judges 3:20 “Ehud then approached him while he was sitting alone in the upper room of his palace and said, “I have a message from God for you.”** This private ‘**upper room**’ was situated on the roof of the house, with several windows to catch the breeze.

And much like Ehud’s sword, his words to the king were also a double-edged dagger. He gave him a message, not from idols, but from Elohim, the Lord Almighty. Elohim, the omnipotent God, the sovereign God. The God who has supreme governing power and exercises control over the destiny of nations.

‘I have a message from God for you,’ Ehud says. And it’s in those words that we get a glimpse of Ehud’s calling from God. He’s acting as God’s servant and he’s defending God’s people against Moab’s oppression. And so the king, in his eagerness to hear this message, rises from his seat and then.

Judges 3:21-23 “Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king’s belly. Even the handle sank in after the blade, and his bowels discharged. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it. Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.”

Now I don’t know about you but that’s pretty graphic. **isn’t it? When was the last time you heard someone teaching that story in Sunday School?** Ehud brutally stabbed the king, and the Hebrew text indicates that Eglon’s sphincter muscles exploded from the deadly blow and a stench filled the room.

Ehud wasn’t able to retrieve his weapon, and so it stayed inside the king’s stomach but you couldn’t even see the sword because the king’s fat covered it. And then he quickly locked the door and departed without incident or suspicion. **Judges 3:24-25 ‘After he had gone, the servants came and found the doors of the upper room locked. They said, “He must be relieving himself in the inner room of the palace.” They waited to the point of embarrassment, but when he did not open the doors of the room, they took a key and unlocked them. There they saw their lord fallen to the floor, dead.’**

The text tells us that that the king's servants thought he was relieving himself. Now some commentators believe this means he was doing the toilet but others strongly believe he was actually sexually relieving himself. But whatever he was doing, after a long while, to their humiliation, the servants gradually plucked up enough nerve to unlock the door only to find their king dead.

And Ehud got away safely, he blew the trumpet and Ehud swiftly rallied his army together. **Judges 3:26-27** 'While they waited, Ehud got away. He passed by the stone images and escaped to Seirah. When he arrived there, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went down with him from the hills, with him leading them.'

Now notice **Judges 3:28** "He said to them, "Follow me, for the LORD is about to defeat your enemies, the Moabites!" Ehud not only gave credit to God, but he also had trust in God, Yahweh is about to defeat the Moabites, he says. Now loved ones, it's all very well trusting that God will fight our battles for us, but if we just sit back and do nothing in the process, that's not faith. Faith acts, faith has legs attached and so we need to be actively trying to meet people in order for God to open up those doors of opportunity for us to share the message of Jesus with others.

Ehud knows that it's God whose going to win the day for the Israelites but the Israelites can't just sit back and let God do it all. They had to do something with their faith, they had to act upon their trust in God. **Judges 3:28-29** "So they followed him down and took possession of the fords of the Jordan that led to Moab; they allowed no one to cross over. At that time they struck down about ten thousand Moabites, all vigorous and strong; not one escaped."

The Israelites acted upon their trust in God and when they did, the Moabite troops ended up just like their king. And although they were strong, they're also described as 'vigorous', which is a term that can be translated 'fat'. And so they too, like Eglon, are 'struck down' by the hand of Israel and Israel finally had peace again, for the next **80 years** anyway.

You see loved ones, we sometimes let ourselves be defeated by our limitations, by things no more significant than being left-handed. And we think to ourselves, we're not good enough in certain areas and so they keep us from offering God our service. But if we learn anything from Ehud, surely we can learn that it's not about our abilities, it's about God's ability to use us.

Yes we should recognise our weaknesses, but those weaknesses are the very things we should be turning over to God. **2 Corinthians 12:10** "I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

It was the missionary Hudson Taylor who said, 'God chose me because I was weak enough.' Now thankfully God doesn't ask us today to go out and kill some kings but God does tell us that we are involved in spiritual warfare. **Ephesians 6:12** "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

And we have to arm ourselves with God's word, which according to **Hebrews 4:12** is "alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword." Now Ehud's account is very graphic and very bloody, but we need to understand that Ehud's actions saved Israel from cruel enemy oppression.

And in a very real similar way, a very bloody sacrifice upon a Roman cross ensured our eternal salvation. When you read the accounts of Jesus' death, they're not pleasing to read but yet He had to go through all of that in order for us to have forgiveness. Israel trusted a left-handed saviour, and we trust a Saviour whose hands are scarred by nails.

Now let's go ahead and read the account of Shamgar, it won't take very long, as it's only one verse. **Judges 3:31** "After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He too saved Israel." Now as we all should know by now, just because we only have one verse concerning Shamgar doesn't mean we can't learn a lot from him.

Now there's a lot of speculation concerning his name, for example the name 'Shamgar' means either 'sword' or 'cupbearer'. But that doesn't really give us any problems because both meanings fit well with his character. If his name means 'sword' then he certainly was like a sword in the hand of God, as God used him to destroy the enemies of Israel.

If his name means ‘cupbearer’, then he certainly was like a cupbearer who brought the cup of God’s wrath to those whom God would judge. But he’s also called ‘the son of Anath’ but who is ‘Anath’? Well Anath was the Canaanite goddess of war, and so Anath may well be Shamgar’s nickname. It’s also possible that he was called ‘the warrior’.

This name could also mean that he was from the town of ‘Beth-Anath’, which was located in northeast Israel on land belonging to the tribe of Naphtali. And lastly of course, it could simply mean that his father’s name was Anath. And so there’s a lot of speculation concerning his name but one thing we don’t need to speculate on is his occupation.

One thing we know for sure about Shamgar was that he was a farmer and we know that because he obviously carried and fought with an ‘oxgoad’. Now an oxgoad was not a weapon, it was an agricultural tool, it was a pole some 8 to 10 feet in length and about 2 inches in diameter. One end was tipped by a long iron point, this end was used to encourage the oxen he was driving to move. Oxen might not respond to voice commands or the pulling of the reins, but they would respond to the sharp point of the oxgoad. The other end of this tool was shaped like a spade, it was a metal blade used to clean wet clay, roots and other impediments off plough points.

Another thing we know about Shamgar has to do with the time in which he lived. Don’t underestimate what he did, it was a very difficult time for the people of Israel. In **Judges 4-5** which we will look at next time, we see that the nation of Israel was being oppressed by Jabin, the King of Canaan. Jabin was a powerful enemy, who possessed 900 iron chariots, according to **Judges 4:3** and so his army seemed totally unbeatable. It was a time when the people of Israel were filled with fear, according to **Judges 5:6-7**.

Loved ones, the Israelites were living in fear, they were afraid to travel the highways because of their oppressors and they were afraid to live in their homes because of those who invaded and attacked them. The Israelites were being oppressed by the Canaanites under King Jabin and his powerful army. Jabin has disarmed the Israelites and made them militarily weak and so they weren’t in a position to defend themselves. And this provided an opportunity for the Philistines, who were a warlike people who lived near the Mediterranean Sea, to take advantage of the situation.

They would invade Israel and capture them as slaves, steal crops and destroy villages. And you can only imagine what it would have been like to live during these days. When the Philistines came, most of the people in Israel would flee in terror because they wanted to avoid death or being captured. But Shamgar, he didn’t flee, he didn’t run away, he wasn’t afraid. When the Philistines came, he stood his ground and he fought and remember he didn’t have any weapons of war, but he did have his oxgoad.

Do you understand what he did? Shamgar took what he had and he used it to secure victory for his people and safety for his family. The text tells us, over the course of his life, he killed **600** of the Philistine raiders. Using that heavy oxgoad to kill **600** men would have been an amazing physical feat, which tells us he must have been a man who was in top notch, physical condition, but. And I say but because his power wasn’t just physical, his power was also spiritual.

Shamgar was a man empowered by God for this task and there can be no doubt that the Spirit of God enabled Shamgar to stand and fight like he did. Shamgar stood his ground and fought while others ran away because Shamgar knew that some things are worth fighting for. **And what was he fighting for?** He was fighting for his home, his family, his freedom and his land. But more importantly, he was fighting for the right to worship his God.

Now loved ones, please remember that we too as Christians aren’t only called to be workers for the Lord, but we’re also called to be warriors. **Galatians 5:17** “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.” When God saved us, He enlisted us into His army and set us about the business of spiritual warfare.

We’re at war today, we have these inner conflicts between the flesh and the Spirit. We’re at war with Satan, and like the Canaanites, he’s trying to oppress us. We’re at war with the world, and like the Philistines, it’s trying to invade us and take away everything we value. We’re at war, and there are some things which are worth fighting for, there are some things that cry out for us to stand our ground and fight. Because if we don’t fight and protect the things that matter the most, we will see them taken away by the enemy and destroyed.

You know the kinds of things I’m talking about **don’t you? Isn’t your marriage, your spouse and your children worth fighting and dying for?**

If you married to someone who isn't a Christian or your children aren't Christians **wouldn't you fight against Satan and against the world with everything you've got to lead them to salvation?** What about our brothers and sisters in Christ, **aren't they worth fighting and dying for?** The world can easily slip in and take away the things we value as a church. Things like the Bible, our preaching, our worship, our doctrine and our separation, are all under attack by Satan and the world.

Aren't the lost worth fighting and dying for? They don't know God and they don't care about God, but they need someone to stand up and remain true to the Bible so that they might hear about Jesus. They need people praying for them, they need people who will not run away from their vileness and sinfulness, but who will stay and tell them about Jesus.

They need someone who will fight for them, after all, someone fought for us, **didn't they?** His Name is Jesus the Christ, He went through the cruellest things possible for each and every one of us and so the least we can do is to stand and fight for others, just like Jesus did for us.

Winston Churchill paid a great tribute to the young men of the Royal Air Force, who mounted up with wings as eagles and with their sheltering wings guarded the land they love. He said, 'Never in the history of mankind have so many owed so much, to so few.' But when we think of the cross of Christ, and Him who died on it, loved ones, what we should say is this, **'Never in the history of the universe has mankind owed so much, to one.'**

Judges 3:31 tells us that Shamgar **'delivered or saved Israel'**, depending on your translation. His courage freed the people around him and allowed them to live in freedom and liberty. In other words, he made a difference in the lives of those he fought for. In most of my text messages I keep encouraging you all to **'keep making a difference'**. I don't encourage you to **'make a difference'** but to **'keep making a difference'**.

Loved ones I see what you're all doing but more importantly God sees what you're all doing. And I'm telling you this congregation is filled with little Shamgars. Shamgar fought from where he was and he didn't give in to fear. And I see my brethren going through all kinds of circumstances and not giving in to fear but standing their ground, trusting in God.

Shamgar fought with what he had and I see my brethren with what they think are weak weapons, putting them in the hands of God and I'm looking forward to watching God doing great things with them. Shamgar left the results to God, every time he fought he put his life on the line, he trusted God with his life. And when I look at my brethren I see the same attitude of no matter what happens to them, everything is in God's hands.

And finally Shamgar enjoyed victory, every time he fought, Shamgar walked off the battle field as the victor. God honoured his faith and I know that God will honour the faith of my brethren. **2 Timothy 4:7-8 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing"**.

Loved ones, I'm fighting for each of you and have been even before we became a part of this congregation. I've been fighting for you all with my prayers, with my encouragement, with my love, with my corrections, with my council. And you need to know that I'm not going to stop fighting for you until each of you are crowned with righteousness. And that's because every one of you, just like my physical family are worth fighting for.

And so whether you're like our two unlikely heroes, disabled like Ehud or a farmer like Shamgar, you need to know that God can use anyone, even those who think they are nobodies for His glory. Whether you're a Christian or not think about this as we close. Shamgar used an oxgoad, Moses used a rod, David used a sling, a Widow used a meal and oil, Dorcas used a needle and thread, and a little boy used his lunch.

Why not let the Lord use you with what you've got today, to do great things for His glory?