

God's Grace at Work

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 May 2021

Preacher: Jim Masters

[0:00] Judges, please, if you're visiting with us or need a Bible, take that black Bible in the chair in front of you. Start at the beginning where Genesis is located and find page 182, page 182, Judges chapter 3.

The book of Judges, chapter 3. Judges 3, starting in verse 7 this morning, 3-7. To the end of the chapter, 3-7-31, again page 182 in that black Bible.

Judges chapter 3, verses 7-31. That will be our study this morning. Judges chapter 3, starting in verse 7.

Samuel writes this, And the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and forgot Yahweh their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroth. Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushon Rishathayim, king of Mesopotamia. And the sons of Israel served Cushon Rishathayim eight years. And when the sons of Israel cried to Yahweh, Yahweh raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them.

[1:30] Othniel, the son of Canaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the spirit of Yahweh came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the Lord gave Cushon Rishathayim, king of Mesopotamia, into his hands, so that he prevailed over Cushon Rishathayim.

Then the land had rest forty years, and Othniel, the son of Canaz, died. Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord.

And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek. And he went and defeated Israel. And they possessed the city of the palm trees.

And the sons of Israel served Eglon, the king of Moab, eighteen years. When the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud, the son of Gerah, the Benjamites, a left-handed man.

And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon, the king of Moab. And he had made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length.

[2:41] And he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak. And he presented the tribute to Eglon, king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. And it came about when he had finished presenting the tribute.

He sent away the people who had carried the tribute. But he himself turned back from the stone idols, which were Gilgal. And said, I have a secret message for you, O king. And he said, keep silent.

And all who attended him left him. And Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, I have a message from God for you. And he arose from his seat.

And Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. The handle also went in after the blade. And the fat closed over the blade.

For he did not draw the sword out of his belly. And the refuse came out. Then Ehud went out into the vestibule, and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked them.

[3:38] When he got out, his servants came and looked. And behold, the doors of the roof chamber were locked. And they said, huh, he's only covering his feet in the cool room.

And they waited until they were embarrassed. But behold, he did not open the doors of the roof chamber. Therefore, they took the key and opened them. And behold, their master had fallen to the floor dead. Now Ehud escaped while they were delaying.

And he passed by the idols and escaped to Syrah. And it came about when he had arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim. And the sons of Israel went down with him from the hill country.

And he in front of them. And he said to them, pursue. For Yahweh has given your enemies, the Moabites, into your hands. Excuse me. So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab.

And did not allow anyone to cross. And they struck down at that time about 10,000 Moabites. All robust and valiant men. And no one escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel.

[4:47] The land was undisturbed for 80 years. And after him came Shamgar, the son of Anath, who struck down 600 Philistines with an ox goad.

And he also saved Israel. One thing you can be sure of in Los Angeles, in Los Angeles County, there's always road work on the freeways.

Always. Always, always, always. Right? Always. It never fails. They're expanding something.

They're doing this. They're doing that.

Causing more traffic. It's annoying. If there's one thing when you visit California, one thing you don't ever miss? The traffic. Who misses that? But with the thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people using the freeway, of course, it's a no-brainer.

They're always going to be working on the freeways. If there's one thing you can be sure about God, is that He, by His grace, is always working in your life.

[6:03] Always, always, always. No doubt about this. He does this because of His love for us.

His overwhelming, never-ending, relentless love for His people. He wants you to solely want Him. And He's working everything out. In your life, in my life, in our lives, for that to happen. No doubt, He's working.

His grace is always working. And as we come to this portion, in chapter 3, 7-31 in Judges, we see God's grace at work. God's grace at work.

When we read this true historical narrative, kind of graphic historical narrative, what can we glean?

[7:13] Paul told us in 1 Corinthians 10, this is written as our example. What are the examples that we're going to see from this? From this almost grotesque type story, where some people might say, why is this even in the Bible?

This is disgusting. This is gross. Well, we'll see God's grace at work, specifically. Six truths about God that teach us how His grace is at work in our lives so that we would love Him first and foremost.

From these verses, here in chapter 3, from the first three Judges, we're going to see six truths about God that teach us how His grace is at work in our lives so that, His grace is at work, so that we would love Him first and foremost.

His grace is at work. His grace is at work. Grace, unmerited favor, undeserved favor.

We don't deserve this. And yet He's working. His grace is always working in us. Another way to put it, we'll see these six truths, and I'll put it up there again.

[8:42] God is directing everything in your life so that you would love Him and all of this work is by His grace. Everything in your life, it's all by His grace.

And it's His goal for us to be conformed into the image of His Son, which means that we would love Him in the same way the Son loves Him.

That we would love the Father the way the Son loves the Father. That we would display the Son the way Jesus displayed Himself, the way Jesus said, I'm here to do the will of my Father, we would be the very same image.

Everything is working out that way. And that's what you'll see here. You see, you will see, Israel's blatant infidelity, Yahweh's anger, and then His disciplining hand.

But even more important, the way God delivers and saves His people and their afflictions, which He brings on them, said they would love Him most of all.

[10:04] That's how much He loves you. That's how much He loves us. That's how much He loves His people. One writer says this, God delights to save His people and their afflictions.

That's good. We're going to see that. So He will do things and allow situations to drive us to Him.

He will allow, He will do things and allow situations to drive you to Him. O Lord, make us soft to You that we will see You, that You are our love and our deliverer.

So six truths about God that teach us how His grace is at work in our lives so that we would love Him first and foremost.

You're going to see these first two truths from Othniel, three of them from Ehud, and one from Shamgar. Okay? 2-3-1. That's how you're going to see it.

[11:11] From the three judges, 2-3-1. Okay? So first, let's start with Othniel. We're going to trek through and then I'm going to give you the truth. Okay? So first, Othniel.

Notice verse 7. Notice the verbs of verse 7. And the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh. Forgot Yahweh.

Serve the Ba'az. You notice those verbs? Do you notice those are the same verbs that Samuel uses in chapter 2, verses 11-23?

He's trying to make a point. Remember when I told you guys about this? He used those verbs to direct us back, to remind us of Israel's sin and infidelity to the Lord and why they would be oppressed.

And then notice verse 8. Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. He has a jealous passion for His people.

[12:23] And His jealous passion for us actually is a sign of hope. You realize that, right? It's a sign of hope for us that He would do whatever it takes to make us holy and to love Him.

Remember we said this last week. With His hand against them, He was actually for them. To love Him.

Which leads to the first truth. Truth number one. God takes seriously if our love for Him is rivaled. God takes seriously if His love, if our love for Him is rivaled, if it's challenged.

Here's some other phrases for this. He doesn't want any rivals and will discipline us so that we'll love Him most. He'll be faithful to His word, love me foremost.

His anger was from a jealous love refusing to let His people love or serve false gods rather than Himself.

[13:41] So He'll discipline. We'll see that in just a few moments in the next part of verse 8. He takes seriously if our love for Him is rivaled.

He will not let us be comfortable in our sin. He will drive us towards Himself so that we're not cozy in any infidelity.

As Paul says in 2 Timothy chapter 2, the Lord knows those who are His and you put that together with Hebrews chapter 12, those who are His, what's He gonna do?

Discipline them. Because the next part of 2 Timothy 2 is let Him who named the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness. He takes seriously if our love for Him is rivaled.

Here's another aspect to this first truth. He will force us to lose our grip on stuff, the stuff of this life to direct us to have an eternal Him-focused, Christ-exalting perspective.

[14:55] He will. And He may inflict misery on you. Sickness, pain, suffering, heartache, trials, difficulties to awaken us to love Him more and love this life less.

That's the first truth we see. That's the first truth we see. And you see the disciplining hand of the Lord. Notice the next part of verse 8. So that He sold them into the hands of Kishon Rishathayim. Who is this guy? Maybe he was from the Harab Habiru people who struck the Canaanite cities in the south. Kishon was a very strong leader.

Rishathayim means double wickedness is what it actually means. Israel would have suffered severely since they were a brutal people. Or it could have been the kingdom of Metani. They were in upper Mesopotamia.

But see, what's clear though, you see, is God's sovereign hand over history. He rules the nations directing them to carry out His purposes.

[16:16] You see that? And if He's sovereign over nations, He is sovereign over individuals directing them through secondary causes to accomplish His plan.

And for us in particular, that we would love Him. That we would solely want Him. Notice what happens here in verse 9.

When the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord, you see that? Notice also in verse 15, when the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord, that word cried, groaned, the way you can put it.

And remember, when we see that word cried, cried, remember, this does not necessarily mean that the sons of Israel repented. repented. Don't read that into the text.

It doesn't necessarily mean they repented. They just groaned. They just cried out to the Lord. They cried for help out of deep distress or because of their unbearable circumstance, as one writer put it.

[17:28] But they did not repent. And is that not a perfect display of God's grace? His undeserved favor?

Interesting, this leads us to the second truth. The first one, He doesn't like it when our love for Him is rivaled. That's the first one. The second one, God loves to save us from trouble.

And now listen to this next part. He loves to save us from trouble whether it's a result of our sin or not.

We have a compassionately gracious God who hears our cries for help and comes to save us in our distress. That's how one writer put it, which is perfect. It's a perfect way to put it.

God loves to save us from trouble even if it's from your own sin even if you dug your own grave.

He's going to get you out of it. Why?

[18:40] You sang about it. What's it called? Grace. God's grace at work. You know, this holds true for those who cry out to Him to save them.

That they see that God is just and He should condemn them because they're sinners. And they see and they realize that Jesus died for their sins and rose from the dead and they repent and trust Christ and if you're here and you're not a Christian, you should repent and trust Christ.

You should turn and put your hope in the Lord Jesus alone. That's the gospel. God loves to save us from trouble. He'll save you if you do repent and trust Him.

He loves to save from trouble. Notice what happens. Verse 9, they cried out to Yahweh. Yahweh, raise up a deliverer for the sons of Israel.

Notice, a judge is not elected. He wasn't humanly appointed. He was temporary. He wasn't continuous. And God gave the judge authority to lead the people and bring the proper response to love Yahweh alone.

[20:03] To trust and obey Him. That was the purpose. It's just a goal to get them to that point. So notice, He raised up Othniel. Oh, that sounds familiar.

That's from chapter 1. The son of Canaz, Caleb's younger brother. This guy was a strong leader, a dedicated follower of Yahweh because it was in His blood because of his uncle or it could be his brother.

It's hard to determine from the Hebrew text which one he was. Remember Caleb? Remember the 12 spies back in Numbers chapters 11, 12, and 13? The 12 spies, they went out to the land of Canaan and they all came back and 10 of them went, oh, no, that's dumb.

What are we going to do? Caleb and Joshua were like, no, let's go. Yeah. And what happened to that generation? They all died in the wilderness except for Joshua and Caleb. So Caleb was like an old man which tells us what?

Othniel was probably 19 years old. Remember, those 20 and up, they died in the wilderness. So Othniel at this time was probably 19 or he could have been like maybe 10 or 5, who knows?

[21:17] He was one of the ones that trusted the Lord. He was down with that. He was one of the ones who was alive when the previous generation died in the wilderness. So he would have been faithful.

Trusted Yahweh, was dedicated. A few of the judges and not any of them were like him. Not to mention the fact, remember chapter 1, Caleb said, hey, who's going to take this land from me?

You can have my wife or my daughter as a wife. Othniel said, I'll do it. And Othniel at this time, he was probably, if he was about 19, 40 years later, so he's like 60.

Could have been maybe 50. But the gate's getting up there. You know? So now, all these years later, maybe he's 60, 60. Maybe he could have even been 70 years old at this time. He's judging Israel.

Notice also, verse 10, And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the Lord gave Kishon Rishathayim, King of Esfetam, into his hand.

[22:22] So he prevailed over Kishon Rishathayim. Now, I want to make mention of this to you so that you understand some, have some understanding about the theology in reference to the Spirit of the Lord in the Old Testament.

This is important. He would come and go, the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Oh, he would come and go empowering individuals to do certain tasks and then leave.

He did not and would not indwell individuals. That's part of the New Testament. That's part of the New Covenant. He would come and dwell inside of us. He's inside of us as Christians, as followers of Jesus.

That's part of the New Covenant that wasn't in the Old Testament. So just because he, the Spirit of the Lord, came upon him, that doesn't necessitate he was a godly person with godly living and a godly life.

That doesn't necessitate that. What it does clearly say, it designates that he was God's chosen man. That's true. But when the Holy Spirit would leave and then actually be replaced, King Saul, God was not with him.

[23 : 36] Samson, you'll see that later, God would not be with him. So just keep that in mind as you're seeing this Spirit of the Lord coming upon him. That doesn't necessarily mean, oh, he's a holy godly man. No, no, no.

Time out. No, it doesn't mean that. But notice this, verse 11, then the land had rest forty years and Uthniel, the son of Canan, died.

Here's God's gracious kindness to Israel. No attacks, no oppression, no afflictions. His discipline should drive us to him but also his peace and stability should also drive us to worship. You see that here.

So we had those first two principles. He doesn't like it when our love for him is rivaled. That's the first one. Second, he loves to save us from trouble. Okay, that's in Uthniel.

Now we're gonna see three truths from Ehud. Notice verse 12. The sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord.

[24 : 35] Notice the chiasmic structure. Evil in the sight of the Lord, evil in the sight of the Lord. That's why Eglon took over. Samuel's emphasizing this for a reason. The reason why the Moabites were allowed to do this is because Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.

And the Moabites became strong and took over these two nations. Ammon and Moab. They took over these two nations. So three against one. The city of Palms that you see here in verse 13 probably was the designation of Jericho.

And they were slaves, notice verse 14, for 18 years. And then verse 15, notice, the sons of Israel cried out to Yahweh and Yahweh raised up a deliverer for them Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.

Now you come into this almost humorous, satirical, intriguing story about Ehud's deliverance of Israel.

A very different kind of story because all is fair in love and war. And you get the details of what Ehud did to deliver Israel. So you see this here in verse, what, the end of verse 15.

[25 : 57] The sons of Israel sent tribute by him. Paying tribute was customary when he took over a nation. And a person of great importance would bring it so, Ehud had to have been of great importance and he had to be to get close to Eglon.

And most people in that day as it is today, most people are what? Right-handed. So nobody would ever think to check on the right thigh.

They wouldn't check that thigh. They would check the left one. Excuse me, yeah, am I getting this right? Yeah, they would check the left one. They wouldn't check the right one. They wouldn't do that because most people were right-handed.

They wouldn't do that. Hmm. Notice what happens. Present a tribute. Verse 18, it came about and finished presenting it. He sent away the people.

Verse 19, he turned back. I have a secret mission for you, O king. And the king said, keep silent. And all who attended and left him. Eglon was a fool.

[26 : 58] He was an arrogant fool. Especially for dismissing his attendance. It showed his arrogance. And notice thinking, look at verse 20, Ehud said, I have a message from God for you.

And notice, Eglon stood up from his seat like, oh. Thinking God had a message for him. What an idiot. So what happens?

He stretched out his left hand, verse 21, took the sword, the handle went in after the blade. He thrust it in. The blade closed in. The refuse came out.

This is pretty graphic. And that's why he did that. I mean, he went out to the vestibule, shut the doors, the roof chamber behind him, locked him, and then walked away.

Oh, you know, he's in the bathroom. And that's what happens. Notice verse 24. The servants, they came looking for him and behold, he was covering his feet. Taking care of business is what he was doing.

[28:02] Yes, it's in the Bible. Yes, they did that in those times. And then, it's almost humorous. They thought he was taking a long time in the bathroom.

They waited until they were becoming embarrassed. Sure, he's taking a long time because he's got some problems today. We don't know. Maybe it was something he ate.

I don't know. He didn't open the doors. Notice at the end of verse 25, they took the key, opened it, and behold, he was dead. While they waited, Ehud escaped.

He assembled the troops. Notice verse 28. He said to them, pursue for Yahweh has given your enemies, the Moabites, your hands. They went down. They seized the fords.

Didn't allow anyone to cross. They struck down at that time about 10,000 Moabites. And notice verse 30. The longest rest Israel ever experienced in this period, time period of the judges.

[29:01] The land was undisturbed for 80 years. That's a long time. Isn't this a gross story? Why is it even in the Bible?

How in the world could God use this event or allow this in his word? And now we can come to the principles, the truths that we see from this. Truth number three.

God takes seriously those who oppress his people. He takes seriously those who oppress his people. To this point, he may make sport of oppressors as a way to humiliate them and uplift himself.

It doesn't set well with God when enemies attack his people. He is for us. He is for you. If there's one truth, these truths you don't want to forget.

It's another one you definitely don't want to forget. Not only does he love to save us from trouble, not only does he, he doesn't like it when his love for him, our love for him is rivaled, but he takes seriously those who oppress his people.

[30:26] Here's a fourth truth that we see from this text. Number four. God is never dull or boring. His ways are creative and unexpected.

That's the truth. That's exactly what you see here. And this is so true. He works so that we can later look back on circumstances and almost laugh over how he delivered us from our troubles.

Isn't that true? Haven't you experienced that before? Where you say, you know what, if it was, if I was just two seconds earlier or two seconds later, such and such would have happened to me.

Or you look at circuit, he's like, it's like, whoa, see, how this, then this happened, then I ran into this, and then blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You know what I'm talking about. Because God is never dull. He's never boring. His ways are creative. They're unexpected. So you will come to a place where you say, wow, God's grace was at work in my life.

[31:37] That's amazing. It's almost funny. Funny. He takes seriously those who oppress his people.

That's the third one. He's never dull or boring. That's the fourth one. Here's the fifth truth. God loves to be actively involved in the dirty issues of life.

Or you can say the dirty issues of your life. He doesn't have white gloves on and doesn't want to touch you.

No touchy. He doesn't want to do that. He's not like that. He deals with the muddy, murky, normal things of life in which we find ourselves.

He's not standoffish, hesitating to be engaged. No. He's actively involved so that we would actively love him. And you know that when you read this story and you see God, Yahweh God, involved in the dirtiness of this stuff of Israel, it shoots you down later in history to our Lord because he is our high priest who was tempted just like us and yet he was without sin.

[33:16] He can fully identify with us because he lived a murky life. He was a man of sorrows. He can identify with that.

He knows what that's like. He knows about the muddy dirtiness of life and just stuff happens and it's hard.

He's not standoffish. He's experienced that himself. He takes seriously if our love for him is rivaled. He loves to save us from trouble even if it's from your own sin. He takes seriously those who oppress his people. He's never dull or boring. His ways are creative and unexpected and he loves to be involved in the dirty issues of your life to actively bring about that you would love him.

And then we come to Shamgar. One verse. Verse 31. And after him came Shamgar the son of Anath who struck down 600 philistines with an ox goad.

[34 : 38] The briefest report of all the judges. His work though parallels out of a major judge. I mean now you see a judge knock down 600 philistines.

It wasn't with an ox goad. The oppression was not of sufficient extent. It wasn't of a long duration. his activity wasn't as dramatic or serious and he was probably maybe towards the close of Ehud's time.

But an ox goad. Yeah an ox goad. Which means the guy was a plowman. He was made of hardwood about 8 feet long 6 inches in circumference at the large end.

The small man was armed with a sharp prick for driving the oxen. The other had a small spade or iron paddle. It could be used as a bayonet. Pretty lethal.

And you can go into this whole thing. Some say he wasn't an Israelite. Some say because of his name Shamgar. Some also say he may have been a worshiper of Anath. Anath is the goddess of war.

[35 : 49] You know Samuel doesn't give us all the information. He doesn't give us enough info about him. So all this stuff is mere speculation. But what's the main point? The end of the verse. And he also saved Israel.

That's the main point. We don't know anything about Shamgar. Except he saved God's people. Which this is driving us to the last truth.

Notice first of all God loves to use the unknown the most unlikely to save his people and show his glory. Which leads to the sixth truth for you.

God uses the obscure for his own glory. God uses the obscure for his own glory. He loves to use the unknown.

The most unlikely to save his people to show his glory. He loves to do that. So God uses the obscure for his own glory.

[36 : 55] Dot dot dot dot. Using plowmen as judges and fishermen as apostles. He uses unlikely, unexpected means so that his power and his glory may be seen.

Not the power and glory of men. God and he does it so he gets all the praise. You know this directs us to Jesus, right?

He was a nobody. Isaiah 53 says he wasn't just a man of sorrows. He was nothing beautiful to look at. He was nothing.

And he was a nobody in cultural society. He maybe had two followers on Facebook. Yeah, his mom and dad.

But then when his dad died, and yet, he's the Messiah King and by him we're saved. And what looked like defeat, what looked like failure, he's hanging on the cross and there's victory.

[38 : 17] He's hanging on the cross and that's glory. As he says in John 17, now Father, show your glory.

And the way he's going to show his glory was on the cross. God loves to use the obscure and the nobodies. grace. Which is why God is directing everything in your life so that you love him and all of this work is, it's all his grace.

It's all his grace. His goal is to conform you to the image of his son. His goal is to do that in me, in you, in us. six truths about God and all the six truths about God.