

Judges 3.12-30 An Unexpected Message

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Preacher: Dan Morley

[0 : 00] Some things will surprise you that they're not always what you would expect them to be. And some things are so unexpected that it's ironic.

! Now, I have come to learn how much I enjoy sourdough bread. What I enjoy about sourdough bread is the bread itself, the taste, the texture, the chewiness of the crust.

It's the bread itself, which to me is a standard or a pattern of successful bread. But there's something that is very surprising and unexpected and unlikely about, in the culinary world, what makes a proper sourdough loaf.

And that's the bubbles. Now, the bubbles being a sign of successful fermentation. But when you have the loaf itself, the bubbles become holes. As you know, holes are an absence of the thing itself.

So, the culinary sign of a proper sourdough loaf is not the bread itself, but the absence of bread. So, it's surprising, it's unexpected, and it's kind of ironic.

[1 : 09] And similarly, in the book of Judges, in verses 12 to 13, we have something surprising, which is quite unexpected and ironic. So, we move on from the account of Othniel, which really had very little details about Othniel's deliverance of the people of Israel, but that he delivered Israel and the land had rest.

So, we move from an account with very little detail to an account with a lot of detail, to a very detailed account. And in fact, if this was not the inspired word of God written, some might think that it's too much information.

Nonetheless, we have a very detailed account. And this account that we have, it's detailed, it's colorful, it's racy, it's brutal, it's ironic, it's clever, it's embarrassing, it's unlikely, and it's unexpected.

And it contains an unexpected message from God. So, let's take a look. Let's read Judges chapter 3, and we will read from verses 12 to 30.

And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So, the Lord strengthened Eglon, king of Moab, against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord.

[2 : 40] Then he gathered to himself the people of Amalek, and Amalek went and defeated Israel and took possession of the city of Poms.

So, the children of Israel served Eglon, king of Moab, 18 years. But when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud, the son of Jerah, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.

By him, the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon, king of Moab. Now, Ehud made himself a dagger. It was double-edged and a cubit in length, and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh.

So, he brought the tribute to Eglon, king of Moab. Now, Eglon was a very fat man. And 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 images that were at Gilgal and said, I have a secret message for you, O king. He said, Keep silence.

[3 : 56] And all who attended him went out from him. So, Ehud came to him. Now, he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber.

Then Ehud said, I have a message from God for you. So, he rose from his seat. Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.

Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly. And his entrails came out.

Then Ehud went out through the porch, and shut the doors of the upper room behind him, and locked them. When he had gone out, Eglon's servants came to look.

And to their surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So, they said, he is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber. So, they waited, till they were embarrassed.

[4 : 56] And still, he had not opened the doors of the upper room. Therefore, they took the key, and opened them. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor.

But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images, and escaped to Sarah. And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim.

And the children of Israel went down with him from the mountains, and he led them. Then he said to them, Follow me, for the Lord has delivered your enemies, the Moabites, into your hand.

So, they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over. And at that time, they killed about 10,000 men of Moab, all stout men of valor.

Not a man escaped. So, Moab was subdued that day, under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for 80 years.

[5 : 59] Our great God, again, we thank you for your word, for supernatural revelation. We pray that as we seek to sit under the ministry of the word, that you would attend the preaching by your spirit, that you would illuminate your word to us, lead us into all truth.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, the account which we have before us this morning, in our text, from verses 12 to 30, what's going on in this text, is that this is about a message from God, and an unlikely and unexpected assassination, proclaiming a decisive blow to the enemy, and liberty to the oppressed.

So, again, this is about a message from God, and an unlikely and unexpected assassination, proclaiming a decisive blow to the enemy, and liberty to the oppressed. So, we will see in this text, first of all, the canonization cycle.

Secondly, God's agent of deliverance. And third, the message of the gospel. So, first of all, the canonization cycle.

If you recall from our previous text, in Othniel, God having delivered his people from their enemies, and through the wilderness, and settled into the promised land, there was the compromise of the conquest.

[7 : 20] And while they were to be in a covenant relationship with God, for God to be their people, and they to be, for God to be their God, and they to be God's people, they compromised, and they took spouses, whom were of the inhabitants, with pagan religion and pagan practice.

They forsook the Lord, they forgot the Lord, and they served the foreign gods, and engaged in their moral practices. So, because of their sin, because of their disobedience, covenant sanctions kicked in, and because of God's threats for disobedience, he gave them over to their enemies.

And if you recall, their enemies were king double evil. So, they were oppressed by their double evil enemy. And then, while under the oppression of their evil enemy, they groaned out to God, and God raised up a deliverer, that being Othniel, the Lion of God from the tribe of Judah, who delivered the people of God from their oppressive enemy.

So, we see the cycle as it proceeded through the time of Othniel, but Othniel died. He who delivered Israel from the oppressive enemy died.

And, of course, as we know, Israel remained fully devoted to their God, right? No, no, sadly, that's not what happened. As we see in verse 12, and the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord.

[8 : 56] Now, trying to imagine what it would have been like, they were to be, as a nation, devoted to serving God. And, if you recall what Joshua said, he said, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord, where even the very houses are to serve the Lord.

But yet, taking spouses who were engaged in pagan practices, and immorality, and false religion, and false gods, we then have synchronistic houses, synchronistic being the amalgamation of different religions, and then it wouldn't be before too long, where they would discover that God, the worship of God, and God's holiness, and holy living, would be getting in the way of the gratification of sinful human desires, and the pagan practices.

So, they forgot the Lord, they forsook the Lord, they served foreign gods, and Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord.

So, here we see that this cycle, this canonization cycle, is continuing again, as we move on to the next cycle. So, the cycle continues, Israel again does what is evil in the sight of the Lord, and then covenant sanctions.

God gives them over to their enemy, and it says in our text here, that the Lord strengthened their oppressive enemy. So, this oppression, this enemy, is from God.

[10 : 25] God strengthened their oppressive enemy, and God's agent of oppression, here which he strengthens against them, tells us is Eglon, king of Moab. Now, there's some significance to Eglon, who he is, and the fact that he is king of Moab.

And Eglon, as God's agent of oppression, God strengthened them because of the people's sin. Because of their sin, God strengthened their oppressive enemy.

Now, Eglon was king of Moab. And who are the Moabites? The Moabites, if you recall, they are actually of distant relations to the Israelites.

It goes back to Abraham and his nephew Lot. But if you remember the establishment of Moab, or the Moabites, it's, again, one of those things where we read in Scripture, and it's shocking.

It's something that we can't believe we're reading, that this actually happened. And again, it's not normative. It's narrative. And there's reasons why the narrative is what it is.

[11 : 27] But Moab, when we go back and remember, when Abraham and Lot took different land, Lot looked to the land, instead of covenant promises, of where he would settle, and he settles in Sodom and Gomorrah.

We recall the account of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was so given over to wickedness, and God's destruction, and God's wrath on it.

And then afterwards, when Lot takes his family, and they flee the wickedness, and the wrath of God, we read an account that's very disturbing, it's shocking, where Lot's daughters get Lot drunk, so that they can take turns being impregnated by him.

And the results of that, the children which are born from this, is Moab and Ammon. So from them comes the Moabites and Ammonites.

And you might wonder, how did something so shocking and disturbing like this happen? What occurs to come to a place where that would happen?

[12 : 33] And when we go back and think about Sodom, that which they fled from, that which they were living in, the state of Sodom and Gomorrah, the final narrative of what's occurring in Sodom and Gomorrah is very similar to how the book of Judges ends.

The behavior of the Benjamites at the end of the book of Judges is an echo of what occurs in Sodom and Gomorrah. They're so given over to wickedness and sin.

And that was the city. And if you remember the negotiation Abraham tries to have with God of if there's righteous people in it, but God had determined there was nobody righteous and that it needed to be destroyed.

God, in essence, entertains or humors Abraham. And in this discourse, Abraham comes to the conclusion that indeed it is wicked.

So they are living in a very wicked city. And we have to remember that we are not in Israel.

[13 : 36] We are not a nation set apart under God. In the church age, Christians are elect exiles living in a wicked world. So we ourselves are also immersed in much wickedness.

But living in a wicked world, not allowing that wickedness to come into us. That being said, with the sodomization that occurred to Lot's family, think of the process that must have happened for the sodomization of Lot's family.

For the wickedness that they were surrounded by in the city, that wickedness would at first have been accepted. Accepted behavior around them.

And then being accepted behavior, it would then become normalized. This behavior is normal. And then becoming normalized, well then it must be approved. And then by approving the wicked behavior, it then becomes celebrated and educated.

And then they're celebrating of the wicked behavior and educating everyone of their wicked behavior. Well then, of course, everyone needs to unite with their wicked lifestyle and behavior.

[14 : 45] And then having united and celebrated and approving of such wicked behavior, well then they would criticize those who don't celebrate it with them, who don't unite with them in their wickedness, and who don't approve of what they do.

And then having criticized those who don't, then they punish as that which is wicked is normalized and that which is righteous is seen as different and wrong and worth punishing.

Does this sound familiar at all? So the sodomization has its effects on Lot and as his family. And we even see that as they flee the wickedness of Sodom and they flee God's wrath of Sodom, Lot's wife had such fondness of that that she couldn't flee from it without turning back, without looking back.

And of course we know of the fate that ensues. So it remains with Lot and his daughters. The sodomization that affected his daughters caused this very shocking narrative.

And from that comes the birth of Moab and Ammon. Moab, from Moab comes the Moabites. And here we have Eglon, king of Moab, the Moabites.

[15 : 58] And then he has this coalition that we read of, of the Moabites and the Ammonites. So both the sons of Lot's daughters. And then there's also the Amalekites.

So who are the Amalekites? The Amalekites, if you recall, during the wilderness wandering, the Amalekites were Israel's first enemy. So this really is adding insult to injury, that distant relations and their first enemy in the Exodus have this coalition to take and oppress Israel.

So going back then to Eglon, Eglon being the king of Moab and having this coalition of the Moabites, Ammonites, and the Amalekites, it tells us something about Eglon.

It says, Eglon was a very fat man. Now in those days, being fat was something that was a sign of wealth. Only those who were wealthy could afford or have the lifestyle to not have to work so hard or to be deprived of nutrition in order to be fat.

So therefore those who were fat, it was a sign of wealth and they knew that and they would wear it as a sign of wealth, carrying it around as a sign of pride. So to Eglon, it was a badge of pride.

[17 : 15] The name Eglon, it means circular or calf, which is kind of ironic because a circular calf would be a fattened calf. And when we read the Old Testament, what is the reference that is used for fattened calf?

It's when there's going to be a feast and for the feast, what do they do? They kill the fattened calf. They slaughter the fattened calf. And I don't think that Eglon saw the irony of it because Eglon didn't see the play on words as he was the fattened calf ready to be slaughtered.

It also tells us that Eglon, the king of Moab, oppressed Israel. And this oppression was that Israel was defeated and taken over.

And it also says that they took possession of the city of Palms. And the city of Palms is in Jericho and there's actually some tactical advantage to having taken the city of Palms because it was the main trading route into Canaan.

So take control of the main trading route into Canaan and you are able to choke them out and have control over Canaan. So again, more insult to injury.

[18 : 25] So what follows is that Israel served Eglon for 18 years and they had to pay tribute. When it says they had to pay tribute, that doesn't mean that they took their glasses of wine and poured a little bit out in tribute to Eglon.

What this meant was that they had to bring tribute to him and that was the prosperity of their living. So that would have been their wealth, their gold, their livestock, their agriculture, their produce, their prosperity of living they had to bring to their oppressive enemy.

It was burdensome. And after 18 years of this burdensome oppression, they grew weary of it. They grew weary and it says they cried out to God to save them from this affliction.

So that brings us to our next point that when they cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to deliver them. So our second point is the agent of deliverance or God's agent of deliverance.

And that is Ehud. And it tells us something about Ehud. And it tells us that he is God's left-handed agent of deliverance. And again, we have some more irony going on here.

[19 : 45] Because Ehud was from the tribe of Benjamin. And Benjamin, the name Benjamin means son of the right hand. Now, the Bible sometimes uses what we call anthropomorphisms, which is a many-syllabled word to mean in the way of man or predicating the attributes of man to something else.

So in this case, predicating the attributes of man to God. Examples of such would be of God's right hand when there's reference to God's mighty right hand. God is spirit.

God is not a creature. God does not have a body like a creature. But we whom are creatures can't relate to what it means to exist as God. So anthropomorphisms or analogical or metaphorical language is used to help us to comprehend something about God.

So while God is spirit and does not have a body, he does not have a right arm and a left arm. But the reference to saying by God's mighty right arm is that of his strength.

For a creaturely human person, it's more common to have a strong right arm, particularly in those days. And that is the source of your strength, is your strong right arm.

[21 : 03] So here in our text, there's irony because there's deliverance by God's mighty right arm, or God's mighty right hand, through left-handed Ehud, son of the right hand.

So there's some language here that's alerting to us that there's much irony in this text. Now, left-handed, it says that Ehud was left-handed.

And this was very uncommon in that day. And it was actually considered to be a defect. It was considered at that time to be a defect, to be left-handed.

That being said, it provided a surprise advantage in battle because where it was expected to have strength on one hand, the strength was in the other hand.

So it was a surprise advantage to have unexpected strength to deliver an unexpected blow. And this is even recognized in fictional writings.

[22 : 09] And particularly, I could think of the epic sword duel between Indigo Montoya and the dread pirate Roberts on top of the Cliffs of Insanity, where they try to hide from each other, which is their strong hand.

And they start off with their sword duel with their left hand. But then it comes out that they're not actually left-handed, they're right-handed because they wanted to save the element of surprise of where their strength would come from.

In this case, it was unexpected that Ehud's, or Ehud's, Ehud's strength was on his left side, on his left hand.

And Ehud makes a double-edged dagger, it tells us, and that it was a cubit in length. Now, a cubit is approximately 18 inches, or for reference, it would be from your elbow to the tip of your middle finger.

So he had, he custom-made a dagger in this, of this length, a cubit in length. And he strapped it to his right thigh under his garments.

[23 : 17] What's significant about this is that it would be very inconspicuous and unexpected. Now, when he comes to pay tribute to the king in the city of Palms, it's not like they would have had a metal detector, which, of course, would have picked up an 18-inch dagger strapped to his thigh.

Rather, they would be looking for, and all the people coming to pay tribute, they would be looking to what would be most common, and that would be their weapons mounted on their left hip to draw with their right hand.

So to have it on the inside of his right thigh, it would be inconspicuous and unexpected. Thus, him able to approach the king without them detecting that he has this double-edged dagger.

And as such, he's able to gain access with the dagger, and we have the advantage of reading this account as a completed event where we know what happens, but imagine afterwards when Ehud comes back to the Israelites and he's telling the story and they would be on the edge of their seats wanting to know the details of what happened next and he tells them of how he was able to gain access and then he comes before him to pay tribute and he turns back again and he tells the king, he says, I have a secret message for you.

Think how exciting that would be, a secret message. The king just, he's got to know, he's got to know what the secret message is so he, his attendants, his servants, they leave.

[24 : 44] So imagine the Israelites hearing this story and hearing how the king dismissed his attendants and that they left and they think it actually worked. He now has this private access before the king and then he tells him, I have a message from God for you and he gets up from his chair.

And the account that follows of Ehud's assassinating Eglon is a historical narrative. This did happen. It's a narrative of something that actually happened right down to the blood and the guts and the dung of a fat, proud king.

And I'm sure you probably have a lot of visual memories from childhood Sunday school lessons but you probably don't have a visual memory of childhood Sunday school flannel grams of Eglon and Ehud.

It gets graphic and it gets gory. Dale Ralph Davis in his commentary he says this, he says, Yahweh is not a white-gloved standoffish god out somewhere in the remote left field of the universe who hesitates to get his strong right arm dirty in the yuck of our lives.

So what's the point? What's he getting at in all of this? The point is that God doesn't require us to first mop up the messes of our lives and sanitize ourselves in order to be saved.

[26 : 07] God delivers his people where they are when they cry out for salvation. God delivered Eglon and Moab into the hand of Ehud that day and the land of Israel had rest.

And so of course we know that what follows is the land of Israel was wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord worshipping and serving him, right? No. No, that's not what happened. Ehud's salvation did not change the hearts of Israel.

He saved them from their oppressive enemy but he did not save them from the oppression of sin. He did not change the hearts. They merely groaned under the oppression and wanted their freedom back but they wanted their freedom back so that they would have the freedom to continue in sin.

the freedom to return to doing evil again. Israel was enslaved to the power of sin. Ehud did not deliver from the bondage of sin so Ehud is not the real hero.

Which brings us to our third point that Ehud was not the gospel promised skull crushing savior that was proclaimed in Genesis 3.15. So third the message of the gospel with types and shadows and copies in scripture in the Old Testament each shadow in the Old Testament shows us something of the shape of the substance and the perfect savior to come Christ in his kingdom is the substance.

[27 : 45] So the shadow shows us something of the shape of the substance. The shadow shows us something of Christ and his kingdom. And Ehud as a shadow has a special message for us from God.

It is a message about the work of Christ and this account of Ehud's message is fat with irony and humor. Ehud's message didn't leave any certainty for dispute or negotiation Ehud's message it got right to the point or was it left to the point.

Either way Eglund felt it. He felt it right to the core and this message Ehud's message it cut to the core all the way with no insufficient strength in its delivery.

This message for the oppressive evil ruler was from God and it came with authority and it came with power with full delivery. Not only that but this message was customized.

Ehud custom made a two-edged sword a cubit in length. It was custom made for this occasion and the message was custom made for its recipient.

[28 : 57] It says, I have a message from God for you. And it was a message of destruction to the oppressive evil ruler. This message was one that brought freedom to oppress Israel.

If you recall, what did Ehud do after he destroyed the wicked oppressive enemy? He blew the trumpet. He blew the trumpet and the children of Israel went down and the Lord delivered their enemy into their hand and the land had rest for 80 years.

We don't want to miss this. What's going on here in our text is an echo of Genesis 3.15 where God had a message for the oppressive evil ruler.

In Genesis 3.15 God had a message for the oppressive evil ruler and that message included the promise of an unexpected blow that would destroy the enemy and free God's oppressed God's oppressed people.

So God himself is the first one to deliver the custom message to the devil in Genesis 3.15. It's a message of destruction to the oppressive evil enemy and of liberty to oppressed captives.

[30 : 15] Now the name Ehud it means love and united and Ehud's double-edged message points to a greater double-edged message that cuts to the core and it's a message of love that unites us with Christ.

When Jesus was nailed on the cross to be put to death Satan the oppressive the evil oppressive enemy he would have thought that he was being paid tribute here with Jesus being delivered and crucified on the cross.

But while he would have expected that this was being paid tribute to him as the time drew near there was a crushing message delivered to Satan.

What was that crushing message? it is finished. What was finished? The original message from God proclaimed in Genesis 3.15.

The promised seed of the woman has crushed the head of the serpent. Now Eglon was put to open shame and dishonor as his pride was brought to a gory heap amongst his own guts and done.

[31 : 30] With Christ's decisive blow he brought his enemy to open shame and defeat and secure salvation of his people deliverance from the power of sin and eternal rest.

So in conclusion ask yourself do you desire as the Israelites did do you desire liberty from the oppression of sin just to continue in sin or do you long to have the bondage and burden of the power of sin removed in order that you may turn from sin and its oppressive bondage to come to God to please him and live for him by grace procured by Christ and applied by the spirit.

What is the highest good and chief end? Or what is your highest good and chief end? Is it sinful gratification as the unrepentant Israelites? or is the highest good and chief end union and communion with God?

Now this message from Ehud it came in an unlikely and unexpected way and so also the message of gospel came in an unexpected and unlikely way.

What would be more unlikely and unexpected than God the son of God who is eternal and infinite and almighty to assume human nature and in the nature of the oppressed to take a body to himself and in that body to perfect what had yet to be done, that which mankind had failed to do, to perfect obedience, to perfect righteousness, and to suffer and to die in the place of his people to pay the punishment, to gain victory over sin and death, and having died, raised from the dead, ascended on high, exalted and seated with all power and authority.

[33 : 32] The message of the gospel came in an unlikely and unexpected way. Now the account of Ehud and Israel, it ends in tragedy. It ends in tragedy because they again forsook the Lord, they forgot the Lord, and they returned to doing evil.

If you are enslaved to sin, don't let your life be likewise tragic. Cry out to the Lord for salvation, and the perfect and final deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall save his people not only from their evil enemy, but from the oppressive power of their sin.

Luke 4, 18-19 says, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of the sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

Salvation was procured by Christ on the cross, and it is applied by the Spirit. But we do not want to view salvation as the Israelites did, in order to have freedom to return to the wicked ways of the world or of the nations around us, but to be freed not only from the punishment of sin, but the power of sin, the burden, the misery, the oppression of our evil enemy.

So if you are not united to Christ, remember the Israelites, they cried out to God. They did not have to earn his merit or earn his favor by their works.

[35 : 10] They cried out to God. God. But the Israelites did not look to God for salvation from sin. We are saved from sin, from death, from wrath, by receiving Christ, by crying out to God for salvation, by receiving Christ freely offered to us in the gospel and resting on him alone for salvation.

If you are still enslaved to sin, if you are still under the power of sin, if you are not united to Christ, if you have not been saved, receive the Lord Jesus Christ, rest on him alone for salvation, embrace the Lord Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel.

Our Lord, we thank you again for your word. We thank you for that which it contains, the message of the gospel of salvation and the shadows and types and copies in the Old Testament which further reveal to us the gospel promise in Genesis 3.15 as revealed by Father Steps.

We thank you, our Lord Jesus Christ, that you came to deliver your people, from the burden and the misery and the oppression of sin. We thank you that you lived a perfect righteous life and perfected obedience and righteousness.

We thank you that you shed your blood and poured out your life to die in our place, that our sins would be fully forgiven and that we would have reconciliation with the holy and just God.

[36 : 32] We thank you for the righteousness of Christ which is accredited to us, that we being united to Christ have full access to God and that as your word tells us, are saved from sin, are saved from the power of sin and that we are united to Christ, heirs with Christ.

We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen. We take your hymnals, we'll stand and sing Thank you.