

Judges: Ehud the Leftie

Revival

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: Judges 3:12-30

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I thought of those of you today who enjoy baseball that I would mention a few quaint sayings from the great Yogi Berra. Those of you who enjoy baseball know that Yogi Berra made famous the phrases that don't make sense. And you kind of scratch your head after you hear it and you wonder: What does that mean?

Here is a couple of them. "Half the lies they tell about me aren't true." Only half? "Only half the lies they tell about me aren't true."

Here is another one. "Ninety percent of baseball is half mental."

Well, I think there is a significant aspect to sports that involves your mind and your thinking processes. Here is another one I think we can understand. This one may be a little bit better. "It gets late early out there."

It seems that way sometimes, doesn't it?

Here is one last one. "It is like déjà vu all over all over again." That one probably is the more famous one of his sayings. But it fits the children of Israel. It is like déjà vu all over again. It seems like the children of Israel never learned. They kept making the same mistakes over and over again. And we have looked at several of them thus far from the book of Judges, how they keep repeating their sin and we come to another section that describes the same cycle. God had delivered them. He had brought a deliverer to their nation. He delivered them from the enemies and when he died they went right back to the same sins that they committed before God raised up the Savior.

We find it repeated again in this example. We find another example recorded for us in Judges chapter three. This time we read from Judges chapter three starting in verse number 12. It said:

"And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD."¹

¹ Judges 3:12.

Now you will remember from a few studies we did a few weeks ago that God gave us a little summary of the book of Judges and he said this cycle would reoccur and reoccur and reoccur like déjà vu all over again. Only he said each time that they would do it they would get successively worse. They would get worse and worse and worse. And here we have one of those instances where the children of Israel did again what was evil in the sight of the Lord. What was the again that they did? They doubted God. They doubted God's Word for them. God said to them, "Go into the new land. I will be with you. I will deliver them from your hand. You will overcome your enemies and you will live securely in the land that I have given to you."

They didn't believe him. Initially they did. When they first went into the land they did, but as time progressed slowly, slowly they began to doubt God. And they didn't believe his Word. And they even came to doubt and failed to believe his works. They had heard about his works that he did when he brought them out of Egypt and what he did for them in the wilderness, how he provided food for them and how he protected them from their enemies. They had heard about how he had brought them into the Promised Land with great victories. But they began to doubt it and they began to look to their own ideas. And they began to merge with the nations that left in Canaan.

And before long they forsook God himself. They would abandon God and they would begin to worship the idols and the gods of the peoples in the land that God told them to destroy them, destroy the people, destroy their altars lest they tempt you to worship their gods.

We read Israel did again that which was even in the sight of the Lord. Once again they failed to believe God and they ended up worshipping idols. Then we read also at the tail end of verse number 12 from Judges three. It says:

...and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and went and defeated Israel. And they took possession of the city of palms. And the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.²

God had warned them long before they ever entered into the Promised Land. He told them, "If you fail to obey me and to believe me, I will become your enemy. I will join your enemies and I will make war against you to defeat you and to punish you for your unbelief and for your sin."

We see that described for us very clearly here. It says God emboldened Eglon. He gave him strength. He gave to this wicked, godless king the strength and the ability to attack Israel and to defeat them. Now he brought in three other nations to join him. He brought in the Amalekites, the Ammonites and, of course, the Moabites, the nation that he governed.

² Judges 3:12-14.

Just a real quick reminder. Israel had faced these people when they came out of Egypt. They had faced the Amalekite. And the Amalekites had defeated them and they defeated them because God wasn't with them. God said, "Don't go against the Amalekites."

And they said, "Oh, we are going to do it anyway."

And they went against them and they were defeated by the Amalekite. The Ammonites, they were the children that inhabited the land of Lot. Lot was the nephew, you remember, of Abraham. And God brought them together and time developed a relationship between Lot and Abram that wasn't smooth. Their shepherds and herdsmen fought and so Abraham thought it best that they separate. Lot separated and settled down by the land of Sodom, a beautiful land at that time. The Ammonites came from that territory. And then the Moabites had a king by the name of Balak who brought in a false prophet by the name of Balaam to prophesy against the children of Israel as he saw them coming through the wilderness and coming near his land. And he was afraid for his land, because he thought the Israelites would overtake him. And God told him, "You are not to touch the Israelites. Leave them alone. They are my people."

That is the group of nations that came together under Eglon to make war against Israel. And God enabled these enemies to win and to defeat Israel and to overtake them. And it says that they overtook the city of Palms. Do you know what city that was? Jericho. Do you remember what happened in that very first battle when the children of Israel came across the Jordan River and came into the Promised Land? What city did they defeat first? Jericho. God gave them a great victory there and now we see enemies coming across the Jordan River and inhabiting the very city over which God gave Israel victory, Jericho.

And in the process they took control of the Jordan River so that the children of Israel did not have free access back and forth across the river to their other brothers and sisters on the other side of the river. It says they served them 18 years. The previous time they served only eight years. This time they served 18 years under a godless king. God came against them because of their sin and unbelief.

Now we read starting in verse number 15 a change. We read some things kind of disturbing to us in our sensibilities in our day. But we will just read through them and not worry about them. It is a very graphic display of how God brought victory over the evil king Eglon starting in verse 15.

Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, and the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The people of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. And Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his clothes. And he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. And when Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who carried the tribute. But he himself turned back at the idols near Gilgal and

said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." And he commanded, "Silence." And all his attendants went out from his presence. And Ehud came to him as 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 reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. And the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not pull the sword out of his belly; and the dung came out. Then Ehud went out into the porch and closed the doors of the roof chamber behind him and locked them. When he had gone, the servants came, and when they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, "Surely he is relieving himself in the closet of the cool chamber." And they waited till they were embarrassed. But when he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them, and there lay their lord dead on the floor. Ehud escaped while they delayed, and he passed beyond the idols and escaped to Seirah. When he arrived, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim. Then the people of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he was their leader. And he said to them, "Follow after me, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites and did not allow anyone to pass over. And they killed at that time about 10,000 of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men; not a man escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.³

A rather graphic display and description of how God brought victory to Israel over Eglon and the Moabites and their enemies. God raised up Ehud, a man to deliver them, a judge, a savior, one who God used to bring about victory over their enemies. Ehud believed God. It says, "The Lord has given them into our hand. Come, follow me." He believed what he had heard that God had done in the past on behalf of Israel and he trusted in God's ability to do the same thing again for those who would trust him and believe and obey. And he gathered about him troops from Israel who went down and conquered Eglon and the Moabites. And they had rest eight years.

While Ehud governed them and served as judge, they knew peace and rest from their enemies.

What do you think God wanted the children of Israel to learn from these records, these events that he had recorded and preserved for them? They read their Old Testament Scriptures, you know, The children of Israel even to this day read the Old Testament Scriptures and they read the book of Judges. And what would God want them to learn and to understand from these events? He would want them to understand that unbelief brings sin and bondage. A failure to believe God brings sin and bondage. It didn't start that way, as you recall. When God created the heavens and the earth and he placed man on the earth and gave to him life it says he created him upright, without sin. And Adam

³ Judges 3:15-30.

and Eve in those early days walked with God, believed him, trusted him, obeyed him. And then one day they sinned. They disobeyed God. they failed to believe him. And they ate of the fruit of the tree that God forbade them to eat. Now man inherited a depraved nature a sinful nature. And what we see described for us so many times throughout Scripture and vividly portrayed for us here failure to believe God brings sin and bondage. That is the natural path of man without God. We will walk in sin. We will choose the sinful way. We will not pursue after God. In fact, we flee from God. We do not seek after him like desires of us. And God wants the children of Israel of all centuries and ages to know and to understand unbelief brings sin and bondage.

But we see another thing here that God wants them to know and understand. Faith in God brings freedom from sin and bondage. Faith in God brings relief. When you turn to God and trust him and his provision on your behalf, you find freedom from sin and its bondage. And we see that pictured very clearly in this description of the children of Israel under Ehud and contrasted with Eglon. When under the leadership of Ehud they believed and trusted God, he gave them victory and they found relief and freedom from sin and bondage, in this instance, for 80 years, a long time span, four generations who grew up knowing God's hand in their lives in their nation.

God also wanted them to know and understand his way of redemption. He wanted them to understand it is not by might. It is not by power. But it is by my Spirit, saith the Lord. God is the one who brings victory over evil. God knows we have tried, haven't we? But the children of Israel as long as they tried, they kept falling farther and farther and farther away from God, not closer and closer until finally they abandoned God. They rejected him and departed from him to worship idols. Only when they believed and trusted God did they experience victory. And God wanted his people to know that was the path of victory, to trust him, to follow him, believe him. And when they would do that they would experience relief and freedom from sin.

He also wanted to remind them of his covenant. He had made a covenant with Abraham, their forefather and he had made a covenant with him covering many things, but a couple of them in particular that fit this circumstance he promised to Abraham a nation, many people, a strong nation, a nation that would bless the whole earth. He promised to them a Savior. He promised to them a possession, land.

“I will give all of this land, Abraham. I will give it to you and to your seed after you.”

And God, when he makes a promise, he keeps his promise. And he wanted to remind the children of Israel of this promise that he had made to Abraham that they would become a strong and mighty nation. He wanted them to remember the promise of the land. It belonged to them, not the Moabites, not the Ammonites, not the Amalekites, not the Canaanites, but to the children of Israel, the descendants of Abraham. And he also wanted to remind them of his promise of a Savior. He promised it, first of all, to Adam and Eve in the garden.

“I will send the seed of a woman who will come and will crush the head of the serpent on your behalf.”

And then to Abraham he promised that of your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed. And that seed, that word is a singular word identifying one person and he promised to Abraham that through his seed and through his descendants some one man would come who would be the Savior and the Redeemer of Israel, would fulfill the promise. And God here we find through these events in the life of the children of Israel and through Ehad reminding them of his promises that he had made to Abraham and going farther back to Adam and to Eve. Only here we see him pointing out to them that this Savior who would come would not be a mere mortal man, because a mere mortal man could not provide the kind of victories, ultimately, that man needed. For, you see, because of the inherited nature from Adam and Eve who sinned, mankind has an inherent helplessness and weakness and inability to conquer sin and bondage. Only under God’s provision, only under God’s power can anyone find relief from sin.

And so he is pointing out to them here by way of a vivid description in their history that this Savior who would come would be greater than just another Ehad, greater than just another Othniel, greater than Moses, greater than Joshua, greater than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It would be one, ultimately, Jesus Christ, his only Son who came down and inhabited human flesh, who would ultimately provide the victory on behalf of sinners to experience victory and freedom from sin and bondage. And through his life on earth and through his death on the cross and by his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God the Father, he gained a victory over the evil one and crushed his head so that now all who trust in that provision, that Savior, that deliverer will find freedom from sin and bondage, not just here and now in this life, but throughout eternity.

These events occurred centuries ago and you might ask, “How do they relate to us in our day and age? What use do they have to me centuries later?”

They describe for us, though they occurred centuries ago, they describe for us our condition today. They describe the condition of every man, woman, boy and girl, born into this world, has the same nature, the same propensity, the same desires as those Israelites did back centuries ago. The inherent desire of you and of me does not pursue after God, but pursues after sin, away from God, rejecting God, wanting to do things in our own strength, finding some way to please God by what we do, not realizing that we cannot do it on our own.

It also describes the Church of Jesus Christ today. The people of God in this day resemble the people of God in that day. For the people of God today have begun to show signs of spiritual decline and decay because of their unbelief and failure to trust God and to obey him completely. And we begin to see the initial stages of adapting to the culture about us, mixing in, not being different, but wanting to be just like the world about us and in many areas of our world today we find people who once professed to follow Christ now following false gods. And we begin to see some of those initial stages occurring even in our own land today. And so from the experience that we see from the children of

Israel and how God dealt with them, we can know how God will deal with us. And Peter warned his friends back in the days when he lived. He said back then, 2000 years ago, “It is time for judgment to begin at the house of God.”

You see, God judges sin whether it is in the life of an unbeliever or in the life of a believer. God hates sin. A holy God cannot stand sin. And he judges it. Oh, he is patient. He waits. But he will bring discipline even to his own children, even to those who believe and trust him, but have permitted sin to control their lives. He will bring discipline to them. We can learn from their example.

Furthermore, it causes us and points us to Christ, the one true Savior. We can't depend upon another man. We can't depend upon another one just like us to deliver us and to bring us freedom from sin and from bondage. We must trust the one whom God raises up. In this day it was Ehud, a temporary victory, 80 years, a long time, but temporary. We must now trust and obey and believe with our whole hearts the one whom God has raised up for us, Jesus Christ, his Son. And we must obey him completely and trust him exclusively.

What can the Spirit of God do with these truths in our lives today? He can open our eyes to see that which is false, that which is error and can open our eyes to see that which is true that we might believe the truth and reject error. He can convict us of our failure to believe and trust his provision, Jesus Christ fully and completely and exclusively. And if at some time in our lives or in your life you have trusted him it can encourage you and comfort you and remind you of his provision for people like you and like me. He has made provision for us. And he has said, “All who believe, all who call upon me, all who come to me will receive eternal life.”

You see, we need a new heart. It isn't enough just to have a new government. It isn't enough just to have a new leader, a good leader. We must have a new heart. And only God can give that to us.

Well, I pray that the Spirit of God will take these events and make them vivid and clear in your minds to understand God and how he works and his ways and what his will for us is, his will for us is to have greater than the garden of Eden. His desire for us is to enjoy him for eternity. And all of us who come to faith and trust in Christ will enjoy him now and throughout all eternity.

I pray that the Spirit of God will bring you to that kind of faith, that kind of trust, that kind of obedience that you might experience what he has in mind for people just like you.

Let's close in prayer.