**Ehud, Left-handed Warrior**

July 14, 2013

Judges 3:12-30

Key Verse 3:15a “Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite.”

When we read the Book of Judges, we see that there is a spiritual cycle of the Israelites. The cycle lasted for a few decades or a few hundred years. They experienced a spiritual high, and spiritual low, and they were restored by God’s help. At first, they experienced God’s great power and lived according to his word. Then after their lives became comfortable, they became complacent, and lived like the Canaanites. They lost their zeal for God and became idol worshipers. But God did not let them perish under the idol worship, but let them suffer under the oppression of neighboring countries. The Israelites, under the oppression, became humble, and cried out to God for help. Then God raised a judge and saved the Israelites through him. This is the spiritual cycle of the Israelites.

This spiritual cycle is seen in a person. When he is young, he is very zealous for God and serves him with all his heart. Then after marriage or getting a job, or after he is hurt in a church, he loses his zeal. Even though he is a believer, we cannot see his burning desire for God. Rather, he begins to compromise with the world, and even loses a sense of right and wrong. He becomes complacent and Christianity becomes a fringe activity, something you do when you have spare time. Then God punishes him, and he repents and is restored.

This spiritual cycle of sin came from the Israelites’ failure to drive out the Canaanites due to many factors. First of all, the Canaanites had superior weapons such as iron chariots. So the Israelites were afraid of fighting the Canaanites. Also they had desire to get some benefit of getting iron technology. But God was angry. Look at verses 2:2-3. “and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars. Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.” In spite of the Israelites’ failure, God decided to use it for his purpose. Look at verse 2:22 and 3:2. “I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their forefathers did.” “he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience.” This is very similar to our situation. When we believe in Jesus, God did not destroy our sinful nature. God left sinful nature and trials and problems in our lives. Why? It is to test our faith to see whether we keep the way of the Lord, and teach us to fight the good fight of faith. St. Paul had a thorn in his flesh. He prayed to God to remove it. But God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9) The thorn was there to make Paul humble and depend on God.

In today’s passage, we learn one of the cycles of sin. Look at verses 3:12-14. “Once 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…The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years.” During 18 years of oppression, the Israelites were under defeatism and despair. But Ehud’s act gave them courage, and defeated the Moabites. When we look at today’s passage, it is just plain ugly. Sin is not easy to kill. Sin problem doesn’t go away by ignoring it. It must be faced head-on – like Ehud takes on Eglon – even if it is gory and disgusting.

We learn in this story that people are content to stay enslaved for a long period of time. It took Israel eighteen years before they cried out to the Lord. We have to ask ourselves, why did they wait so long? The Israelites tried to solve the problem with their own strength for 18 years. They did not cry out to God. Their pride did not allow them to cry out to God. But finally, they confessed that they could not do anything with their own strength. God was waiting for his people to cry out to him.

We too wait so long when we become addicted to patterns of sin? Why? Perhaps because we’re afraid or ashamed to face the reality or the ugliness of these patterns and addictions. Maybe we feel we’re going to lose something we enjoy too much. Or maybe we’re content to remain where we are and our misery becomes comfortable. But we have a Redeemer, a Savior, a Deliverer whose name is Jesus, and he saves us from the dominion and power of sin in our lives. Whether it’s been eight years or 18 years, we can cry out to the Lord today. We can turn away from sin and he will begin to free us from our enslavement to patterns and addictions.

God had compassion on the Israelites and raised up a deliverer. Look at 3:15. “Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite.” Ehud was a left-handed man. The literal translation of this particular phrase is “hindered in the right hand.” Twice the text says that he put the sword on his right side because he was left-handed. Ehud, we know, came from the tribe of Benjamin, a name that means “son of my right hand” – a term of strength. But the text is clear: Ehud was left-handed. He was “hindered in the right hand,” meaning, he was weak and physically limited. He was an awkward man – “gauche,” as the French would say. Ehud could not use his right hand, and was forced to use his left hand. Probably, it was clear to everyone that he could not use his right hand. That is why Eglon was not suspicious of Ehud and met alone.

Ehud must have been a prominent individual because he was given the responsibility of taking the tribute to present to Eglon. And he must have been courageous, because he was willing to go it alone. The Bible records in detail how Ehud killed Eglon because Ehud was a handicapped person. It would show that even a handicapped person can win the victory over his enemies if he had faith and wisdom.

Look at verse 16. “Now Ehud made a double-edged sword about a foot and a half long, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing.” In that day almost everybody was right-handed, and they were searched on the left side to see if they carried a weapon. The king’s Secret Service agents searched Ehud on the wrong side. Eglon was a very fat man, like Jabba the Hutt in Star Wars film. Ehud pretended to have a secret message from God. Eglon let his guard down. He was flattered. He stood and stepped close to him. His body language clearly indicated that he was physically superior to Ehud and the Hebrew briefly noted that the warrior-king stood taller than Ehud. But the brief hesitation passed and Ehud realized that the king was actually making his job easier. Look at verses 21-22. “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, which came out his back.” Ehud’s sword punctured the large intestine and Eglon’s poop came out. The foul stench was so strong that his subjects thought that Eglon was relieving himself in the bathroom. This shows that Ehud trained his left hand to be strong. He was not limited by his disable right hand. The Bible says that Ehud escaped through the porch. But according to the footnote, the Hebrew word is uncertain. Some theologians suggested that Ehud escaped through toilet pipe, just like the boy in the movie, “Slumdog Millionaire.”

Here we learn that God works according to the perfect timing. Because Eglon let his guard down, he commanded his subjects to leave him and Ehud alone. Because he got up to hear the message, Ehud was able to plunge his sword to his belly. If Eglon was seating, Ehud would not have been able to kill him. Because the sword punctured the large intestine, the foul stench gave the time for Ehud to escape. When we trust in God, God will work according to the perfect time and plan ofr us.

Ehud was an unlikely hero; a man who was handicapped and not well known. He was an underdog, an obscure person, a man whom God chose to use to his glory. Ehud could very easily have dwelt on his disability and doubted his value to God. He could very easily had passed on the opportunity of taking the tribute to Eglon and hence passing up the opportunity to deal with him. Ehud could have doubted and said, “How could God possibly use me?” But no, he didn’t. Ehud accepted his potential in God’s eyes. He rested in his value to God. We encounter these people all throughout the book of Judges. What we have here are underdogs, obscure people, men and women whom God chose to use to his glory.

Simon Birch was born with a condition that prevents him from growing--similar to a dwarf. He was always made fun of. But he did not lose heart, but always practiced holding his breath under water. People asked him why. He said, “God has a purpose for my life.” Later a bus he was riding on crashed into a river. Simon answered the call and saved the children. His tiny body was used to save one boy in the end, but he died. God had a purpose for him all along.

Jesus was a most unlikely hero. Isaiah says in Isaiah 53:2-3, “He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” Yet Jesus accomplished the single most important act in history: He died for our sins, thus becoming the greatest hero of all. No one recognized him when he came upon the scene. There was no red carpet, no fanfare. An unlikely hero.

Now here we are in Christ. We, too, might feel like underdogs; that we don’t have the right credentials. Our family background is not good enough, we think. We feel we’re too ordinary. But our text tells us that God can use us in amazing ways. This room is filled with possible Ehuds. It doesn’t matter what your family background is. It doesn’t matter if you are limited in some capacity. God sees you as very much more than ordinary. He takes each one of us from our different backgrounds, with our different talents and our different gifts, and he molds us uniquely into a representation of himself. We don’t have to look alike. He uses us, each one of us, in unique ways. And God is excited about how he wants to use you! The miracle of Christianity is when God takes someone ordinary, someone just like you and me, and uses him or her for his glory. He doesn’t heal all the problems or the handicaps at first. The miracle is, he uses us when we are limited. This is how he used Ehud. He takes a life that the world discards and uses it to his glory. 1 Corinthians 1:27 says, “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”

Look at verse 28-29. “‘Follow me,’ he ordered, ‘for the Lord has given Moab, your enemy, into your hands.’ So they followed him down…struck down about ten thousand Moabites, all vigorous and strong; not a man escaped.” Sometimes it takes only one person to motivate many to righteousness. That is what happened in Ehud’s case. He was willing to go on the attack first, but then he blew the trumpet and all of Israel joined in the battle, routing the enemy!

We sometimes let ourselves be defeated by our limitations, by things no more significant than being left-handed. Thinking we are not good enough keeps us from offering God our service. God’s ability to use us should raise our expectations. When we recognize our weakness, we turn things over to God. Missionary Hudson Taylor stated: “God chose me because I was weak enough.”

Look at verse 30. “That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years.” The Bible says that the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23). Sin makes us miserable; it robs us of our sense of joy and well-being. But God gives us new life in Christ and gives us rest from our enslavement to sin.

We are engaged in spiritual warfare—we struggle against worldviews opposed to God’s truth. We arm ourselves with His word, which has been described as “living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb 4:12). God’s word is our weapon against all secular ideologies. Don’t leave home without your sword! May God bless you to fight the good fight of faith every day even with your handicaps and win the victory.