



Central Peninsula Church

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Judges 3:12-31
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The God of the Left Hand

A few years back a movie came out called *Simon Birch*. It's a funny and sad movie about two 12-year-old boys, Simon Birch, who is a dwarf, and his friend Joe. Rejected and ignored by his parents, Simon idolizes Joe's mom Rebecca, who showers him with love and affection. But Simon suffers exactly what you'd expect in a small New England town of the early 1960s. Not only is he physically different, he's too smart for his own good. He's not afraid to confront Rev. Russell and his Sunday School teacher with questions about faith. And when the pastor invites the congregation for refreshments after church, Simon stands up and demands to know what donuts and coffee have to do with God.

His run-ins with the church leaders are a source of bitterness for Simon because he's convinced he's an instrument of God. He believes God has a plan for him and will someday use him in a heroic way. And sure enough, he's right. Through a bizarre turn of events, Simon and Joe end up chaperoning a bunch of third-graders on a school bus. When the driver swerves to miss a deer in the road, loses control, and plunges the bus into a rushing river, it begins to sink, endangering the lives of the small children. But here is where Simon comes in. The panicking little kids will listen to Simon precisely because his size doesn't threaten them. Thanks to Simon they're all rescued; all except one. When the bus finally sinks, it looks like that one child will die, but again, because of his small size, Simon is able to fit through the bus window and drag the child out to safety. The child is saved, but Simon loses his life and dies a hero.

Simon Birch is a story about what some people might call fate and others might call providence. It's a story about how God's plan works itself out in our lives in unexpected ways. It's a story of how God uses our so-called handicaps to fulfill a larger purpose. In a strange way, it's a story that reminds me of another story; a story out of the OT, found in the third chapter of the book of Judges; a story about a man named Ehud, in which God works in some strange and unexpected ways.

I. A story of God's unexpected ways.

A. God strengthens an unexpected foe against Israel: In many ways, though, the story begins rather predictably. After 40 years of rest from their enemies, Israel falls back into sin. Look at vv. 12-14.

“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. The sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.”

It appears that the same cycle of sin, slavery, supplication and salvation is beginning here, but some things are different. As I said, this is a story in which God acts in very unexpected ways. We see here that God himself raises up an unexpected foe to discipline his people. The Moabites were not even mentioned among the nations named as “the people of the land” in the first two chapters. They were descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot. They inhabited the east side of the Jordan River, which Israel had long since left behind. They were a people who Israel didn't particularly like, but didn't really fear either. The book of Numbers says that when Israel wandered in the wilderness Moab was in dread of them (22:3). So when the king of Moab and these people joined hands with Israel's enemies, crossed the Jordan River, and took over the city of palms, it would have not only been unexpected but humiliating. This is like getting beat by the last place team. To make matters worse, King Eglon sets up his headquarters in the very city Joshua had and the people had destroyed. The city of palms is the ancient city of Jericho; the first city Joshua and the people destroyed when entering the Land. Joshua vowed that anyone who tried to rebuild it would be cursed (Josh. 6:26). For 18 long years Israel served this Moabite King, Eglon. But God will use this Moabite King in the lives of his people.

B. God raises up an unexpected deliverer: Look at the first part of v. 15. **“But when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.”** Once again, it appears that the cycle continues predictably. Israel finally becomes miserable enough that she humbles herself and cries out to God. The Lord graciously raises up a deliverer for them. His name is Ehud. He's the second Judge in this

book, the first being Othneil. We're told two significant things about Ehud. First, he's from the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was the youngest son of Jacob. It was a small and insignificant tribe. Ironically, the name Benjamin means "son of my right hand," because the second thing we're told about Ehud is that he was left-handed. The Hebrew word used here for left handed is literally, "a man who can't use his right hand." It's possible that his right hand was deformed. Regardless of why he was left handed, this was viewed back then as a defect. Think of all the references in the Bible to the "right hand of God." It's by God's right hand that he blesses and delivers his people; Jesus is said to be seated at the right hand of God. But here we see a left handed deliverer.

Yousef Karsh created a book called, *The Faces of Greatness*, which displayed the photographs of 90 famous people. Someone studied those faces and discovered that most of them were not physically attractive. Thirty-five of them had unsightly moles or warts; 13 of them noticeable freckles or liver spots; 20 had obvious traces of acne; and two had visible scars. Thornton Wilder, the playwright; Richard Rogers, the composer; Picasso, the painter; and many others had noticeable imperfections. Like Simon Birch, somehow those imperfections became part of their greatness.

That was Ehud. Ehud was a guy you would never expect to be the next Judge of Israel. He didn't look like a hero. He didn't have the right pedigree. He was an unlikely southpaw. And as the story unfolds, we see that he didn't go about his work in the conventional way. In delivering Israel from Eglon, he uses an unexpected method.

C. God uses an unexpected method: At the end of v. 15 we're told that Israel sent the left handed Ehud to the king of Moab with tribute. But Ehud had a plan of his own.

"And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak. He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man" (Judges 3:15b-17).

The paying of this tribute is another sign of Israel's subjection and humiliation. Year after year they sent the best of their food and wool to this character who sat there looking and acting a bit like Jabba the Hut. It's a picture of God's people living in defeat and disgrace. It's possible they even sent Ehud

because as a "lefty" he was the last guy who would stir up trouble. When it says they sent tribute "by him," literally it is "by his hand" (his left hand!). But we see here that Ehud has had enough of this and he has a plan. He makes a two-edged dagger, about 18 inches long, and he straps it to his right thigh under his robe. No one, not even his own people, know about this. He sets off with an envoy to carry the tribute, which they present to the king. Look what happens next.

"It came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. But he himself turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal, and said, 'I have a secret message for you, O king.' And he said, 'Keep silence.' And all who attended him left him" (Judges 3:18-19).

After the tribute is paid, Ehud sends the envoy home. And then it appears that he leaves as well, but now he's by himself. It's all part of his plan. When he gets to the idols at Gilgal, he turns back and announces to the king and his bodyguards that he has a secret message for the king. So the king says, "Cool, I love secrets. Now everybody scram. I want to hear this." I know it seems like he's a little dense, but remember Ehud is all alone, and not only that, he's handicapped, so what harm could he do? Look at v. 20. **"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."**

Eglon's palace had a cool room on the flat roof that kept cool because of the breezes. It didn't take much for King Eglon to work up a sweat, so he and Ehud move upstairs where it is cooler. When Ehud says he has a message from God, the king's interest is really perked. So he arises from his seat to hear this divine word. But the word from God is as unexpected as the messenger.

"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" (Judges 3:21-23).

When Eglon stands up (no small task), he leaves himself wide open and Ehud grabs the dagger with his left hand and drives it through several layers of fat. We're even given the wonderful little graphic detail that "the refuse came out." Then Ehud locks all the doors and escapes through what was either a porch or an opening in the privy! But that's not all; it gets better.

“When he had gone out, his servants came and looked, and behold, the doors of the roof chamber were locked; and they said, ‘He is only relieving himself in the cool room.’ They waited until they became anxious; 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” (Judges 3:24-25).

The servants are getting a bit anxious. “Boy, this Ehud is long winded. I wonder if our king is all right.” But then they smell something, if you know what I mean. Not a good smell. “Oh, of course, he’s going to the bathroom. You know Eglon. He takes his time!” (There’s a lot of bathroom humor in this story). Finally, after who knows how long, they break in through the doors and “Behold, their master is dead on the floor.”

D. God grants an unexpected victory: The story ends with an unexpected victory. In vv. 26-30 Ehud escapes to the hill country of Ephraim. He’s wise enough to know that this would be a great time to attack the Moabites who were in a panic with their king gone. So he blows the trumpet to mobilize Israel. They attack the Moabites in Jericho. Before the Moabites can flee across the Jordan River, Israel seizes the fords and smites the Moabites. Look at vv. 29-30.

“They struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men; and no one escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land was undisturbed for eighty years.”

10,000 Moabites. That’s a lot of men! That’s an unexpected victory! There is a bit of humor here on the writer’s part. These Moabites are called “robust and valiant men.” That word “robust” can also mean “fat.” Like their master, they’re fatted calves! Also it says they were “subdued that day under the hand of Israel.” Remember, up in v. 15, Ehud brought tribute “by his hand.” Well, here Moab is subdued by Israel’s hand. Which hand? The left hand! Remember this is a left handed victory.

Don’t you love the Bible! What a story! But what’s the point?

II. Principle: God works using unexpected people in unexpected ways to accomplish his promised plan.

Out of this strange and ancient story we learn something about how our God works. We learn that he’s the God of the unexpected; the God of the left hand.

He works in left handed ways. He uses failure and humiliation. Israel was doing just fine. They had 40 years

of rest. They never thought they could be subdued by Moab, but their sin had brought them that low. This is what can happen to us. We think we’re doing great, we let our guard down, we begin to make compromises with the flesh, and we end up in slavery to things we thought we had dealt with a long time ago. We say to ourselves, “I could never fall back into that,” but we do. “I dealt with that drinking problem a long time ago.” Or, “I used to lie a lot but that was dealt with years ago. That sin could never control me again.” But then we begin to coast, we make small compromises, and soon we’re back where we started, even worse. It’s not only surprising, it’s humiliating. But God uses that to humble us. You might find yourself today enslaved to sins that you thought you had conquered a long time ago. It might be drugs. It might be pornography. It might be lying or even stealing. You know it’s wrong but you can’t seem to shake it. You’re ashamed and humiliated. God can use that. He can use that to cause you to cry out to him, and when you do, he’ll be there to deliver you.

Not only that, he uses left handed methods. Let’s face it. This is a story about deception and even killing. The point of the story is not for us to go out and do the same. We have to read this in the larger context of what was going on in Israel. God’s people were called to take possession of the land. But, because of their sin, they’re defeated and disgraced. Finally, someone comes along and does something! Finally, someone says, “Enough.” Finally, someone is willing to risk his life for Israel. God will use that, even if our methods are questionable. Sometimes we have to be creative. Sometimes we have to use our head and come up with a plan. Sometimes we have to leave room for God to work outside of the box. What if Israel said every Judge had to be like the first Judge, Othneil? I mean, he was the prototype. He was related to Caleb so he had the right pedigree. The Spirit of the Lord came on him; it doesn’t say that about Ehud. And he didn’t concoct some personal assassination plot, but immediately he led Israel out to war. We have to leave room for God to break out of the expected mold. He works in ways that might even seem scandalous to us. He told the prophet Hosea to go marry a prostitute. He told a young carpenter named Joseph that his fiancée was impregnated by the Holy Spirit.

Not only does he use left handed ways and left handed methods. *He also uses left handed people;* people that we would least expect. Maybe you’re one of those people. Maybe you come from a left handed family of disfunction, divorce or adultery. Elisa Morgan is the president of an organization called Mops International (Mothers of Preschoolers). Her parents were divorced when she was five. She and her two

siblings were raised by an alcoholic mother. Her earliest memories are of her mother weaving down the hallway of their ranch home in Houston with a glass of scotch in hand. She would often wake Elisa up at 2:00 A.M. just to make sure she was asleep. Elisa would wake her up at 7:00 A.M. just to make sure she got off to work. Even the good days like Christmas and birthdays ended in the warped glow of booze. Elisa writes, "Ten years ago, when I was asked to consider leading MOPS International, a vital ministry that nurtures mothers, I went straight to my knees and then to the therapist's office. How could God use me, who had never been mothered, to nurture mothers? The answer came as I gazed into the eyes of other mothers around me and saw their needs mirroring my own. God seemed to take my deficits and make them my offering."

He does that. Maybe it's not your own family, but your own past; your own sin. Maybe you've made a mess of several marriages. Maybe you're the one who raised your kids as an alcoholic, and now you see the bitter fruit of that in their own lives. Maybe you've climbed your way to success, stepping on the backs of coworkers. Maybe you've done more to turn people away from God than towards him. Moses was a murderer. David an adulterer. Paul, a persecutor. If you have a left handed past, the story of Ehud tells you that God can still use you. If you repent and turn to him he'll make even your failures an offering.

Maybe it's not your family or your past, but some flaw in your appearance or your body. Maybe you live with chronic pain, or you're confined to a wheelchair. When she was 17 years old she broke her neck in a diving accident. For 36 years she's been a quadriplegic. Without help, she can't do a whole lot. She can't turn over in bed, brush her own teeth, or put on her own make-up. Pain is her constant companion, as is the knowledge that she lives on borrowed time. A broken bone or a bladder infection could put her in the hospital for months. It takes two hours to put her to bed each night. But every morning she drives her specially equipped van to work in southern California. She has written numerous books. She has a daily radio show which airs on 850 stations. She painstakingly paints pictures with a brush or pencil stuck in her mouth. She is known as Joni and she heads up an international organization that ministers to people in wheelchairs. Years ago, when she was in rehab from her accident, she came to the conclusion that her injury was an expression of God's love; that her soul was infinitely more valuable than her body.

Now she looks back and says, "I was heading down a path of self destruction. I was checking out a birth control clinic to get some pills, because I knew I'd be sleeping with my boyfriend in college. Somewhere in that mess of emotions and regrets and falterings and failings, while making a sham of my Christian faith, somewhere in the desperation, I said, 'God, rescue me.' And he did. I believe my accident was his direct answer."

CONCLUSION

Joni is living proof that he uses left handed ways and methods and people. There is nothing predictable about God, except for this—his character and his purposes are very predictable. Here we see that he hates sin, calls us to repentance, and is willing to deliver those who cry out to him. In this ancient story the Lord says, "This is what I intend to do for you, and this is how you expect me to do it. Now you may pin me down as to my purpose and my promises, but you can't pin me down as to my methods. You love things manageable and predictable. But I prefer to do things my way, and my way is to take the left handed things of this world and use them."

Paul put it this way, "**Consider your calling, brothers, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God**" (1 Cor.1:26-29).

Maybe the best example is Jesus. If ever God worked out of the box, it was in his Son. Why did his own people reject him? He didn't fit the mold. He didn't come from the right family. He didn't do the things they thought the Messiah was supposed to do. He didn't look like the Savior of the world was supposed to look. Isaiah put it this way, "**He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, he was despised, and we did not esteem Him**" (Is. 53:2-3).