



Series: Judges - Breaking the Cycle of Sin

Sermon #2: The Strength of Weakness

Passage: Judges 3:1-31

Introduction

Judges chapter 3. Quick survey of the room here, how many of you are lefties? If you raised your hand you are in elite company.

- Barack Obama | Oprah Winfrey | Babe Ruth | Leonardo DaVinci | Jimmy Hendrix | and Ned Flanders... all lefties.

Did you know that tomorrow, August 13th, is international Left-handers day? Started in 1976 this day is intended to promote awareness of the inconveniences left handers face in a right handed world.

- That's where they talk about how zippers are made for righties. There's that flap that makes it a real struggle for lefties. Scissors are made for righties. My son is a lefty & trying to find a baseball glove for him was a joke. Here are 400 right handed options & then here's the lefty glove. Thanks.
- *You righties never have to think about this. That's called right privilege. (Can I say that?)*

Historically left-handedness has been treated as a weakness even in how it is labeled.

- Greek - Skaios - "Ill-omened"
- Latin word for "left" - sinister. Also means "evil,"
- Italian - Mancino - Crooked, maimed
- Australian - Mollydooker - hit like a girl - manage to insult lefties and women in the land down under.

Believe it or not, left-handedness plays an important role for us today in teaching us how God works in our world & in our lives. What's going to happen is left-handedness is going to be viewed by everyone as a sign of weakness and then God's going to show us how he works most powerfully through weakness. We are in Judges 3 and the main character today is a southpaw Judge named Ehud (ay-hude).

Today we are going to see three sections in this chapter unfold and then I want to show you how this story puts a very powerful truth on display. What you are going to see on repeat today THREE TIMES is This main idea: **weakness is our greatest strength**. Now, that's just an idea right now. We'll see it come up in the story and THEN I'm going to show you how we respond to God in light of this truth. But we'll get there, lets get into the story.

[1] These are the nations the Lord left in order to test all those in Israel who had experienced none of the wars in Canaan.

[2] This was to teach the future generations of the Israelites how to fight in battle, especially those who

had not fought before.... [4]The Lord left them to test Israel, to determine if they would keep the Lord's commands he had given their fathers through Moses. -- Judges 3:1-2,4 (CSB)

If you remember from last week, the reason the foreign nations were still in the promised land is because God's people, Israel, had failed to push them out.

But now we are seeing another angle on the situation. At the start of Judges 3 the author tells us another couple of reasons why the nations remained in the Land. The Lord left them there to 1) test them and 2) to teach them to fight in battle. These are really one in the same. Because its not like the Lord was teaching them how to do the flying V attack formation. Teaching them to fight means teaching them to TRUST him to give them victory.

Listen the Lord leaving enemies in the land that will attack his people... translates really well to your life and mine. Let me ask you: **Have you ever wondered why God doesn't just cure us completely of sin?**¹

Like we trust him for salvation...why not right then and there put an end to that? Personal: Why do I keep acting selfish in my marriage which causes me to hurt my wife which causes her pain and us conflict. I KNOW THAT WON'T END WELL. I KNOW I'M SUPPOSED TO BE SELF-LESS to HER AS GOD WAS SELF-LESS TO ME. SO HOW DID I GET HERE AGAIN!?

Well, part of why he allows us to continue to be affected by sin is to teach us that we must fight against these things IN HIS STRENGTH. Do you see that? WE NEED THE WEAKNESS that our inability to defeat sin on our own gives us. Because that's how we learn to rely on his grace to get through the battle instead of our own willpower. This is the first time in this chapter you are seeing our main idea: Our willingness to be weak...to admit we cannot defeat sin on our own...that becomes our greatest strength. Because it forces us to rely on God's strength in the battle TODAY not our own.

Think about it, God may be allowing you to struggle with a lesser sin to keep you from a bigger one, and that's pride. If you could just beat every sin the first time you battled with it, you'd be incredibly arrogant. And that would ultimately lead to you thinking you didn't need God, which would lead to spiritual disaster.

John Newton, the guy who wrote amazing grace, talked about this battle saying that he actually learned to find the real riches of God's mercies more in the multiple pardons he received for the same sin than if he had needed no forgiveness at all.

God didn't keep the Caananites in the land so that Israel would just be content in their sin. No he kept them so they'd learn to fight.

"So when you are tempted to despair because you continue to struggle, remember what God is doing in that fight. Look to Christ whose resurrection

¹ Love this question from J.D. Greear's sermon "Southpaw Savior" on Judges 2.18-3.31

guarantees your victory! Look to Christ who fought FOR you when you were his enemy, Look to Christ, the only savior who can give you the strength to stand, and who will pick you up every time you fall. Look to Christ and fight!”²

Second section of Judges 3 will be pretty quick. This is the story of our first judge...Othniel. His story actually serves as a recap of last week. Remember how we talked about the cycle of sin? And I told you that cycle is gonna be on repeat the whole book. Well, it is clearest in Othniel's brief account. So if you will keep your bible on the passage I'll walk you through the cycle here on the screen.

7 The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight; they forgot the Lord their God and worshiped the Baals and the Asherahs. 8 The Lord's anger burned against Israel, and he sold them to King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim, and the Israelites served him eight years.

9 The Israelites cried out to the Lord. So the Lord raised up Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's youngest brother, as a deliverer to save the Israelites. 10 The Spirit of the Lord came on him, and he judged Israel. Othniel went out to battle, and the Lord handed over King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram to him, so that Othniel overpowered him. [11] Then the land had peace for forty years, and Othniel son of Kenaz died. -- Judges 3:7-11 (CSB)

There's the cycle. I want you to see a couple of things that just really hit home with us. First, when it says Israel "forgot" God, what its saying is that Israel was no longer controlled by what they knew about God from the law. They still had the info, but it didn't carry weight with them anymore. That same problem exists today. We may know a lot of bible stories in our heads but our hearts aren't moved by the God we see in those pages. Listen, our hearts are like buckets of water left outside on a really cold day. They will freeze over unless we continually smash the ice that is forming. Though we know truths about God, we can let their influence on our hearts just kind of fade. And when that happens deep down, it is made evident because our lives start to drift into one of two directions:

1. **Sin doesn't really bother you that much.** You know it is sin, but you just don't feel all that bad about it. That means the ice is callousing over your heart and it is becoming hard to the voice of God. Because God's voice is a loving father who wants your best for you and now all you see him as is a cold rule giver and you just kind of don't care. Sin isn't bothering you that much because God isn't mattering to you that much. Listen that is a DANGEROUS DANGEROUS place. God doesn't promise to bring you back from there. That's why the author of Hebrews says in chapter 3, two times in 7 verses:

TODAY, TODAY if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

² From jdgreear.com blogpost "Why God doesn't remove our sinful cravings immediately." Posted on March 17, 2015 by Pastor J.D. Greear.

I'm completely serious when I say you better not leave this room until you tell somebody: My sin isn't bothering me like it should. And you need to ask them to pray for God to start melting that ice immediately.

2. **You see other people's sin before you see your own.** See when my heart grows cold to the person of God & the work he's done in my life, and all I'm left with are his rules...I start to measure myself primarily by my performance in keeping those rules. AND...I start to place value on other people based on how they measure up to those rules. For you, forgetting God looks like sitting down in God's judgment seat. You conveniently forget how sinful you are and you start judging people by a select portion of God's laws that you THINK you are performing well in. You make quick judgments AND...you hold a grudge. It's hard for you to forgive. And listen in all that the saddest thing is: you've forgotten grace. People who *know* the God of the gospel... they look at someone and see a story. And they think about the person God could make them into. And they have great grace with them.

So a couple of questions to diagnose Spiritual Amnesia:
1) Does your sin bother you all that much? 2) Do you find yourself judging other people's sin more than your own

The cure to spiritual amnesia is, shockingly enough, training ourselves to remember our deliverance! To remember that we were weak and helpless and when

we were weak, Christ died for us! **Second section of Judges 3, and once again we are seeing that Remembering our weakness becomes our greatest strength!** Israel shouts HELP! And right there where they are their weakest is when God sends a deliverer. And btw God only ever saves through his deliverer. So if you want God's grace, God's delivering power in your life, you gotta follow his savior to get it. If you are recognizing you've grown cold to God you can cry out to your deliverer. He LOVED US... **WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS.** The gospel says God loves you, God wants you. And that moment where you realize how unworthy of his love you are...that's the moment he pours it out on you like a waterfall.

Disciplines of Remembrance - Ps 105.... The disciplines keep us in a state of helplessness. Why do we worship? Why do we gather in community groups? Why sit under the preaching of the word? Why take communion? **REMEMBRANCE!**

- They rhythms of remembrance of the grace of God because our hearts keep growing cold to it.
- The first thing you learn when you are a Christian is the gospel, its also the first thing you forget.

I spend all this time here because WHAT IF YOU didn't have to wait on hindsight sitting in a disaster of your own making? Recognizing amnesia before disaster is amazing grace!!

Now lets get to the main event. Ready?

12 The Israelites again did what was evil in the Lord's sight. Keeps happening. Othneil died. And when the

judge dies, Israel drifts right back into their sin. Which leads to

He gave King Eglon of Moab power over Israel, because they had done what was evil in the Lord's sight. 13 After Eglon convinced the Ammonites and the Amalekites to join forces with him, he attacked and defeated Israel and took possession of the City of Palms (That's Jericho, an iconic deeply symbolic point of victory from Israel's past. It's like one year when I was in college and NC state beat UNC in football at UNC...and then the NCSU fans rushed our field. The enemy was on our field!?! No sir. So we rushed it). 14 The Israelites served King Eglon of Moab eighteen years.

15 Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he raised up Ehud son of Gera, a left-handed Benjaminite, as a deliverer for them.

- Ok, left-handed. Most likely this means this guy was disabled, potentially deformed somehow on his right arm & hand. And listen, his society is going to look down on his disability more than even ours would. Nobody from Israel would have followed him and nobody in Eglon's court would have been scared of him. But that's who God chooses. A weak, disabled man.

The Israelites sent him with the tribute for King Eglon of Moab.

Tribute is not the male and female from district 12. Tribute is the tax Eglon made the tribes pay as he ruled over them. And the tribute was most likely not money but produce. So ehud is bringing the goods to this oppressive king...

16 Ehud made himself a double-edged sword eighteen inches long. He strapped it to his right thigh under his clothes Like a boss where no one would see because they only suspected RIGHTIES to carry on their left thigh.

17 and brought the tribute to King Eglon of Moab, who was an extremely fat man. That is important. 18 When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he dismissed the people who had carried it. 19 At the carved images near Gilgal he returned and said, "King Eglon, I have a secret message for you." The king said, "Silence!" and all his attendants left him.

- Again the attendants left him because Ehud was so weak he posed no threat to King Eglon the Hut.

20 Then Ehud approached him while he was sitting alone in his upstairs room where it was cool. Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you," and the king stood up from his throne. 21 Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and plunged it into Eglon's belly.

- The unsuspecting disabled guy has dealt a fatal blow to the powerful oppressive king. Catch this for the third time in the chapter: **HIS WEAKNESS is his greatest strength.**

22 Even the handle went in after the blade, and Eglon's fat closed in over it, so that Ehud did not withdraw the sword from his belly.

- You know when you are in the dentist chair and they give you that suction stick to get the mouthwash out. You know the sound it makes when you close your mouth around it? That's the sound I hear in my head when I read this.

And the waste came out.

- “waste” is our English translators sanitizing this for us. It should say the dung came out. First time I ever re-enacted a bible story on my own at home as a kid was as a 10 year old boy when I heard this one. I read it on my own and I was like “WE NEVER HEARD THIS IN SUNDAYS SCHOOL.” Of course we didn’t. Can you imagine the coloring sheet kids would have brought to their parents at pick-up? Hey what did you learn today? A hero stabbed this mega-fat guy and his poop went everywhere. SEE?
- Some of you newer to the bible are like...where am I? Listen somebody somewhere may have told you the bible is boring. It’s anything but that. Onward...

23 Ehud escaped by way of the porch, closing and locking the doors of the upstairs room behind him.²⁴ Ehud was gone when Eglon’s servants came in. They looked and found the doors of the upstairs room locked and thought he was relieving himself in the cool room. (because of what we just read about)

25 The servants waited until they became embarrassed (Might have made like ancient moabite poop emoji scribbles in the dirt laughing for a bit but then it was just getting weird how long eglon was in there ...So they took the key and opened the doors – and there was their lord lying dead on the floor! Ehud goes back to Israelites and now that he’s killed eglon they follow him as their leader. And they go to war against the Moabites.

30 Moab became subject to Israel that day, and the land had peace for eighty years.

End of awesome story. Ok so I showed you three different times in chapter 3 where the author is making a point to bring our attention to this idea that our weakness is our greatest strength. What I want to do now is show you a few spiritual truths that develop out of this idea across the pages of scripture.

1. Jesus, our deliverer, chose weakness

As the weeks in this series progress you are going to see that these judges become more and more flawed. Joshua was awesome. I mean led all of Israel into battle and into countless victories. Othniel did too. But then you have Ehad who is weak because he is disfigured. And Israel is going to learn to follow someone they didn’t think they could follow. Deborah is next and she is only able to rally two tribes of Israel to fight. Then Gideon tests God way too much. Only rallies one tribe, but then God whittles that army down to 300 so that victory can clearly belong only to the Lord. How else could such a WEAK army have such great STRENGTH? Let’s not even get into Samson who was morally weak yet God used him to save! Then there’s even king David who comes after the judges and who is he? The weakest of all of his brothers. A shepherd boy. And God used a weak little shepherd boy to rescue Israel from a GIANT enemy named Goliath.

Listen to me all of these stories are creating a great big alarm bell that is telling you what the true savior is going to be like. Isaiah 53.2-3 says

He didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him. [3] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him. -- Isaiah 53:2-3 (CSB)

See in these narratives God is showing the world that salvation is not going to come through some kind of triumphal political giant. It will come from an outsider born in a manger, through weakness, not what the world calls strength; through defeat, not what the world calls victory. Through folly, not what the world calls wisdom.

³

AND OUR danger is responding to Jesus like Eglon responded to Ehud. Listen, just like Ehud surprised Eglon so Jesus' resurrection surprised A LOT of people.

- The roman leaders and the jewish leaders who conspired to have him killed...they thought it was finished when they sealed the tomb.
- But then Jesus, a lowly carpenter's son, showed power they didn't know he had. He had the power to DEFEAT death itself!!

And the big warning here in Judges is that a lot of people can miss the salvation God is bringing because it doesn't fit the form they were expecting.

- Paul said the gospel is foolishness. [22] For the Jews ask for signs (they wanted some kind of political ruler to come in and take over) and the

Greeks seek wisdom (they wanted a great philosopher who could reason from on high), [23] but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles -- 1 Corinthians 1:22-23 (CSB)

- The gospel is wisdom but not what you'd expect. Nobody expected the savior of the world to die a criminal's death on a cross.

And Jesus is still troubling people today. People say:

- A loving God wouldn't let suffering happen. Because they expect a savior who will reign by ending suffering. But because God saw a deeper need than fixing temporary pain he sent Jesus to defeat death! So now even when cancer rages in our bodies and threatens to take our life we can say OH DEATH WHERE IS YOUR STING? WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? You don't have victory over me because my savior didn't just come to fix suffering he came to reverse death itself!

**QUOTE PHILIPPIANS 2 -. Humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death..

Here's the second truth we see: **We can only receive salvation through the weakness of faith.**

Remember the cycle of sin. During both Othniel and Ehud's time as a judge, Israel was actually enslaved by a foreign power and needed saving. Rescuing. This is in the bible precisely to depict our relationship to God and

³ Keller, Tim. *Judges for You* (____) 50.

to sin. We are God's people but we are currently enslaved to sin and we need to be set free.

Now how do we get free? Well different people try different things:

- Religious people try to be moral enough that they will earn God's approval and kind of like a report card they will earn God's admittance into heaven one day. God accepts me because I'm a good man/woman.
- Non-religious people try to find this sense of acceptance and fulfillment too, just in other places.
 - I read an excerpt this week from a book coming out by Lisa Brennan-Jobs. The daughter of Steve Jobs. Who talks about growing up with Jobs as a dad. It was on vanity fair and she talked about how she would tell her friends she had a secret. That jobs was her dad. And it gave her validation but he was never really around. Once a month or so. Only paid child support after making her take a paternity test. And she kept anticipating time together with him hoping that maybe this time he'd give her some showering of love that he'd been withholding. And time after time he'd just stonewall her. And on his deathbed she realized she'd never find acceptance in her father. That's the story of so many people. If only my parents would love me. Never meant to be fulfilled by that. That was always meant to be a

reflection of God's love. Only God's love can satisfy.

- They look for it in money, in leisure, in power. Because these are the places you EXPECT to find salvation but you actually find enslavement.

But that's not how you get salvation. It's not something you earn or something you ascend to a place where its available. Righteousness, meaning, fulfillment are all a search for salvation. But True salvation from God is a GIFT. And the only thing you can do with a gift is open yourself to receive it. Which is, at the end of the day, a posture of weakness.

Have you ever received it? If you haven't...you can today. It's a gift! No work!

And listen if you have...it means you can trust him in your battle now. If saving your life came through his strength...why would you think sustaining your life comes from your own strength? Trust him in your battle right now. In the weakness of faith...trusting God whom you cannot see...you will find your greatest strength. Leads me to the last point.

Last truth: God does his greatest work through weak people

the kind of person God works through. The author wants us to see he's flawed. God didn't want Ehad's ability, he wanted Ehad's willingness. He loves using weak, willing people to accomplish his purposes. In fact, Nobody in the NT is a full scale awesome person. Except one... Jesus. There's a reason.

6 For if I want to boast, I wouldn't be a fool, because I would be telling the truth. But I will spare you, so that no one can credit me with something beyond what he sees in me or hears from me, 7 especially because of the extraordinary revelations. Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself. 8 Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."

Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. 10 So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.** -- 2 Corinthians 12:6-10 (CSB)

What weakness have you been carrying around? Maybe hiding it? Maybe defining yourself by it? It's meant to point you to your need for Christ. To save you and to sustain you. To give you victory over sin, beginning today and going for every day.