

## **WILL YOU LOOK AT THAT?!** **(Judges 3:7-31)**

When you see something surprising, what kind of reaction do you have? Maybe your eyes get big as saucers. Maybe your mouth drops open, but what do you say when you come across something surprising and unexpected? If you are Gomer Pyle, you might say, “Gall-all-lee!” or “Shazam!” or “Surprise! Surprise! Surprise!”

Through the years, there have been many other exclamations that have been used. Here are a few:

- By George! Fancy that!
- For goodness’ sake! Good golly! Good grief! Good heavens! Goodness me!
- Great Scott! Gee-willikers!
- Holy Moses! Holy Toledo. Holy Moley!
- I can’t believe my eyes! I’ll be a monkey’s uncle! I’ll eat my hat!
- My word!
- That beats everything! That just takes the biscuit! That’s a new one on me. That boggles my mind!
- Tickled pink! Tickled to death!
- What in the Sam hill! What on earth! What the devil!
- You could have knocked me down with a feather! You must be joking!

Those are just a few. There are so many more expressions of surprise. When I see something unexpected, out of the ordinary, or rather astonishing, I am apt to point at it and say, “Well, looky there!” A more common way of saying that is, “Will you look at that?!” I have chosen that as the title for today’s message.

In Judges 3:24-25, there is a single Hebrew word that is used three times. The KJV and the NASB translate the word as *behold*. The ESV, the NIV, and most other translations don’t even bother to translate the word because without its presence you can get at its meaning simply by reading the text with inflection. Its whole purpose is to let the reader know, what’s happening is surprising.

While that one word is found only three times in this chapter, and it appears in just those two verses, as I look at the entirety of chapter Judges 3, I see 3 surprising things that I want to highlight.

We said last week that there are 12 judges who arise in this book—11 men and 1 woman. These judges served as deliverers or liberators. Three of them emerge in this one chapter—Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar. From them and the events that surrounded their emergence, we are afforded a view of three surprising truths.

### **Look at What Happens When We Disregard God?!**

In a previous message, we emphasized that in this book we see a continually repeated four-fold cycle. Wiersbe described that cycle with the words **Disobedience, Discipline, Despair, and Deliverance**.

We see the first two cycles in 3:7-8. First, the Israelites disobeyed God. Verses 5-6 shed further light on how they disobeyed God. Instead of destroying the inhabitants of the land as they were commanded by God to do, they sought to co-exist with them. Eventually, they intermarried with them. Finally, they became like them and even worshiped their gods.

Verse 7 says they “forgot” the LORD. What do the biblical writers mean when they use the word *forgot* or *not remember*? It does not mean erased from their memory. For instance, we read in Isaiah 43:25, “I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”

God is not saying that He no longer possesses the ability to recall our sins. He means that He will no longer hold those sins against us. He will treat us as though those sins had never been committed. In other words, those sins will not control how He views and interacts with us.

Likewise, to forget God does not mean that we are unable to remember anything about God. It means we will no longer be controlled by our knowledge of God. We will act as though He does not exist.

One person drew a distinction between a true atheist and a practical atheist. A true atheist believes God does not exist. A practical atheist lives his/her life as though God does not exist. There are many people who claim to be Christians, but in reality, they are practical atheists. Such people have a spare tire faith. Let me ask you, “Did you think about your spare tire this week?” In all likelihood, you did not think about your spare tire this week unless you needed it. Many people do not think about God unless they need Him to get them out of a jam.

Disobedience is followed by discipline. In the case of Israel, God let them be defeated by a neighboring king. Dale Davis explained, “[God] refuses to allow His people to remain comfortable in sin.” His people were overtaken by a King named Cushan-rishathaim. That name literally means “Cushan of double-wickedness.

Do you remember the old Jim Croce song, “Bad, Bad, Leroy Brown.” Leroy Brown was from the south side of Chicago, and he stood six foot four. The repeated refrain of the song was:

And he’s bad, bad Leroy Brown  
The baddest man in the whole [darn] town  
Badder than old King Kong  
And meaner than a junkyard dog

I remind you of that song to say that King Cushan was doubly bad. He was the baddest King from all round. Most versions claim he was the King of Mesopotamia, but that is a translation of Aram-nahraim which literally means Aram of the double rivers. Our text presents to us Cushan the doubly wicked King from Aram of the double rivers.

After eight years of being oppressed by bad, bad Cushan, the Israelites get to the third phase of the cycle, and the third phase quickly leads to the fourth. Look at v. 9. The text doesn’t say that God’s people repented. It does even say they felt remorse for their wickedness. All they did was cry out to God for His help.

Look with me at one of my favorite Psalms—Psalm 46. Notice v. 1. Our God is a very

present help in trouble. Because He is that, we are to cry out to Him. Then, what do we do. Look at 46:10-11. We be still. We know He is God, and we trust that His presence will protect us.

Be warned, however, if you choose to disregard God, you will face His disciplining hand. That does not mean that every bad thing that happens in your life should be interpreted as the discipline of God. We live in a fallen world, and sometimes bad things happen. Know this, however, God is able to take the bad and work it for our good. Know this also, even when God disciplines us, He does it for our good.

Turning again to Dale Davis, he pointed out, “We must confess that Yahweh’s anger is not good news nor is it bad news but good bad news. It shows that the covenant God who has bound Himself to His people will not allow them to become cozy in their infidelity.”

If God needs to awaken you, He is quite capable and willing to do so.

### **Look at What Happens When We Call Out to God!**

According to v. 9, when Israel called out to God, He raised up a deliverer named Othniel. We met him back in chapter 1. He is both the nephew and the son-in-law of faithful Caleb. God graciously provided a Savior, a Deliverer for Israel, after and because His people cried out to Him.

After 40 years of rest, the cycle was repeated. Look at v. 12 and following. Back in Joshua, Israel’s first and biggest victory was taking the city of Jericho. It was also known as the City of Palms. It was the Palm Springs of the ancient world. Here, Israel loses Jericho to the King of Moab. The site of their great victory has become the very location of a great defeat. They have to serve the King of Moab for 18 years.

Look at v. 15. They cry out and God raises up a Deliverer. His name was Ehud. We will talk more about him later. This time, Israel has rest for 80 years before the cycle repeats itself. It’s like the instructions on a shampoo bottle: lather, rinse, repeat. The new Deliverer is Shamgar.

Every Deliverer came after and as a result of the people crying out to God.

Have you ever cried out to God? Let me offer a bit of counsel, when you cry out to God, don’t ask Him, “Why?” Don’t ask Him “Why did this happen? Why didn’t that happen?” I can say, based on my experience, that God is not in the business of explaining Himself. He doesn’t feel obligated to do so, and He rarely if ever does. So, instead of asking God, “Why?”, ask Him instead, “What now? What do you want me to do now?”

Ask God for His wisdom? Ask God for His help? Ask God to strengthen your faith. Ask God to grow you. Ask God to glorify Himself through you. Ask God to use you to reach and bless others who are going through the trials you faced.

It was late 2012 when Marion Shurtleff, at the age of 75 went to a used book store near her home in San Clemente, California. At that book store she bought a Bible. When she got the Bible home, she discovered a couple of folded pages tucked in the middle of the Bible.

The yellowed notebook sheets of paper contained a child’s handwriting that looked familiar. To her utter amazement, Shurtleff discovered her name at the top of the first

page. Upon closer examination, she realized that she was actually reading a four-page essay she had written as a ten-year-old to earn a merit badge for the Girls Scouts in Covington, Kentucky—more than 65 years later and 2,000 miles from where she had just purchased the Bible.

By her own account, Shurtleff was deeply moved. Shurtleff said, “I opened the Bible and there was my name. I recognized my handwriting. I was shaking, literally. I was crying.”

Although it remains a mystery how the essay ended up in a Bible in a used bookstore half way across the country, one thing is certain: When we look deeply into God’s Word, we see ourselves. Sometimes, reading the Bible is like looking into a mirror. In the pages of Scripture, we see individuals just like us—people who need God, people who are looking for hope, people who are battling depression, doubt, lust, and pride. As we read the biblical stories about Abraham, Ruth, David, Mary, Peter, and others we see ourselves.

This morning, as we look into the pages of God’s word and see people who cried out to God, do you see yourself? If so, know this: The God who answered them will most surely answer you.

### **Look at What Happens When God Chooses to Save!**

When God chooses to save, He sends someone. When He purposed to save Israel from their bondage in Egypt, He sent Moses. When He looked upon the suffering of His people described in this book of the Bible, and when He heard their cries to Him, He sent first Othniel, then Ehud, then Shamgar, and eight more individuals over more than three centuries. The NT teaches, “When the fulness of time had come, God sent forth His Son . . .”

God uses human instrument to fulfill His purposes. But whom does God send and whom does God use? Let me offer three answers to that question.

#### *1. Sometimes God Chooses to Use the Wicked.*

Ironically, when God’s people became godless, God used the godless to bring them to their senses. The prophet Habakkuk saw this and it disturbed him. He asked God, “Why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallow up the man more righteous than he?” (Habakkuk 1:13).

Davis explained:

When Yahweh’s own people are unfaithful, He raises up an instrument of His wrath to bring them low; but then the times comes when that instrument becomes too big for his international britches, when the instrument deludes himself into thinking he is lord rather than the feeble vassal of the Great King. Then Yahweh must bring down His instrument-that-refuses-to-be-an-instrument.

We see this happening again and again both in Scripture and in history. Assyria judges Israel, and then Assyria is judged. Babylon judges Judah, and then Babylon is

crushed. On and on it goes. There is only one Kingdom that will never pass away, and it is not the United States.

If the Lord tarries, a thousand years from now, a history student may ask his teacher, “Are the Americans going to be on the test? Were they really that important?”

I was a college student when I first heard the saying, “God can hit a straight lick with a crooked stick.” God can and does us the wicked to accomplish His will.

## *2. Sometimes God Chooses to Use the Weak.*

Let’s talk about the story of Eglon and Ehud. Eglon was the King of Moab, which is east of the Jordan River. At some point, Eglon wasn’t content with remaining in the east. He heard someone say, “Go west young man.” Eglon made a pact with the Ammonites and the Amalekites. Together, in a surprise attack, those combined forces took Jericho, and King Eglon made it his new capital. From Jericho he enslaved and oppressed the Jewish people in the surrounding territories.

The Israelites were oppressed for 18 years, and when they cried out to God, He raised up a warrior named Ehud. Ehud was an unlikely Deliverer. The text tells us that he was left-handed. The text, however, actually says he was unable to use his right hand. Some commentators argue that Ehud had a shriveled or non-functioning right hand which forces him to use his left. It appears that Ehud was handicapped. Ironically, this left-hander was from the tribe of Benjamin, and the name Benjamin means, “son of the right hand.”

If Ehud had been drafted by the government, he would have received a deferment due to his handicapped status. Knowing full well Ehud’s status, God drafted Ehud into His service because those are just the kind of people God loves to use. It is when we are weak that God is able to demonstrate His strength.

Let’s look at how God used weak Ehud. Being enslaved as they were, the Israelites had to bring tribute to the King. It might take the form of silver and gold or more likely produce from their fields. Ehud was among the entourage that brought the tribute to King Eglon.

Before making the trip, Eglon fashioned a crude but effective knife. It was probably about 18 inches long. He strapped that knife to his right thigh underneath his robe.

Let’s read 3:17-23. You get the picture of what happened. After the tribute had been presented, everyone proceeded to leave, but Ehud comes up and says in a whisper, “I have a secret message for you.” King Eglon sees this handicapped man standing before him. He appears to be no threat. He sends everyone away.

Ehud approaches and says, again in a whisper, “I have a message from God for you.” Fat King Eglon struggles to his feet to get closer. Ehud reaches underneath his robe, grabs his knife from his right thigh, and in one swift move, he sinks that knife deep into the King’s fat belly. It was then that Eglon got the point of God’s message to him.

Immediately, the King loses control of his bowels. He defecates on the floor. The fat closes over the knife. The King crumples to the floor next to the pile of feces.

Ehud surveys the scene and feeling certain and satisfied that he has accomplished his mission and delivered God’s message, he makes his escape after locking the doors to the King’s rooftop chamber.

Now, let's read vv. 24-25, the two verses that contain the three *beholds*.

What a wonderful and comical story. I am sure that every time the Jews read this story, they did so with a smile on their face and satisfaction in their hearts.

Once again, Davis points out:

The glory of this text is that it tells us that 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. The God of the Bible does not hold back in the wild blue yonder somewhere waiting for you to pour Clorox and spray Lysol over the affairs of your life before He will touch it. Whether you can comfortably put it together or not, He is the God who delights to deliver His people even in their messes and likes to make them laugh again.

The point I want you to get is that God uses those who are weak, and He uses them in a strong way to accomplish what He wants. Let God have full access to you in all of your weakness. God can and will do great things through those who are fully surrendered to Him.

### *3. Always God Chooses to Use the Willing.*

Othniel was willing for God to use him, and He did. Ehud was willing for God to use him, and He did. Shamgar was willing for God to use Him, and He did. Shamgar's story is told succinctly in the last verse of chapter 3, v. 31.

We know virtually nothing about Shamgar other than the fact that he probably was not a native Israelite because Shamgar is not a Jewish name. God uses a non-Jew to save the Jews because Shamgar was willing for God to use him.

Are you willing for God to use you? We should have the attitude of Isaiah. After Isaiah had the vision of God's glory filling the temple in Isaiah 6, he heard God ask a question of His own triune self, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

Immediately, Isaiah raised his hand and said, "Here I am! Send me," and God did.

God is not only willing to send you. He already has. Jesus gave what we call the Great Commission. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . ."

The question is not, "Is God willing?" The question is, "Are you willing?" Are you willing to go where God sends you? Are you willing to say what God tells us to say? Are you willing to do what God tells you to do?

It is interesting the types of instruments that were used in Judges to deliver God's people. Ehud used a homemade dagger. Shamgar used an ox-goad. Later, we will discover that Jael used a hammer. Gideon and his soldiers used torches. An unnamed woman used a millstone. Samson used the jawbone of a donkey.

The most interesting instruments used in Judges to bring about the deliverance of God's people, however, were people God chose to use. God always uses people.

The strangest and most unlikely instrument of deliverance God ever used was a Roman cross, and the greatest instrument was His sinless Son who died on that cross. Now, whoever places his or her trust in Jesus and what He did for us will receive the deliverance that He came to bring.

I close with two questions: First, have you received what Jesus came to bring? Second, are you willing for God to use you as He wishes?