

Keynotes from Steven Driver's am Sermon on 21/03/2021

"An Unlikely Hero" Judges 3: v 12-30

All scripture references are taken from the ESV

An unlikely hero – Steven Driver (Poole Christian Fellowship) March 21st

Judges 3: 12-30 ¹² And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD. ¹³ He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and went and defeated Israel. And they took possession of the city of palms. ¹⁴ And the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

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. ¹⁶ And Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit^[a] in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his clothes. ¹⁷ And he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. ¹⁸ And when Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who carried the tribute. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ And Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. ²² 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. ²³ Then Ehud went out into the porch^[b] and closed the doors of the roof chamber behind him and locked them. ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Ehud escaped while they delayed, and he passed beyond the idols and escaped to Seirah. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ And they killed at that time about 10,000 of the Moabites, all

strong, able-bodied men; not a man escaped.³⁰ So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

Many people thought that the new building at Broadstone Baptist Church was unlikely to happen, given the size of our church, and in human terms it was unlikely. It is only through the grace of God that this work of bricks and mortar has been completed, but this is only the tip of the iceberg compared to what God can do here in Broadstone among the people. We should be ready for, rather than surprised by, the unlikely happening as this passage shows.

This period in Israel's history was messy and disorganised. We see that Israel repeatedly:

- Starts off serving the Lord but then does evil in the eyes of the Lord
- is enslaved by another nation but then cries out to the Lord.

God raises a Judge for them and Israel is saved – only to go through the same process again! In this passage, we see how God works through an unlikely King, an unlikely man, an unlikely death and finally an unlikely leader.

1. The unlikely King – Eglon, king of Moab

Moab should not have been a substantial threat to the Israelites at this point, having previously been in fear of the Israelites. (**Numbers 22:1-3** see p4). Yet they defeated Israel, taking possession of the city of palms (Jericho) which had been the first place the Israelites, through the power of God, conquered as they entered the Promised Land. It symbolised the hand of God upon them, and now it looked as if all was being lost in an unlikely way, through an unlikely king (Eglon) and his unlikely people. How could this have happened?

The answer is found in **v12** (above). The evil that they did is spelt out in **Judges 2: 12** (see p4). The gods they bowed down to were the Baals and the reasons why they were so appealing to the Israelites are still a problem to us today. These gods promised wealth, prosperity, power, greater fertility and abundant harvest, claiming to control all the

elements which make those things possible. The Baals are just the name of things that mankind has been drawn to

throughout human history. We may not give our gods actual names today, but they are no less prevalent in our culture. We may not bow down to them with our words, but it shows in how we live our lives.

'Giving allegiance to what the surrounding culture says gives ultimate meaning to life,

instead of worshipping the Lord, is the definition of idolatry' Dr J Sklar.

The Israelites had followed the way of the surrounding culture, rather than having their lives defined by God himself. God's response is both loving and just, a punishment that fits the crime. He gives the people over to the culture with which they are aligning themselves.

This is a warning we need to heed. If we align ourselves with our culture rather than with God's word,

where real truth can be found and eternal life discovered as it draws us to Jesus, then ultimately,

God has to reject us. We need to put our trust fully in his Son, Jesus.

God raised an unlikely king to reveal his glory through his just action.

2. The unlikely man – Ehud

We learn little about him, but what we learn is significant. He was:

- A Benjaminite, so from the least significant of the tribes, and one of the first to falter in their obedience to God, by not driving out the people who lived there (**Judges 1:21** see p4).
- Left-handed – at that time, being unable to use your right hand, the symbol of power and activity, left handedness was considered a sign of weakness and essentially useless in that society.

So Ehud was a weak nobody from a tribe mostly known for failure – surely a great encouragement!

We can easily think we are not good enough to be used by God because of our apparent weaknesses – our background, our busyness, our upbringing, even where we live. Most of us have plenty of reasons (and excuses) we can give as to why God

would not use us to reveal his glory, yet those things are exactly why God can use us, if we choose to put our trust in him and make ourselves ready for him to do so. Ehud would have been aware of his weaknesses, but as he strapped his sword to his right thigh, he trusted God's strength and power to lead him through the unknown (and unlikely) sequence of events that followed.

God uses the most unlikely man to reveal more of his glory.

3. The unlikely death – in three unlikely parts

- a) The Moabites didn't find the sword – Ehud, the weakest of men from the least of tribes, went apparently in submission to deliver the tribute. Though not seen as much of a threat, he would nonetheless have been searched for weapons. The sword was not found because it was on the opposite side to normal. Ehud's weakness gained him entry. **God was in control.**
- b) Ehud had a private audience with the king – Eglon invited him to come to his private chamber, with no guards to protect him, not seeing him as a threat. Ehud's weakness gained him entry. **God was in control.**
- c) Ehud had ample time to escape – the servants delayed entering the chamber because the smell emanating from it suggested that the king was relieving himself. Eglon was fat, having gorged himself on the tribute from Israel over the years. Eglon's fatness is the symbol of the gluttony and power that their culture said gave ultimate meaning to life. His name means 'little calf' so he was always destined for slaughter and his gruesome death was a punishment that fitted the crime.

God was in control. Any one of those things could have gone wrong, but they didn't. Ehud's weakness was the very thing God used to administer his judgement and reveal to us more of his glory. We are ready with our reasons why God can't use us, but from this we can see that we are without excuse. God makes a habit of using our weaknesses to reveal his glory to those around us.

- We may be busy at work, but that workplace might be where God has placed us to bring the gospel to a group of people who might otherwise never have the opportunity to hear it

- Our background might have been difficult, but through that perceived weakness, God can use us to speak into the lives of people from similar backgrounds in a better way than other people could

There are many other possible examples from the list of 'God can't possibly use me' reasons and excuses we make, but to be used by God, we must first deal with the same problem in our own hearts that Israel faced – the problem of idolatry, of who we truly let lead in our life. To do this we need to look at the fourth 'unlikely' in the sequence.

4. Our unlikely leader – God (v28 above)

Ehud, the unlikely left-handed nobody, was now Israel's leader (v27 above), but he understood that although he was A hero and leader, he was not THE hero and leader (v28). God has done all this, and Ehud called on Israel to make God their leader again, putting to death all the ways of the Baals, and then to risk their lives in full assurance that God has already won this victory, before they have done anything. They rose to the challenge and the Moabites were defeated with ease, suffering God's just punishment for their cruel oppression of his people.

The Israelites could now see clearly that it was better to trust in God than in the surrounding culture – 18 years on!

God is our unlikely leader – unlikely only because we so often fail to make him leader of our life.

We too can use Ehud's rallying cry to put to death all the ways of our culture that we have allowed to indoctrinate us, and to point us back to God. Ehud points us to our unlikely leader and deliverer (Jesus) by his very being:

- He had nothing in his appearance that made him desirable. We read the same about Jesus in **Is 53:2** (see p4)
- Ehud won a great victory through weakness, and without help from others – Jesus won a great victory over sin and death on behalf of all who believe in him, but through apparent weakness and without our help.

Jesus crushed Satan, destroyed sin and conquered death as he hung on the cross.

As we look to Jesus and reflect on what he has done for us by granting us eternal life, putting our faith fully in him, we discover that we can be fully satisfied in him. We have no need to align ourselves with what our culture tells us gives meaning, because we can see clearly how Jesus has given us true freedom from the oppression of following the idols of this world.

We become free, not because of what we have done, but because of what our unlikely deliverer, Jesus, has done.

This makes sense of why, if we put our trust fully in his Son, God can use us despite our weaknesses, and why things that seemed unlikely will certainly happen, if they are in the will of God, revealing his glory all the more.

Our prayers and actions should reflect an expectancy for God to move mightily in the hearts of every member of this church, for God to bring thousands to know him through this church, then becoming disciples who make disciples who make disciples, passing on the gospel at every opportunity.

As a start to the challenge of refocussing your expectations, write down one unlikely thing you would like God to do, and put it somewhere you will see it and pray for it daily. As examples:

- If you don't yet know Jesus, pray for your heart to be aligned with God's ways and not the ways of the world.
- Pray for someone who seems far from God, or perhaps even for a whole location like Broadstone.

Numbers 22: 1-3 Then the people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho. ² And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. ³ And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel.

Judges 2: 12 And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the

gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger.

Judges 1:21 But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

Is 53: 2 he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.