

## **Ehud – Insignificant to Incredible**

Judges 3:15-30

### ***Introduction:***

Not long after I was married, I went to spend a whole week with my father-in-law. Not just a day or two mind you, but a whole week. And for three days of that week it would just be him and me. We had attended a leadership conference in Colorado and were going to spend a couple of days in Rocky Mountain National Park reflecting on all that we had just soaked in.

We hiked up to the most beautiful, remote area the ranger could point us to— a small lake nestled way up the side of a mountain. It was the perfect place to get in touch with our Creator and giant, bloodsucking mosquitoes. High above us was a large outcropping of rocks. The next day Teresa's dad suggested we climb up to those rocks and spend a few hours in a particular exercise. We would each take turns choosing a passage of Scripture and the other would have to develop a sermon outline for that text. Since he was the older and more experienced, he offered to go first, and so he let me choose the first passage. I chose a wonderful text from 1st Timothy. It was full of good preaching material, easy to understand, and simple to outline. Teresa's dad was equal to the task and he deftly handled the passage. He quickly developed a theme and an outline of three points. Within minutes we had constructed an introduction and a conclusion as well as a couple possible illustrations.

Now, it was my turn. But by this time I was pumped. I saw how well he had worked with the first passage, and I was able to jump right in and help out. So I told him, "Fire away." He opened his little pocket Bible and began flipping through pages. My forehead began to sweat as he made his way to the more obscure parts of the O.T. I was trying to remember my freshman O.T. history class. Sure I had read through the O.T. on several occasions as I read through the Bible in a year, but my bread and butter was the N.T.

He finally came to a stop in Judges 3. And with a big mischievous grin he told me to develop a sermon outline for the story of Ehud. Ehud! No wonder he told me I could marry his daughter. He was just setting me up. As I perused the text the story came rushing back to me. "Oh yeah, this is the story of the guy who stabbed the fat king who was oppressing Israel by making them pay exorbitant taxes. Ehud was able to escape because the guards thought their king was sitting on the toilet." Here's the juiciest part of the text, just so you know what I was up against. Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Judges 3, and as you look that up, I will go ahead and read this part of our text.

<sup>20</sup> *Ehud walked over to Eglon as he was sitting alone in a cool upstairs room and said, I have a message for you from God!*” As King Eglon rose from his seat, <sup>21</sup> *Ehud reached with his left hand, pulled out the dagger strapped to his right thigh, and plunged it into the king's belly.* <sup>22</sup> *The dagger went so deep that the handle disappeared beneath the king's fat. So Ehud left the dagger in, and the king's bowels emptied* <sup>23</sup> *Then Ehud closed and locked the doors and climbed down the latrine and escaped through the sewage access.*

<sup>24</sup> *After Ehud was gone, the king's servants returned and found the doors to the upstairs room locked They thought he might be using the latrine,* <sup>25</sup> *so they waited But when the king didn't come out after a long delay, they became concerned and got a key. And when they opened the door, they found their master dead on the floor.*

It's certainly entertaining, but a sermon. How do you preach this text? I struggled to come up with something. Anything! Teresa's dad was just toying with me as he watched me squirm in agony. Finally, he said, “Let me help. I've got a theme for you. This is something you could work with.” Eager for any help I said, “Yeah, what is it.” And he said, “Kill a tax collector for God.” You know, tax day was just last week. That might just preach!

Ehud is one of the best unknown stories of the Bible. People who think the Bible is dull and boring don't know the story of Ehud. It is full of captivating elements. It has a compelling, cloak and dagger storyline (literally). In addition to the sneaky spy stuff the bad guy is an oppressive king described as a “very fat man.” I did some word study here, and just so you know when the Bible says he was a very fat man, it means he was huge.

It even says that his fat was so plentiful that when Ehud stabbed him, his fat closed over not only the blade, but the handle as well. And this was no pocket knife. Bible scholars say that this knife was a foot to a foot and a half long. There are fat guys and then there is king Eglon. He's in a class by himself. Nobody else would fit.

All of this leads to a rather comical situation, if not a bit gross, where the king's guards are unaware of the imminent danger to the throne, because they're all embarrassed thinking the king is on the pot. They think he has a bad case of the runs. This is the kind of story that kids love. I wonder why you never saw a flannel graph version back in junior church.

All rubbernecking curiosities aside, I have come to see this as a powerful story with some excellent application for our lives. So here is my sermon on Ehud.

**Body:**

The book of judges portrays sin and its consequences. Israel neglected the ways of God, and turned to the idols that were worshipped by her neighbors. The more they strayed spiritually,

the more they removed themselves from God's blessing. Things became chaotic morally. Twice we are told in Judges that everyone did what was right in his own eyes. The spiritual and moral breakdown had economic and military consequences for the nation. Soon they were being defeated by invading armies and forced to pay oppressive taxes and tributes to foreign kings.

One of these kings was Eglon, a Moabite King. In alliance with the Ammonites and the Amalekites, the Moabites oppressed Israel for 18 years. This is where Ehud enters the story.

### **I. An Incredible God – Who makes assets out of liabilities**

The first thing I want you see in this text is a glimpse of an incredible God. This story isn't really about how great Ehud is, but how great God is. And one of the great things about God is that He makes assets out of our liabilities. Look with me starting in Judges 3:15

*<sup>15</sup> But when Israel cried out to the LORD for help, the LORD raised up a man to rescue them. His name was Ehud son of Gera, of the tribe of Benjamin, who was left-handed. The Israelites sent Ehud to deliver their tax money to King Eglon of Moab.*

The text seems to go out of its way to tell us that Ehud was left-handed. Now we might think this is no big deal, but this is a crucial point in the story. It is Ehud's left-handedness that allows him to hide his sword in a place where the guards weren't likely to look. It was his left-handedness that allows him to catch Eglon by surprise with an unexpected thrust of his blade.

But there is still more to this point. The Hebrew term translated in our Bibles as "left-handed" literally means "defective in the right." How many lefties do we have here this morning? Did you know the Bible says you are defective? ;-). There are some scholars that believe this means Ehud was handicapped in his right hand, and thus forced to use his left hand. In other words Ehud may have been a disabled Bible hero. Other scholars say that left-handedness was looked down upon by society, because being right-handed was normal. So, this is a case of prejudice. Left-handed people were thought to be inferior, thus being left-handed was believed to be defective. It's possible that both of these things were true.

Whether Ehud was actually handicapped or simply suffered from societal prejudice against lefties, God turned his liability into an asset. Everybody else would have looked at Ehud and they would have seen a disadvantage. Ehud may have even looked at himself and seen a disadvantage. But God looked at him and saw an opportunity. He says, "I'll take what you see as a disadvantage, and I'll use it for my glory. I'll make it the very thing that brings victory."

Being used by God isn't about how great your skills and talents are. God isn't so concerned about your resume. God isn't looking for "qualified" people. He's looking for people

who love him, and will give themselves to Him.

God still makes assets of our liabilities. Do you have some disadvantage in your life? Something you think keeps you from following or serving God fully? Your disadvantage is God's advantage. Is there some horrid mistake that you've made, a huge moral failure in your life? God can still use you. What about your family background? Do you think it holds you back? Do you think it limits you? It doesn't limit God. He makes assets of our liabilities. We just have to give them over to him.

## II. An Insignificant Person — Who can make a difference

There's a second thing we learn about Ehud that would be easy to miss, but it tells us something very important— God uses insignificant people. Average ordinary people can make a huge difference with God.

The text tells us that Ehud is from the tribe of Benjamin. This is a crucial little detail. Benjamin was one of the smallest tribes begun with. But there is an event recorded at the end of the book of Judges, but it happened before. I know that sounds weird, but the end of the book contains a collection of stories, as an appendix or illustration of the spiritual condition of the nation. These stories contained at the end of the book all took place at the beginning of the period of the judges.

One of those stories concerns the tribe of Benjamin and a civil war that tribe had with the other tribes. The other tribes attacked Benjamin when that tribe refused to turn over the men of the Benjamite city of Gibeah for a horrid gang rape and murder of a girl. It was a short, but brutal war fought in three battles. As a result the tribe of Benjamin went from 26,700 fighting men to only 600 in less than a week. So, Ehud's tribe failed in a ghastly moral atrocity. Then his tribe suffered terribly in battle. The tribe of Benjamin was all but wiped out. Ehud was one of the few survivors. Yet he is the very one that God chose to lead Israel against Eglon and his allies. Despite his apparent disadvantage, God chose him. Despite the highly questionable past of his tribe, God chose him. Despite his defeated position and his low stature in the eyes of the other tribes, God chose him.

When we see the remarkable God in this passage we also need to see the unremarkable person He used. There was nothing in Ehud's resume that would convince us that he should be the guy? The Bible mentions no outstanding qualifications. We see no remarkable attributes. The only attributes mentioned are that he was left-handed and he was from the tribe of Benjamin. No one would have seen either of those things as positive qualifications. Ehud was unremarkable at best. A loser at worst. There was nothing special about him, other than he made himself available, and was

willing to be used by God.

Yet God used this one insignificant person to make one huge difference. We see the difference in verses 20-25.

<sup>20</sup> *Ehud walked over to Eglon as he was sitting alone in a cool upstairs room and said, 'I have a message for you from God!' As King Eglon rose from his seat, <sup>21</sup> Ehud reached with his left hand pulled out the dagger strapped to his right thigh and plunged it into the king's belly. <sup>22</sup> The dagger went so deep that the handle disappeared beneath the king's fat. So Ehud left the dagger in, and the king's bowels emptied <sup>23</sup> Then Ehud closed and locked the doors and climbed down the latrine and escaped through the sewage access.*

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How often do we feel like God can't use us, because we are insignificant, average, ordinary. But it doesn't take an extraordinary person to be used by God, it just takes an ordinary person willing to be used by an extraordinary God. Paul's letters to both Timothy and Titus list what we often call qualifications for elders, but they're not qualifications in the sense we ordinarily think of them. God isn't looking at their resume. He doesn't care what titles or position you've held. What Paul describes are character qualities. God is looking for people whose hearts are wholly devoted to Him. If your heart is His, none of that other stuff matters.

The same God that used a left-handed failure from a wiped out tribe to overthrow an oppressive, multi-national military alliance, the same God that used a mere shepherd boy and his sling to topple a 9 foot mighty warrior, the same God that used uneducated fishermen to conquer the Roman empire with the gospel of peace and love, the same God that used a stammering Moses to confront a tyrant and lead a nation, an imprisoned slave named Joseph to save a people, a persecuting Pharisee with a thorn in the flesh to reach the Gentile world is the same God that can use you. The more disadvantages you have, well, the more qualified you are.

### **III. An Incredible Faith — that is willing to risk**

It doesn't take an incredible person to be used by God, but it does take a significant faith— a faith is a faith that is willing to risk. Faith, by its very nature requires risk. When we say that someone takes a step of faith, by implication we are also saying that taking a step of personal risk. Faith means trust despite contradictory appearances and circumstances. Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the conviction of things not seen. If I put a blindfold on you and ask you to walk according to my words, are you not taking a risk?

Ehud took great risk in this story. He made himself very vulnerable, even to the point of losing his life. Look at verses 16-19.

*<sup>16</sup> So Ehud made himself a double-edged dagger that was eighteen inches long, and he strapped it to his right thigh, keeping it hidden under his clothing <sup>17</sup> He brought the tax money to Eglon, who was very fat. <sup>18</sup> After delivering the payment, Ehud sent home those who had carried the tax money <sup>19</sup> But when Ehud reached the stone carvings near Gilgal, he turned back. He came to Eglon and said, "I have a secret message for you." So the king commanded his servants to be silent and sent them all out of the room.*

Ehud was willing to act alone. He sent everyone else home. He was willing to put his own neck on the line. What would have happened to Ehud if the guards would have found his hidden dagger? What if Eglon would have refused Ehud's request for a private audience? What if the guards had entered the chamber immediately before Ehud had a chance to escape and rally the troops? He could have failed at any point along the way, yet this unremarkable man demonstrated a remarkable faith in a remarkable God.

There is another thing that demonstrates Ehud's remarkable faith. Several of the other judges such as Deborah and Barak, Gideon, and Samson all received assurances or special signs from God that they would be victorious. Gideon even demanded several miracles as proof of God's assurance before he was willing to go forward. But nowhere in our text do we read that God promised success to Ehud. Ehud merely acted in faith. He was willing to risk.

Incredible faith isn't about playing it safe and keeping it predictable. It's about daring to go where you can only go if God is with you. Do you want God to do something remarkable in your life? Do you want God to do something remarkable in your family? Do you want God to do something remarkable in your church, then you must be willing to risk. If there is no risk, there is no faith. If there is no faith, then we will not see God do remarkable things in our lives, in our homes, and in our church.

#### **IV. Incredible Things — Small successes lead to big victories.**

Our story is remarkable enough so far, but the death of fat king Eglon is not the end. Ehud's act of faith lead to incredible things, because small successes lead to big victories. Just because king Eglon was dead didn't mean Israel's trouble was over. They were still oppressed by the armies of three nations, but Ehud's risk of faith in killing the king, opened the door to greater victory. Look at verses 26-30.

*<sup>26</sup> While the servants were waiting Ehud escaped passing the idols on his way to Seirah <sup>27</sup> When he arrived in the hill country of Ephraim, Ehud sounded a call to arms. Then he led a band of Israelites down from the hills. <sup>28</sup> "Follow me," he said, for the LORD has given you*

*victory over Moab your enemy.” So they followed him. And the Israelites took control of the shallows of the Jordan River across from Moab, preventing anyone from crossing.<sup>29</sup> They attacked the Moabites and killed about ten thousand of their strongest and bravest warriors. Not one of them escaped<sup>30</sup> So Moab was conquered by Israel that day, and the land was at peace for eighty years.*

Sometimes the reason we don't see the big victories in our lives is because we're not willing to step in faith to fight the small battles. God will give us greater opportunities when we trust him in the smaller things. We beat that long-term sin one day of obedience at a time. We develop a heart filled with the fruit of the spirit one comment, one action, one smile, one helpful gesture, one restraint at a time. As we trust God in the smaller things, He will enable us to fight the bigger battles.

Is there an Eglon in your life? Is there a big fat sin? Is there a grotesque failure in your past? Is there a habit, an addiction that is oppressing you? We serve an incredible God who does incredible things through insignificant people who have incredible faith.