



“The Left-Handed Ways of God”
Judges 3:12-31

Idea: The Lord is a mysteriously good God who works on behalf of His people even when they don’t deserve it.

Intro: There are times when we’ve wondered about the manner in which God did something. You didn’t question the outcome only the process or method. For instance, here is a big one...God why did you choose to provide salvation through the blood of your Son? Here’s one that is personal to me...God why did you choose to take the life of my dad at such a young age? I’m not questioning the outcome or God’s authority to do what He wants; He is God and can do what He wants. I simply wonder why He chose to do it that way. The path seems to be out of left field and backwards.

Did you know that only 10% of the population is left-handed. Since the vast majority of people are right-handed, most everything is tailored for them rather than left-handed people. When a right-handed person tries to instruct someone who is

left-handed everything feels backwards. My sister is left-handed. My dad couldn't teach her to bat left-handed, so he taught her to bat right-handed. My middle daughter is left-handed, and trying to teach her how to write letters is like trying to write by looking in a mirror...backwards and wrong.

Do you know that God oftentimes works in our lives in a left-handed way? You can't put Him in a box. He is unpredictable. That is not to say He is random or capricious. He is neither of those, but God does do things and work in ways that are surprising. He is a mysteriously good God who works on behalf of His people even when they don't deserve it.

Read Judges 3:12-31.

Inquiry: Israel's cry to God for help while under the oppression of Cushan-rishathaim proved to not be one of repentance as the people quickly returned to evil after his death. Thus, *the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab* against them (vs. 12). Moab was a cousin to Israel. They were the descendants of Lot. Moab had been a burr to them since the days of the wilderness wanderings. During that time Balak, the king of Moab, summoned Balaam to curse Israel. Three different times, the curse Balaam was to speak over Israel was a blessing. Thus, God strengthened Israel over Moab. Here we see that because of Israel's faithlessness, God strengthened Moab over Israel.

Eglon gathered the Ammonites and Amalekites. They together defeated Israel, and he set up Jericho as his base of operations in Israel. So Eglon oppressed God's people for 18 years. Then the people cried out to God for help, and He raised up a deliverer named Ehud. His name means, "Where is the splendor or majesty?" The name reflects the despondency of the times. The people had forgotten and walked away from God. Therefore, God's activity was absent. Ehud was from the tribe of Benjamin. In Genesis 35, Jacob named the son that Rachel delivered before dying, Benjamin (son of my right

hand). The irony of the situation in Judges 3 is that the text makes it clear that Ehud the Benjamite was left-handed.

There is some disagreement among scholars as to the exact meaning of left-handed. Some argue that the grammar and word use refers to some type of deformity or handicap that prevented Ehud from using his right hand. Thus, forcing him to be left-handed. Others suggest that the grammar and word use in 20:16 of the Benjamite soldiers, refers to them being ambidextrous. They were skilled in the use of both hands.

What is the big deal about Ehud being left-handed? It's a big deal because as he took the tribute to Eglon, he was able to get close to the king because no one expected him either to have a weapon or be able to use it in that manner. Ehud strapped a small sword to his right leg under his cloak. After delivering the tribute, he sent his helpers on ahead and went back to the king. Ehud told Eglon he had a message for him from God. The king dismissed his aids and security. This gave Ehud the perfect opportunity to kill the king. Eglon was a very heavy man, so he could not escape. Ehud plunged the blade completely through Eglon, locked the door, and fled. When the king's aids began to worry, they unlocked the door and found him lying in a pool of blood and dung. With the king dead, Ehud mustered Israel and defeated Moab, killing 10,000 mighty soldiers.

Not much is known about Shamgar. His name is not Hebrew. It might have been Hittite or Hurrian. This, however, does not infer that he was Canaanite, although it is possible. It may witness to the intermingling of the Israelites with the native population. What we do know is that Shamgar used an oxgoad to kill 600 Philistines. An oxgoad was a long-handled (8-10 feet) pointed instrument tipped with metal. When sharpened an oxgoad shared many qualities with a spear.

These two deliverances remind us of the left-handed ways of God...His mysterious work. From them we find three realities.

1. God's love, mercy, and grace run deep and wide. (3:15)

After 18 years of oppression by Eglon, the people of God cried out to God for help. Their plea to God was very similar to Israel's plea while under the thumb of Cushan in 3:9. This was not a cry of repentance or a plea for forgiveness. It was not in the repentant vein of 2 Chronicles 7:14:

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

Israel's plea was simply one for divine aid. God heard their cry of pain and was compassionate toward them. He willingly delivered Israel even though their hearts were unrepentant and far from Him. His actions were left-handed. They were opposite of what we would logically expect from Him. Israel did not deserve deliverance. They had already proven under Othniel that they were faithless and idolatrous.

Appl: Like Israel, you and I don't deserve God's deliverance and blessings, but He gives them to us anyway. He knows the sin that each of us harbor in our hearts today. He knows your sinful thoughts, your sinful feelings, and your sinful tendencies. He knows every skeleton in your closet, and still He loves you (Mark 10:21).

8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8

God is merciful. He chooses to not give you and me what our sin our rebellion deserves. We deserve hell. God would be just in sending each of us to an eternal fire and separation from Himself. In His mercy, however, He relents from judgment.

God is gracious. Rather than judgment, He offers forgiveness. He gives us what we do not expect. In Jesus, our sins have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west. God remembers them no more. And He gives us more than just forgiveness; God offers to us a relationship with Himself.

His love, mercy, and grace run deep and wide. You can never exhaust them.

22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

– Lamentations 3:22-23

Likewise, the love, mercy, and grace are for every one.

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16

2. God is resourceful and often rescues in an unexpected way. (3:15, 31)

A question we often ask is “Why?” Why did the Lord do this in my life? Why did the Lord allow that to happen to my family and me? Perhaps, the greatest question we ask is “How?” How will the Lord take care of my needs? How will He provide a job? How am I going to get out of this predicament? Like Israel, we just struggle with the logic behind God’s activity.

Although the trials can be seen in Israel’s misery and the rescues as God’s grace, it is spelt out for us that trials as well as deliverances come from the hand of God. We might not see the logic in His actions, but from God’s perspective it is quite logical because He sees the end from the beginning. In other words, where

there is unexpectedness in the story it is put there by God. It is only the God who set the original pattern who is at liberty to vary it. We see this happening in the ways by which He brings His people low. But we see it happening even more, so that the variety of His methods becomes quite bewildering, in the ways by which God saves, restores, and blesses Israel.

“For consider your calling, brothers,” says Paul in 1 Corinthians 1, underlining the great principle of the left-hand; *“not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.”* And the object of such unlikely choices is now what it was then. It is *“so that no human being might boast in the presence of God”* (1 Cor 1:26-29). He is in charge of His people’s world. He is the one provides water to a thirsty people from a rock. This leads us to a third reality.

3. God is sovereignly in charge; history is His story.

God is the Judge, and He makes the decisions. We can indeed claim from Him what He has clearly promised to do, but none of us have the right to dictate to Him how He is to do it. We are not to be surprised if He chooses the most unlikely methods, even if we find that such left-handed things as deprivation or illness, frustration or failure, become the instruments of His rule. After all, who would have expected that He would choose to work through such a left-handed crowd of people as the Christian church? Who would have predicted that when the Judge came himself in the flesh, He would come as such a left-handed person, with *no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.* The truth is

He was despised and rejected by men (Isaiah 53:2-3).

God does what He desires and in the way He desires because He is God. History is truly His story. The history of your life is His story. We must simply trust Him and watch Him work.

Conclusion: Do you see yourself in the people of Israel? Is there any resemblance? They were easily tempted by sin. They were rebellious. They were quick to allow their walk with God to become merely religious. They were apathetic and complacent to the things of God. The things of the world were more attractive to them than their relationship with God. They quickly forgot God and His activity on their behalf.

We have a tendency to do all of those things too. Yet God's love, mercy, and grace runs deep and wide toward us. He chooses to work in your life, often working in unusual ways. Why does He do it? God does it because your story is His story. He works to display His glory in you. Today, open your eyes and heart to His activity.