

**DOWNWARD SPIRAL, PART 3: “THREE JUDGES, ONE LORD”  
JUDGES 3:7-31**

**Personal Introduction**

Hi everyone! If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

**Sermon Series Introduction**

We're currently in Part 3 of our sermon series called “Downward Spiral,” where we're going through the book of Judges together.

And today's sermon is titled: “Three Judges, One Lord.”

So let's get right into it.

**Sermon Introduction**

Some people think history is boring. But history is essentially a recount of *stories*.

It's not merely a telling of facts or a simple timeline of events, but history is comprised of *stories*.

Stories of a person's life, stories of significant events, stories of a whole people and culture.

But these stories are not just told as a way to remember *information*, but stories are meant to *teach* something—certain values, certain truths.

History is not a bunch of random, meaningless events. If that were the case, then there would be no reason to recall the stories of history. There would be nothing to learn from them.

There is only something to teach from history because the stories that comprise history are *not* random and meaningless, but they all occur according to the sovereign plan and purposes of the one Lord who orchestrates all of history.

There's a bit of a cliché that's often said, but it doesn't make it any less true: all of history is *his* story. That is, all of history is about one Lord.

There may be *many* stories that *comprise* history, but they all ultimately point to the one Lord who *authors* and *directs* history.

And *because* all these stories comprise *his* story, history has much to teach us.

Or as God's Word says, “Now these things [or these stories of history]... were written down for our *instruction*, on whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

So as we turn to the book of Judges today, we're not just looking at three random and meaningless stories of three judges, but we're looking at three divinely orchestrated stories in history that are meant for our *instruction*—they're meant to *teach* us some things ultimately about this one Lord over all of history.

So that's what we'll look at more today.

**Scripture Introduction**

Turn your Bibles to Judges 3:7-31.

I'd encourage you to keep your Bibles open to this passage and look down at verses that are referred to throughout the sermon.

If you need access to a Bible, you can download the ESV Bible app, or just ask someone next to you, and I'm sure they'd be happy to share with you.

<pause>

"Judges" here doesn't refer to judicial or court judges, but these judges were military leaders that God raised up to deliver his people from an oppressor. They were not kings over all of Israel, but they were more like clan or tribal leaders.

In terms of the *structure* of the book of Judges, there's a *two*-part introduction, then the main body of the book tells the narratives of 12 judges (6 major judges and 6 minor judges), and then it ends with a *two*-part conclusion.

So, in our last two sermons in Judges, we went through the first and second introductions, and today, we'll begin the main body of book, looking at the first two major judges (Othniel and Ehud) and the first minor judge (Shamgar).

And that's where we are as we begin today's passage.

### Scripture Reading

Instead of reading all of Judges 3:7-31 at the beginning like we usually do, since we'll be looking at the stories of three different judges, we'll read them one at a time and unpack them as we go.

### Overview

- I. Othniel: a story to model (3:7-11)
- II. Ehud: a story of mockery (3:12-30)
- III. Shamgar: a story that marvels [or surprises, or astonishes, or leaves us in amazement] (3:31)

### I. Othniel: a story to model (3:7-11)

Verses 7-11 say this:

<sup>7</sup> And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. <sup>8</sup> Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. <sup>9</sup> But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. <sup>10</sup> The Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. <sup>11</sup> So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

As soon as we read verse 7, we realize that this is the start of the downward spiral that the second introduction told us about earlier (Judg. 2:11-19).

- In verse 7, the people of Israel did what was *evil* in the sight of the LORD by turning to *idolatry*;
- In verse 8, the LORD *sold* them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia for eight years;
- In the beginning of verse 9, the people of Israel *cried out* to the LORD;
  - o But we should note that simply crying out for help is not necessarily true repentance (Judg. 10:10-14); and the LORD will also deliver his people later in the book of Judges even when they do *not* cry out to him (Judg. 13; cf. 2:11-19).
- In the rest of verse 9 to verse 10, the LORD raised up Othniel as a judge to *deliver* his people;
- In the beginning of verse 11, the land had *rest* for forty years;
- And in the rest of verse 11, Othniel *died*.

Now, let's unpack this a bit.

Cushan-rishathaim literally means "Cushan the double wicked."

This is probably *not* the name that his parents gave him, for no parent would name their child “the double wicked,” but this is probably how the people of *Israel* referred to him as they were *oppressed* by him for what must have been eight *terrible* years. He was a wicked, wicked tyrant.

And we’re meant to *feel* how wicked Cushan is we say his name “Cushan the double wicked” *four* times in the span of just three verses.

And he was the king of Mesopotamia, which has been known to be “the cradle of civilization.” This was a mighty superpower in the ancient near east during the time of the judges.

<pause>

So if that’s Cushan-rishathaim, then who is *Othniel*?

We first met Othniel in the first introduction in chapter 1. There, we saw that...

- Othniel is a mighty warrior who took the initiative to capture a pagan city;
- he’s married to the daughter of faithful Caleb, which is especially significant in light of the last verse we saw last week—where the people of Israel intermarried with the pagan nations and turned to idolatry;
- and Othniel is from the tribe of Judah—and throughout the book, we see that when the tribe of Judah leads, everything seems to go well for Israel, because God’s appointed kings would come through that tribe (Gen. 49:10).

So Othniel has godly character, he has a godly marriage, and he comes from the tribe of God’s appointed kings.

In almost every way, he seems to be the *model* judge (or deliverer) for the people of Israel.

But what’s interesting is that his story is told in such a *bland* way. I mean, Othniel defeated one of the greatest superpowers of the ancient near east; he defeated this “double wicked” tyrant-king. And yet, there are almost *no* details that are given about *how* he did it.

Unlike the next narrative, we don’t know what his strategy was, which tribes of Israel may have participated, where the battle took place, or how large the enemy army was.

Most of what is stated here has *already* been stated in the second introduction that we looked at last week, with very little additional information.

<pause>

So *why* is it that this *model* judge is given such *little* description in what must have been one of the *greatest* victories of the time?

Because as great as *Othniel* was, his story is ultimately *not* about *him*, but it’s about the *Lord*.

Look again at who *really* delivered the people of Israel.

- Verse 9: “the *LORD* raised up a deliverer.”
- Verse 10: “the Spirit of the *LORD* was upon him... the *LORD* gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand.”

In fact, when we think about the book of Judges, my guess is that almost *none* of us would readily think about *Othniel*—and that’s what *really* makes Othniel a *model* judge.

He doesn’t call attention to himself, but his whole story points to the *Lord* as the Savior of his people.

Like John the Baptist, Othniel’s joy was not in calling attention to himself, but in rejoicing in and calling attention to his Lord.

“He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

<pause>

Perhaps this is a bit counterintuitive for us.

When we model faithfulness to the Lord, there's something in us that *wants* people to notice and praise us for it.

There's actually a word for this now—humble-brag.

To humble-brag is “to make a seemingly modest, self-critical, or casual statement or reference that is meant to draw attention to one's admirable or impressive qualities or achievements” (Merriam-Webster).

But humble-bragging doesn't just occur in the *words* that we say but in the *heart* that we have in the faithful acts that we *do*.

It's the kind of heart that the Lord Jesus constantly rebuked and warned us of in...

Matthew 6:16-18: “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

This is not just about *fasting* but about the desire to be seen by others in *any* of our faithful acts.

<pause>

Now, perhaps you think that this *isn't* you.

But ask yourself, “How do I respond when *nobody* notices what I do?”

Or perhaps an even better question to ask is, “How do I respond when people think *negatively* about me?”

Do you feel the need to *justify* yourself with all the good things you have done?

Do you feel the need to *vindicate* your own good name and reputation in their eyes?

Do you feel the need to *compare* your faithful acts with their *lack* of faithful acts?

If so, then perhaps there's something in you that *wants* people to notice and praise you for your faithful acts after all.

<pause>

But like Othniel and John the Baptist, a model follower of the Lord isn't faithful *because* people will acknowledge us or even remember us, but we live a life of faithfulness to the Lord simply to *glorify* him and *enjoy* him forever (1 Cor. 10:31).

There is a profound delight in doing what *pleases* the Lord.

There is a deep joy in living to *glorify* him.

There is an incomparable satisfaction to *feel* our heavenly Father's *smile* upon us.

And so, even if *nobody* notices what we do, even if people think *negatively* of us, we don't have any need to *justify* or *vindicate* ourselves because it's not about us at all, but we just keep our gaze upon the Lord and continue to live to glorify him in all that we do.

<pause>

And the amazing thing is that the Lord has said that he *will* reward us for the things that we do in secret—for the things we do simply to glorify him and enjoy him.

Othniel is not in heaven right now wishing that more people thought of him when they thought of the book of Judges.

No, he is *captivated* by the sight of his Lord, and he is *overflowing* with delight in the presence of his Savior.

And *his* story is one for us to model.

<pause>

So first, Othniel: a story to model; and second...

## II. Ehud: a story of mockery (3:12-30)

Verses 12-30 say this:

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and went and defeated Israel. And they took possession of the city of palms. <sup>14</sup> And the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> And Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his clothes. <sup>17</sup> And he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. <sup>18</sup> And when Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who carried the tribute. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> And Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> Then Ehud went out into the porch and closed the doors of the roof chamber behind him and locked them.

<sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> Ehud escaped while they delayed, and he passed beyond the idols and escaped to Seirah. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> And they killed at that time about 10,000 of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men; not a man escaped. <sup>30</sup> So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

Here, we see the same downward spiral that we saw in Othniel's story.

- In the beginning of verse 12, the people of Israel *again* did what was *evil* in the sight of the LORD;
- In the rest of verse 12 to verse 14, the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab *against* Israel... and the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab for eighteen years.
- In the beginning of verse 15, the people of Israel *cried out* to the LORD;
- In the rest of verse 15 to the beginning of verse 30, the LORD raised up Ehud as a judge to *deliver* his people;
- In the rest of verse 30, the land had *rest* for eighty years;
- And later in chapter 4 verse 1, we'll see that Ehud *died*.

But if there wasn't much detail in *Othniel's* story, there's enough detail given in *Ehud's* story to make a whole movie on it.

And aside from all the details, there's also a lot of wordplay or double-meaning to words here that make this narrative especially witty.

In verse 14, the name "Eglon" literally means "little calf."

And in verse 17, the "tribute" that Israel brought to Eglon was *food*.<sup>1</sup> And that verse ends with the rather blunt description: "Now Eglon was a very *fat* man."

So putting this all together, the people of Israel have been literally *fattening* Eglon (the "little calf") with their tribute (or *food*), as if they were fattening a calf for the slaughter—as if he's being set apart and prepared to be killed.

<pause>

In verse 15, Ehud is introduced as being a left-handed man from the tribe of Benjamin.

Later in Judges 20, it tells us that the Benjaminites had "700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss" (Judg. 20:16; cf. 1 Chron. 12:2).

So Ehud was most likely a specially trained left-handed warrior from the tribe of Benjamin.

<pause>

And everything starts to move in slow motion in verses 21-22: "Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. 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."

The word for "blade" can also mean "flame" (Judg. 13:20), so the imagery is of this fattened calf being *sacrificed* on the flames of an altar.<sup>2</sup>

And the word for "thrust" also has a double meaning. When it's used of a *weapon*, it means "thrust"; but when it's used of a *horn* or *trumpet*, it means "to blow or sound." So later, in verse 27, when it says that Ehud "sounded" the trumpet, it's the same word used for "thrust" here.

So here, the wordplay is used in such a *comical* way: Ehud "thrusts" the sword but Eglon "sounded" the trumpet (so to speak)—that is, he farted and "dung came out."

<pause>

And in verse 24, when Eglon's servants see that the doors are locked and they smell Eglon's dung, they think that he is "relieving himself" or going number two in the bathroom.

<sup>1</sup> Barry G. Webb (*Judges and Ruth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015]) notes: "The agricultural nature of Israel's economy at the time and the specific term used for the tribute (*minchah*, a grain offering) (Leviticus 2:8; 6:14 (Hebrew 15); 7:12; 23:16; Numbers 5:25; 6:16; 15:9) imply that Ehud has brought agricultural produce—food!"

<sup>2</sup> In verse 16, the "two *edges*" of the sword that he makes for himself literally means "two *mouths*," so later when the sword is left in the belly of Eglon, it's as if the two *mouths* of the sword are *devouring* the fattened calf. And in verse 20, Ehud gives him the "word of God," which in this case is a *literal* "two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12; cf. Eph. 6:17).

So they wait and wait and wait. And as time passes by, they're probably beginning to wonder—and perhaps even talking among one another—"What is taking him so long? Is he constipated? Did he fall asleep on the toilet?"

But nobody wants to go in to check because they're fearful of entering into the king's presence without being called (especially if he's on the toilet!) and incurring his angry wrath.

So they wait some more. But finally, it's just starting to get *embarrassing*—they're beginning to look like *fools* just standing around all night (perhaps it's even *morning* now).

There's simply *no way* he could be taking *that* long to use the bathroom, so in verse 25, they take their key and open the door.

And there lay their "lord" dead on the floor.

<pause>

Meanwhile, in verse 26, the long delay of Eglon's servants waiting around allowed for Ehud to escape.<sup>3</sup>

In verses 27-28, he sounds the trumpet to call the people of Israel to follow him, "for the *LORD* has given [their] enemies the Moabites into [their] hand."

And the people of Israel seized the fords (or the shallow places) of the Jordan River, so that the Moabites could not run away into the country of Moab.

And in verse 29, it says that they killed about 10,000 of the Moabites and not a man escaped.

But when it describes the Moabites as "strong, able-bodied" men, these are *also* words that can have a double meaning.

"Strong" can also mean "fat," which was the same word used to describe Eglon back in verse 17.

And "able-bodied" can also mean "substantial in size."

So perhaps like their king, these *once* "strong, able-bodied men" have gotten *fat* off the tribute (or *food*) from the Israelites over the last 18 years. And *now*, they are too large and heavy to run fast. And so, like Eglon (the "little calf"), they *too* have been fattened for the slaughter.

<pause>

The whole story is told in such a comical, *mocking* kind of way.

But we have to remember that for the 18 years that Eglon and the Moabites ruled over Israel, it was *no* laughing matter for them.

They were oppressed and in "terrible distress" (Judg. 2:15).

For some of us, eighteen years is more than half our lives.

And for those 18 years, Eglon seemed like a strong and capable king.

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<sup>3</sup> Notice that Ehud passed the *idols* as he was escaping. Here was the chance for these so-called "gods" to take vengeance on the one who had killed their pagan king. But nothing happens. These dead, lifeless idols can do nothing as Ehud passes by. Perhaps the prophet Elijah had this story in mind later on in 1 Kings 18, when he's mocking the prophets of Baal to cry out louder because maybe their god is relieving himself. So the prophets of Baal cried out louder and cut themselves some more until blood gushed out upon them, but just like these mute and deaf and lifeless idols that Ehud passed by, Baal didn't answer them or do anything then either (1 Kings 18:27-29).

Earlier, in verse 13, he was able to gather a coalition of other nations—the Ammonites and the Amalekites—to fight with him to conquer Israel.

He was a military leader, he was strategic, he knew how to win, he knew how to make his conquered people serve him and pay him tribute.

He was a mighty and feared man in the eyes of the people of Israel and in the eyes of the watching world.

<pause>

And yet, here in this story, Eglon and the Moabites are cut down to the level of looking like complete *fools*.

In this entire story, from the way they're described, from the way they respond, from the way that scenes unfold and graphic imagery is used, they're just being *mocked* left and right—in a way that almost feels *uncomfortable* to us.

<pause>

So *why* is this story here in the Bible?

To answer that, we need to understand *who* exactly is doing the mocking?

Listen to what the Lord says in...

**Psalms 2:1-4**: Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." **He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.**

The Lord sits on his heavenly throne and *laughs* in derision (or in *mockery*) at the ridiculously vain attempt of such earthly rebellion against him.

He looks at this mighty king of Moab oppressing his people, and he sees a little calf being fattened for slaughter.

Perhaps this makes some of us a bit *uncomfortable*—to think of God *laughing* and even *mocking* his enemies—but let me try to explain a bit more by using the lyrics of the rap song "Our God is in the Heavens" by Shai Linne. As he meditates on this point, he raps this:

The Sovereign LORD, Great I AM, recognize the name!  
 He's always on top of His game, a Lion that simply cannot be tamed  
 And no, He is not restrained at all- nobody can stop His reign  
 So why do the nations rage and all of the peoples plot in vain?  
 Their sin and offense is against His excellence and they're not ashamed  
 As though He's lacking the power to shackle them now in the hottest flames  
 And so they cock and aim- the target? His cosmic reign  
 That's like a kid with a super soaker trying to conquer Spain!  
 Man thinks he's a pugilist [or professional boxer], trying to ball up his puny fist  
 At the LORD, who is ruling this  
 What's amusing is God just laughs, like "Who is this"?  
 Stupid kids who persist in foolishness  
 It's only by God's power you exist  
 Now you declare war on the LORD  
 When before you were born, He formed you in the uterus?  
 Look- Our God is in the heavens and He does all that He pleases  
 He's established His King in Zion and His name is Jesus!

Simply put, God is God, and we are not. He is the Creator, and we are the creatures.



There is an infinite gulf that separates the infinite God and us finite creatures. And it is completely *laughable* to think that we can stand against God and his sovereign purposes.

<pause>

The New Testament writers *loved* Psalm 2; it is one of the *most* quoted psalms in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup>

Especially in the midst of hardships and persecution, they needed to remember that the *Lord* still sovereignly reigns, and all the rulers and authorities of this world are not only *nothing* but *laughable* in comparison to him.

<pause>

This is especially seen at the cross of Christ.

At the cross, it looked like the religious leaders and Pontius Pilate, representing the Roman Empire, had all authority and power to execute the Lord Jesus on the cross.

And that's *really* how they saw themselves. Think of what Pilate said to Jesus: "Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" (John 19:10).

Can you imagine this arrogant Roman governor telling the Lord of all creation that *he* had authority over *him*?

When you step back to think about it, especially in light of the Lord Jesus' resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father where he now reigns forever, it is *laughable* to think that Pilate *really* thought that *he* had authority over the Lord Jesus.

The cross is where these earthly rulers *thought* they were flexing their own authority, but it was actually the place where the Lord was flexing *his*.

Our Lord is so much higher and greater than us that even "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25).

The cross is not only where he would forgive and redeem sinners for himself, but it is also where "[God] disarmed the rulers and authorities and *put them to open shame*, by triumphing over them in [Christ]" (Col. 2:15).

The Lord not only *triumphs* over his enemies, but he puts them to *open shame*. He not only *opposes* the proud (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5), but he uses "what is *foolish* in the world to *shame* the wise" and he uses "what is *weak* in the world to *shame* the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27).

The Lord not only brings about *justice* and *vindication* for his name, but he brings about a satisfying *poetic* or *ironic* justice to *mock* his enemies who have lived their lives *mocking* him.<sup>5</sup>

The sovereign Lord *laughs* at and will *judge* such arrogance.

<pause>

So what does this all mean for us?

<sup>4</sup> James W. Watts ("Psalm 2 in the Context of Biblical Theology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 12, no. 1 [June 1990]: 80-81) writes: "The New Testament quotes Ps 2 explicitly in Acts 4:25-26; 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5, and duplicates the psalm's language in Rev 2:26-27; 19:15. The voice from heaven in the accounts of Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22 — note the more explicit reference in the Western text) partially echoes Ps 2:7, as does virtually every reference to 'the Son of God,' 'the Son,' and especially the Johannine phrase 'the only-begotten Son.' Revelation is filled with allusions to the psalm's picture of the nations' rebellion and the triumph of God and his Messiah (11:15; 12:5; 17:18; 19:19)."

<sup>5</sup> Notice that death, the last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), is not only *defeated* but *mocked* in 1 Corinthians 15: "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55).

First, this is a *comfort* for those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

This story of mockery is a glimpse behind the curtain to see how things *really* are.

In this world, it's so tempting to live by sight and not by faith. It's so easy to give in to what we see and feel—and to *wrongly* think that we or certain people are *truly* in control or *really* have all the power and authority.

But in *God's* world, true sight is *faith* in God's *Word*.

Even though the world looked at Eglon and the Moabites and *shuddered* at their apparent strength and competency, God *comforts* his people by giving them a glimpse of how *he* sees them in all their foolishness and laughability before him.

And so, he invites us to see what he sees and to *hear* how he laughs.

It's *not* a sinful, man-centered laugh, but it's a holy, God-centered laughter, where we simply see the *reality* of the situation in light of our sovereign Lord. And the whole situation is *laughable*.

It's the kind of laughter that brings us *out* of discouragement and despair *into* comfort and confidence in who our God is.

So, especially if you're going through a difficult time right now, the Lord graciously invites you to see what he sees, to hear how he laughs, to be comforted, and to move forward in confident faith, knowing that faith in his Word is more reliable than anything we may see or feel right now in the world.

<pause>

Second, this is a *warning* to those who would live their lives in arrogant mocking of God.

Perhaps many of us are not so bold to *outright* mock God, but if we live our lives *without reference* to him—if we reject or ignore God in the world he created—this is nothing other than *mocking* him.

Did Adam and Eve *outright* mock God with their *words* when they rebelled against him in the Garden? No, they mocked him and rebelled against him in how they *lived* without reference to God and his Word.

<pause>

If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you may not mock God with your *words*, but what does your *life* say?

Do you make decisions and live life in reference to who God is and what he has said in his Word?

Or do you functionally live as if *you* are the lord over your own life rather than the Lord who formed you in your mother's womb, who sustains your every breath and heartbeat, who gives you every gift and opportunity, and who created and sustains the very world that you live in?

<pause>

If you're not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, then you must face the fact that, even though you may not be conscious of it, you're *already* living a life that mocks God because you're living *without reference* to who God is and what he has said in his Word.

And if you continue to live in such a way, you will one day be put to *open shame* before the holy God who created you and to whom you are ultimately accountable. He *will* judge you for your sins against him; he *will* judge your life of even passive mockery against him.

But the good news (or gospel) of Jesus Christ is that judgment day has *not yet* come but *Jesus* has already come. And at the cross, *he* was put to open shame—publicly mocked and shamed as he

hung naked in view of all—so that all who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will *never* be mocked or put to shame by God on that final day.

Dying in our place, Jesus bore all *our* sin and shame upon himself on the cross; and resurrecting three days later, he conquered sin, death, and Satan, putting *them* to open shame.

So turn to him in repentance and faith—and join in the victory and the holy laughter of our Lord Jesus Christ who now reigns in the heavens over all his creation.

<pause>

So first, Othniel: a story to model; second, Ehud: a story of mockery; and third...

### III. Shamgar: a story that marvels [or surprises, or astonishes, or leaves us in amazement] (3:31)

Verse 31 says this:

<sup>31</sup> After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel.

Here, we are introduced to the first minor judge in the book of Judges: Shamgar.

To say that a judge is a “minor judge” (as opposed to a “major judge”) just means a couple things.

First, their narrative is *not* as long as a major judge—usually between 1-3 sentences.

Second, their narratives *don’t* begin in the same way as the major judges.

All the major judges are introduced with something like “And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” or “And the people of Israel *again* did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.” But minor judges don’t have that.

So, Shamgar is our first minor judge—and he only gets a one-sentence narrative.<sup>6</sup>

<pause>

So *what* exactly did Shamgar *do*?

We’re not told a lot of details, but what we’re told is *astonishing*—“[he] killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad.”

It’s already amazing that a *single* man killed 600 soldiers, but with an *oxgoad*??

An oxgoad was *not* a traditional weapon of war, like a sword or spear.

No, an oxgoad was a traditional tool of a *farmer*. It was basically a long stick with a pointed tip to poke at reluctant oxen as they were plowing the fields.

This would be the equivalent of defeating 600 soldiers with swords and shields with a leather belt with a metal buckle on the end.

Or if it were a kung fu movie, it would be like using an *umbrella*.

Or if it were a Jason Bourne movie, it would be like using a *book*.

<sup>6</sup> It begins with “After him”—that is, “After Ehud’s victory against the Moabites” but *before* Ehud’s death, which happens in the next verse in chapter 4 verse 1 (cf. Judg. 5:6). So Shamgar’s narrative probably happened *during* the 80 years of rest that Ehud had gained for Israel in the previous verse. But while Ehud’s victory was over the Moabites in the east, Shamgar’s victory was over the Philistines in the west, so they were in different regions of the Promised Land.

Except Shamgar wasn't a soldier or a kung fu master or a Jason Bourne. He was most likely just a *farmer*.

But he was a farmer *empowered* and used *mightily* by the LORD.<sup>7</sup>

<pause>

But another question we need to ask is: *Who* exactly was Shamgar?

We know Othniel was from the tribe of *Judah*, Ehud was from the tribe of *Benjamin*, but which tribe was Shamgar from?

There's no mention of any tribe, and that's probably because he was *not* from *any* of the 12 tribes of Israel.

"Shamgar" means "sojourner there," and it is a name that occurs *frequently* in ancient *non*-Israelite texts but nowhere else in the entire Bible.

On top of that, "Anath" was the name of a *Canaanite* goddess, so he likely came from *pagan* origins.

In short, Shamgar was *not* an Israelite, but like Rahab from Jericho and later Ruth from Moab, he was someone who *became* an Israelite by turning away from his pagan idolatry and turning to serve and worship the one true and living God.

So when verse 31 ends with "and *he also* saved Israel," it might be better translated as "and *even he* saved Israel."

<pause>

Just imagine being an Israelite reading through the book of Judges and you come to the narrative of Shamgar.

It's not a long narrative, but the punch would be immediately felt by any Israelite. "What?? The LORD used *even* this *non*-Israelite sojourner-*farmer* to save Israel??"

This was no *Othniel*, the proven warrior from the tribe of Judah.

This was no *Ehud*, the specially trained left-handed warrior from the tribe of Benjamin.

This was a nobody *farmer*—someone who was once *not* part of God's people but who later *became* part of God's people—who just had a stick with a pointed tip.

And that is a story that *marvels* (or surprises, or astonishes, or leaves us in amazement) because the LORD could use *even him*.

<pause>

So what does this have to do with us?

If we are believers in Jesus Christ, then this story that marvels is actually *our* story.

We were once *not* God's people, but through faith in the Lord Jesus, he has *made* us his people (1 Pet. 2:10).

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<sup>7</sup> The LORD is actually not mentioned in verse 31 anywhere. Later on, in Judges 10, while the LORD rebukes his people, he says this to them: "Did I not save you... from the Philistines?" (Judg. 10:11). And the only deliverance from the Philistines that is mentioned prior to that point is right here, where Shamgar defeated 600 Philistines with an oxgoad. And earlier in the second introduction that we looked at last week, it was clear that "the LORD raised up judges for [his people], the LORD was *with* the judge, and *he* saved them from the hand of their enemies" (Judg. 2:18).

Like Shamgar, we were once *enemies* of God who deserved nothing but his judgment for all our sin and idolatry (Rom. 5:10), but through faith in the one true Lord, he has made us his own and given us every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

<pause>

And if *that* were not enough of an amazing story, like Shamgar, the Lord also *uses* us to bring salvation to his people—*not* with an *oxgoad* but with the *gospel* of Jesus Christ.

Through our faithful proclamation and sharing of the gospel, we as *weak* and *ordinary* nobodies become *mighty* instruments in Lord's hands to bring salvation to more people around *us* and around the *world*.

They are still living in sin and idolatry *now*, but Christ has *already* purchased them as his *own* through his blood.

Wherever we are, the Lord says to us something similar to what he said to the apostle Paul in...

**Acts 18:9-11:** And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but **go on speaking and do not be silent**, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for **I have many in this city who are my people.**" And he stayed a year and six months, **teaching the word of God among them.**

Just linger on that passage a little longer, and may it encourage you to boldly share the gospel with others: "I have *many* in this city who are *my* people, so go on *speaking* and do *not* be silent—go on *teaching* the word of God among them."

The great *confidence* we have in sharing the gospel is that the Lord *will* save his people.

And the great *privilege* we have in sharing the gospel is that he uses *even us* to be his instruments in bringing salvation to his people.

<pause>

When I first entered university, I was *not* a Christian, but I had Christian roommates, who invited me to church.

I was never interested, but I eventually went to the church about a semester later amidst their repeated invitations.

And I wasn't someone you would *think* would become a Christian.

I had stopped going to church in high school, I didn't see how God had any relevance to my life, I cursed a lot, I partied a lot, and I enjoyed my life.

But eventually, through hearing and seeing and understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ *proclaimed* and *lived out* in the church, I came to put my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

<pause>

Later on, some of my friends in the church told me that after initially meeting me when I *first* came to church, they thought to themselves, "This guy is *never* coming back."

And *yet*, here I am, a Christian and a pastor in Indonesia—and that  *marvels* me.

<pause>

When God first saved me, I felt like I was in a *crowd* of people, and he pointed at *me* to come up to him and be *his*.

And I was thinking, “Really?? You want *me*??”

I couldn’t believe that God would save me and use my life for his redemptive purposes.

It *has been* and *will forever be* the greatest privilege of my life—and it will *marvel* me for all eternity.

### **Conclusion**

The details may be different, but if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then *this* is also *your* story.

Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar had their *own* stories, but the significance of *all* of our stories is how we’re connected to the Lord’s *greatest* story of redemption in Jesus Christ.

If you ever thought history or your life was boring, just think about how the Lord saved you and is using you for his redemptive purposes.

Think about it often, and may it never cease to *marvel* you.

Let’s pray.