

Unpredictable Deliverance

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to turn to our Bible reading, and Josh Johnston, one of our ministers, is continuing his series in the book of Judges. The book of Judges, yes. And he'll be preaching to us from Judges 3, verse 7 to 31.

But for our reading, we'll read from verse 5 and following. So if you'll turn with me to Judges 3. We do have visitor Bibles available, so if you need one, don't be shy.

Just grab one from outside the hall or give our welcome team a wave, and I'm sure they'll be happy to hand you a Bible. If you're using one of our church Bibles, it's found on page 202.

So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods.

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. Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan Rishathayim, king of Mesopotamia.

[1 : 22] And the people of Israel served Cushan Rishathayim eight years. 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 Canas, Caleb's younger brother.

The spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the Lord gave Cushan Rishathayim, king of Mesopotamia, into his hand.

And his hand prevailed over Cushan Rishathayim. So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel, the son of Canas, died. And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

And the Lord strengthened Aglon, the king of Moab, against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and went and defeated Israel.

And they took possession of the city of Palms. And the people of Israel served Aglon, the king of Moab, eighteen years. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, and the Lord raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gerah, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.

[2 : 38] The people of Israel sent tributes by him to Aglon, the king of Moab. And Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it in his right thigh under his clothes.

And he presented the tribute to Aglon, king of Moab. Now Aglon was a very fat man. And when Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who have carried the tributes. 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.

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 rose from his seat.

And 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.

[3 : 37] For he did not pull the sword out of his belly, and the dung came out. Then Ehud went out into the porch, and closed the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked them.

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 reliving himself in the closet of the cool chamber. 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. He had escaped while they delayed, and he passed beyond the idols and escaped to Sarah.

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. 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. And they killed at that time about 10,000 of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men, also translated to fat and stout, not a man escaped.

[4 : 52] So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel, and the land had rest for 80 years. After him was Shamgar, the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an ox goat.

And he also saved Israel. Amen. May God bless to us his words. Well, do you open your Bibles once again to Judges chapter 3.

Now, what does God love to do in this world? That can perhaps seem like the blandest of questions.

Perhaps sometimes our answers can be easily confused. But if we want to take the Bible seriously, we cannot get away from this. God loves to rescue.

Salvation flows out of his very heart into this world. Undeserved, unrivaled, unfathomable salvation seeps out of the pages of the Bible.

[6 : 04] God's purposes in this world are achieved above all through his wondrous work of salvation. And yet, it is possible, isn't it, for familiarity with God's salvation to make it feel somewhat ordinary to us.

Not because there's any lack in God, but because our sin-stained hearts cloud our vision. We lose sight of our needs and of God's righteous judgment and the sheer abundance of his grace.

And when that happens, salvation seems smaller than it is. Well, with that said, our passage this morning gives the Lord's people a fresh view of his scintillating salvation.

It blues up every tedious notion of sanitized, snoozy salvation and turns our hearts to the Savior who confounds all drab expectations.

Here, God's gracious rescue begins to play out amidst his people's sin and rebellion. flesh is now put on the cycle and the pattern of the judges that was introduced in last week's passage.

[7 : 18] Last week, Judges 2.6 to 3.6, we saw the deadly downward spiral of Israel's idolatry. But this week, our passage shows us the surprising mercy of God within that spiral.

And it shows us that Israel's deliverers do not come as we might expect. One, yes, is a faithful remnant from Caleb's line, but one is a left-handed assassin from the tribe of Benjamin.

And one appears for a single verse with an ox-goode in his hand. But through them all, the Lord is showing that his saving grace is not predictable, nor team, nor deserved, but it is real.

And so the first thing we see in verses 7 to 11 is the epitome of salvation. The epitome of salvation. God's salvation teaches us never to make peace with spiritual enslavement, for the Lord is wonderfully able to break the power of the very evil that our sin has allowed to master us.

Othniel, the first judge and deliverer, serves as the prototype of salvation throughout this period of the judges. He is, in many ways, the sort of savior you might expect among the Lord's people.

[8 : 44] We met Othniel back in chapter 1 when he rused to Caleb's challenge and he seized Kiriath-sephir and he won Caleb's daughter.

He belongs to Caleb's wider family, that line of faith and courage from all the way back in Joshua's day. Othniel is the archetypal hero.

But look at how events actually unfold. The cycle from last week is now playing out in history. First, there is apostasy following on from verses 5 and 6 where Israel intermarried with the Canaanites and served their gods.

We now get a real-time episode of such apostasy in verse 7. 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.

Evil is done in the sight of the Lord. God is forgotten. Baal is worshipped. It never takes long to descend into evil once we forget God and his works, once we stop letting his mighty acts shape our lives.

[9 : 56] You see, forgetfulness here is not spiritually neutral. Forgetfulness is not merely a lack of recall about God's mighty acts, but it's a lack of response to God himself.

Forgetting, in that way, is the doorway to disaster. And so, verse 8, that disaster comes in the shape of God's wrath. Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he sold them into the hand of Cushion, Rishathim, king of Mesopotamia.

You see, God's wrath is not mechanistic. It is personal. Because sin is a grave personal offense against the holy and loving God.

But with that said, what we see here also brings a tinge of hope. This wrath brings a tinge of hope even amidst his anger. Because God does not allow his people to bow to idols undisturbed. The bitterness we taste when we've chosen our own way is one of his loving prompts. He does not let us settle into sin and idolatry and comfort and contentment.

[11 : 18] And here, the bitterness is very bitter indeed. You see, God sells his people into the hand of Cushan, Rishathim, king of Mesopotamia or king of Aram, Naharim.

His name is hard to make sense of because it's unlikely to be his real historical name, the one you'd find in the historical records. It may well be the name Israel used for their tormentor, a kind of nickname.

It sounds like Cushan of double wickedness from Aram of double rivers. It's a name that captures the harsh and cruel oppression Israel experienced under his hand.

It's their little note of resistance to him, a nickname for their tyrant. And you see, they served this tyrant for eight years, eight years of grim servitude, eight years of devastating subjugation.

That is until verse nine. 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.

[12 : 30] Several times in Judges, cries go up to the Lord and a deliverer is raised up. We should be careful though as we read that in assuming that every cry is a cry of genuine repentance.

The word itself doesn't mean repentance and actually what we see throughout Judges is the cycle continues ever downwards after each judge dies. So it's not necessarily wholehearted repentance but what it does show us, verse nine, as the people cry out, what it does show us is the abundant mercy of God.

who really is moved by the distressed cries of his people. And so here comes Othniel. Othniel had not intermarried with the nations as Israel had in chapter three verse six.

No, he had married the daughter of Caleb, that great warrior of the faith. And so here is the prototypical savior being raised up. Verse 10, the spirit of the Lord was upon him and he judged Israel.

He went out to war and the Lord gave Kushan Rishathim into his hand. Othniel goes out to war, his hand reveals over Kushan of double wickedness and the fruit of his deliverance is 40 years of peace.

[13 : 46] Eight years of oppression, 40 years of peace because of Othniel. And so this is a wonderful picture of rescue for God's people. The expected savior, Othniel, of such pedigree, delivers them.

But before we get caught up in Othniel's aura, notice what is emphasized the whole way through this episode. Verse 7, it is the Lord who has sinned against.

Verse 8, it's the Lord's anger that is kindled. Verse 8 again, it's the Lord who sells them into the hand of Kushan. Verse 9, it's the Lord who raises up a judge.

Verse 10, it's the spirit of the Lord who comes upon Othniel. Verse 10, again, it's the Lord who gives Kushan into Othniel's hand. God is the chief actor here.

His salvation doesn't depend on having just the right kind of deliverer available. Oh, thank goodness I've got Othniel. God can use foreign kings as his instruments of discipline and he can raise up deliverers to rescue his people.

[14 : 56] Even those whom God has used for a time as instruments of judgment, chastening and discipline, he can just as quickly move against by raising up a deliverer.

Well, here is one thing this Othniel episode teaches us. We must never make peace with spiritual enslavement. God. Yes, the reality may well be that our sin is real, the consequences may be bitter, the oppression may feel deserved, but real faith does not just shrug and say, well, that's just how it is now, isn't it?

God loves to rescue and real faith never settles down under the rule of evil. It cries out to the Lord. Real faith stirs us to fight.

It trusts God to grant victory, and so it discovers that the Spirit of God is wonderfully able to give victory where defeat once seemed inevitable. I wonder if there's something that you've stopped crying out about.

A sin, a fear, an addiction, some kind of bondage, something you've admitted the faith on, you've renamed it the new normal.

[16:26] Well, listen to William Still in these verses. He writes, God is on the side of the dispersal and defeat of evil, even when he has allowed it to envelop his people for their sins.

This is doubly encouraging. It means not only that it is a person and not blind force who is in control, but also he is favorably disposed to those who cry to him and bestir themselves in faith to implement with their own hands the victory which faith seeks.

We can always cry out to the Lord. He is on the side of the dispersal and defeat of evil. But Othniel is also here by way of contrast.

One commentator notes that in some ways Othniel is almost a kind of fill in the blanks judge. The patterns all here insert the judge's name, insert the oppressor's name, and the cycle's complete. Apostasy, oppression, cry, deliverance, rest. It's plain, almost formulaic, this commentator says. Not because salvation is ever bland, of course it isn't, but because the writer is setting Othniel up as a literary contrast to what follows.

[17:48] For if Othniel is the epitome of salvation, then Ehud shows us secondly, the earthiness of salvation verses 12 to 30, the earthiness of salvation.

You see, God's salvation is not sanitized, it's thrillingly able to enter into the mess and muck of real life, to overthrow powers that enslave, and to put joy back into the mouths of his oppressed people. This episode begins with the same pattern, it follows the same pattern. verse 12, there's apostasy, verse 12, there's wrath, verse 15, there are cries to the Lord, verse 15, there's a deliverer, and then verse 30, there's rest.

But this time, the pattern is not plain and formulaic, no, it's filled with all manner of interesting and exciting details.

This episode is comic, it's ironic, it's earthy, it's messy. So let's walk through the story. We see then that God strengthens Eglon, king of Moab, as his instrument of discipline.

[19:03] And verse 13, Eglon joins forces with his neighbors, the Ammonites and Amalekites. And so we see a picture of growing strength rising against Israel. And the picture gets even worse than what we saw with Cushan of double wickedness.

Israel is defeated, and Eglon's army takes the city of Palms. That is Jericho. That key victory all the way back at the start of the conquest, Jericho.

Here, Israel is pushed right back to where it all began and defeated. And this time, verse 14, the oppression lasts not eight years, but 18.

And so the picture is ramped up distress for the Lord's people. And so again, verse 15, they cry out, and again the Lord raises up a deliverer.

But this time it's not picture perfect off Neil. No, this time it is Ehud, a Benjaminite. The Benjaminites mentioned in chapter one, they failed to clear out what they were meant to do.

[20:15] And look at the detail. Ehud was a left-handed man. That in itself is laden with irony. Benjamin means son of the right hand.

So here is Ehud, son of the right hand, who's left-handed. And in the Bible, it's the right hand that normally signifies strength and honor and skill and salvation.

Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.

But here is left-handed Ehud. And it was likely that Ehud was left-handed because of some sort of deformity or disability in his right hand. So God is raising up here an unlikely deliverer.

In fact, to the people of Israel, he looked much more suited to delivery than deliverance. You see, he's a delivery man for the tribute that was to be sent to Eglon.

[21:18] The tribute gives us another window into Israel's plight. They must hand their riches and provisions over to the tyrant who rules over them. And Ehud's the delivery boy. But then in verse 16, we begin to see what is really at play.

After all, for all the gore and grime of this story, we've already been told that it is God who's raised up Ehud as a deliverer. And so Ehud crafts a double-edged sword, a cubit in length.

That's about the length from your knuckles to your elbow, a very small sword or a large dagger. And he binds it to his right thigh under his clothes.

A right-hander would normally strap his weapon to his left thigh, but not this left-handed deliverer.

And that's a key detail for the deception that is to follow. And so off Ehud goes to deliver tributes to

Eglon and we're given more detail, aren't we?

You see Eglon, verse 17, was a very fat man. Not just a fat man, enormously fat. And to add to the picture, the name Eglon means something like bull calf.

[22 : 35] So here was a king who was a fattened bull calf. Now when Ehud presents the tribute, he sends away those who'd accompanied him, those who'd been helping to carry it.

And then verse 19, Ehud himself turns back at the idols near Gilgal. That's not an incidental detail. Gilgal was another key marker for the Lord's people, the place they first camped out in the land, the place where their reproach of Egypt had been rolled away, where their covenant identity had been reaffirmed with circumcision and Passover.

Gilgal was the place where stones had been set up to testify that the Lord had brought them across the Jordan safely. Gilgal should have been a standing testimony of the Lord's faithfulness, a reminder of Israel's commitment to the one true God.

But here, notice verse 19, Ehud turns back at the idols. That's what had become of Israel's sacred places. And as Ehud turns back, he claims to have a secret message for Eglon.

Eglon takes this very seriously, perhaps because Ehud has turned back at the idols. He thinks this is a divine word coming from these idols. And so it's all been building.

[23 : 54] The writer has four times referred to Eglon, and each time it's Eglon the king, Eglon the king. And here it builds again with Ehud saying, I have a secret message for you, O king.

O wondrous king, O mighty king. Well, what might God say to earthly kings? What might his message be? See, this is an important message, not just for Eglon, but for anyone who longs for a worldly king, or anyone who thinks that he is one.

And so Eglon waits with bated breath. We, of course, have more than an inkling about what's coming, what the message is. But he's eager to hear, and he says, silence. So he sends away all his attendants, all his guards, for this message from the Lord.

Ehud, verse 20, enters Eglon's presence, and the narrative slows right down now so that we get all the little details. He goes into the cool chamber on the roof.

Eglon was alone. Eglon, we know how foolish this big fat king has been, and his folly is about to be exposed. Ehud says, I have a message from God for you.

[25 : 10] And there's big fat Eglon who arises from his seat. Even stupid, greedy pagan kings recognize the respect that ought to be afforded to a divine word.

He stands in reverence to receive it. Another key detail. Because his enormous fat belly would need to be stretched out if this plan was to succeed.

If this little blade is going to do its business. So he stands up and verse 21, Ehud reaches his left hand for the blade on his right thigh. A touch of irony.

Ehud would not have been expected to carry a weapon. He's probably deformed. The guards would be looking for bulges on the opposite side. He was just the deformed delivery boy, no threat.

But Ehud takes the secret sword and delivers the secret message from God. A sharp sting into Eglon's fat belly. Verse 22, the hilt, the handle even goes in.

[26 : 15] It's swallowed up by the fat so that it closes over it. The blade stays in, which is a lot more than can be said for the dung, which comes seeping and spewing out.

Message delivered. God's sword of judgment strikes down this fattened bull calf, this tyrannical oppressor of God's people who's grown fat, very fat, from oppressing them.

God does not stand for that. Worldly kings who exploit their role face God's judgment, even where they have been instruments of God's activity.

His sword of judgment strikes. In verse 23, Ehud escapes, closing and locking the doors behind him. And the comedy of this episode continues. Do you see the stupidity, the ineptitude, the irony carrying on?

Eglon's guards notice the closed doors. They no doubt smell the dung. And conclude verse 24, he's just relieving himself. He's using the facilities.

[27 : 25] And so they wait, and they wait, and they wait, to the point of embarrassment. And then finally, verse 25, they open the doors, and there lies their dead king.

All the while, with such farcical delay, Ehud has escaped. Verse 26, he passes once again past the idols. Do you see that?

The idols are passed by on the way to kill Eglon, and on the escape after killing him. Idols. Well, they offer no protection for Eglon, and they offer no punishment for killing him.

You could almost say that these idols simply stood idly by, as the great pagan king was struck down. That's all idols ever do for us.

Promise lots, but stand idly by as destruction comes. And so after all of this, Ehud goes and he rallies the Israelites. Verse 27, his deeds have established him as a leader, and he declares that the Lord has now given Israel's enemies into their hands.

[28 : 35] They seize the fords of Jordan, and in verse 29, they kill 10,000 Moabites, all strong, evil-bodied men. The word there is actually fat or stout men.

And so the fat king, the very fat king and his fat soldiers are two scenes of the same deliverance. The regime that has fed on Israel is now cut down by Israel because the Lord has given Moab into their hand.

There you go, a comedic, ironic, messy, earthy deliverance. Here are two implications from Ehud's deliverance. The first one is the earthiness of salvation.

This whole event is laden with irony and comedy. It's not simply a defeat for evil Eglon, it's humiliation, a humiliation ultimately at the Lord's hand. And so the Lord's people taste 80 years of rest now.

And friends, we must not be shocked at this picture of salvation. It is scintillating. It is the Bible story of little boys dreams. It's exciting, it's earthy, because it is a real picture of salvation.

[29 : 53] Now, of course, there are some forms of mess that we instinctively recoil from. A few weeks before my daughter was born, I confessed to my wife that one of the things I was most apprehensive about was the thought of our baby constantly vomiting on me.

even more than the dirty nappies. But more than a year in, that apprehension was misplaced. It's never been a bother.

It's a delight to nurture and bring up this little tiny precious one. Well, similarly, God is not waiting only to enact some sort of sanitized salvation, as though the grime and the mess of this world are things he could not involve himself with.

No. Ehud shows us that God is not far off waiting for us to clean ourselves up so that we're ready for him to step in once we're prim and proper. God steps down, he reaches down into all the mess of our sin, all the consequences, all the ruined relationships, all the brokenness, all the taintedness and filth of our lives.

And he gets involved. And he's able to deal with it all in full. There is new mess of our making that God's salvation cannot meet, match, and overcome.

[31 : 21] And God wants us to not only see that but to feel it. That's why he's given us this vivid, earthy episode. God's salvation doesn't stop short of dealing with heinous and hideous tyrants.

It hasn't stopped short of dealing with the devil. And it isn't kept away by our unholy mess. And praise the Lord for that.

Praise the Lord for Ehud. Second implication. We see in this the joy of salvation. after the mess and mire, respite and rejoicing.

Think of the Scottish rugby team back in 2018 when the rugby team finally ended ten years of pain in the Calcutta Cup at the hands of the vile English.

That wasn't any old results. It was a victory to savor, one to retell. They'd be going on about it for months. Anytime an Englishman came along it would be celebrated, there'd be great reveling and rejoicing.

[32 : 33] We stuck it to them after ten years of suffering. Aha, relief, relief, catharsis. Well, in a small and trite way, that is a little picture of how Israel would have delighted in this wondrous victory.

Oppressed, extorted, subjugated, crushed, and impoverished by Eglon the Enormous. They were not just given relief and rescue, they're left with a story to retell, no doubt with glee.

You can imagine the smiles appearing on Israelite faces as they retold this story with all of its irony and comedy. And so that shows us that when God reaches out to rescue us, to lift us up in his salvation, he does not leave us miserable, maruse, or maudlin.

No, his salvation brings a smile to our faces. He doesn't save us to leave us miserable. As the psalmist says, weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning.

God's salvation is a daring wreath upon the kingdom of Satan, a daring defeat of death itself, a scintillating subjugation of the power of sin. And though these enemies may have bloodied our nooses, although they may have wreaked havoc with us, with God's salvation there will be a teal to

tell of mesmerizing grace, of a rescue that has stretched down and lifted us up.

[34 : 15] God's salvation is anything but mundane and ordinary. it is an audacious rescue against all odds. Ehud shows us that God's salvation brings a smile to the faces of his people.

It allows us to revel in the Lord's triumph over the ugliness of evil, over big, fat, greedy, ridiculous, and stupid evil that he has conquered for us.

And then almost before we can catch our breath, another deliverer appears, briefly, strangely, but wonderfully effective.

And so we see thirdly with Shamgar the eccentricity of salvation, verse 31, the eccentricity of salvation. God's salvation is able to turn obscure servants and ordinary tools into mighty instruments of deliverance because the Lord delights to shame worldly strength through what looks weak, unimpressive, and unlikely after Ehud Shamgar.

The normal pattern isn't quite present here, but the writer clearly wants us to see Shamgar alongside Ehud and to see again that verse 31 Shamgar saved Israel.

[35 : 38] He was another deliverer, another rescuer. Now we don't know much about Shamgar at all. One verse is all he gets, and yet his deeds were significant enough for Deborah later on in Judges 5 to label the days of Shamgar.

He enters from obscurity. His name is unusual. It likely is not even an Israelite name. He may even have been a foreigner. But look at what he does.

600 Philistines fall at his hand. The enemy who would later bring Israel such persistent trouble is here single handedly troubled by Shamgar, the obscure outsider.

But there's more. How does he level these 600 Philistines? With an ox good. An ox good was a farmer's tool.

A long wooden pole with a sharp point to prod and direct the oxen and often a kind of shovel like blade on the opposite end. A farm tool. God's salvation is not only earthy, it's eccentric, totally at odds with what this world might expect.

[36 : 57] He can use an unfamiliar, perhaps even a foreign farmer to strike down in judgment those who stand against his kingdom. And not with the shiniest swords or the sharpest blades, but with whatever old implement is lying around.

And this is just a picture of how God works out his purposes in salvation in this world, isn't it? With Ehud and Shamgar, we have the whole pattern of the cross and of salvation shining backwards into history.

Ehud, the left-handed deliverer, Shamgar, the ox-gold wielding saviour. But then later, when it was time for Israel to have a king, it wasn't to be Saul, more handsome and taller than any other, a king like all the nations all around him.

No, it was to be David, the youngest son, not the oldest, the one left to tend the sheep. David, who with just a sling and stone defeated mighty Goliath.

And later still, the Bible speaks of the saviour of all saviours, as the one who had no form or majesty that we should look at him, no beauty that we should desire him.

[38 : 10] One who was born not in a palace city, but in little Bethlehem, laid in a manger. One who came to his own, and yet his own did not receive him. Derided and written off as the carpenter's son, from the place of which people asked, can anything good come from Nazareth?

death. The one whose procession into his royal city was made on a donkey. The king whose coronation took place, yes, with all the regalia, dressed in purple, declared to be a king, given a crown, though made of thorns, all in mockery, and then lifted up onto his throne, which was wooden, and shaped like a cross.

And his great and triumphant victory looked like humiliating defeat, the perfect and innocent one dying as a criminal.

All so that it can be said and shown, God choose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God choose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

God choose what is low and despised in the world. The unexpectedness of God's salvation is a great encouragement and boon to us because he does truly reach down into the muck and mire of our world, into the mess of our hopelessness and helplessness, and he confounds all expectations.

[39 : 37] He silences all mockers. He humbles the proud and the mighty, and he draws to himself and raises up those who cry out to him, those who are helpless and seeking rescue.

And in it all, he shows the world that salvation happens only ever by his hand. But it happens by his hand.

You see, God's salvation, his whole design, leaves no possibility for man to boast, no root for us to depend upon ourselves, no possibility for us to get too big for our boots.

He doesn't wait for just the right conditions to work his wonders. He does not depend on man's brains or brawn. In fact, he works in such a way as to show that these things are futile on the room. So it is unexpected salvation, earthy salvation, eccentric salvation, but real and eternal salvation. God's ways of working look eccentric to this world.

[40 : 45] Shamgar shows us that. that's true of the gospel itself. It's true of the savior himself. But isn't it also true for the church?

Remember what Paul wrote to the Corinthians? Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But all by design.

Brothers and sisters, our church does not need to be impressive in the eyes of the world to be useful in the saving purposes of God. And you and I as believers do not need to be impressive in the eyes of the world to be useful in God's saving purposes.

If the Lord can use an ox gudge in Shamgar's hand, he can use an ordinary church, a modest youth group, a steady witness, he can use a stumbling conversation.

A faithful junior church teacher, a simple sermon, or a faltering prayer. Because any simple instrument when in the Lord's hand can become a tool of salvation.

[42 : 04] After him was Shamgar who killed 600 of the Philistines with an ox gudge. he also saved Israel.

Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, we need your grace.

We're so often dull to the wonder of your salvation. And therefore slow to cry out to you. Perhaps even willing to settle under that which would enslave us.

So awaken us, we pray. Awaken us to be ready and willing to cry out to you for salvation. And to find joy in your salvation.

And as these things are so, would you be pleased to make us instruments in your hand? Help us, we pray. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

[43 : 12] Amen.