

A Junkyard Orchestra

Forgotten Lives . . . Remembered Truths, Part 4

Judges 3

Around 24 months ago, a major news service ran a story entitled, “From landfill in Paraguay, sweet music emerges”.

A poor community in Paraguay has formed an amazing orchestra that plays instruments created from pieces of trash found at their city landfill. There’s actually a slum built on the landfill where more than 1,000 tons of trash gets dumped every day.

More than 1,000 residents actually make their living by picking through the trash with long hooks called *ganchos* (hence the garbage pickers are called *gancheros*).

When Favio Chavez, a young professional and musician saw the desperate poverty among the *gancheros* and their families who lived at the landfill, he decided to donate some of his time by offering music lessons to the children.

At first Chavez only had five instruments to spare, but he soon had 50 students. So he asked one of the trash-pickers, Nicolas Gomez, to keep an eye out for materials that might be used to make some instruments.

What has happened has been amazing.

A cello made out of an oil can and old cooking tools, a flute made from tin cans, a drum set that uses X-ray film as the skins, bottle caps that serve as the keys for a saxophone, a double bass constructed out of chemical cans, and a violin made from a battered aluminum salad bowl and strings tuned with old dinner forks.

This recycled orchestra plays beautifully – classical music, folk tunes and popular pieces.

With tongue in cheek and a slight play on words, they don’t refer to themselves as the London

Harmonic Symphony, but the Landfill Harmonic Symphony.

Chavez claims that this amazing story has taught him at least one profound lesson: “People realize that we shouldn’t throw away trash carelessly. Well, we shouldn’t throw away people either.”ⁱ

I recommend you search online under junkyard orchestra and listen to one of the young boys play a piece of classical music on his cello made from an oil drum, some old kitchen tools and a stick of wood.

What creative, dedicated people can make out of trash is truly amazing.

But I got to tell you – as amazing as that is, it isn’t nearly as amazing as what a creative, dedicated God can make out of people; especially people that have been tossed aside; overlooked, ignored – or even considered unusable.

The truth is, God is most often searching for His servants, miles away from the beaten path.

He’s creating an orchestra by rescuing and recycling, discarded, grace redeemed people.

The truth is, God most often chooses to use the unlikely, not many from among those who are strong or noble or influential or impressive (I Corinthians 1:26).

The average Christian feels inadequate due to lack of education, or experience, or charisma, or gifting, or physical attributes; some believe they don’t belong in the orchestra of God’s grace because of their past, or their family history or personal limitations.ⁱⁱ

Warren Wiersbe writes, When God wants to move His program along He chooses the most unlikely, the least apparent, the most ordinary person

and then accomplishes through them the most unpredictable and many times the most unexpected results.ⁱⁱⁱ

I like the way D. L. Moody commented on that text when he said – and I’m paraphrasing – It is remarkable how God uses ordinary people who refuse to believe they deserve any credit.

Let me introduce to you to someone who knew it was all about God – and yet at the same time he courageously gave everything he had to Him – which is the way it works.

Once again, take your copy of the Old Testament and turn to the Book of Judges.

As you’re turning, you need to know that the Book of Judges is a record of the nation Israel sinning, being disciplined, repenting, being rescued – then sinning, being disciplined, repenting, enjoying the blessing of God again.

The book of Judges is the record of Israel’s cycle of sin and God’s never failing grace; Judges is the record of Israel’s foolishness and God’s forgiveness.

And by the way, don’t ever be even slightly tempted to say, “Those Israelites – talk about thick headed . . . can you believe the way they sin and then go through the agony of discipline and despair and then repentance and then God forgives them and then what do they do? They rebel all over again?”

Can you believe them?

Yes, I can . . . I happen to live with someone who does the very same thing. I’m not talking about my wife. I happen to live with me and I know me. And am I ever glad for God’s relentless discipline and forgiveness and grace.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “God never allows His people to sin successfully.”^{iv}

In other words, we can neither get away with it completely nor enjoy it fully – God makes sure of that.

So the Book of Judges is the narrative of Israel’s unrelenting sin . . . and God’s unrelenting grace.

Now what God will do, whenever His people come to their senses and cry out in repentance, is to raise up a judge. The Judges form the narrative of this Book, which is why it has been named The Book of Judges.

One more thing before I introduce you to a long forgotten judge – I wanna make sure you don’t think of these judges as you might the judge you stood before not too long ago where you paid the fine for your traffic ticket – or worse.

He or she was wearing a long black robe – they were sitting up on a raised platform behind an imposing desk.

Old Testament Judges were different; you need to think of them more like a Sheriff in Wyoming – with dirt streets, and town crooks and gun battles at high noon; think of Wyatt Earp and the shootout at the O K Corral – and you’ll be a lot closer to the true context.

These judges here were fighters – Samson was one of them. And wherever they went, the enemies of God and of Israel were killed in what was nothing less than judgment of God.

Now one of the least known judges is the one I wanna focus on today.

His name is Ehud.

I’ve never met a parent who named their son, Ehud, in honor of this judge. For one thing, we don’t remember him.

But in his day, this unlikely nobody rose to become a special instrument in God’s orchestra of justice and redemption.

Turn over to *Judges chapter 3 and let’s touch down at verse 15. But when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.*

Now stop. I’m left handed . . . how many of you are left-handed? Why point out here that Ehud was left-handed? Why make such a big deal out of that?

I’m left handed . . . is that a problem?

My grandson, Nicholas, was over the other day and he was throwing a ball to me, and I immediately noticed that he was throwing it with his left-hand. I got so excited about that – but he’ll soon enough discover that the world is designed for right-handed people.

You drive a stick-shift and you’d better get some coordination going with your right hand and your feet.

I remember as a student being so frustrated with having to write in those spiral bound notebooks, because I always had to rest my hand on the metal spiral while I wrote while the other students got to rest their hand on a flat surface – which is the main reason I never got good grades.

And then, during the late 80’s when I planted this church – all the other pastors who were really with it – with the technology of the day – they got to use overhead projectors and they could write during their sermons all the points of application – but if I

tried – and I did – my hand followed that sharpie pen across the transparency and smeared whatever I wrote – I could never use the overhead projector . . . which is why our church never grew.

Did you know that in the French language, an awkward man is simply referred to with the French word for left-handed? The word sinister in Latin is the word for the left hand.^v

The truth is, centuries ago, it was actually considered a curse from God to be left-handed . . . and it had to be corrected at all costs.

Now we know, through brain research that those people who are left handed are dominated by the right hemisphere of their brain.

Which means, left handed people are in their right mind! I just had to say that.

Now, is the Bible just pointing out some trivia point that Ehud was a lefty? Not really.

The Hebrew expression literally translated means, “deformed – or hindered – in his right hand.”^{vi}

Now we’re told here that he was from the tribe of Benjamin – a tribe known for skillful warriors able to use both hands equally in battle.

But this text informs us that he was not ambidextrous at all but, in fact, able to use only his left hand.^{vii}

In other words, he was left-hand because his right hand was physically disabled.

One Old Testament author wrote that Ehud would have grown up enduring the taunts of children in his village and the whispers of young women his age; he’d seen the old men shake their heads in pity and wonder how in the world he would ever earn a living when he reached manhood.

All that to say, as the people began to call out to God in repentance for a deliverer to end their shame and judge their idolatrous enemy, the Moabite nation, had there been an election runoff for a Judge and a deliverer – Ehud would have never been on the ballot.

For 18 years the king of Moab and his allies have made the Israelite life miserable; he has subjugated them, taken their finest young men, and trafficked their young women – kept them nearly insolvent with demands for greater and greater taxation.

And now, after 18 years, the Israelites recognize these are consequences of their own rebellion against God and they cry out to God.

It’s time to take the tribute money to Eglon, the Moabite King.

And Ehud makes plans that are evidently confidential – notice *verse 16. And Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length* (about the length of the knife you use to cut your Thanksgiving turkey) *and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak.*

A right handed warrior is going to strap his sword or knife to his left side so he can reach it. They won’t be wearing swords anyway – more than likely, they know they will be searched and patted down.

This is where Ehud’s disability begins to open the door of possibility. The Moabite guard won’t even think of patting down the right leg . . . and certainly not the right side of an obviously handicapped man.

What others think of as a deformity God will use as an opportunity.

Think about it this way: Ehud is actually the only person in the nation with the remotest possibility of getting close enough to the king to kill him and release Israel from his Moabite grasp.

Now verse 17. And he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man (now that bit of information will weigh in later – no pun intended). *18. And it came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. 19. But he himself (this is Ehud) turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal, and said, “I have a secret message for you, O King.”*

Here’s what’s happening. The Israelites hand over the tribute, but the opportunity Ehud was looking for to kill the king and rescue Israel doesn’t pan out. The text implies that the king was in a hurry to get back to his cool roof chamber.

So now the Israelites are traveling back home from the King’s palace in Jericho and Ehud is probably in turmoil. He doesn’t want to pass up this once in a year opportunity.

And then – no doubt from God – the idea comes to him. He tells the other Israelites to keep on their journey and Ehud comes back to the palace with the promise of a message from God.

The only condition is that Ehud must be granted a private audience with the king.

Why not . . . what threat can this disabled man be to our King?

So the king agrees and Ehud is escorted up to his private quarters on this flat palace roof.

Notice verse 20. And Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you."

And he did – by the way – a message of judgment – a verdict from the Judge of death.

The king arose from his seat – no doubt struggling because he was obese – and Ehud stepped forward, reached for that dagger with his left hand and – the text tells us in **verse 21; he thrust it into his belly. 22. The handle also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly – and the refuse came out.**

It's graphic here . . . in fact, the text sort of goes into slow motion – it's intended to show the utter futility and the ultimate tragedy of man literally bloated with luxury and sinful decadence, killed by a disabled man empowered by God.

By the way, this king was a descendant of Lot, Abraham's nephew. He along with his nation had continued to reject the God of Abraham and had reveled in having Abraham's descendants under their heel – priding themselves in the fact that evidently even the God of Abraham wasn't strong enough to break the iron grip of Moab.

And now – irony of ironies – God uses a disabled man to end his life.

Now, the text implies that Ehud really hadn't planned on coming back home. This was going to be a one way military mission – with no possible hope of returning home alive.

But God had other plans – even somewhat comical plans at that as He humbles this idolatrous nation's pride and allows his disabled servant to escape with his life.

Look at verse 23. Then Ehud went out into the vestibule and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked them.

In these days of antiquity keys were made from flat pieces of wood . . . doors could be locked from the inside. So Ehud effectively pushed the lock and then closed the door behind him; they'll need a key to unlock the door.^{viii}

Notice verse 24. When he had gone out, his servants came and looked, and behold, the doors of the roof chamber were locked; and they said, "He is only relieving himself in the cool room."

In other words, they assume the king has locked the doors because he's in the bathroom.

Ehud calmly walks out of the palace – waiting any moment to hear the alarm; but the guard is back

in the palace assuming the King is in the bathroom . . . and he's evidently not the kind of king to interrupt when he's in the bathroom.

Notice verse 25. And they waited until they became anxious – I mean, they're pacing around wondering why on earth he's taking so long! The Hebrew text can read they waited to the point of embarrassment.^{ix}

In other words, none of them wanted to volunteer to be the guy to knock on the door and potentially embarrass the king and certainly embarrass themselves.

So they waited and waited and waited until it became a national security crisis.

I agree with one Old Testament scholar who wrote that God reveals what happens here in order to provoke laughter, if not joyful hilarity among the freed Jewish nation over this comedy of errors and turn of events.^x

Look at verse 25b. Therefore they took the key and opened them, and behold, their master had fallen in the floor dead.

They're mystified . . . remember, there's no visible weapon – it's going to be a while before they probably figure it out.

And by now, Ehud, the disabled man ends up commanding the armies to draw up in battle and they kill 10,000 Moabite troops – notice the irony **of verse 29 – and they struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men.**

In other words, *they* weren't crippled . . . or disabled . . . but neither was God on their side empowering them to do His will.

The irony is intended to make the point. People who are powerful and skillful and valiant and experienced, but do not have the power of God – are not as powerful as people with limitations who are empowered by God.

What are your limitations?

What are your excuses? What does the grace of God need to overcome – or forgive in order to use you for His glory?

- Abraham was old
- Leah was unattractive
- Joseph had a prison record
- David committed adultery and conspired to murder
- Jonah quit
- So did John Mark
- Elijah wanted to die
- Jeremiah grew deeply depressed

- Peter chose sleep instead of prayer then refused to admit he knew Jesus – how’s that for a testimony?
- Naomi was a widow
- The Samaritan woman at the well had a reputation
- Rahab never outran her past as a prostitute
- Zacchaeus had spent a career as a white collar thief
- Thomas always assumed the worst and battled doubts
- Paul was never physically healthy and traveled most often with a doctor
- Timothy was inexperienced and fearful

Take it from these saints of old – including Ehud, the forgotten Judge –

- your disabilities do not disable God;
- your limitations do not limit God.

There’s no telling what God can do through someone who fully understands that he or she deserves none of the credit.

Hudson Taylor once said later in life, “God is sufficient for God’s work . . . God does not do His work by large committees. He trains someone to be quiet enough and small enough, and then He uses them.”^{xi}

The treasure of His gospel poured into and through vessels of clay – highlight the glory of His creative genius.

Discarded pieces of trash – that’s the Body of Christ:

- a junkyard orchestra – that’s the Redeemed
- a symphony made up of people,
 - recycled by grace –
 - refashioned by our unrelenting gracious God – our creative, forgiving, redeeming Divine Conductor – Who allows us to play again and yet again – to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness and into a marvelous light.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/22/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Mathew Woodley, managing editor, PreachingToday.com; sources: Anastasia Tsioulcas, “The Landfill Harmonic: An Orchestra Built from Trash,” NPR (12-19-12); Pedro Servin, “From landfill in Paraguay, sweet music emerges,” The Seattle Times (12-15-12)

ii Gary Inrig, Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay (Moody Press, 1979), p. 44

iii Adapted from Warren Wiersbe, Be Available: Judges (Victor Books, 1994), p. 22

iv Wiersbe, p. 26

v Inrig, p. 50

vi Cyril J. Barber, Judges: A Narrative of God’s Power (Loizeaux Brothers, 1990), p. 61

vii Wiersbe, p. 30

viii Barber, p. 63

ix Ibid, p. 61

x Dale Ralph Davis, Such a Great Salvation: Expositions of the Book of Judges (Baker, 1990), p. 60

xi Wiersbe, p. 54