

Judges 3:12-30; Ps. 2 “A Surprising Savior” I. The New Oppressor II. The Uncommon Savior

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we return today to the book of Judges and we pick up in chapter 3 where we find another cycle or sin. Remember that in this cycle, a time of peace is followed by Israel turning away from the Lord in rebellion and begins to serve idols and foreign gods. So the Lord gives Israel over into the hand of oppressive rulers. Here in bondage and slavery, Israel cries out for mercy. God in His grace hears and provides a savior- He raises up a judge who rescues His people. Last time we saw Othniel- the son in law of Caleb, who was a mighty husband savior. He delivered Israel from the hand of king double wicked- and the land had rest for 40 years. But Othniel dies- he is just a man after all- and Israel returns to her old ways like a dog returning to its vomit. We also see that in each cycle, the repentance is not as whole hearted. Each cycle brings us lower into the state of idolatry and chaos- everyone doing what is right in their own eyes. Today we are introduced to Ehud and Eglon. The conflict is told in very colorful and graphic language- yet we once again read of God’s grace- His kindness bestowed on wicked mankind. Remember that even here we are reading of Jesus Christ and His love- the good news is told as we see God delivering His people with a surprising savior. We must also remember that Israel is a theocracy- the land of Canaan was God’s special and chosen piece of property. In this conflict, God is dealing with idolatry and sin. God was working in a particular and unique way during this time. Our application will not be- lets act like Ehud. Rather, today we see that the LORD gives rest to His people by defeating the oppressive ruler with a surprising savior. Today- on Palm Sunday- we are reminded of just how surprising our Savior is!

I. The New Oppressor

Our passage begins in the all too similar fashion- Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. Once again, Israel rebels against her husband and lord. So the Lord raises up Eglon- giving strength to this foreign king. God enables this wicked king to oppress and afflict His people! Why? Remember that God is doing something important in the hearts of His people- God is teaching them what sin is really like. Basically God says- if you want to be like the nations I will let the nations rule over you. If you choose to serve idols and false gods- I will give you into the hands of those who serve these false gods. Then you will see that sin leads to bondage- then you will see you sin as it really is- slavery! If you

reject me, then I will give you the desires of your heart! God is scourging- disciplining his straying child to teach them- to draw them back to Himself! So the Lord sets up Eglon. Eglon is introduced as the fat king. His name literally means- a little calf or choice cow. By the oppression of the Israelite people, Eglon grew fat by decadence. He was the king of Moab- and he aligned himself with the Ammonites and Amalekites. Remember back in Genesis the passage about Lot and his daughters- two sons were born to Lot- Moab and Ben-ammi. These two people groups- the Moabites and Ammonites join forces against their kin, Abraham's children, in order to oppress them. Israel had failed to bring their tithe to the Lord, now they were forced to bring tribute to a foreign king. Israel was serving golden calves, so the Lord sets a calf king over Israel. After defeating the tribes on the east side of the Jordan, Eglon crosses over to the west and advances against the chosen inheritance of God's people. He then rebuilds the City of Palms in v. 13- making Jericho his base of operations west of the Jordan. There is an interesting twist- the City of Palms or Jericho has been defeated when Israel crossed the Jordan. It was not Joshua that defeated this walled city- but it was the LORD that reduced this city to rubble. In Joshua 6, Joshua pronounced a curse upon this city saying that anyone who rebuilt it would forfeit the life of his sons. Yet this is the very city that Eglon chooses to rebuild- Eglon is making a very public spectacle of this city. By this action, the king of Moab is denying God's power and the Lord's right over the land. This is much more than just some king expanding his territory- it is a frontal attack on the Promised Land, the chosen people and upon the covenantal God! Thus far it appears that wickedness is getting the upper hand. It looks like idolatry works and that the foreign gods are more powerful than the sovereign LORD. God's people are made a laughingstock- and even forced to serve other kings. But God will have the last laugh as Ps. 2 says. Even in our world today, it sometimes looks like the tide of darkness is growing. Idolatry is ramped and the church is ridiculed and despised. But we must not forget that as v. 12 makes clear, even in the dark times God is and remains in control! God strengthened Eglon for a reason- God was at work in Israel and God is working today! The night is the darkest just before dawn! The kings of the nations may rage and plot. But there is a King who sits above!

II. The Uncommon Savior

Here in slavery, oppression and bondage Israel sees the error of their way. They cry out to the LORD. And in God's mercy He hears- He raises up a judge and a savior for His people. God raises up Ehud. Now Ehud is an unlikely savior- first we find out that he comes from the tribe of Benjamin. Thus far in the book of Judges, Benjamin does not look very promising. As 1:21 says- Benjamin was not strong enough to drive out the Canaanites living in the land. And later in the book of Judges, we find in Chapter 19 that the tribe of Benjamin commits the sin of Sodom and they are nearly wiped out for it! But back in Genesis 49, Jacob had said that Benjamin was a ravenous wolf- that Benjamin would devour the prey and seize the spoil. So there is an indication of strength and might. We find in v. 15 that Ehud is left handed which was not a common trait. This makes the deception of Ehud possible- being left handed would allow a person to better conceal a weapon where others would not expect it. Being left handed literally means he was bound or hindered on the right. He was from Benjamin- which means "son of my right hand." In v. 16 we find that Ehud makes a sword or a dagger for himself. This was a remarkable feat- because there were no iron works in the land of Israel. The Israelites had to go to the Philistines for any iron implements. But remarkably, Ehud makes a dagger 1 ½ feet long- and straps it on his right side. Remember most people were right handed- so in order to draw a sword the left side was the sword side. Ehud then takes a tribute to the Eglon king of Moab. A tribute would perhaps be silver or gold, grain, and animals. It would take many hands to lead and carry this tribute. So after dropping the things off, Ehud departs with the people. In v. 19 Ehud stops by the idols- the graven images and returns to Eglon. Ehud sees the false gods standing tall in the promised land- and filled with zeal he returns to the Eglon. Imagine- seeing the statue of an idol in the land of the LORD! Ehud returns with a message and challenge- and that message is two-fold. Ehud sends a message to Moab and a message to Israel.

First, Ehud gives a message to Eglon and sends a message to Moab. And that message is accompanied by action in v.20-21. It is a message of death and destruction- a promise of swift retribution for those who serve false gods and who despise the name of the LORD. Through deceit, Ehud gets Eglon alone. God has sent Ehud with a message- death to those who oppress my people! The word that Ehud brought was immediate doom- as he plunged the dagger into Eglon's belly. We do not read that God told Ehud to assassinate Eglon- nor do we read any praise for this event. But none the less, God uses Ehud's zeal to set

His people free! This act was also a message to Moab- a challenge to war and an ultimatum- get out of the Lord's land or we will drive you out! The surprising nature of this story is emphasized in v. 24-25- the word "behold" or suddenly is found 3 times in a literal translation. Events take a surprising turn! There is a clear connection in the Hebrew to a ceremonial death. Eglon- the fat little calf, gets approached by Ehud who is going to offer a tribute. In v. 16 his sword is called a dagger- literally a "cherub"- like the flaming sword held by the angel in Gen. 3. And again in v. 22- his sword is called a flashing spear- or a flame. So a knife is plunged into the calf- so that all his guts fall out- replicating the action of a sacrifice. A sacrificial fire is lit- and the offering is consumed by God's anger and wrath! The fat king becomes a sacrifice on his own altar- and God's justice is satisfied. And second, it was a message to the Israelites. This message comes in two parts- One- it was a call to battle in v. 27; and two it was a shout of victory in v. 30. A word of good news- deliverance and salvation! The wicked oppressor is dead- slavery has been thrown off- and salvation has been received! The LORD not only raises up Eglon, He raises up a savior- Ehud- to deliver His chosen ones. Ehud calls Israel to war and Moab is routed. Not it is Moab that has no king and they lose 10 K soldiers. Moab is subdued under Israel and there is peace- this time for 80 years! Our reading from Ps. 2 speaks of the Son- Jesus- as the surprising King who executes justice. Although the nations may rage and plot, the LORD will set us a King. Now this King- Jesus was not the expected choice. No- there was nothing humanly speaking that would draw the crowds. He was humble and lowly- despised and rejected by man with no form or majesty Isaiah 53 says. Yet God chose this Saviour- Jesus- to be the One savior of world! No one expected the King of Kings to come from a cattle trough and to be raised in Nazareth! But He was- and He has defeated the foe! A lowly and humble King- coming into Jerusalem riding on a donkey's colt. Not what the nations would expect! So praise God for His unexpected and marvelous salvation! And the 2nd application flows from Jesus' work. The Word of the Lord is sharper than any double-edged sword as Heb. 4 says. His word is likened to a flaming fire that consumes! Eglon overlooked the sword to his own peril- may we never overlook or forsake the Sword of the Spirit or the Word of our God! Or to put this in the words of Ps. 2- do not despise God's unexpected deliverer, or you too will be surprised and consumed by His wrath! The power and efficacy of God's Word is much more than any sword wielded by Ehud!

To conclude we have seen a magnificent turn around in our passage- God uses uncommon means to deliver and save His people. As Moab is in power, Israel is in bondage and forced to give tribute. It appears that idolatry and slavery has the upper hand as Eglon gets fat with pride and food. But God radically changes everything- upon those living in darkness a light has dawned. We know that Ehud is just a man- he is called a savior and God raises him up- but the victory was not complete. The land had rest for 80 years- the normal life span of 1 man. But the hearts of the people were not changed. External slavery may have been thrown off- but death once again claims the victory as Ehud dies. As 4:1 reads- again Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died. Eventually death has to be dealt with and the hearts of men need to be addressed. It would take the coming of Jesus Christ as the perfect Judge and eternal Savior to deal with sin and death. He is an extra-ordinary Savior! It would take the pouring out of the Spirit to deal with our hearts! By suffering death, Christ overpowered it and won the complete victory! This complete victory is exactly what we find in Rev. 20. Here we find that the devil is thrown into the lake of fire; and death along with hell is cast into the burning pit! Man's greatest enemy is dealt with once and for all! And here again we hear the two messages- both a message of destruction and a message of life. For those connected to this Savior there is life- if you look to Jesus this unexpected savior- you will be delivered! But for those who are not connected to Jesus Christ there is only destruction! God has a message and He is proclaiming it today in His Word- The Word of God is a sharper than a two edged sword- it contains either good news or bad news based on your relationship to the Savior! Even in our passage the good news is clear- God sees His people in slavery and does something about it- He sends- He raises up a Savior! And by this Savior we have lasting rest and peace! The LORD gives rest to His people by defeating the oppressive ruler with His surprising Savior!