

Place: Lurgan Baptist 5:11:2002

Reading: Judges 3: 5-31

## HEARTS OF IRON, FEET OF CLAY

### 3. GOD HAS A PLACE FOR YOU !

With tears streaming down her face, she looked at the pastor and said, " *I want more than anything else to make my life count for the Lord Jesus. When you were talking about what He has done for us and our position in Him, that really got through to me. But how can He use somebody like me ?*" Then she talked about Christians she respected and their qualities which she admired and envied. They inspired her, but they also discouraged her because she lacked their personalities or gifts or talents. So how could the Lord have anything significant for her to do ? Have you ever thought like that ? Have you ever spoken like that ? " ***How can God use someone like me ?***" Sincere believers think and speak like that because they do not fit their concept of what a Christian must be before God can or will use them. The reasons are as diverse as the people who come. Some believers are consumed with guilt and failure. Others feel inadequate due to a lack of education.

Many suffer with the scars of their family history or personal background. Several have physical problems and limitations. A number have difficulty accepting themselves, they have a poor self image. The point is,

that many believers are paralysed by the belief that they do not fit the mould. They have an image of the person the Lord uses, and they see themselves as being a long way from that image. The conclusion is inevitable, I am not what God requires, so the Lord cannot use me. Some years ago that great man of God Oswald J. Smith pastor, of Peoples Church Toronto, produced a little book entitled, " ***The Man God Uses.***" If I were to ask this company this .... what kind of Christian does God use ? The answer would be as diverse as the people gathered. You see, each of us has an image of the person God uses and invariably we see ourselves as being a long way from fitting that image.

As we most problems, the real problem is that we are not guided by the Scriptures in our thinking. For when we turn to the Word of God, we discover a delightful truth. God is not stuck on one pattern. He does not have a heavenly mould into which we must fit, or else we will be discarded. *Now the world produces conformity, but God produces individuality.* My .... our God is a God of infinite variety who uses people of all kinds, shapes, and colours, and He has a wonderfully unique purpose for each of us. Nowhere is this seen more clearly as in the first three Judges we meet in ( Judges Ch 3 ) Now in this book, 12 Judges are successively spoken of.

*Othniel: Ehud: Shamgar: Deborah ( with Berek ) Gideon: Tola: Jair: Jephthah: Ibzan: Elon: Abdon: and Samson.* Of these 12 Judges, 6 stand out pre-eminently because the whole story of the Book gathers around 6 successive apostasies of Israel and these 6 Judges or Deliverers who under God brought about

deliverance.

The main 6 are Othniel: Ehud: Deborah: Gideon: Jephthah and Samson. You see, at least 6 times we read these words, "*And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.*" ( 3:7, 12 4:1 6:1 10:6 13:1 ) Consequently, there was Suffering, but eventually Salvation came through these Judges. Judges who were as different from each other as day is from night. Nowhere is that difference more obvious, than in the first three judges we meet.

### **(1) OTHNIEL A MAN WITH A GLORIOUS HERITAGE**

Now will you mind that in Judges we're going round in cycles. We have the first cycle of sin in ( 3:6-9 ) Did you notice there was (1) SIN: ( 3:6-7 ) In ( 3:5 ) It begins with *FRIENDSHIP:* Instead of destroying them, ( Deut 7:1-5 ) they're dwelling among them. This was exactly what god told them not to do. Of course friendships lead to *RELATIONSHIPS:* Look at ( 3:6 ) If you become friendly with unsaved person of the opposite sex, chances are a relationship will soon form. But it didn't end there ! Friendships, Relationship, and then *WORSHIP:* ( 3:6-7 ) They threw themselves into this pagan, sensual worship of these Canaanite gods. ( Exod 20:3-6 ) (2) SUFFERING: ( 3:8 ) You see, we are immune from God's anger. "*Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*" ( Heb 12:6 ) Israel felt the heat of God's anger as He sold the nation into the hands of

Chusan-rish-a-thaim. His name means "*doubly wicked Cushan,*" which may have been a nickname that his enemies gave him. He was a cruel, powerful man and for 8 years Israel were subject to him.

(3) There was SUPPLICATION: ( 3:9 ) Their prayers were saturated with tears ! When Bible-believing churches have prayer meetings which are packed with men and women earnestly crying to the Lord, then we will be well on the way to deliverance. (4) There was SALVATION: ( 3:9 ) Now Bible scholars don't agree as to the exact blood relationship Othniel had to Caleb. Was Othniel Caleb's nephew .... that is the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother .... or was he simply Caleb's younger brother. As far as the text is concerned either interpretation is possible. If he was Caleb's brother, then why was his father's name Kenaz instead of Jephunneh ? ( 1 Chron 4:13 Jos 14:6 ) Whatever way we seek to untangle the branches in Othniel's family tree. One thing is certain. Othniel had the privilege of belonging to family that was led by an outstanding believer. Caleb was one of the two greatest men of his generation. It was God Himself who said, "*Caleb hath followed me fully.*" ( Num 14:24 )

Since Othniel's parents would have died in the wilderness, Caleb would have become a father to him. This man, could thank God for (1) What a great thing it is to have a solid Christian family. Some years ago a young pastor was dying of cancer. As he was lying on his deathbed, his father, and uncle, both of whom were pastors, came to see him. They visited for a while, and then the young man asked his uncle, "*would you mind*

*if I talk to my father alone ?"*

When the father came out after their visit, he said to his brother, " *I want to tell you what David did when we were alone. He called me over to his bed and said, Can I put my arms around you. I stooped over as best as I could and let him hug me. Now dad would you put your arms around me ? I could hardly control my emotions, but I put my arms around him. Then with his arms around me he said, " Dad, I just want you to know that the greatest gift God ever gave me outside of salvation itself, was the gift of a father and mother who love the Lord, and taught me to love Him too."* I've learned to text you know, on my mobile phone. The other day I texted Christine assuring her I was praying for her, in these early days of her Christian life. She texted me back thanking me and then she wrote this, " *Thank God for giving me a good family, without them I don't where I would be."*

Young person, do you appreciate your heritage ? Yet a godly heritage does not equip a person to be used of the Lord. Othniel was a man with some special characteristics. For one thing, Othniel was:

**(a) MINDFUL OF GOD'S WORTH:**

You see, Othniel was associated with Hebron. ( 1:8-10 )  
and Hebron is the place of fellowship. Beneath its oaks Abraham had pitched his tents. ( Gen 13:18 ) Its soil had been trodden by the Son of God Himself, when He visited that place. ( Gen 18:1 ) There Abraham and

Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah lie buried. ( Gen 49:29-33 ) Hebron, the place of communion where God's people are mindful of God's worth. Can I ask the elders here, including myself, are we men of Hebron ? Do we know anything about real fellowship with the Lord ? Do we know what it is to abide in Christ ? You see, we'll never be able to lead God's people out from the enemy, unless we start here. (a)

**(b) MASTERED BY GOD'S WORD:**

Do you recall God's Word to Joshua ? " *Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you as I said unto Moses."* ( Jos 1:3 ) Now Othniel is being challenged by Caleb to obey the Word of the Lord. Look at ( 1:12-13 ) Here was a man who took a city in obedience to the Word of the Lord, and because of love for a girl. I'm not asking do you love your wife ? Though the Scriptures clearly teach that we ought to. But this is the question. Do you love the Lord ? You see, an essential qualification for every elder is love for the Lord. Do you recall Christ's question to Peter ? " *Lovest thou Me, more than these ?"* ( Jn 21:15 ) Then Christ " *Feed my sheep."* Are you overseeing because you like the office ? The name ? Like the authority ? Or do you really love the Lord ? Now because of Othniel's obedience and love he smote a city. Do you see its name ? " *Kirjath-sepher,"* it means the " *city of the book."* Then its name was changed to Debir, " *the Word of God."*

My .... all elders, for these judges are not only a picture of believers they are a picture of elders ( Acts 20:28 )

all elders must know what it is to take the Book ( 1 Tim 3:2 ) to know the Book, and to be mastered by the Book.

That is why the elders should always be giving a lead at the Breaking of Bread. Do you remember what Peter says, "*The elders which are among you I exhort, .... feed the flock of God.*" ( 1 Pet 5:2 ) That will take time, and you need to take time to be mastered by the Word.

### **(c) MARRIED IN GOD'S WILL:**

Othniel had a equal yoke. He not only married a girl who belonged to Israel, but a woman who had spiritual desires, who said to her husband, "*Ask for me.*" That is she encouraged her husband to pray. Not only that but when she met her father she said, "*You have given me the south country, give me also springs of water.*" Have you a wife like that ? What kind of girl or fellow are you going to marry ? Take your time, for next to salvation its the biggest decision that you'll make. Now you cannot read the NT.. without coming to the subject of elders and their wives. ( 1 Tim 3:2 ) Bless God, for the wives of elders and pastors who stand by them when the going gets tough ! You see, Othniel did not do what the people had done, they had married out of God's will ( 3:6 ) he married in God's will. My .... this man who was

(a) (b) (c) was able to lead the people of God ! (1)

### **(2) EHUD A MAN WITH AN OBVIOUS HANDICAP**

By the time we have finished in the Book of Judges we will be thoroughly sickened by the cycle of sin. Do you see the second cycle beginning in ( 3:12 ) ? As long as God's man lived, and showed the example, there was rest. But Othniel died, and then was apostasy. John Calvin, God's servant died, and then apostasy set in in Geneva. John Knox, God's servant died, and then apostasy set in Scotland. Archbishop Cranmer, Bishop Latimer, and Bishop Ridley died, and then apostasy set in England. As long as God's man preaching God's truth, leads the people of God in the ways of God, there is rest but when he dies, his ministry is forgotten. Now the man that God raised up on this occasion had an obvious handicap. Look at ( 3:15 ) or "*a man handicapped in the right hand.*" Its ironic that Ehud was from "*Benjamin,*" meaning "*Son of my right hand,*" ( 20:16 1 Chron 12:2 ) yet he was able to use only his left hand. A lefty from Benjamin. What an encouragement this to people with physical disabilities who have the wrong idea that God cannot use them in His service.

Do you know the lifestory of Joni Eareckson ? As a young woman she became a quadriplegic in a diving accident. For years, Joni struggled with the terrifying fact that she would never again be able to walk or use her arms. Then, as God worked in her heart, she began to develop her skill. The Lord began to use her in a wonderful way to share His truth. When she accepted what she was, the Lord began to use her as she was. That is exactly what Ehud did. He not only accepted his left-handedness, he used it. When someone asked Hudson Taylor why he was chosen to lead the great

China inland Mission he said, " *God chose me because I was weak enough.*" I want you to notice that this man, with an obvious handicap.

**(a) DETECTED THE ENEMY:**

1. Ehud Detected the AUTHORITY of the Enemy:

Did you notice that there was a Trinity of Evil arraigned Israel ? Moab, Ammon, and Amalek. ( 3:12-13 ) Now where did they all hail from ? ( Gen 19:37 ) Moab was the child of Lot and his eldest daughter, Ammon was the child of Lot and his younger daughter. Incidentally, where did they learn all this incest, immorality from ? Sodom ! My .... when you decide to drift from the Lord, and pitch your tent toward Sodom, you remember that you'll take your children with you ! So there was Moab, Ammon, and to complete the Trinity there was Amalek, stemming from Esau. ( Gen 36:12 ) You see, *the enemy that Israel faced represents the enemy within us, the Flesh !* The flesh stands for that part of man's nature wherein his natural desires have free rein. " *I know that in me," says Paul " that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.*" ( Rom 7:18 ) Sometimes the Bible refers to this flesh nature as " *the old man.*" It is our old or natural nature. Now there are certain features about the King of Moab that help us to develop this picture.

\* He was a very Fat Man:

(3:17 ) Some of you would need to take to W.W. He was fat. Nothing admirable, a true picture of the flesh

with all its works. ( Gal 5:19 )

\* He sat alone in his cooling House:

( 3:20 ) You see, when the flesh reveals itself in all its ugliness, it does not make for good company.

\* He was seated and pampered:

( 3:20 ) Is this not what the flesh likes ? Rest, ease, time to satisfy its desires.

\* When he was slain, the dirt came out:

( 3:22 ) You see, the flesh is corruption within.

( Mk 7:21-23 )

Now to be born of the Spirit does not mean the old flesh disappears. Some tell me that the old nature may be eradicated or eliminated. Paul did not think so. He says,

" *For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not I do.*" ( Rom 7:19 ) " *I have not sinned for some time,*" said a lady to Mr. Spurgeon. " *You must be very proud of it,*" he replied. " *Yes, indeed I am.*" I tell you, the more holy a person becomes the more he will shrink from claiming the attainment of sinless perfection. Indeed someone has said, ***that the old nature is born within us, and it will be borne by us all the days of our lives.*** My .... do you recognise the power of the enemy within ? 1.

2. Ehud Detected the STRATEGY of the Enemy:

Look at ( 3:13 ) Jericho was their first triumph in the land. Now the object of God's deliverance was to bring Israel Out, to bring them Through, and then to bring them In. Its interesting that now the enemy has retaken the place of earliest triumph. Do you recall when you

were saved ? Some old habit of the flesh was abandoned, and you found a new power. But what about now ? Has the flesh retaken that place of early triumph ? Has the enemy retaken territory from which it once was driven ? 1. 2.

### 3. Ehud Detected the MASTERY of the Enemy:

For here were Israel dominated for 18 years ! Then they cried unto the Lord. Oh, the tragedy of needing to be delivered again. I don't mean getting resaved for that cannot happen. But I wonder, have we lost territory to the enemy and we need to be delivered afresh ? Maybe your cry is " *O God if only I could get back to where I once was.*" Could it be that you're not living for the Lord as you used to ? Has the enemy come in ? Has victory gone out ? Bless God, there is a Deliverer, a Saviour.

A High Priest whose ministry is to prevent us from sinning, and an Advocate whose ministry is to recover us when we do sin. ( 1 Jn 2:1 ) Yes, Ehud (a)

#### **(b) EJECTED THE ENEMY:**

How did he do it ? With a weapon. Notice:

#### 1. The MENTION of this Weapon:

( 3:16 ) A.T. puts it like this, " *Ehud made him a sword.*" What a picture of the Word of God. " *The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.*" ( Heb 4:12 ) Paul says, " *Take the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.*"

( Eph 6:17 ) During the early days of the church there was a young Roman soldier Martius, who had been saved. The centurion of his band died, and Martius was about to fill his place, when the soldier next to him, reported to the Emperor that Martius was a Christian. The penalty was death, and Martius was summoned to appear before him. When the Emperor looked upon this courageous young soldier, he hesitated to deprive the state of such a good soldier. " *Are you a Christian ?*" he asked. " *I am, sire,*" answered Martius. " *I will give you until tomorrow morning to reconsider.*"

Martius was led away. The Bishop of Rome hearing about his terrible plight sought him out in his prison. He brought with him a beautiful centurion's sword with glittering blade and jewelled hilt, and laying by its side, a roll of Scripture said, " *Son, I know of your unhappy lot now, pointing to the book and the sword .... choose for yourself.*" For a moment the young soldier looked longingly on the glittering blade and thought how well his strong right arm, could wield it in the fight. Then he looked upon the Book, and thought of all the comfort it had brought, the promises it bore, he thought of its Christ, who died that he might live. " *Choose,*" said the bishop. " *He that findeth his life shall lose it and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*" As he read those words the young man's eyes were filled with tears that trickled down his sunburned cheek. Then reaching out his hand he drew the precious volume to his heart, " *I choose,*" he said. " *Thou hast chosen well,*" said the bishop. " *For before the setting of tomorrow's sun thou shalt be with thy Lord.*"

The Emperor died and passed away, but Martius still lives and for eighteen hundred years has been singing the praises of the King. My .... in an age when other glittering blades would tempt us away have we chosen for ourselves the Sword of the Spirit ?

Do you realise that the only offensive weapon that God has given you in your battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil is the Word of God ? 1.

### 2. The MAKING of this Weapon:

Look at ( 3:16 ) He had made this weapon personally. Do you make the Word of God your very own. Do you recall Jeremiah's words ? " *Thy words were found and I did eat them and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.*" ( Jer 15:16 ) Preacher .... do you make the Word of God your own ?

### 3. The MEASUREMENT of this Weapon:

" *A cubit length.*" ( 3:16 ) Eighteen inches long. Not a bit less than a cubit, nor a bit more than a cubit. My .... if the sword would remind us of God's Word to be used against the flesh lets remember it must be the whole Word of God nothing more and nothing less. Do you ever leave out parts of God's Word, you don't want to obey ? You slip quickly to the next part ! 1. 2. 3.

### 4. The MINISTRY of this Weapon:

We can use the Sword Defensively: Did you notice that

Ehud hid the Sword ? " *Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee.* ( Ps 119:11 ) We need to hide the Word in our hearts, have the Word in our minds so that the Holy Spirit may bring it to us the moment we are tempted. Of course we can use the Sword Offensively: ( 3:21-22 ) Is that not how to deal with sin ? In God's presence with God's Word ? If we are going to deal with the flesh we need to get alone with God. And " *if we confess our sins ....* " ( 1 Jn 1:9 ) My .... have you an obvious handicap ? A defect ? Listen: accept your so called limitations and the Lord will open up new areas of ministry ! (1) (2)

## **(3) SHAMGAR A MAN WITH A COURAGEOUS HEART**

Now Shamgar was not an Othniel or an Ehud, but he was a man used by the Lord to strike down the Philistines who were starting to exert their power and authority in the south west corner of the land. Now;

### **(a) HIS BACKGROUND CONFUSES US:**

For Shamgar is not an Hebrew name. His father's name Anath is the name of a Canaanite god of sex and war. it may be that Shamgar was a Canaanite convert, someone who had come from raw paganism to the worship of Jehovah, or his fathers name may show how deeply paganism had influenced this Israelite family. But if (a)

### **(b) HIS BRAVERY INFUSES US:**

For he slew 600 Philistines with an ox goad. Now that tells me he was a farm-labourer. An ox goad was a strong pole about eight feet long. At one end was a sharp metal point for prodding the oxen, at the other a spade for cleaning the dirt off the plough. It was the closest thing Shamgar to find to a spear for the enemy had confiscated the weapons of the Israelites. ( 1 Sam 13:19-22 )

Charles Spurgeon once gave a lecture at his Pastors College entitled "*To Workers with Slender Apparatus.*" Shamgar didn't hear that lecture, but I'm sure he could have given it. An ordinary farm labourer whom the Lord took. "*And he also delivered Israel.*" ( 3:31 ) Now when we draw together the threads of ( Ch 3 ) what do we find ? Three great principles:

### **1. God uses People who are DIFFERENT:**

If you were trying to find in this passage a stereotype of the kind of person God uses you would end up confused. You would look at Othniel and say, "*Well God uses people of proven ability and godly background.*" But then the Lord worked through Ehud, a man others thought had a serious limitation, yet God used it for His glory. You say, "*I cannot identify with Ehud, he was pretty important.*" That's why God chose Shamgar, a farm labourer and worked through him. I don't know what you see when you look at yourself. Do you see Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar ? Whoever you see be yourself for the Lord does not deal in duplicates He only makes originals. 1.

### **2. God uses People who are DEPENDENT:**

Even Othniel with all his abilities and talents was successful only because of what the Holy Spirit did through him. ( 3:10 ) Do you recall Isaiah's words ? "*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.*" ( Is 40:31 ) God exchanges our weakness for His strength.

### **3. God uses People who are DEFIANT:**

Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar different in many ways, but they had one thing in common .... they dared to step out in faith for God. As Hudson Taylor looked over 30 years during which he had seen 600 missionaries respond to his vision to reach China, he said, "*God does not do his work by large committees. He trains someone to be quiet enough, little enough, and then He uses him.*" By that standard, which is God's standard all of us qualify. The issue is not whether He can or will use us. The great question is this, will you trust Him to do so ?