

# The Fight of Faith

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] All right, we're going to read together from the book of Judges in the Old Testament. Judges chapter 3. We'll read the whole of chapter 3. Now these are the nations that the Lord left to test Israel by them. That is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before. These are the nations, the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites and Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon from Mount Bell, Hermon, as far as Lebo, Hamoth. They were for the testing of Israel to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Parasites, 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 they served the Baals and the Asheroth. Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he sold them into the hand of Kushan, Rishah, Taim, king of Mesopotamia, and the people of Israel served Kushan, Rishah, Taim 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 Kinas, 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 Kushan, Rishah, Taim, king of Mesopotamia into his hand and his hand prevailed over Kushan, Rishah, Taim. So the land had rest for 40 years then Othniel, the son of Kinas, died. And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. And the Lord strengthened Yglon, 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 Amilokites and he went and he defeated Israel and they took possession of the city of Palms, that's Jericho. And the people of Israel served Yglon, the king of Moab for 18 years. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord and the Lord raised up for them a deliverer, Ehed, the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The people of Israel sent tribute by him to Yglon, the king of Moab. And Ehed made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his clothes and he presented the tribute to Yglon, king of Moab. Now, Yglon was a very fat man and when Ehed had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who carried the tribute. But he himself turned back at the idols near Gilgal and he said, I have a secret message for you, O king. And he commanded silence and all his attendants went out from his presence. And Ehed came to him as he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber and Ehed said, I have a message from God to you. And he arose from his seat and Ehed reached with his left hand.

He took the sword from his right thigh and he 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 excrement came out. Then Ehud went out into the porch and closed the doors of the roof chamber behind him and locked them. And 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. 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 they opened them and there lay their lord dead on the floor. Ehud escaped while they delayed and he passed beyond the idols and escaped to Sayyira. When he arrived, he went, he sounded the trumpet and 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 me, 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, not a man escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel and the land had rest for 80 years. And after him was Shamgar, the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an ox code and he also saved Israel. This is God's Word. We are in a series on the book of

Judges, the Gospel according to Judges. We're as late in history here as about 1200 BC, sometime between 1200 and 1200 BC. It's a very ancient text, very ancient story, very different from modern life. And in it, God in real history is communicating to us over and over again that human beings need deliverance. So 12 times in the book of Judges, the Israelites find themselves captured by another people group because of their sins, because of their idolatry, and God's sins 12 times, a deliverer to save them, to rescue them out of it. And the Word that's used for that deliverer is most often the word judge, Shafet. A judge is not a person who sits on a bench in a courtroom and sentences people to prison or something like that or issues judiciary pronouncement. A judge in this book is more like a warrior rescuer, more like a warrior deliverer, somebody who comes in and battles and saves God's people. That's the meaning of judge throughout this book. And we've said the past two weeks, if you've been here at all, that these are 12 very real life pictures, historical pictures, of the fact that there is an ultimate judge that is to come. So in all 12 of these stories, all 12 times these judges show up, they are pointing every single time to the ultimate judge, to the ultimate deliverer, the great deliverer himself,

[ 6 : 32 ] Jesus Christ, in the New Testament, that every single one of these stories are ultimately about the gospel and that God tells the reality, the fact that the gospel is coming over and over and over again throughout the Old Testament in cycles. And that's exactly what we have here in the Book of Judges. And so what you can do is you can come to the Book of Judges and you can look at the stories of these judges and learn in fresh ways about the meaning of the gospel and about what it means for us, about ourselves, about our lives, even modern people like us can learn from a story like this. And that's because ultimately this is about the gospel. And so in Judges 3 we have three judges mentioned, the first three of the 12, Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar. That's a great list for baby names if you're thinking about it. We've got to be selective. You read the text like this and you say, what are you gonna say from a pulpit about this? But you know, I had to throw a sermon away at the end of the study of it because there's so much here. And just choose one and be selective. And so let's think about what we learn about the gospel, about ourselves, from these judges. What we learn is the test of faith, how to renew your faith in a time of testing, and finally the messiness of Christian faith. So let's think about that first, the test. Now if you look at the very beginning of the passage it says, these are the nations that the Lord left quote to test Israel. And so the very first thing we learn here is that God tests his people. And we've seen that already in the Bible before this in Genesis 22, we learn that God tested Abraham. And oftentimes in the Bible the word for test and the word for temptation are actually the same words, especially in Greek. God tests his people. And then

James tells us, do not ever say that God tempts anyone to sin. And those are both true at the same time. God tests his people and he never tempts anyone to sin.

And what that means is that God never puts us in a situation where he tempts our inner life towards the desire to sin. God never gives you a desire for sin, never. But he does put you in objective external situations that are tests that do come with external temptations. God tests his people. Do you believe that? The Bible teaches that from beginning to end that he sometimes often and often puts us in the midst of tests. Why? Why do you take a test? You know, I know that right now I think I don't yet fully understand the secondary system of hires and all the examinations. One day I will. But some people are in the midst of that right now. Some people are taking medical exams right now. Why do you take an exam? Many of us have had exams. We've all had exams in our lives. What's a test for? At its best, a great professor, a great teacher, will give you a test because they want for you to be able to show what you know, to show this is what

I know, this is what I learned, and for you also to see what you don't yet know. So a test exposes you, but it exposes you in the best ways when it's given at its best. It seeks to grow you up by showing you and being able to show you in confidence. Here's what I know and then saying, but here's what you don't yet know. And so it's an opportunity, test for opportunity to grow. God does that for us. God gives us test in our lives in order to grow. This is an Old Testament thing and a New Testament reality. James 1-3, no friends that the testing of your faith produces perseverance in order that you would become complete and mature as a Christian. So many of us may right now be in the midst of the test.

What is the test? How do you know? Often you don't, you don't know, but what could that be? We learn about it right here. What is the test? The test that appears here is really the same test that happened and come into our lives that God sends. What is it? In verse 4 and 5, the testing of Israel here is that God has placed and left these Canaanite people groups all around Israel for their testing. Now what does that mean? That is not fundamentally about ethnicity.

[11:07] There's a temptation to see it that way, but that's not at all what it's about. Instead we learn what it's about in verse 6. Verse 6 says, their daughters took for themselves wives. So the daughters of Israel married the men of the Canaanites and the women of the Canaanites married the daughters of Israel.

And so the issue that he brings us to here is about marriage actually, and that's just an illustration for us when it gets connected to our lives. You see what he's saying? It's not about ethnicity. We see this in marriage. In marriage there's a holism, right? Marriage is so holistic, isn't it? When you marry somebody, James pointed this out last week, if you are a Christian, a devout father of Jesus, a Christian, and you marry somebody that's a Hindu that worships the gods of Hinduism, there's going to be real difficulty in marriage about that, right? Hinduism requires household gods, for example, and in the ancient world the polytheism of all the Canaanites meant worshiping regularly, daily, by tribute, sacrifice, household gods, and public gods of all kinds. And so the people of Israel are in the world, they're in the midst of people groups that are polytheistic, and they're marrying one another, and the holism of marriage requires typically somebody to convert to the other faith, typically, quite often.

And that's exactly what takes place. You see down in verse 7, the people of Israel do what's evil on the side of the Lord. What did they mean? They forgot the Lord. They had intermarried so much. In other words, they had become integrated with the people groups around them by way mostly of religion. And so by religion they came to worship the gods of all the people all around them all the time. And so we have the word in verse 7, they worshiped Baal and Asheroth. That's male gods and female goddesses, that's what that's referring to. And the anger of the Lord's kindled against them because though they're in the midst of people groups, it's not a problem of ethnicity, no, not at all. It's a problem of being exclusive, of worshiping the Lord, the true God, the God of the Bible, in the midst of temptations, in the midst of pulling all around you to chase after all sorts of other types of gods. That's the issue here. Now we know it's not about ethnicity because the third judge in Judges chapter 3 who gets two verses is a man named Shamgar, a son of Anath. And we don't know anything about him except that the name Shamgar and Anath are very probably Canaanite names, meaning that God raised up a deliverer from the Canaanites. Why? Because

Shamgar very clearly followed the true God, the true Lord, right? It's not about ethnicity, it's about religious integrity, it's about the holism, the exclusivity, the fact that God wants our worship in the whole of our lives, the whole of who we are. Now that teaches us the test. The test is the same here as it is for us today. And what is the test? Now let me give you one more detail, make it a little more specific in order to answer.

And that's when you get to the Othniel story from verses 7 to 11. We learn that because of this idolatry, because of serving male and female goddesses in the context of polytheism, worshiping and chasing false gods of all kinds, that they are given over by God to a man named Kushan Rishiatayim, verse 8, king of Mesopotamia. Verse 8, there's lots of humor and sarcasm in this passage, as you might have saw when we read it. We'll come to the majority of it in just a second.

[14:50] But right here it already shows up in verse 8 because it says in Hebrew, Kushan Rishiatayim, king of Aram Nahariim. So it rhymes in Hebrew, they didn't translate it exactly like that. King of Mesopotamia is how they translated it, but his name very literally means Kushan the double wicked, the king of the two rivers, or the double river, the doubly wicked king of the double river, that's what it says. And what that tells us is that the double river in the area Aram is the Tigris and the Euphrates at its edges, and that tells us that he is from Babylon. This is the king of Babylon, so that means that the very first people group that oppress Israel because of their idolatry are the Babylonians, and all throughout the Bible, there's a big narrative arc throughout the Bible where Babylon is the symbol of all that's wrong with the world. It's the symbol that really stands in for the world, the flesh, and the devil, the world under the grip of sin. And you see what God's doing, he's saying, if you choose idolatry, if you choose to chase after things that you love in this world more than God, I will give you over to Babylon. You've chosen Babylon. And you see, that's the test. The test comes to us all throughout the Bible, Jeremiah 29, the Sermon on the Mount, to be salt and light, John 17, what is it every time?

It's go and be in the world, but not of it. That's the test. Go be in Babylon, but never of Babylon. Jeremiah 29, when you're in the midst of Babylon, seek the shalom of Babylon, but never be of the idols of Babylon. It's the test, it's always the same. It's the same for us as it was for them. Go be salt and light in the world, but never chase after the values, the idols of the culture all around you. Always be both in it and distinct simultaneously. Be exclusive towards the Lord, the God of the Bible, and yet before the people in the city that God has put you. That's the test. That's basically the generalization of the test, and it comes to us in all sorts of specific ways and so many ways throughout our personal lives. What do we learn here as we move, we need to move on? Here's what we learn. We have a command that is also a test in our lives.

To be on the one hand, be in the world and not of it. That means be in the world friend, go and be in the city. And yet as Paul puts it to the Corinthians, a dearly beloved flee from the idols. He told that to the Corinthians, go be in the midst of Corinth, be a part of it, be salt and light, and run from the idols.

That's the first thing we learn here. The second thing, the second thing, when we go and do that, we've entered into the test. And when we've entered into the test, we've got to know that when we are being in the world but not of it, sometimes, sometimes it's almost impossible for us to not be of it in certain ways. What do we learn in Judges? If nothing else, that God's people go through cycle and cycle and cycle of being in Babylon and becoming Babylon.

And God has to come every time and rescue them. That it really is a struggle for us. That we're called to that and we're fighting and we're striving and sometimes we're struggling with the idols that surround us all the time.

[18:19] We have to constantly be told by the Lord. We have to constantly be renewed, be delivered, that we're always in the midst of the test and struggling with the test. And so let me read to you from Ralph Davis. When I have to preach morning and evening, I end up having to rely on whoever I think really is most helpful on a passage. And Ralph Davis is most helpful on Judges 3. And this is what he says. You can be baptized. What this passage teaches us is you can be baptized, catechized, or whatever background. You can be a Christian of any kind, of any tradition. And at the same time you can be presently enslaved by an idol. You can be a Christian, baptized, catechized, and enslaved by an idol in your life. And that's exactly what's happening to God's people over and over again. Now the third thing, the last thing before we move on, maybe you're there right now. In some sense, you're there right now struggling with an idol, being in the world and becoming of it, struggling with becoming of it in some way. And let me say, what this passage also tells you is that God will not leave you there. And here's what Ralph Davis says. He says, even here in the Lord's anger you find hope for Israel and for us. So what does God do? In his anger at their idolatry, he gives them over to it. He lets them experience oppression when we choose idolatry. And here's what Davis says. He says, the Lord's wrath is the heat of his jealous love by which he refuses to let go of his people. He refuses to allow his people to remain comfortable in their sin. And so, serving

Kushan Rishi Atayam, it may not sound like salvation. And it isn't. But if being given over to the consequences of our idolatry forces us to lose our grip on our idols, it may be the beginning of our salvation. You see, what he's saying here is that sometimes the beginning of being rescued, of being delivered, is actually to see how much our idol cannot save us, cannot fulfill us, cannot help us, how much it's going to leave us empty. Sometimes that's exactly what we need. You chase money in this modern economic world and you lose it and you have to lose it to sometimes realize, Mammon cannot save me, not really. And C.S. Lewis says, only when romantic love ceases to be a God in your life can it cease to be for you a demon. You know, you chase romantic love as your God and the breakups happen and the relationships fall apart and the relationships struggle or they don't fulfill. And you know that romantic love has become something that it's never meant to be. And that's exactly what we learned here, that God refuses to allow us to sit comfortably in the idols that we chase. Now secondly, how then do you find renewal in the midst of the season of testing? How do you find faithfulness in your life in the midst of testing? The most important thing we learn here is to just to look at the deliverer, see the object of your faith, the deliverer. That's the big thing. So E.H.U.D. E.H.U.D. story. 40 years Israel had a rest after Othniel delivered them and then later under E.H.U.D.

the same thing happens. They're in the world and they become of the world. They worship false gods, idols of all kinds and so God gives them over to Moab this time. Now Moab is a name of a man, Moab. He was a son of Lot. He's Lot's son by way of his own daughter in the book of Genesis and also he that happened again with his other daughter and that produced the Ammonite people. And so the Moabites and the Ammonites both team up here to oppress Israel. And it's very important just to mention this, try to do this anytime, this kind of historical fact or data comes up. We have a fragment, not a fragment, a whole piece of stone called the Mesha Stelae. The Mesha Stelae is a one-meter stone. I think it's at the Louvre. I forgot to look this up recently right now. And it is from around the year 900 from Moab. And it is a piece that refers to the events of 2 Kings chapter 3 but written by the Moabites. So we have a text that describes exactly what happens in 2 Kings 3 in the Bible written by Moabite

Han and we learn a lot about the Moabites. They refer to the lineage of David, the tribe of David in the Stelae, this stone. And they refer to their God that we know the Moabites worship throughout the Old Testament, Kamosh.

And Kamosh was like Molek. He required sacrifice to the highest degree, to the worst possible forms. And this is the type of people group that are capturing Israel here. And we learn about Eud. Eud is a left-handed man. Now what is going on? Why this little notion? He's left-handed. And it's because as far as we can tell, the commentators mostly say, that left-handed training was basically like special forces. So we see these left-handed warriors coming up throughout Scripture on occasion and they're unusual. And it seems from both the Bible and extra biblical data that when you were trained as a left-handed warrior, it was like the special forces being dropped in. You know, you can fight with your right hand, you can fight with your left hand, you can do both. This is the redemption for all of us left-handers in the room. Left-handed people, special forces in the Old Testament. That's what he is. He's some kind of particularly specialized warrior. And he's chosen by the people of God Israel to be their judge, to be their leader. And we're told here also that he creates a double-edged sword for himself, which is also unusual. Most of the time the swords were blunted on one side with a sharp side just on the other. So most people were right-handed in their fighting and they would carry their sword on their left side and draw it like this. But we're being told in this passage, E. HUD is able because he fights with his left hand as well to put a sword hidden on his right side. Now the reason that that's important too is because we think that most often in security checks in the palace, you would almost always only check the left side where you would keep a sword if you were right-handed because it was so unusual to fight left-handed. And that's very important to see in the text. Now Eglon is this king of Moab. He's a man, we're told, of wild overindulgence to put it kindly. The text takes it more bluntly than that. The implication here is that what has happened is that this man has put Israel under 18 years of starvation. That's the idea. He's an evil oppressor. And you can think if you've read the book Dune or know the story of the Vladimir, the Baron Vladimir, the Harkonnen Lord type figure. He's a man of wild overindulgence that just seeks to oppress everyone. And that's exactly what's happened here. He's the head of four other kingdoms, Ammon, the

[ 25 : 52 ] Amelokites, and he is the head over them all, oppressing Israel. He's the head of the snake. He's the head of this serpent, this evil serpent of oppression. And the tribute that is brought to him, the sense of the text, is that it's food. And so it's so large we learned that multiple people had to carry it in. The people are paying tribute. He's requiring taxes basically as the people's food and they're bringing them and he's eating it. Now the assassination, this is where we get to it. How can you, how can you, what do you do in the midst of the test? And to find that out you got to look at what happens here. A stranger it is, an ancient, but it tells us and this assassination, Eglon goes up into his cool chamber and this is a spa of some kind up on the roof with open windows breezy area. And in verse 20 we're told that we're told that Eihad says to him, I have a word of God from you. Another important facet here is that a word of God, from God for you, it's the generic word for God. It's not the name of the God of the Bible. And so Eglon thinks that he's saying I have a word from one of the gods for you. And that's because we learn Eihad had gone out to the center place of idolatry and pretended, if you will, to pay homage and then came back and said I have a word from a God for you. And so he's, Eglon doesn't understand, he thinks that the idols have spoken, that there's some important word for him. And so he dismisses all of his servants and he's in this spa, this cool chamber and it's there that Eihad draws this two-edged sword and sticks it into Eglon's belly all the way in, it says. And there it is, Eglon dies in the most messy and brutal way in the midst of his own spa. Now look, if you look at it, we didn't have time to look at Othniel's delivery, but Othniel is a man of the tribe of Judah and he delivered the people of Israel. And you know what the people would have sang about it? They would have said Othniel, the son of Judah, the lion of the tribe of Judah.

You see, Jesus Christ is the better Othniel. And when you come to Eihad, you say what is going on here? And you see, Eihad came and killed the head of the snake, crushed the head of the serpent, and how did he do it? He did it with a double-edged sword. And when you come to the New Testament, you learn that the Word of God in Hebrews goes forth into the world as a two-edged sword, a sword that's sharp on both sides. And the Word of the Lord in Hebrews is not just the Bible, it's talking about Jesus Christ Himself. And you turn to Revelation chapter 1 and there's an image of Jesus Christ and there what is coming out of His mouth, a sword with two sides sharpened, a double-edged sword. And you see that Eihad, he delivers judgment, the Word of the Lord comes literally in judgment by way of this double-edged sword. And Jesus Christ comes into the world, the greater Eihad, to destroy the serpent, to crush the head of the serpent. The head of the serpent thought, the serpent thought that he had him. And yet Jesus comes in and brings judgment by his two-edged sword right into the heart of the evil serpent. And Jesus Christ is the better and greater Eihad. And we learn right there what it means to be delivered. We learn what it means to persevere in the midst of the test that may be going on in your life. And here it is, first, you do what they did. They were in the midst of the test, they knew their idolatry, and that says that they cried out to the Lord. And that's it.

Tonight you might be in the midst of the test and you're struggling with some idol and you're able to identify it. And the first thing is just to cry out to the Lord and be honest with them. The second thing we see here is then you got to look up and you got to see the deliver, that there really is a deliver in the middle of history that came to crush the head of every serpent. The ultimate serpent himself and every single little idol that looks like mimics the serpent in the midst of our lives. As soon as you do that, you know, verse 28, as soon as that happened, he went out to the people and said that the head is dead. I've crushed the serpent and he says, now follow after me. You cry out to the Lord, you see the deliverer and you follow him. And that path of renewal is actually the exact path we all have to take over and over and over again in our lives when we're in the midst of struggling with a particular idol that we're facing. Ralph

Davis says, deliverance is an act of holy, vicious violence by which Christ wrenches his people out of the clammy clutches of the Prince of Darkness himself. When you do that, you have experienced the sword of Christ, the two-edged sword, not as the sword of judgment, but as the surgeon's scalpel that enters you to cut you in order to heal you again. Now, that's the way out.

No left-handed Savior can ever break us free from our true tyrant. But there is one with nail-scarred hands who can and who does and who will tonight for you if you're in the midst of the trial of idolatry. The only tragedy we can face in our lives is if having the Savior, we don't cry out to him. We don't seek deliverance because he wants to deliver. Now lastly, let's close with an epilogue, the messiness of the Christian faith. We could stop there, but I just want to say a note about the messiness of the Christian faith. If you've been tracking just a couple minutes, if you've been tracking with this story so far, you'll know that you'll have seen. When we read it, when we've talked about it, it's messy. And I didn't point out all the mess that you could have read about in the passage. It's very literally messy. The Bible is not prim and proper. It teaches us real religion for very real problems. And the messiness and the disorder and the ugliness of our sin brings a life of messiness for us quite often. And the Bible, the Word of the Lord, the actions of God into history come and situate right in the midst of human mess. God comes all the way down. He comes right to our earthiness and our messiness that we brought into this world. You know, you read a passage like this and you just got to say God deals with real problems in real ways. And when you go through the

[ 32 : 45 ] Bible, you see this. You see a God who gets his hands dirty, who gets deep into our lives, the lives that we, the world that we have dirty that we have made a mess of. And from the temple all the way to the cross, we see the cost and that God will come all the way down. So let me just say a word about eglons, very ugly death here. The servants think that he is locked in the chamber because he's on the toilet. So it says literally in Hebrew, they were embarrassed because they thought he was quote covering his feet. That is a euphemism. It's the same euphemism that Americans use like bathroom. You know, the bathroom, the restroom, it's a euphemism. It's not literal. And that's exactly what the Bible says here, that he was covering his feet, a euphemism. And the commentators when you read them will say, this is sarcasm, it's irony, it's meant to be funny in a way. And Ralph Davis says this, as modern people, let me say, I'm saying this and then I'll quote Ralph, as modern people we struggle sometimes with the violence, the messiness in the stories of the Bible, don't we? And that's a very real thing, that's a very important discussion to have in detail about every single one. But if you're, you've got to take yourself out of the modern context and remember here, we have Israelites who for 18 years have been oppressed and taxed to the bone under King Eglon. And in Israelite, living in persisting poverty, ecking out some sort of borderline existence in the hill country of Ephraim, well then you won't be surprised but rather will understand the devastating humor in the biting satire that's written into the Hebrew of this narrative. God has delivered them from a tyrant who stole all their food and he's done it in the most ironic way. And that means that we've got to be willing to see, I think, as modern Christians with our eyes.

The poverty, the enslavement, the fact that they were being taxed to death and starving and that God comes to save them all the way to exactly the place where they are in a way that makes sense. This story shows us that, that God deals with messes. Let me draw two conclusions. One, we've got to be as porous and as earthy as the Bible is. This is the Bible. The Bible talks about the messiness of human sin and Christians in ministry have to know that human sin really is so messy and that ministry sometimes often follows that and gets really messy.



And that means I think this passage is inviting us again to say if you're a person of faith that's stepping out into the world to walk next to sinners knowing yourself that we can't be easily offended. We can't be easily shocked. We can never be surprised by sin and all the ways it gets into the bones of humanity. It's a call to be honest about the messiness of the world and God's people, the church, this church family is a place for sinners in need of redemption.

Not a place for the righteous, not the righteous, not the righteous, oh, but sinners. Jesus came to call and that means ministry is always going to come with messy bits and we can never be surprised by that. The second thing, the final thing, comfort. The Lord deals with the dirty. The Lord deals with the messy.

[ 36 : 10 ] Jesus Christ came to touch the leper and that is the glory of this passage that God deals with the dirty mixed up affairs of life in which all of us find ourselves sometimes. And so one final quote from Ralph Davis and I'll give him the final word because I don't think this quote could be much better. Here we are. This is a paraphrase. Some of us in family situations that we have messed up, some of us in family situations that have been messed up by others. Some of us in emotional trauma, some of us in grief and sorrow are in the clutches of temptation.

Life seems to be a mass of twisted coat hangers and disconnected doorknobs. And the glory of this passage is that it tells us that the Lord is not a white gloved standoffish God out there somewhere in the remote left field of the universe who hesitates to get his strong arm dirty in the yuck of our lives. The God of the Bible does not hold back in the wild blue yonder somewhere waiting for you to pour Clorox over the affairs of your life before he will touch it.

Whether you can comfortably put it together or not, he is the God who delights to deliver his people even in their messes and likes to make them laugh once more. He is the God who allows weeping to endure for a night but he sees, he will see, that joy will come in the morning. We have a God who delights to deliver us in the midst of our messes and longs to make us laugh again. Let us pray. Lord we thank you for E. HUD the deliverer who points to a much greater deliverer who came to crush the head of the most evil serpent. So we sing and celebrate tonight Christ the victorious Christ the victor and we thank you God that you don't stand far off but you come all the way down into the mess of our lives the sin all the things that the broken world has become and you deliver you heal you restore you save and sometimes you do that in mighty acts the acts of a warrior. So we thank you we thank you ultimately for how this points us to Christ and we ask Lord that it would make us into people who are ready and willing to walk along others who are in the midst of a hard circumstances messes that have come about through the complications of human behavior in the midst of sinful world and so make us like Jesus in that way Lord and we pray that in Christ's name. Amen.