

"Shamgar": The Lonely Deliverer

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[0 : 00] Well, turn with me again to Judges chapter 3 and particularly verse 31 where we read that after him, after Ehud, the second deliverer, the second judge in Israel, after him was Shamgar the Simabannath who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxcode.

He also saved Israel. You know as you go through the Bible you come across individuals who appear just for a, well for a very short time maybe even a few fleeting moments and then you hear of them no more.

Whether you go through the Old Testament or even the New Testament you see this happening. Take the 12 disciples of Jesus, each disciple, they're named.

But then you come across some of the disciples for whom you simply hear the name and that's it. James the Son of Alphaeus, we know nothing about that individual other than the fact that he was called James and he was the son of a person called Alphaeus.

Or you come across another disciple Simon the Zealot, again you know nothing more about him, the whole of Scripture other than he was called Simon and he was a zealot, this was a modern day, would be a nationalist.

[1 : 24] James the Son of, Judas rather the Son of James. And the one recorded speech of him in the whole of the New Testament, these three men that we might say faded into obscurity.

And yet the so-called obscure disciples along with people like Peter and James and John and Andrew, the more prominent disciples, these disciples were very much part of the early church. They were very much the foundation of the church, they helped the church grow, they were, we might say unheralded men and yet God used them mightily for His purposes.

And just because an individual isn't accorded all the descriptions that we might find elsewhere in Scripture of other individuals whom God used for His service, that doesn't mean to say that just the individuals who are mentioned just in a momentary mention, that doesn't mean to say that they are no part to play in the work of the Kingdom and fulfilling God's purposes.

And when we come here in Judges chapter 3, we see this individual, he's only mentioned once here and also towards the start of Judges chapter 5 and that's it, no further mention of this individual, this man just appears for a few moments and we might say he's forgotten.

[2 : 50] A solitary individual, a solitary witness, no one seems to have supported him against, well against humanly speaking, those who seem to be far more powerful.

But even in this little episode, this little account of this individual, this man called Shamgar, actually we're seen much to teach us, to teach us about how God uses individuals, whoever these individuals are, whoever you are in the work of the Kingdom.

In this little episode we see how God will use individuals even in the gifts that these individuals have, even the gifts that you have for the furloughness of this Kingdom.

And I believe too that we see even in this individual, someone who points forward to the Lord Jesus, because remember the Lord Jesus in his work of salvation, we might say his solitary work, but by his work, by his power over what certainly might have seemed a greater enemy, he delivered, he saved, he saved you, he saved me from the power of sin, the power of Satan, the power of death itself.

So there's much here even in this little section too, I pray to give you encouragement, because I'm sure as you feel this often I feel myself, just almost one against many, when it seems that a certain worthy enemy is just too strong and too powerful, when we're up against those who seem to have so much more clout as it were in their attacks against God's word, against God's church, against God's people.

[4 : 35] But I pray even here that you'll get encouragement in your witness as individuals, in your witness as a congregation. So three things to look at here, I pray that will give you encouragement.

Three things from this individual shamga that we'll see first of all as a converted man, secondly as a courageous man, and thirdly as a committed man, the three going together, converted therefore being given the courage to take a stand against the enemies of God's people and in his courage being committed in service for the Lord.

So first of all, maybe even before we look at the individual himself, I do think we need to get a wee bit of the context with what's happening here.

I'm not going to spend too long because of course there's much to say on the individual himself, but we've reached out the point in Israel's history where they're now in the Promised Land.

They're in the land of Canaan. Moses led them thus far. Joshua took them into the land of Canaan and the various Israel tribes, they settled in the land because the problem was that they didn't fully extinguish the local pagan people that were in that land and of course not extinguishing the local pagan people.

[6 : 00] The gods of these people were still there. And you know, we're rid of this. It's like worshipping these foreign gods, these gods that are no place in the true worship of God.

And you see the expression, you know, regularly that people, this relates to evil in the sight of the Lord, abandoning God for worshipping these false gods and suffering the consequence.

And God in His mercy, God raising up these judges, these deliverers, these judges who lent the people, who saved the people for a time anyway from the enemies and yet the people rebelling against the judges and this sort of downward spiral of disobedience and punishment because they didn't fully serve the Lord their God.

And it's in that scenario that we start seeing these different named judges, these deliverers of Israel. And of course, delivering from oppression and many of the enemies were Philistines themselves.

We might see a sorry picture. The land's given peace for a certain amount of time, a certain number of years. The judges have defeated the enemies.

[7 : 19] But then the people come, go back to their evil ways and then they're oppressed again by enemies. You see the names there that we read as we were going through chapter 3, Othniel, then after him Ehud and then this third of the judges, third in succession, Shamgar, a man whose name is almost hidden in the pages of scripture and yet a man who's got so much to teach us and to understand the ways of God with his people.

And this man who as people look at more closely will see is a man whom God used who was a converted man.

You might think, well, how do we work that out just from verse 31? I mean, we're not specifically told that he followed God. We're not specifically told of any acts of devotion that he showed for God other than what we find here.

You've got other examples of people whose acts of devotion were recorded. But what we're told here is his name and this one thing he did against the Philistines.

But that's enough. That's enough because his name reveals a great truth because his name you see isn't Hebrew.

[8 : 40] It's not a Hebrew name. It's not an Israelite name like Joshua or David. These are Hebrew names, but this name is a name that's foreign to Israel.

It's a name historians help us to work out where this name came from. It seems this name came from Eastern Turkey, the Armenian people.

And it seems that obviously at some point in this man's life he was converted. We don't know where it happened. We don't know how it happened.

But here's this man who's come into the covenant community of God's people, come in by faith in the one true God. He's left his past behind.

He's come to follow the one true God, the God of Israel. And of course there's a fulfillment of what God had told Abraham. Remember many centuries before God had promised Abraham that through him all nations of the earth would be blessed.

[9 : 40] We're even seeing that in this man, Shamgar. Here's this man, this solitary man, a man who's been outside of Israel and come into the covenant community of Israel by faith.

And he's going to show his faith. He's going to demonstrate his faith. He's going to show that faith in attacking the enemies of God's people, the Philistines there.

Just pause for a moment, just reflect on what we've seen so far. Because doesn't this tell us, it tells us many things, doesn't this tell us that God will raise up some of the most unlikely people from the most unlikely places to serve him as one who follows him?

I think of Abraham himself, he came from, he came from a part of the Middle East, it's what we would say nowadays Iraq. He came from that, outside of Israel we might say, but converted God bringing him into his people.

We see the other examples, Ruth. Ruth came from Moab. Or the Syrophenician woman you read often in Mark chapter 7. Or do you think of Paul and his missionary, John, he's going to non-Jewish gentile people.

[11:02] Well here's this man, Shangar, you might see one of the early one, Jewish converts. And that surely, I should encourage you, if you're praying for someone, if you're praying for a loved one who's not yet a Christian, if you're praying for someone in your family or maybe your neighbour or a friend or a work colleague, well be encouraged that God will bring in.

So he says, even some of the most unlikely people in the most unlikely of circumstances. The gospel seed continues to be so, whether it's here in Carly or in Lewis or Livingston or Eir or Helmsdale, whatever, God's words proclaimed.

Yes we live in a rapidly paganised country, but there's encouragement here. This man, Shangar, as we're just thrown into the scene as it were, Israel's itself is going through a particularly spiritual bad time.

It's backsliding significantly. But God raises up this non-Israelite, this man from Armenia to save Israel, certainly for a particular period of time.

Pray that God will raise up leaders who will take that mantle, take that command of God and not to be afraid to take that stand for the Word of God.

[12:33] To be faithful servants. I pray you will be faithful servants taking your stand for truth in a world that would try and stifle the truth.

Well, Shangar was one such man, a converted man, but secondly, a courageous man. I mean, here's this man, this solitary man, and there's the enemy before him, a vast number of Philistines. And obviously the Israelites are afraid of these Philistines. You go to the start of chapter 5. In fact, chapter 5 was a female judge, Deborah, and Deborah sings a song, she sings this song about the sorry state of the country.

And in chapter 5, in verses 6 and 7, you hear Shangar's name again, in the days of Shangar, the son of Anath, in the days of Jail, the highways were abandoned and travelers kept to the biways, the villages ceased in Israel.

The people are afraid. The people are keeping away from the main streets. They're afraid of being attacked. But one man, I mean, the people are afraid, all the people are afraid about one man's going to take his stand against the enemy.

[13:53] One man's not going to be afraid except we're to step into the breach. He's going to face the enemy, this man, Shangar. Again, what do we know, this further encouragement, is one man against many.

I mean, even Gideon had 300 men with him to attack the Midianites. But here's one man, here's one man to save Israel.

Here's one man against the enemy when the Israelites, as we said, had run away from the enemy. But this converted man, he's going to face the enemy and he's going to do it not on his own strength, in strength of God the Lord.

And you know when you face the enemy of your souls, when you face the enemy of the church, you face the enemy of the Lord Jesus.

Don't run away. Confront that enemy not on your power, but the power of the One who enables you to do all things through Him. Because we're not told to resist the evil one by our own strength.

[14:57] You'll do it in strength of God the Lord. Yes, numerically you might think, well I don't know the percentage, even the whole of Scotland, something like 5%, maybe we'll have attended church this morning.

Maybe even you're one person compared to, I don't know who you work with, maybe even at home. But there's an old saying, and it's true, one plus God is a majority.

It may well be one, but plus God, He's with you. He's with you. You're not alone, you're never alone. Even when you're being attacked for your faith.

Even when the world might ridicule you for following the Lord Jesus, you're not alone. You're not alone. Even when God's law has been trampled on and the various social media that you see time and time again, you're not alone.

You're not alone because you have God with you. And you have been given a weapon in that spiritual warfare.

[15:59] You've been given the word of God. Shamgar had a weapon. Shamgar had a very unusual weapon you might say, this ox goat.

It wasn't a sword, it wasn't a spear, it wasn't a boson, and from other parts of scripture you can work out the Philistines for bad the Israelites even to make their own weapons. Of course they disarmed the Israelites to weaken them.

But here's Shamgar using this, it was a long spear-like implement, one-end sharpened, it was used to prod oxen when they were pulling a plow.

So it's an agricultural implement, very phish-like thing nevertheless, but you know, here's an implement that was more used in farming than in warfare. But I think there are still lessons for us even here.

I mean obviously Shamgar has obviously some agricultural connection, otherwise he wouldn't have had this weapon. He may well have had that military background as well.

[17:00] But here he's using what's available to him. I mean one minute he's obviously been prodding oxen, the next minute he's going to use this weapon in warfare. He's going to use it against the enemies of God and his people.

He's using what God's given him. He's using what he's using to show that God ultimately is the victor, God ultimately has the power and the control over his enemies.

You know that implement, that agricultural implement, people would have thought Shamgar was mad to use it. But foolish, but no God enabled Shamgar to have the victory.

But we've been given spiritual weapons to fight in the battle. Every Christian soldier, you've been equipped with that armour, the armour of God that you read often in the book of Ephesians.

You've been equipped to fight the enemy and even to defend yourself against the enemy's attacks.

As we said the word of God, the sword of the spirit, use it.

[18:10] Don't keep it shut. Use God's word. Use what God has given you in the fight, that fight against the evil one and all who would seek to damage and destroy God's church and God's people.

Use what, well Shamgar, use what people would have thought was foolish. People today will think the word of God is foolish and utterly irrelevant, but no. We're told in Hebrews chapter 4 that the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword.

Use it. It's right beside you. Use it in that battle against the enemy. It is the most powerful of all weapons, more powerful than anything that man can use against God's people.

And when you use it, you'll know the victory. Shamgar uses what he's been given in that fight against the enemy.

He's that converted man. He's fighting the enemy with courage because he will know that God's on his side and battles against, we're told there, these 600 Philistines and gains the victory.

[19:22] I'm sure that ox god was a very clumsy weapon to use, but Shamgar has faith that God will give him the victory even in what he used in that fight.

Now, I know some people might get a wee bit worked up about the numbers there, the 600 Philistines. I don't think we need to worry too much about these numbers. The point surely is that even in the vast number of the enemy that God, one plus God, is the majority that we see the hand of God ultimately in this victory.

Shamgar prevails in strength of God the Lord. And so you take courage when you're confronted by what appears to be overwhelming forces against you as a Christian against God's church, take courage.

I mean, there's Shamgar, he didn't run away. He didn't just think, well, all I've got is this ox god against 600 Philistines. So he knew that the one who is in him is greater than those who were against him.

And as we said, there are so many, it's almost like a coalition of forces against God's people, that coalition that seems so powerful. But remember our God reigns, that God is on the throne and the gates of hell will not prevail against him.

[20 : 51] And so we're commanded to be strong in the Lord and the power of his might and to face the enemy of our souls, the enemy of his church with courage.

And thirdly and lastly, with commitment, we're told that he also, Shamgar also saved Israel. He saved Israel, he delivered Israel from the oppression of these Philistines.

Yes, the people did it later, returned to the evil ways, but at that point in Shamgar, what God had asked Shamgar to do, Israel was delivered from the Philistines.

He was so committed to serve God, he was committed in using what God had given him to save Israel with, he was committed in his witness, in his courage.

Now, where does all this lead to? Who does all this lead to? It leads surely to the Lord Jesus. You know what we do? You think of the Lord Jesus and his victory over Satan, when you think of that victory in the cross, just think of the Lord Jesus, one man, the God man, the yes or saviour.

[22 : 06] But Jesus came from heaven to earth, that one man who saved his people and not like Shamgar just temporarily, but the Lord Jesus saved his people by his power, saved his people eternally.

What was the weapon that the Lord Jesus used in his victory over sin, over Satan and over death? It was a weapon that people then, even people now think is foolish.

What was that weapon? That weapon was himself. He gave himself by his life of perfect obedience, by his giving of himself in the cross.

His body was broken for you, his blood shed for you. Lord Jesus, yes, defeated a great power. He conquered his and our enemies.

Yes, he is the ultimate judge, the ultimate deliverer. He saved the Israel of God. He saved his church and continues to save his church.

[23 : 09] And you who know him, you know that victory in the Lord. You are equipped with the resources in that fight. You have the Lord Jesus with you.

Remember this, yes, the saviour is with you. But like Shamgar, you have a part to play in the battle. Be prepared to be used, be prepared to be used in that battle and to know that you will be provided for, that he will strengthen you, equip you and that his strength is made perfect in your weakness, not for your glory, but for the glory of God, our Lord.

And may he have that victory in him. Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, we give you thanks and praise that yours is the victory and we give you thanks and praise that you will use weak individuals such as ourselves, even in that conflict, against sin, against Satan, against all who would seek to destroy the church of the Lord Jesus.

So give, Lord, we pray that courage where we can be so weak, when we are so frail, when we might even be tempted to run away.

May you, Lord, give your people here that strength in the battle. Continue with us now, Lord, we pray. And again, we pray your forgiveness for our many sins. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

[24 : 48] Amen. Good.