

Title: Loyal and Lefty  
Text: Judges 3  
Theme: The folly of idolatry  
Series: Judges #4  
Prop Stmtnt: Trusting idols will lead you to an inglorious end

I do not think that I have ever read this text publicly before, nor have I ever heard it read publicly before. But, since all Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and training in righteousness, I am reading it with conviction, though with a hint of self-consciousness.

Read Text:

How many times have you been promised something that did not live up to the hype? Think of all of the things that you have looked forward to, but, if you were really completely honest with yourself, it really did not go as planned. As many of you may have heard by now, Johnny got appendicitis and last Sunday on the day his beloved Eagles won their first Super Bowl, Johnny's appendix burst and he ended up in the hospital and had surgery. Isn't that like life? You look forward to something for so long that you dream about it, only to have something happen. For most people, that is life; pursuing, but never getting there. And yet, we keep looking forward. If you are 3, you can't wait until you are 4. If you are in elementary school, you can't wait for Junior High, or High School, or to drive, or to get a job, or to get on your own, or to get married, or to have kids, or to go on vacations, or to get home from a vacation, or to get your kids through school, or for them to drive, get on their own, get married, and have kids or for you to retire, to travel, for Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and on and on it goes. We are always looking and never arriving; always searching, never finding; always dreaming; never realizing; always wishing; never satisfied. Never satisfied. Never quit, never stop pushing, never stop running, never sit down, - why? Where exactly are you going? What are you thinking that you will find that will make your world better? Some of you break out into a sweat if you think that you may have lost your phone. You have this urge to check it every 60 seconds just in case you got an update, or a text, or an alert. Your attempt at being in the know, being in control, being aware owns you, but no matter how much you know, you never know enough and you are never satisfied. This lust for information creates junkies who cannot rest. So, the fact that you know the weather, you know the news, you know where your kids are, are you happy? How many times do you have to check the weather forecast in a given day? Does it really matter if we get 5-8" of snow or 6-9"? My point is, we live on the edge of always wanting more and never arriving.

I said that the book of Judges is wisdom for those who receive it, but condemnation for those who reject it. Let me tease that out for a minute. Wisdom is not found living just in the moment. Wisdom is found in knowing where you are going and understanding the impact and consequences of your decisions. Wisdom is looking down the road and seeing the dangers and avoiding them. Wisdom is seeing the big picture, and the big picture is graphically displayed for us in Judges and particularly in chapter 3. Here is wisdom.

Judges 3 begins summarizing the national condition of the time by focusing on the failures of Israel and the consequences from that (3.1-6). The very existence of Israel is at stake. The people of God are in danger of being absorbed by the Canaanites and if that happens, Israel will cease to exist as a nation. If she worships like the Canaanites, she will marry like the Canaanites and live like the Canaanites, and the plan of God to raise up a distinct people for the glory of his name will be lost. So, God raises up judges who rescue Israel from her oppressors, but more than that, these judges help rescue the nation from being completely faded out. This chapter tells us the story of 3 judges; Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar. I will focus this morning on Othniel and Ehud. The stories are actually quite different even as they both hammer at the same point.

For example, the story of Othniel covers 5 verses and the story of Ehud 19. Therefore, there is a lot more detail about Ehud than about Othniel. However, in Othniel's account, the LORD is featured prominently and is mentioned 7x in 5 verses, while the LORD is only mentioned about 3 times in the 19 verses about Ehud and from verses 16-27 the LORD is not mentioned at all. So, even from that casual observation we can already see what the author of Judges is highlighting for us. In Othniel's account, the focus is on God and really, the power of God to care for his own, when they trust him. While in Ehud's account, all of the graphic details are intended to point out the disgusting and repulsive stupidity of idolatry. I will not skip some of the graphic nature of this text so that you will see and even smell, if possible, the offensiveness and nauseating results of idolatry.

It all starts with verse 7. *The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. What was the evil that they did? They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.* Two things are going on here. They rejected God and they served the Baals. Look at who they rejected. Look at what you forfeit when you reject God. That is the emphasis of the story of Othniel. In that story, God is clearly the hero. In the second story, the emphasis is on making you see what you get when you worship idols. So, Othniel's story (point 1) is to motivate you to worship God and Ehud's story (point 2) is to motivate you to reject idols. Let's dig in.

In 3.3 we are told about the nations that are left in the land that prove to be Israel's undoing. These nations are southwest, northwest, northeast, and southeast representing the fact that this problem was all over the place for Israel. Most of the enemies listed in this book were more localized. For example, the Philistines were a constant problem for Israel for years. They were the enemy during Samson's time, during Saul's reign and the early days of David's reign. But, the Philistines, like the Midianites or the Moabites, were not going to conquer the world. They were not that big of a deal. But, when Israel was in rebellion to God, then enemies who were not that big of a deal became a big deal. However, the first guy mentioned as an enemy of God's people was probably the biggest challenge, humanly speaking. But that only underscores the point....

1. **Look at what God can do!** (7-11)

When Israel invaded Canaan, she fought with local kings and city-states. She did not face empires. Her enemies around her were not that powerful. But, Cushan-rishathaim was different. This guy was from Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia means the land between the rivers and that refers to the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates. So, if this guy was King of Mesopotamia and he was able to extend the boundaries of his empire all the way to Israel, that meant that Cushan-rishathaim was the biggest and baddest adversary they would face for many, many years. This guy was a legitimate bad boy and he had a big ole kingdom to prove it. He did not just rule Israel; he ruled the Canaanite countries as well. For eight years, Israel served him, which meant that basically everything they grew, everything they raised, everything they built, and everything they earned went as taxes and tribute to him. Again, Israel forgot God. They went to the Baals who promised them prosperity and the Asheroth who promised pleasure and what did they get? They got poverty and despair. So, they cried out to the LORD and the LORD raised up a deliverer, named Othniel. Othniel? Remember that guy? Othniel was the nephew of Caleb. Othniel was the guy who conquered a city in order to marry Caleb's daughter. Wow, that's interesting isn't it?

That means that Israel's rebellion against God and pursuit of idols happened almost immediately. Othniel was featured in her taking of the land, and this guy is still young enough to lead an army. What is also interesting is the fact that every time this guy is mentioned, he is on the right side, isn't he? I call him Loyal. Most of the judges in this book are not pretty. This guy is the standard by which the others should be measured. Here is what can happen when someone dares to trust God and obey him. What is a guy like Othniel doing going up against an emperor? What chances does he have? Well, when the Spirit of the LORD comes on him, his chances go up to 100%! That's the point all along. Israel is nothing without God, and neither are you. But, with God, you can face the enemy knowing that he will be toppled. So, there you have it. God's power takes a small town guy and uses him to topple an emperor, which saves his nation.

This account is notable for what it doesn't say. How did Othniel pull this off? What was his battle plan and strategy? Did he kill Cushan-rishathaim or just defeat his army? When did this take place? Where was the battle? We don't know because that is not the point. The point is that God will protect his people when his people trust him and God will deliver his people even against overwhelming odds. He did that ultimately through Christ. So, certainly Othniel's faithfulness, loyalty and freedom-winning victory points us to Christ, but Christ rose again and therefore, unlike Othniel, the influence of Christ goes on and on. Now, compare that to this.

## 2. **Look at the disgusting and repulsive stupidity of idolatry.** (12-30)

The story is introduced with a familiar refrain in this book. "*the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.*" So, in response to Israel's evil (which should be understood as idolatry), the LORD strengthened Eglon. Yes, the LORD strengthened Eglon. Eglon was the king of Moab (definitely not as impressive as Cushan-rishathaim) but he was able to gain the cooperation of the Ammonites and Amalekites and set himself up a little palace in Jericho. Eglon, no doubt had no idea that he was merely an agent that

God was using to punish Israel for their rebellion. But, the LORD's strengthening should not be seen as a blessing, but instead as a curse. You see, the "success" that Eglon experienced made him so full of himself that he was being set up for a major fall. Do you see this now? The "success" of Eglon was a major factor in his judgment, while the judgment on Israel was a major factor in their rescue. See how this plays out.

For 18 years, Israel had to bring tribute and taxes to Eglon because he had defeated them. In rejecting God, Israel bowed down to and served the gods of the Canaanites, meaning that Israel served the gods of the Moabites, Ammonites and Amalekites. So, she got what she served. You become like what you worship. (more on that in a bit) If you serve idols, you will be in bondage to them – and that is exactly what happens. Eglon, whose name means, "bull" or "calf" is also very close to a word that means round or rotund. Everyone who saw him would have thought that because as the text says, the man was very fat (17). Here is a man who is given over to his own appetites. Here is a man who cannot control himself, but who is in control of the people of God. It is a pathetic scene. But, the way the author sets this story up is so profound. What happens to a bull or a calf that is fattened up? It is slaughtered. That is how you are to understand Eglon. Here is a king, who thinks he is in charge. He thinks that he has the life. He is living large and in charge but in reality, he is only being fattened up for slaughter. This is the king of the nation given over to idolatry. This is what happens to people who follow idols. This is the story of what idols will do for you. They will destroy you. This is wisdom. So, instead of living for the moment, take your lesson from this text and start with the end in view. Here is the end of a man who follows idols. Is this how you want to end your life? It isn't pretty. Eglon is not only full of fat; he's full of himself. Hold that for a second, I'll come back to it.

So, this obese, loathsome man is now ruling Israel, instead of God. The children of Israel are bringing him tribute and taxes and finally after 18 years, they cry out to God and God has pity on them and he raises up a man from the tribe of Benjamin named Ehud, whose name means, "Where is the splendor or majesty?". The fact that he is from Benjamin is important as we will see when we get to the end of the book, and the fact that he is left-handed will be important in just a second. Ehud appears to be familiar to Eglon because Ehud is the man who delivers the tribute to him and probably appears to be a loyal subject. The text says that when Ehud finished presenting the tribute (which probably means that he gave an accounting of everything) that he sent away the people who helped bring all of the money and goods in. Now, Ehud is by himself before Eglon and of course, without the others, Eglon assumed that he was safe.

At this point, Ehud says, "I have a secret message for you, O king." Well, Ehud, is all ears now. He foolishly orders his attendants to leave him so that he can hear this secret message. At this point, Ehud draws closer in order to give the impression that he cannot say this very loud and says, "I have a message from God, for you." Well, as I said, Eglon is not only full of fat, but he is full of himself and he stands to hear this. Of course, when he stands he makes himself an easier target, and being so portly, he is not going to be quick on his feet. The fact that God has a message for him is flattering and he stands to hear what it is, when Ehud, who was probably trained to be left-handed, reached for a small sword that he had hidden on this right thigh and plunged into Eglon's belly. Ehud

lost his sword that day, which is just as well, because it would have been a bit difficult to retake the sword without getting a good bit of blood on himself. But, Eglon's girth consumed the sword and the end of v.22 gives us this inglorious phrase, "and the dung came out." Obviously, Eglon died rather quickly and when that happens, it is common for the bowels to relax and this is the consequence of that.

Now, stop the movie for a second. Do you get it? Look at how Eglon ends up? Here is a man who cannot defend himself, whose power, splendor and authority is nothing but a veil for a fat buffoon who dies in his own excrement. This is idolatry. This is where it will lead you. Here is the king of it.

Ehud makes his escape. He not only makes Eglon look like a fool, but Eglon's bodyguards are not presented as the sharpest knives in the drawer either. But, the manner of Eglon's death obviously emitted an odor that made these men believe that their glorious king was in his privy answering the call to nature. The text says (v.25) they waited until they were embarrassed. I can understand that. Imagine the conversations the guards were having. "You need to go in there and check on him. I'm not going in there; you go in. You are the youngest one here, so I'm telling you to go in. I'm not going in, are you crazy?" "What am I supposed to do, knock-knock?" "Uh, your honor, are you okay in there?" It's like a scene from the old 3 stooges flicks. Now when they finally decide to go in, they have to get a key. They have been totally duped. And what do they find? They find their king who is no longer powerful, or glorious, or intimidating, but who has died in a profoundly disgusting and embarrassing manner.

Why would you worship an idol that cannot save you? Why would you give yourself to idolatry when it will lead you to this end? And it will lead you to this end.

On average, 27,000 people died every day between September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland and September 2, 1945 when Japan surrendered. In all, 60,000,000 died. Most of the people that the Allies killed were soldiers (though not all) and most of the people that the Axis nations killed were civilians. As one historian recently noted, "*World War II exhausted superlatives. It's carnage seemed to reinvent ideas of war altogether.*"<sup>1</sup> The man primarily responsible for the War (at least the European element of it) is Hitler. Last year Norman Ohler, German journalist released a book on Hitler that is having a profound impact on how the German Fuhrer to be understood. The book is called *Blitzed*. I read it last week and could hardly put it down. It is the account of the influence of drugs in the Third Reich. Germany terrified Europe with her Blitzkrieg, that is her lightning fast invasion of Poland, and then famously of France. What we know now, is that one of the major contributing reasons of why the German armies could move so fast is because most of the soldiers were jacked up on methamphetamines. They could go for 3-4 days without sleeping. But, as they say, you live by the sword, you die by the sword. And Hitler himself was so addicted to drugs, including heroin, that his ability to think, to reason, to make any rational decision was completely impaired. Inexplicably he ordered an invasion of Russia, when everyone knew that the Allies would invade Europe one day from the

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *The Second World Wars*, Basic Books, 2017, p.3

west. Ohler's work is convincing. His 5 years of meticulous research of Hitler's doctor's notes spells out the damning evidence that the feared leader of the Nazi was nothing more than a dying drug addict who could not function for more than a few hours without being juiced. By the end of his life, there were no more veins to shoot and with the Allies bombing the pharmaceutical labs out of business, Hitler's suicide was preceded by anguished days of withdrawal coupled with the news of defeat that could no longer be medicated away. Ohler describes what Hitler was like toward the end.

*The sight of Hitler now only caused revulsion or at best pity...now his tooth enamel was decaying, his gums were drying up, and his ruinous teeth were falling out. His brain irreversibly damaged by neurotoxins, was no longer receiving stimulation... Everything had stopped working. ... H started digging into his yellow skin with a pair of golden tweezers, with aggressive, nervous movements, to get rid of bacteria that had presumably passed through his body's boundaries and entered his system, and were now destroying him from within. ... He trembled with anxiety from head to toe, he chewed the air, the lost weight, his kidneys were failing, and so too was his circulation. He was tormented by a painful yearning and unquenchable thirst from each cell of his body. His left upper eyelid was so swollen that he couldn't see out of his leg eye. Like Eglon, this is the end. On April 30, 1945, Hitler took his own life.*

But, here is the irony. Hitler himself was the drug that Germany took in order to ease them of their pain. Germany was the addict looking for escape and they found it in a drug called Hitler. Hitler was Baal. If you followed him, he would give you prosperity and so Germany followed and at first it seemed to work. The economy roared back to life, the world started to respect Germany again, and happy times were back. Hey, as long as the stock market is going up, as long as unemployment is down, as long as people are getting their vacations, it doesn't matter if a few Jews go missing – right? It doesn't matter that he is a little eccentric about things. He's making things feel better. That's what drugs are supposed to do. That's what alcohol is supposed to do. That is what a new car, new clothes, new stuff is supposed to do. Hitler was the drug who couldn't bear the weight of what he claimed. So, even as Hitler preached sacrifice, he was getting high. Look at the end. Look at the dead bodies of Hitler and his mistress that he married the night before they took their hydrogen cyanide pills the bullets in the brain from a 6.35 mm Walther. Look at the bombed out cities, the charred cities, the millions of people who died at his hands. This is not what idols promise, but it is what they deliver. This is life without God.

The gods of this world promise you the world and take everything from you. Christ demands everything from you, and gives you the world. The idols cannot give you the world because the world is not theirs to give. The idols cannot save themselves, much less anyone else.

Keep in mind that an idol is something that I sin in order to get, or sin when I don't get it. What do you want so badly that you will lie in order to get it? What do you want so badly that you will cheat in order to get it? What do you want so badly that when you don't get it, or you don't get to do it that you get angry over it? So, what do you tend to get the most angry about? Now, what does that idol promise you?

The Idol	The Promise
Alcohol	comfort, acceptance
Drugs	relief, escape, acceptance
Nicotine	comfort, acceptance
Approval of others	acceptance, love
Pornography	pleasure, intimacy
Materialism	respect, success
Wealth -	Security, envy
Children -	Love, esteem, acceptance
Ripped body	Desired, worship
Young looking	Envied

The Result - Eglon - (Apart from God's grace, I am Eglon and this is my end.)

Wisdom - starting at the end and working back

Conclusion: Who will stand up, Othniel did and Ehud. They risked it all for the rescue of others. And in that way they point us to Christ.