

A JUDGE, A CATTLE PROD AND 600 DEAD PHILISTINES
Judges 3:31; 5:6

INTRODUCTION:

I thought about sharing this during the prayer time but I decided to wait for this opportunity instead. *Our church was saddened to learn this week of the death of one of our most valued members, Someone Else.*

Someone's passing creates a vacancy that will be difficult to fill. Else has been with us for many years and for every one of those years, Someone did far more than a normal person's share of the work.

Whenever there was a job to do, a class to teach, or a meeting to attend, one name was on everyone's list, "Let Someone Else do it."

Whenever leadership was mentioned, this wonderful person was looked to for inspiration as well as results; "Someone Else can work with that group." It was common knowledge that Someone Else was among the most liberal givers in our church. Whenever there was a financial need, everyone just assumed Someone Else would make up the difference. Someone Else was a wonderful person; sometimes appearing superhuman. Were the truth known, everybody expected too much of Someone Else. Now Someone Else is gone! We wonder what we are going to do. Someone Else left a wonderful example to follow, but who is going to follow it? Who is going to do the things Someone Else did?

From now on, when you are asked to help, remember - we can't depend on Someone Else anymore.

The Bible is replete with examples of people who saw a need and did not wait for someone else to act. They took God as their partner, used what was at hand and accomplished great things for the Lord.

Do you remember Gideon? Some of our VBS kids remember Gideon quite well: one of his stand-ins visited their class last week. Gideon was a hero of Old Testament times. He led 300 Israelites against several hundred thousand Midianites and defeated them, using only torches, pitchers and trumpets. Gideon was such a significant figure in Israelite history that he also gets a mention in the New Testament book of Hebrews as a giant of faith.

Deborah was another national leader whose biography is recorded in the book of Judges. She led Israel's army against Jabin, a king of Canaan, killed him and routed his army. Her name appears in Hebrews 11, also.

Samson figures prominently in the book of Judges, too, as one who led the Israelites to rout their enemies and deliver God's people from foreign oppression.

But one of the leaders of Israel who often gets overlooked in the account of the Judges is a man named Shamgar. His brief biography is recorded in Judges 3:31.

³¹ *After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He too saved Israel.*

Just a little more information is buried in Judges 5:6.

⁶ *"In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the roads were abandoned; travelers took to winding paths.*

It has rightly been said that people can be divided into three categories:

1. Those who make things happen
2. Those who watch things happen
3. Those who ask, "What happened?"

The future is shaped by those who make things happen. God wants His people to shape the future that He intends for His creation. We can learn to contribute to that if we will learn from Shamgar.

Shamgar:

I. Reflected God's Displeasure

Shamgar was a man who was out of step with his society and out of step with his culture. In his day, some might have called him a kook, a weirdo, misfit or an oddball. But while he was out of step with his peers, he was absolutely in step with God.

God was not pleased with the conditions in which His people were living. His people had migrated from Egypt to the Promised Land. When the Israelites finally settled into the Promised Land of Canaan, Joshua led them to defeat the Canaanites and possess the land.

But after Joshua died, the people neglected their responsibility to subdue their enemies. Instead, they cowered in caves for fear of the Philistines. They snuck through the fields at night rather than travel the roads by day.

God wasn't satisfied with this fate for His people. He had better things in store for them but they were living beneath their destiny.

Not only was God not pleased with the way things were, Shamgar wasn't pleased with the way things were, either.

I suspect that none of the Israelites were happy with life as they knew it but most weren't willing to do anything about it. Most of the people were dissatisfied with the status quo but they seemed to shrug their shoulders and accept it. Whole generations were born into life in an occupied territory under foreign oppression. That's all they'd ever known. And they were apt to think, "Well, that's the way it's always been so that's the way it ought to be." With an attitude like that, they would never break free from the Philistines.

Sometimes we can fall into that trap in the church. We can believe that the way we've always done something is the best way...or, perhaps, the only way...that it can be done.

Shamgar was not content for the people to hide in caves because of their fear. He wasn't willing for the people to be afraid to use the roads. He wasn't willing to simply live with the way things were because he shared God's displeasure for the way things were. Because of that, God could use Shamgar to effect change where change was needed.

God cannot use us to make the changes He desires until we view things the way He does. We must be displeased with that which displeases the Lord and that will never be if we have bought into the world's principles, the world's standards and the world's values. When we spend so much time in intimate fellowship with God that His Spirit inhabits our hearts, we'll love what He loves and grieve over that which grieves Him.

II. Remained at God's Disposal

Shamgar reflected God's displeasure and he remained at God's disposal.

What Shamgar had was not very much (just an ox goad) but he surrendered it to God for Him to use.

If you've never had the privilege of wading knee-deep in mud, muck and manure, you may not know what this is. This is an electric cattle prod. It is a kind of a steer stun gun; a bovine tazer. Cattle do not always want to go where they are supposed to go. That's the reason that we've adopted the phrase "bull-headed" to describe a stubborn person.



To try to persuade a cow to go where you want it to, you can:

- Yell – but know this, they don't pay much attention to yelling.
- Whack them with a board – but they have awfully thick hide and it takes a whale of a whack to have much effect.
- Twist their tails – but you have to get close enough to the cow to do that and they are prone to kick.

- Or you can use an electric cattle prod. Place the electrodes on the south end of a north-bound cow, pull the trigger and watch the cow move!

Well, back in Shamgar's day, the battery-powered cattle prod had yet to be invented. What the farmer did have was an ox goad. The ox goad was typically about 8 – 10 feet long. On one end was an iron point that made the ox goad almost like a javelin. On the other end was a flat metal paddle. When the ox-herd wanted to move the oxen gently, he would slap them with the flat paddle. But if that didn't work, he could flip the ox goad around and poke the animal with the sharp point.

Among the Israelites, there were no swords or spears. The Philistines had confiscated all of their weapons so they couldn't rebel. Then the Philistines put all of their blacksmiths to death so no new weapons could be crafted. The only metal workers in the land were Philistines.

Apparently, Shamgar got the Philistine blacksmiths to make an ox goad for him. I presume he must have been a farmer or at least an ox-herd. I presume he was a busy man and I say that because farmers are busy people. But it seems that God rarely uses the idle but often calls the busy to accomplish His will.

- Moses was busy tending Jethro's sheep when he was called to deliver God's people.
- Gideon was busy threshing wheat when he was called.
- Saul was busy searching for his father's lost donkey's when God called him.
- David was busy shepherding sheep when God called him to shepherd His people.
- Elisha was busy plowing with 12 yoke of oxen when he was called.
- Amos was busy following his flock
- Nehemiah was busy serving the king
- Peter and Andrew were busy fishing
- James and John were busy mending nets
- Matthew was busy collecting taxes
- Saul was busy persecuting the church

All of these people were busy when God called them to serve. To say, "I'm too busy" when you are asked to serve is a cop-out. Everybody is busy. But is your busyness more important than God's business?

Shamgar was busy but because his heart throbbed with the pulse of God's disappointment, God's displeasure and God's dissatisfaction over the oppression of God's people, even though he was busy, he acted. So Shamgar picked up what he had and used it for the Lord.

During the month of August, we are going to look at some other examples of God using simple and unlikely instruments to accomplish His will. But He can only do that when people give to the Lord what they have. What we are going to learn is that if our resources are at God's disposal, He can do great things with them.

A voice from the fourteenth century, St. Teresa of Avila, reminds us that God will use what we surrender to Him.

*"God has no hands but our hands to do his work today;
God has no feet but our feet to lead others in his way;
God has no voice but our voice to tell others how he died;
and, God has no help but our help to lead them to his side."*

III. Responded with God's Dynamic

Among God's people, all were anxious. Some were angry. But only one was active; and that was Shamgar.

It was because they were anxious that they hid in caves. It was because they were anxious that they slipped through the fields after dark. It was because they were anxious that they cowered like frightened animals.

Some were angry. Those were the ones who blustered and bristled, who ranted and raved, who criticized and complained. Some gritted their teeth, clinched their fists and resented the Philistines. But they didn't do anything except get angry.

All were anxious, some were angry but only one acted. The one who acted was the one who partnered with God to do His will.

Shamgar used his ox goad to kill 600 Philistines.

- That must have been a pretty remarkable ox goad! No, it was just an ordinary ox goad.
- Well, then Shamgar must have been a pretty remarkable man. No, by all accounts, he was just an ordinary man.

Well, then, how was a simple man able to slay 600 Philistines with a simple ox goad? He did it in the power of the Lord.

How can the church ever hope to tell the whole gospel to the whole world before Jesus comes again? Certainly not with conventional wisdom, human power or customary methods. To accomplish a supernatural mission requires supernatural power. God is super and you are natural. Team up with Him to accomplish His purposes.

CONCLUSION:

As I said before, people can be divided into three categories: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who ask, "What happened?"

The crying need of the hour is for people who will make things happen for the Lord. God's priorities must be theirs. God's power must be theirs. And if God's priorities are theirs and if God's power is theirs, then God's promises will be theirs.

What do you have that you will surrender to the Lord? A gift or an ability? An opportunity? Time? Treasure? Effort? Energy? Whatever you have that you can give Him, He will take, bless and use to accomplish far more than you can imagine. But you must surrender it to Him. Your moments and your days, your hands and your feet, your voice, your intellect, your will, your heart...your life: will you let Him take them and let them be consecrated to Him?

INVITATION: # 597 – *"Take My Life and Let It Be"*