

When The Odds Are Against You

Judges 3:21

Judges 3:21 begins, “*After Ehud...*” There is an after to whatever you are going through. Israel had enjoyed 80 years of peace, but now things had returned to how they were before. It may be bad now, but there is an after. Things will not always be the way they are. They had slipped into the recurring cycle of bondage and oppression and Shamgar said, Enough! Have you been in a place where you’ve had enough? This is a story about what God can do when we say, “Enough!” Amazing things can happen when we have enough.

In Montgomery, Alabama, a woman who was told to go to the back of the bus had enough and she refused to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a segregated city bus. Rosa Park’s subsequent arrest became the catalyst for the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott and a turning point in the American Civil Rights Movement.

In Germany in 1517, Martin Luther was reading Bible and looking at catholic practices and said, “I’ve had enough.” He nailed his 95 beliefs on the door at Wittenberg on Halloween day, 1517. He was tired of things being the way they were.

Shamgar is a minor judge, but he had a major impact. Shamgar didn’t start out as a hero. He started out in the field as a farmer. Never day I am just a _____. He was going about his business until he had had enough.

He was born to do this. He was unique. He was born an original, and he decided he wouldn’t die a copy. He was going to be who God made him. He decided he was going to do what God called him to do. Shamgar was a farmer, so he understood the times and the seasons. He understood when to plant, when to cultivate, and when to harvest. He understood it was time to do something.

Shamgar is not a household name. All he gets is one verse in the Bible but he had a massive, massive impact. He lived 3,000 years ago, but his story still speaks to us today. During the days of Shamgar, nobody was traveling along the highways. The main highways had been deserted. If people wanted to travel, they had to go down dirt roads and the side roads. They couldn’t go on the main thoroughfares.

When morality breaks down safety and security, any society will suffer. This was the natural result when anyone “Does what is right in their own eyes.” The book of Judges repeatedly talks about God’s people in a spiral of recurring struggle. Judges 21:25, says, “*In those days Israel had no king; everyone did what was right in their own eyes.*”

This period of time is just like our period of history. We call this “postmodernism” today. That means there are no absolutes. Everybody has their own truth. The result is people individually became their own god, became their own king, because there is no absolute right or wrong, and truth is entirely subjective. They lived as though there was no governing guidance to which all the people subscribed.

Postmodernism is a highly destructive philosophy that rejects objective truth and absolutes. Postmodernism completely strips away individual identity, forcing people to be defined entirely by the social or demographic groups they belong to. It is a cultural and academic rebellion against Western civilization and Biblical Christianity. It has become the underlying operating system driving modern progressive politics and “wokeism.” Postmodernism was incubated by left-wing professors within higher education to systematically dismantle historical, theological, and cultural certainties.

We need a return to “outside absolutes” which is a standard of right and wrong outside ourselves, established by God in Heaven and the Christian concept of the *Logos*—the belief that the universe operates on a foundational, divine order created by God. Christians and conservatives must engage in the political and cultural debate to defend Western civilization against postmodern deconstruction.

In Judges 3, they had the same philosophy as us, and it was very destructive and chaotic. Then the Philistines enter the story. The Philistines were the enemies of Israel. When they saw the chaos in the society, they took advantage of a disintegrating culture. They essentially said, "Since you can't get along, everybody is making up their own rules, and there's chaos everywhere, we the Philistines are going to invade Israel." That's why it talks about him slaying the Philistines, because they were creating chaos, and today we have enemies who will also create chaos for us.

We don't have to read the Bible to see what that looks like. All you have to do is read the newspaper or look at the news, and you can see it today. In the midst of the crisis, we have 20 words. Judges chapter 3:31—20 words about a man named Shamgar, but these are 20 powerful words that give each of us encouragement and principles for victory.

They teach us how to make a difference in spite of how bad things are around us. Someone had to rise up for things to get better. In these 20 words are a few things that will challenge us and encourage us.

The question is, "How do you defeat 600 when it's only you, and all you have is an oxgoad?"

1. Start Where You Are - The Farmer's Calling

"After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He too saved Israel." Judges 3:21

Shamgar teaches us that you can make a difference right where you are. He was faithful in the field, and God gave him favor in the fight. Where you are may not be where you want to be, but you have to be faithful where God has placed you, believing He will move you to where He wants you to be.

He was not in a powerful position. He was not at a university, where he had prestige and influence. He was a farmer. He was a blue-collar worker. He was not famous, or wealthy, or powerful, or influential, or popular. He was a farmer, and he had to start where he was.

Zechariah 4:10 says, *"Do not despise the day of small beginnings."* To many people say, "When I get a big break" "When the right door opens" "When somebody notices me" "When somebody sees my talent, and invests in me". "

The key to success is to start where you are. Right where you are. Not when things get better, not if things were different, not if you had what somebody else has, but start where you are. Noah didn't wait for his boat to come in; he built it. Big doors swing on little hinges.

The person who's too big to do little things, is too little to ever do big things. Start where you are. The person who says, If things were different. If I had this going for me. If I knew that person. If I had what they have. You can sit around and wish, and miss your whole life. Start where you are. Not, if I get a big break, not, if somebody will help me.

You may feel like you have an assignment below you, but God will use you right where you are for His glory. He has you there for a reason and a season and soul. Longing for what's ahead will only cost you where you are.

You don't start where you want to be. You start where you are. A lot of people are waiting till they get more money, more education, or a higher position before they do anything. There are many things in God's kingdom that do not get done because people are waiting for something else. They do not get done because He's waiting on God's people to move. Stop waiting on God! God is waiting on us!

Where are you right now in your life? What is your situation that God wants you to be faithful to Him in where you are right now? Sometimes people say, "Well, I'm praying about this and I'm praying out that," but what are you doing right here and right now? If there is no movement where you are right now, what you're saying is, "I don't trust God here. I'm only going to trust Him when I go there."

God finds Shamgar on a farm. One of the great tragedies of life is procrastination.

"Serve the Creator in the days of your youth." Ecclesiastes 12:1

Don't wait till you get old. Don't wait until things get better. Don't wait until you get it all perfect. One of the things that far too many of us lack is vision. "Vision" means "looking further than you can see." If all you see is what you see, you do not see all there is to be seen. God created us to have vision. Vision for our life. Vision for our family. Vision for business. When God created Adam, He said, "Adam, here's the garden. I want you to take this garden and cultivate it, develop it, and turn it into something beyond what you started with."

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Proverbs 29:18

We need a vision for where God wants us to go. If you don't like things as they are, seek God to give you a vision for what He wants you to do, to take it from where it is to where He wants it to be. Shamgar sees that he can't travel down the main highway now. He was dissatisfied. He didn't just accept things the way they were.

2. Use What You Have - The Sanctified Oxgoad

"After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He too saved Israel." Judges 3:31

Shamgar's resources were very limited. But he didn't let what he didn't have keep him from doing what he could do. He's on his farm, in his field, when the enemy was invading. He said, "I'm going to use what I've got."

He had no M1 tanks. No Black Hawk helicopters. No Navy Seals. That's what we'd need if God told us to go fight 600 ISIS soldiers. Shamgar's resources were limited. If I had more resources, Pastor. "If I had somebody who would really believe in me". "If I had what somebody else has, I'd really do something for God". But God has given you an ox goad. God has given you a talent. God has given you an ability. God has put something in your hand.

An oxgoad was not a weapon of war. It was a farming tool used to prod animals along when they were tired and wanted to stop working. Shamgar used an oxgoad because there were no weapons in Israel. The Philistines were blacksmiths, and they had taken all the weapons away.

An oxgoad is an eight-foot pole and had a sharp metal tip on one end and a flat chisel area on the other end. The sharp end of the oxgoad was used to goad the ox and keep them pulling the plow. The farmer used it to dig up roots and dig up things that were obstructing tilling of soil when planting seed.

- Give God What Is In Your Hand.

A boy gave the disciples his 5 loaves of bread and 2 small fishes, and Jesus fed a multitude.

A widow gave her two small coins, and Jesus said she gave more than all the rest.

Shamgar was a man of vision, he sees, "I can use this oxgoad for more than farming."

When Moses stood trembling, unsure of himself and afraid of failure, God didn't give him a sword, an army, or a new voice. He asked a simple question: "What is that in your hand?"

"So the Lord said to Moses, 'What is that in your hand?'" Exodus 4:2

Moses looked down and saw just a stick. It had no power, no glory, no worth in the eyes of Pharaoh, but God saw something else. He saw the beginning of miracles. He told Moses to throw it down, and when he did, it became a serpent. The lifeless stick turned into something living, something dangerous, something powerful. And when Moses picked it up again, it turned back into a rod.

That rod would later part the Red Sea. It would strike a rock and bring water. It would be lifted in battle and bring victory. In that moment, it was just what Moses already had. We keep asking God for new things, for more signs, more resources, or more confidence, but He's asking us to look at what's already in our hand. Maybe it's a talent, a story, a position, a relationship, or even a past you thought disqualified you. God doesn't need something shiny. He just needs something surrendered. God can take the ordinary and make something extraordinary.

Stop focusing on what you don't have. What do you have? God has given you something that can win the battle. God has given every person a dream. Dreams motivate us. Dreams energize us. In all of your getting, get a dream for your life. Get it from God. And you will become unstoppable. A dream is the inward picture of the future you desire. And don't underestimate it, and don't act like it's not important, and don't act like it's not spiritual. God is the Giver of dreams. And when God is going to do something in your life, He'll give you a picture first on the inside of where you're going, before you ever get there.

Sometimes, we think all we need from God is a promise, but just because God gives you a promise doesn't mean you're going to reach, God gave them a picture of the promise land when He brought them out of the wilderness. Ten spies came back and said, "There are grapes the size of melons". Sometimes, a promise isn't enough. You need a picture. The Bible said that Jesus, for the joy that was set before Him. He had a picture of what was ahead: *"For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross."* Hebrews 12:2

You may be in a season right, where you know where you're going, but you don't understand where you are. Follow the dream that God has put in your heart. If you know where you're going. Don't get discouraged by where you are.

You also have Passion. Shamgar had it. Shamgar had passion and, you don't fight 600 warriors if you don't have some passion. If you don't have some enthusiasm you won't do anything. Use what you've have. Your passion determines God's timing. The woman with the issue of blood, Jesus didn't have her on His agenda. He was going to raise a man's daughter from the dead, and she interrupted the schedule, because your passion determines God's timing.

The Bible said she couldn't get to Jesus because the crowd was so large. She couldn't break through, and talk to Him. All she could do is touch the hem of His garment. She couldn't get to Him. She somehow touched the hem of His garment, in her passion to do that. In her sick condition it stopped Jesus. It was her passion, her enthusiasm that triggered the miracle.

"And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my garments?'" And his disciples said to him, *"You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'"* And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, *"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."* Mark 5:30-34

Blind Bartimaeus's enthusiasm decided his miracle. Jesus was just gonna walk through that community, and go somewhere, and when he heard Jesus was passing by, blind Bartimaeus cried out, "*Son of David, have mercy on me*". Luke 18:38 And when the religious people said, "You need to calm down. You're too passionate. You're too enthusiastic. Be quiet. You're not important". He cried the louder. And it wasn't Jesus' timing that decided the miracle, it was the man's enthusiasm and passion. And Jesus stopped and said, "*And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*" Luke 18:42-43

Jesus went to the wedding of Cana, that wedding. He had no intentions of performing a miracle at the wedding of Cana. It was His mother, and her passion, and her enthusiasm that decided the timing of the miracle. The Bible said that they had run out of wine, and His mother went to her Son, "you need to do something" It's time for a miracle. But Jesus said, "*Mother, My time has not yet come.*" John 2:4

Do you think she just looked at him like mother's do? He said, "Bring the water". And the water blushed in the presence of His Creator. And He turned the water into wine, it wasn't His agenda, it was His mother's passion that triggered the miracle power of God in His life.

The word enthusiasm comes from the word theos, from which we get theology, or the study of God. Theos means in God. If God is in you, your life should be turbo-charged. You should be brimming with enthusiasm. And there's just something about an enthusiastic, passionate person who says, "Whatever my hand finds to do, I'm gonna do it with passion, and smile, and energy". You will not stay down. Use what you've have.

Brahms wrote a famous symphony, and the famous conductor, Eugene Ormandy, was conducting it. And it's written, in one section of that music "As loud as possible", by the composer. Brahms put that there. He was saying, "I want the musicians that you lead as loud as possible". He really started emphasizing with enthusiasm, as loud as... come on, he's pulling it out of 'em. A few bars later, Brahms wrote on his score piece: "Louder still". "Louder still". So now, he's really throwing his arms, trying to bring out. And when he did, he literally threw, his shoulder out of joint. And the press was laughing at him in the press interview after the concert, and one of the reporters asked, "How does it feel to throw your arm out of joint, leading the orchestra"? And his response was, "I know some people who have reached middle age who have never become enthused enough to dislodge a neck tie, not to mention a shoulder, so I feel pretty good about it".

Where is your passion? Where is your enthusiasm? Use what you've have. Shamgar said, "I've got an ox goad". And, God said, "Start where you are, and use what you've got, and I'll bless what you've got, and I'll take down your giants, and I'll bring victory to your life". The miracle is not in what you don't have. The miracle is in what you have.

You may feel unequipped, but God isn't asking you to be impressive. He's asking you to trust Him. The rod didn't have power on its own. It had power when it was in the hands of a man who obeyed God. When God touches what you already carry, miracles begin to happen. What's in your hand? And will you lay it down at God's word? Will you trust Him enough to give it back to Him? He's not waiting for perfection. He's waiting for obedience.

That thing you think is ordinary may be the very thing God wants to use to shake nations, break chains, and build faith. So don't hide it. Don't downplay it. Hold it out to Him and watch what happens when you place it in His hands.

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- When The Odds Are Against You, God Is For You.

“Who struck down six hundred Philistines.” Judges 3:31

600 to one is long odds! A farmer, with a farm tool, and he slew 600 Philistines. It would be the equivalent of one man with a stick, with a sharp point on the end, killing 600 ISIS terrorists. One man, one oxgoad and one vision. But he slew 600 Philistines with the oxgoad. His one oxgoad gets rid of 600 problems. How many problems are in your life, in your world, in your job, in your career? How many problems are in your home, in your family? You say there are dozens and dozens of them. He had 600.

600 to one is long odds but Matthew 19:26 says, "With God, all things are possible." He had one tool, but because he knew how to use the one tool the right way, under divine influence, it was able to get the job done. When God is ready to move, He don't need a bunch of stuff, but He needs to own the stuff. Sometimes God will ask you to demonstrate your faith by asking you to do something opposite to your logic.

We have to become dissatisfied with the status quo. Dissatisfied with the confusion. Dissatisfied with the crime. Dissatisfied with the chaos. We have to take what God has given us and give it back to Him to be used for His glory.

All David had was a stone. He said, *“Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that would taunt the armies of the living God?”* 1 Samuel 17:26

He only had a stone and a slingshot, but he also had the Lord. He says, *“You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.”* 1 Samuel 17:45

All he needed was what he had. It just had to be sanctified by God so that it could now do something bigger than it could ever do on its own. The question is, “How do you defeat 600, when it's only you, and all you have is an oxgoad?”

There are 600 coming at him. They had cut off all the highways. They were spread out among the different highways. He had a bunch of gangs to deal with. There were maybe 10 in one location, 25 in another location, and 50 in another. He looked at his oxgoad and said, “It's sharp on one side, flat on the other side, and I know how to use it because I've been farming with it for years.”

God has given you something. You may not even know what it is yet, but God has given you something. You have an oxgoad. God has given you something that He wants to use for His glory and the good of others. God wants us to have a bigger vision. You must start where you are. You must use what you have.

3. The Secret of Supernatural Power – The Holy Spirit

“He too saved Israel.” Judges 3:31

What was Shamgar's secret? What was the key that shifted his life so that he became a judge, and one man who saved the whole nation? What was his secret? To understand how you became a judge, you first have to have the secret weapon. Judges 3:10, Judges 6:34, Judges 11:29, Judges 14:6, Judges 15:14 *“The Spirit of the Lord came on him, so that he became Israel's judge.”*

You became a judge when God took over your life. The Spirit of the Lord came, and the Spirit of the Lord grabbed these people and empowered them to do extraordinary things. We need a deep and dynamic relationship with the Holy Spirit all the time.

He wants a relationship so deep that He owns our thoughts, owns our decisions, owns our feelings, and owns our perspective, so that He can rule over us. This one man gets rid of 600 Philistines and saves a whole nation from falling apart.

If Jesus were to come back tomorrow, we don't have to worry about what's happening in our nation, but if He doesn't come back for another 100 years, we better worry about what's happening in our nation. God needs some men and women with some spiritual oxgoads who will step up to the spiritual plate, who will make a relationship with Him the number one driving force in their lives.

God needs men and women who will operate underneath His rule so that He can sanctify the oxgoad and do things that will blow your mind as He starts slaying things that are trying to destroy us. That means He's got to give us a vision. We have to be close enough to hear His voice. We need to have a deep daily relationship with God, not just a "Sunday morning only" relationship. You can't hear God with just a "Sunday morning only" relationship. It's the job of the Holy Spirit to tell us what He wants to do with us.

What is your oxgoad? What does He want you to do? What new thoughts does He want you to have? What vision does He want to cast in you? What moment does He want to use you to change everything? A sermon can't tell you that. That's what a "once a week" relationship with God looks like. You need a daily relationship with the Holy Spirit so that He can speak to you directly.

You say, "But how does He speak?" You have to be in close proximity to Him, because He whispers. He doesn't scream. He whispers. Because He whispers, we have to be close.

When we are in close proximity, 1 Corinthians 2:11 says, "*No one discerns the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*" He brings the thoughts of God, and He puts them in your mind. He registers them in your head so that now you begin to think God's thoughts after Him. When you begin to pray and talk to God, you begin to speak things that your mind is thinking. But your mind is now thinking thoughts that the Holy Spirit has now put in your brain, so that, when you talk to God about what the Holy Spirit has put in your brain, the reason God has to answer it is He told you to think it in the first place. He wants to connect with you in an intimate relationship.

He wants you to "see what eyes have not seen and hear what ears have not heard." God wants to give you new ideas, new brainstorm, new initiatives, new ways to use old talents like the oxgoad. He's got all this stuff He wants to do... but He's speaking in a whisper. Make time for God. Give Him the right to give you new thoughts and visions of what He wants to do.

"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days." Joel 2:28-29

Pursue Him so that He can show you what He wants you to deliver. You can beat the odds through God's authority. God is calling every person to beat the odds. God is not limited to how you were raised or what limitations people or family have placed on you. God is not limited by the unfairness that may have come against you. All that is real, and we cannot deny it, but neither should we surrender to it. You can beat the odds just like Shamgar.

I don't care how big the odds are or how long they've been there. You can beat them if God is covering you, guiding you, directing you, leading you, and if you are surrendered to His authority. You can change the odds.

You can turn things around, not only for yourself, but for the society in which you live and the family that you oversee.

Don't let the odds discourage you from moving forward with your life. Don't get trapped by numbers. Exercise God's authority in the sphere He's given you. You lay out the odds that are against you before Him, based on the realities of your life, and then you lay claim to His victory.