

Join the Victory!

Judges: Deliverance in Darkness

Judges 5:1-31

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Good morning church! My name is Curt, and I'm one of the pastors here at First Free. We're pressing on in Judges this morning. We have a very unique passage today. Most of Judges is a narrative, meaning that it's telling the stories of what happened. But today in chapter 5, we have a song. It's more like a psalm than a historical narrative. Go ahead and open your Bibles to Judges 5. I'm going to read most of this passage as we go along this morning, rather than read the whole chapter at once. So don't panic that we're not going to have a time to stand and read God's Word like we usually do! We'll read almost the entire chapter as we go along. Let's start right away with verses 1-3 for the context. Listen as I read them. "Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day: That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord! Hear O kings; give ear, O princes; to the Lord I will sing; I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel."¹

Sometimes you've gotta just burst into song, am I right? Some of you are thinking, "Yeah! I love to sing anytime, anywhere! I wish life was a great big musical." And some of you are thinking, "Uh no, I have never in my life had the urge to burst into song." I'm more in the former. There is a lot of singing that happens in my house. I don't think my dear wife Michelle had any idea when she married me how much I would sing at home. And both of our daughters have picked it up too. They are liable to pretend anything in the house is a microphone and start belting out their favorite tune. Our three-year-old is convinced that the more vibrato, the better, and it's quite hilarious. Deborah and Barak are doing the same thing; they're bursting into song after a big victory for Israel. They can't help themselves. They have seen God work in a powerful way, and now it's time to celebrate. They have gladness in their heart, so they are going to sing about it. They are singing about the story that took place back in chapter 4, and even retelling the story in some ways here. It's rare in the Bible that we have a story and a song about the same incident back-to-back, so why do we have this sudden song in Judges 5? The simple answer is that Deborah and Barak had seen God deliver his people in a miraculous way! The song will talk more about that deliverance with a tone of celebration. But the song also tells us more about the characters.

THREE WOMEN: DEBORAH, SISERA'S MOTHER, AND Jael

There are three main women in the song: Deborah, Sisera's mother, and Jael. We'll start by observing them, and then have two main teaching points after that. So let's begin.

Deborah

First, we have Deborah. She is the primary author of this song. We see that in verse 1 where the word for "sang" is actually in the feminine form in the Hebrew. Then in verse 7, she says, "I Deborah." So Deborah is the primary voice here, and this makes sense because Deborah was the judge in Israel at the time. She had called on Barak to lead the army because the Canaanites had been cruelly oppressing them. Deborah explains to us just how bad it had gotten in Israel. Let's look at verses 6-8. Verse 6 says, "In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways.” This probably means looters and bandits had taken over most of the roads. It was a dangerous time. Then verse 7: “The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel.” Why did they need a mother? Look at verse 8. “When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates. Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel?” Israel had fallen low yet again. They had chosen new gods, and the men of Israel, the 40,000, didn’t have shields or spears ready. It appears that Israel had resigned themselves to being defeated by the Canaanites. They had given up! How could the people of God who had seen such deliverance in the past give up so quickly? They’re sitting around doing nothing! They needed a mom to step up and get them in gear! And Deborah did just that. Deborah saw the oppression, heard from the Lord since she was a prophetess, and she called upon Barak to step up and go deliver the people. That’s a good mom, taking action!

Sisera’s Mother

Now let’s look at a second woman in the text, another mother. Her son was Sisera, the leader of the Canaanite army who was oppressing Israel. Let’s read verses 28-30; we observe Sisera’s mother waiting for him to come home from battle. “Out of the window she peered, the mother of Sisera wailed through the lattice: ‘Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?’ Her wisest princesses answer, indeed, she answers herself, ‘Have they not found and divided the spoil?—A womb or two for every man; spoil of dyed materials for Sisera, spoil of dyed materials embroidered, two pieces of dyed work embroidered for the neck as spoil?’” Sisera’s mother is worried, even wailing, because Sisera’s chariot is so long in coming. You might be tempted to feel sympathy for her at this point, because we know Sisera is dead. But the author does not want that. We saw in verse 30 that Sisera’s mother is hoping, even expecting, that Sisera is dividing the spoil, the spoil of Israel. It talks about dyed material. She is probably hoping that Sisera’s victory will bring her some nice, new, colorful clothes. But the line that really shows Sisera’s cruelty is “a womb or two for every man.” She is expecting that the male soldiers would be able to take over the wombs of the Israelite women. In other words, they would use and abuse the women in a terrible form of sexual slavery. This is not ok! So we should feel no sympathy for Sisera’s mother, who is cheering for this kind of cruelty against Israel. She stands in contrast with Deborah, the mother of Israel, who stepped up to fight for justice.

Jael

The third woman in this text is also the biggest hero of the text. Jael receives the highest tribute in the song in verses 24-27. Let’s take a look. “Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent-dwelling women most blessed. He asked water and she gave him milk; she brought him curds in a noble’s bowl. She sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen’s mallet; she struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; between her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead.” Remember from last week’s passage that Jael is the one who killed Sisera with a tent peg. Here in the song, Deborah calls her the “most blessed of women.” So even though Deborah was the mother of Israel, and Barak led the armies of Israel, Jael receives the highest honor in chapter 5. Again, we see the detail of her heroic deed with the use of strong verbs like “struck,” “crushed,” “shattered,” and “pierced.” Then I think verse 27 is the climax. It’s very poetic! “Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; between her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead.” The poetry helps us feel the irony. The oppressor of Israel, particularly of Israel’s women, lies dead

at the feet of a woman. God, once again with great irony, has delivered his people from the oppressor.²

So our characters in the song have told us more about the story of God's deliverance. Now I want to bring to light two main teaching points from the chapter. Deborah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is calling out to us today about a couple of things.

JOIN THE BATTLE!

The first is this: Join the battle! We are going to see this in the center of this song. In verses 14-18, Deborah goes through some of the tribes of Israel, and you'll see what she says about each one. Let's read it. "From Ephraim their root they marched down into the valley, following you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen; from Machir marched down the commanders, and from Zebulun those who bear the lieutenant's staff; the princes of Issachar came with Deborah, and Issachar faithful to Barak; into the valley they rushed at his heels. Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and Dan, why did he stay with the ships? Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, staying by his landings. Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death; Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field." Deborah praises the ones that joined the battle. Benjamin and Zebulun are mentioned in verse 14, Issachar in verse 15, then Zebulun again and Naphtali in verse 18. All of them joined Barak, marching down to fight Sisera, and all of them are commended for their participation. They joined the battle. But then there are the other tribes and their excuses. We see that Reuben "sat still." There was great searching of heart, it says twice, but they decided to sit still and stay home. They didn't help their brothers and sisters. They didn't fight for the Lord. They sat still. In verse 17, the tribes in the region of Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan. The tribe of Dan stayed with the ships, and Asher also "sat still," staying by his landings. In these verses we see division among the people of Israel, and as we go forward in the book of Judges, we will see even more strife and division.

Why do these tribes stay home? It appears each of them is unwilling to leave their possessions. They stay with the sheepfolds, the ships and the landings. They don't want to risk what they have to go and defend their brothers and sisters in another part of Israel. They don't even care that other Israelite women will be enslaved! Deborah is clearly condemning them for this. Consequently, they don't get to rejoice with Israel over this victory. They missed out on seeing firsthand how God was working. They preferred to keep their ships and sheep, while the people of Zebulun were risking their lives, and got to see God's great deliverance and be a part of it. Down in verse 23, we see the strongest language of all when the angel of the Lord says, "Curse Meroz and its inhabitants thoroughly, because they did not come to the help of the Lord." The commentators don't know anything about Meroz. Their best guess is that it was a town near the battle, and therefore it was especially pitiful that they didn't join in. Regardless of who or where they were, they were cursed for not joining God's army to fight.

How does all of this connect with our world today? In some ways, it's the same! Brothers and sisters, there is still a battle going on today! What is it? It's the gospel battle. It's a battle to see the gospel grow deep in us and go wide to all peoples, as our mission statement says. Growing deep today is just like in the book of Judges. Israel needed to stop their own idolatry. And today, we need to fight to let the gospel defeat the idols in our hearts. God is calling us to holy living, and we need

² Keller, Timothy. *Judges for You*. Purceyville, Va: The Good Book Co, 2013, p. 64.

to fight against sin. So really, the battle hasn't changed. For going wide, the battle hasn't changed either. In the Old Testament, Israel was called to be a blessing to all the nations. We see that in Genesis 12 when God called Abraham. Then in the New Testament, Jesus calls us to go and make disciples of all nations. God's mission has not changed. So we know what God is fighting for now. His mission is for the gospel to purify our hearts from idolatry. And his mission is to save people from every tribe, tongue and nation. Our call is not to go out and fight against Canaanites or call down curses. Our call is to be gospel people in our hearts, and to proclaim the gospel, in love, to the nations. Friends, join the battle! You might be thinking, "Only Pastor Curt could somehow take Judges 5 and turn it into a missions sermon." Well you might be right! But friends, the battle isn't over! God is fighting for his people, and you are called to join the battle! Don't be a Reuben, sitting still, searching your heart. Don't be a Dan, staying with your ships. Be a Zebulun, risking your life to the death to fulfill God's mission.

Mama Deborah is calling for some courage. And it's interesting that in this passage, two women are the model of courage. You know what? It's not that different today, in my opinion. When I went to Central Asia, to a people group that was 99.9% Muslim, I had some fears. You see, I was 24. I wanted to be married, but the Lord hadn't opened that door for me yet. I knew moving to Central Asia would decrease my chances of finding a wife. But in all honesty, I wasn't that scared because there a lot more single ladies in global missions, than single men. I've even heard it's a 7:1 ratio. So my odds weren't that bad. But you know who really had some courage? Michelle Fong. Michelle also moved to Central Asia as a single person, and she also wanted to be married someday. She knew the odds were not in her favor, and she still went. She stepped up. She got to share the gospel with tons of women who had never heard it before. And even with the odds against her, she got to marry me, and she gets to listen to me sing! But I'm definitely the blessed one in this marriage. Michelle had some courage! And there are plenty of other single women among unreached people groups right now doing some courageous work!

So where are all the men? My observation as a missions pastor is that men are more prone to sitting still in their faith than women. Women seem more likely to step up with courage, even risking their lives to the death. Why is that? I wish I knew the answer. I'll take a guess though. Just like Dan in the text, men tend to be more worried about the ships. I hear it cloaked in the word "responsibility." We men have to be responsible. And usually, when we talk about being responsible, we're talking about financial responsibility. And we should be financially responsible. But I think a lot of men in the church are more concerned with financial responsibility than with gospel responsibility. We're like Dan, being responsible for those ships when those ships are just going to sit there and do nothing. They're not even joining the battle! Who cares how many ships you've got if they're sitting at the dock? Who cares how many dollars you've got if you're not putting them to use in the battle? Let's not use "financial responsibility" as an excuse to sit still. Certainly there are a lot of men who are very courageous for God, and a lot of women who are sitting still as well. But I am specifically calling on men because Deborah called on Barak in the text, and because I see more of that "sitting still" in men today than I do women.

I hope and pray that the Holy Spirit is speaking to many of you this morning about being men and women of courage. But I also know that courage doesn't necessarily mean moving overseas. Not all of you are called to go to Asia for missions. I'm not saying that. I don't know what your role is in God's mission. But I know one thing. You're *not* called to sit still. You're *not* called to do nothing in God's mission and God's church. I am 100% sure of that. God has good works prepared for you to do in accomplishing his purposes. God has given you spiritual gifts to build up the body and to share the gospel. Let me give you an example. A guy in our church who is not sitting still is my good

friend Daniel Schaible. Daniel works hard to provide for his family; he's working two jobs in fact. But beyond that, Daniel is in the battle of making disciples. He's serving in the middle school ministry here at church. He's making disciples of his kids at home. He creates space and opportunities for his wife to thrive and make disciples. And he's engaged in global missions by connecting with a couple of our missions partners and by praying for them regularly as a family. Daniel is in the battle! Daniel is part of the mission!

Deborah is calling us to have some courage. God is calling us to get into the battle. Before we go on, let me ask you a question: How is God calling you into the battle this morning? Maybe spend some time in prayer about it today. Maybe ask your small group how they see the Lord has gifted you. Maybe give me a call this week and ask where you can serve.

GOD FIGHTS AND WINS THE BATTLE.

Our second main teaching point is the best news of all, and our ultimate reason to be courageous. It's the fact that God fights and wins the battle. This song in chapter 5, even more so than the story in chapter 4, emphasizes God's work in winning the battle.³ Israel didn't win because Barak was a uniquely gifted general. They didn't win because Zebulun risked their lives. No. They won because God was fighting on their side! Look at verses 4 and 5. They say, "LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel." The Lord marched from the region of Edom. The Lord was the one leading Israel into battle. And when the Lord is on your side, you will win! Deborah highlights his awesome power here by saying, "the earth trembled and the heavens dropped and the clouds dropped water, and the mountains quaked." If the mountains quake, then you know that 900 iron chariots of Sisera don't stand a chance.

Jump to verses 19-21. We'll see Deborah emphasize this again. "The kings came, they fought; then fought the kings of Canaan, at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they got no spoils of silver. From heaven the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera. The torrent Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. March on, my soul, with might!" So the kings come and fight against Israel, but then the stars fight against them. This may have been a very pointed statement against the Canaanites who commonly used astrological readings for guidance.⁴ So while they're looking to the stars for guidance, God is using the stars against them because he created the stars. God is making sure they know that he is supreme over all of their gods and all of their silly tactics. Then in verse 21, the torrent of Kishon swept them away. If you were here last week, you may remember that Pastor Josh mentioned that this battle took place in a kind of streambed. When Sisera's army reached the river Kishon in chapter 4 verse 13, Deborah told Barak, "This is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand." It is likely that God brought a kind of flashflood to the river Kishon, as we saw the clouds dropping water back in verse 4. And this flood neutralized the threat of Sisera's iron chariots. God, in his sovereignty, organized the forces of nature, even the weather, to deliver his people Israel.

This reminds me of some other verses in the Bible. Think about Psalm 20:7, which explains "Some trust in horses, and some trust in chariots, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." God can deliver his people from the strongest of armies. Or how about Romans 8:31: "If God is for us, who

³ Webb, Barry G. *The Book of Judges*. Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p. 200.

⁴ Wolf, Herbert. *Judges*. in *The Expositor's Bible commentary with the New International Version: Volume 3*. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1992.p. 414; Webb, p. 214.

can be against us?” And verse 35, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

Friends, this passage is a powerful reminder that God is sovereign. He accomplishes what he wants. No army, no enemy, no bully, no dictator, and not even Satan himself can stop God. He can manipulate the stars to fight for him. He can cause rain and hail to fall from heaven to fight for him. This is a beautifully freeing truth, brothers and sisters. God doesn't need us to accomplish his purposes. He doesn't need you. At first that really jars us, because we want to be important and we want to make an impact. But God doesn't need us. He can fulfill the Great Commission without you and me, without First Free. He can rise up donkeys to proclaim the truth. He can make rocks cry out the truth. May we never think that God is dependent on us to fulfill his promises! This takes the pressure off of us; the weight of the universe isn't on our shoulders. Instead of God needing us in his mission, he *wants* us in his mission. He calls us and he wants us. We don't have to join his mission; we get to. We get to participate in painting the picture of Revelation 7:9, where we see “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” We get to be a part of making that happen. When we realize that God is fighting the battle and God is the one fulfilling his promises, then it transforms our work from an overwhelming obligation to a joyful opportunity, because we are joining in the victory of God.

To finish up this morning, I want to look at the last verse in this passage. How does Deborah conclude this song? With a prayer: “May all your enemies perish, O Lord! But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might.” The Lord answers this prayer. This is truth that will happen. The enemies of God will perish. They will be destroyed. But the friends of God will be like the sun. The friends of God will shine forever in God's kingdom. God wins in the end! Join the victory! So which team are you on? Are you friends with God, or enemies with God? A lot of people think they are friends with God, but they are not. The only way to be a friend with God is to have a relationship with his son, Jesus. I'll quote the famous verse, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Believe in the Son, Jesus Christ as your Savior for sin, and you are eternally a friend of God. Reject the Son, and you are an enemy and you will perish. That's hard for some people to hear, but that's the biblical truth. Do you believe in Jesus? Then you are God's friend! So join his mission! Do you not believe in Jesus? Then you are God's enemy, because your sin is not paid for. But that could change today by putting your faith in Jesus for your salvation.