



**Series:** Judges - Breaking the Cycle of sin

**Sermon #3:** Deborah

**Passage:** Judges 4-5

Week 3 of our series in the book of Judges. If you are new with us here's the quick recap:

There is a cycle that God's people keep falling into that lead them into disasters of their own making. They get into a mess they can't get out of. Usually they get enslaved to a foreign nation...and then they cry out. AND when they cry out...God raises up a deliverer that the bible calls a Judge.

And the reason I love this book so much is because of how real the author keeps it. Real people who know God and have an incredible encounter with him where he saves them. And we've already seen AWESOME salvation happen 3 times in chapter 3. 12 times Israel experiences God's deliverance. I mean in remarkable ways one of which we are going to read about today. But then they wake up the next day and the next and the next and years go by and that deliverance that was so exhilarating...its become a distant memory. Kind of loses its luster.

So listen they start drifting back into old struggles. Even though they've been there before and they know how bad it is they still wind up back there again. DOES THAT CONNECT WITH ANYBODY?

Ya'll I struggle to believe in God's power like a pastor should. And that struggle expresses itself as pessimism. And when things start looking bleak my instinct is to doubt and start worse-case scenario-ing. The other day we were in an elders meeting and I said some little thing and one of our lay elders said "Sounds like glass half-empty Spence is here again." And he was right! Called me on it. And I thought...I know that God is powerful. I know my role is to believe him. I've experienced his power & provision before...so how did I get here again where my faith is so shaky?

I was drifting back into a familiar struggle. Ever been there? For some of you that struggle is with a substance. For some of you that struggle has a name like Mike or Janice or something and you keep finding yourself back with that person that you know is no good for you. For some of you its doubt. Its fear. It's anxiety. How did you get here again?

If that has ever been you, I believe God has a word for you today. The great news of the book of Judges is that even when you mess up AGAIN...and go binging hard into that same sin again...when you go further in it than ever before...Our God can still deliver you from it. And the reason we are in judges is to help you find that deliverance.

And more than that, to learn about yourself and how you slip into that cycle and teach you from God's word how he can break the power that sin has over you through the greater power of his redemptive love!

See one of the recurring ideas today is going to be that we are not playing games in church. You need real hope today because you got real life waiting on you when you leave here. And I believe God offers real power to us. And the deeper we dive into his love for us, the more we unlock that power and unshakable hope starts to fill our souls. We'll get there today.

Today in our story that deliverance is gonna come, again like last week, from a surprising place. We are in Judges 4. We will walk through the story and then I'll show you what God wants us to walk away with from this incredible story.

[1] The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud had died.

Why is this important? Because they had just been saved by Ehud in a really miraculous way! But the deliverer died. And things were a little shaky. And when things seem a little shaky its easy to go back to that familiar place of escape. You know its not good for you, but its familiar. Courtney and I were talking about this and our first couple of years here in CLT she escaped from her problems at Chick-fil-a and target because they were familiar escapes. Terrible on the budget and impulse shopping & eating is problem **escaping** not problem **solving**. But we are drawn to it like a magnet b/c its familiar. And the familiar sins have the tightest grip on us don't they.

[2] So the Lord sold them to King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera who lived in Harosheth of the Nations. [3] Then the

Israelites cried out to the Lord, because Jabin had nine hundred iron chariots, and he harshly oppressed them twenty years.

Remember the iron chariots? 1<sup>st</sup> chapter Israel was too scared to go up against them. Now its come back on them. The people with the iron chariots are now oppressing Israel.

[4] Deborah, a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. [5] She would sit under the palm tree of Deborah (I guess that's her tree) between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to settle disputes.

This is our only female Judge. And I love the details. She was married. Other judges may have been but the bible wants us to know she is. Yet being married did not mean her HUSBAND was the judge. God called her. And men, this guy didn't seem to have a problem being married to a woman who was a lot more visible in leadership than he was. She was wise. Only judge who wasn't primarily a military hero.

[6] She summoned Barak .... "Hasn't the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you: 'Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites? [7] Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin's army, his chariots, and his infantry ... and I will hand him over to you.' "

This is big. God has given a command. The rest of the story is going to be built around this: Go down the

mountain

[8] Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go.” Deborah, being ready for a good adventure replies...

[9] “I will gladly go with you,” she said, “but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because the Lord will sell Sisera to a woman.” Now a little aside on faith here. We are going to get into it later, but this little exchange is, I believe, a fascinating lesson on faith. Barak often gets dissed for his “if you don’t go with me I won’t go” comment. But if you look at the rest of Barak’s character it just doesn’t fit to think of his request as cowardice. Instead, it seems Barak is recognizing that here is a Godly woman who speaks God’s words to the people. Why wouldn’t he want her with him...in a battle GOD had called him to go fight?

- In fact this echoes Moses’ request of God in Exodus 33...God offers Moses great victory and wealth...offers him the promised land when they had been wandering in the wilderness...God says its all yours but I’m not going. And Moses says NO! If you will not go with us, we will not go. And I see Barak looking at a battle that God’s messenger has said he will win....again he has guaranteed victory...and he says NOT UNLESS YOU GO WITH ME.

So Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. [10] Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; ten thousand men followed him, and Deborah also went with him.

[12] It was reported to Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up Mount Tabor. [13] Sisera summoned all his nine hundred iron chariots and all the troops who were with him...[14] Then Deborah said to Barak, “Go! This is the day the Lord has handed Sisera over to you. Hasn’t the Lord gone before you? ”

Hey I need you to hear God saying GO! to us Mercy Church. Jesus has given us a task to get the gospel to the world and he said “I will be with you always.” What you are about to see in this text is an unmistakable act of God and what you and I need to see in it is that because HIS PRESENCE is with us, HIS POWER is going ahead of us!! We want to see an awakening...God wants that! God is for that. Think right now about your 1. Do you find yourself thinking “It’s not likely they will come to Christ?” Right there in that is a colossal misunderstanding of GOD’s POWER and his LOVE. THAT PERSON NEEDS CHRIST AND LISTEN, THE LORD HAS GONE BEFORE YOU! SO GO DOWN THE MOUNTAIN!

So Barak came down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him.

Battle time. Riding into overwhelming odds the outmanned, out-gunned Israelites follow a faithful general into battle. Oh how God loves this moment. The moment after they obey and before they see him work... that’s the faith moment. WE OUT HERE GOD! You better show up here in battle or we are going to all show up there in heaven in about 2 minutes. Some of you are out there right now. You’ve stepped out and chosen to obey God...but you haven’t seen fruit yet. Faith Zone. I’m

here to tell you to press on. Your obedience will bear fruit!

[15] The Lord threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army into a panic before Barak's assault. Sisera left his chariot and fled on foot. [16] the whole army of Sisera fell by the sword; not a single man was left. Ok what in the world happened? We actually get more detail from chapter 5. The way the Lord threw Sisera into a panic was that he sent a huge rain. And the rain flooded the river in front of Sisera's iron army. And when Sisera's chariots went charging in, all that iron got stuck in the mud. That's why they fled on foot. They didn't expect it because it was the middle of the dry season. Obviously you don't take chariots into a muddy river that you know about. This rain was a little act of God.

Watch this: Their most powerful enemy was literally stopped in their tracks, the iron chariots that were so daunting the people of Israel had feared for years and years to deal with them. They just knew there was no chance...God not only defeated them, he made their apparent strength their greatest weakness. You see how God works? He takes Barak's weakness...his lightly armed soldiers...and he uses that as a strength to bring about victory!

God chooses a manner of victory that allows Israel to see how weak and vulnerable even the strongest enemy can be when God is going before them!!!

OHHH MY Goodness I'm coming back to that when we talk about what we can learn from this story. Lets keep going. Sisera ran away on foot...

[17] ...to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite...  
18 Jael went out to greet Sisera and said to him, "Come in, my lord. Come in with me. Don't be afraid." So he went into her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.  
[19] He said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink for I am thirsty." She opened a container of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him again. [20] Then he said to her, "Stand at the entrance to the tent. If a man comes and asks you, 'Is there a man here?' say, 'No.' " Cause he knows a man is coming. His name is Barak. And he has business with Sisera. Now this next verse...whew.

[21] While he was sleeping from exhaustion, Heber's wife Jael took a tent peg, grabbed a hammer, and went silently to Sisera. She hammered the peg into his temple and drove it into the ground, and he died. I appreciate the author added "and he died." Like we couldn't figure that out. The great irony here is that setting up & taking down tents was the work of housewives at this time which means the great Sisera was killed by what one commentator called a common household appliance.<sup>1</sup>

Barak shows up and sees Sisera lying dead and you know what he says? "Nailed it!" No, what should come to his mind & ours is what Deborah said to him way back up in verse 9.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, *Judges for You*, 61.

[9] “you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because the Lord will sell Sisera to a woman.” The great Sisera lying dead at the hands of an unsuspecting house wife. The last couple of verses in chapter 4 tell you that Israel gained strength and defeated king Jabin. The cycle was complete and Israel was again free from their enemies.

What a story! The great thing about this story is chapter 5 provides its own commentary on the story. Chapter 5 is Deborah’s song. It teaches us how to think about the story. And that’s what I want to do with the rest of our time today. Looking at Chapter 5, reflecting on chapter 4...I want to show you **Battle Lessons from the great victory of Deborah, Barak, & Jael**. Deborah is teaching Israel how to understand the events of the battle. And her leadership actually leads to the first truth we HAVE to bring up when looking at these two chapters.

### **1. Women have access to the same spiritual gifts men do.<sup>2</sup>**

Ya’ll how could we look at the career of Deborah and not bring up women’s leadership in the church. She’s too awesome. She, carried along by the Holy Spirit, WROTE this song that is teaching us how to understand the battle she just won.

There are a few ways people read this story and one is that Deborah stepped into leadership because no man

would step into the role. So this wasn’t the original plan but a sort of last resort because someone needed to judge. The problem with that is that the CHAPTER DOESN’T SAY THIS! In fact, the author makes it clear that Deborah was clearly called by God to be a dispute settler and a prophetess!<sup>3</sup> Even if you read Barak as wavering in his faith, which as I said I don’t think is necessary to read, that still doesn’t have anything to do with Deborah’s role. She was placed there by God & gifted by God to lead. Period.

And I pause on that to emphasize something I believe strongly and we believe as a church: that scripture clearly indicates in both its examples and in its teachings that **women have access to the same spiritual giftings men do.**

And I need to say that because sometimes the church can intentionally or even unintentionally communicate that the only role a woman can play in life is as a helper submitted to her husband. As if the rest of scripture applies to men and the little bits in Ephesians 5 & Proverbs 31 and RUTH are for women. And the danger with that is we can communicate that its ok for women to be superficial, shallow people who should sit by and let men do all the important spiritual stuff.

Listen, every single passage in the bible is JUST as true and as important for women as it is for men.

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<sup>2</sup> This phrasing comes from J.D. Greear’s sermon “Deborah and Barak: Calling All Leaders, Both Male and Female” preach in the Broken Saviors series at the Summit Church in 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Keller, 57.

My wife is not a shallow woman and we are not raising our daughters to be shallow either. When I talk about our kids ministry raising up gospel warriors you better BELIEVE I'm talking about our daughters just as much as I'm talking about our sons. I refuse to lead a church that creates shallow superficial women. Women God has gifted you with the full array of giftings he has to offer his church and he expects you to use them!

Now you better believe part of that, is training you for the role God will call some of you to of wife and mother. And we are going to celebrate that and equip you for that posture of submission because the bible celebrates it. We are also going to do our best to try and equip you to use the gifts God has given you for ministry, whatever those gifts are!

Reason #250 you need community here. Not superficial community, but the real kind where people can affirm your gifting and help equip you for it.

Now, let me say this: There are certain roles in the Bible that God reserves for men. In the Old Testament that role is a priest. The person who stands before God on behalf of the people. And in the new testament that role is called pastor-elder.

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 18.26

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2.17

<sup>6</sup> Romans 16.1

We don't shrink away or try to hide that, we believe if God sets it up that way it is right and good for us. That doesn't prohibit women from teaching at all, it means she is not to teach as one who has the authority of a pastor-elder.

In the NT You see Priscilla tutoring Apollos<sup>4</sup> and women serving as prophetesses<sup>5</sup> and deacons<sup>6</sup>.

- Tim Keller said: "God forbids one kind of role in the church to women, as he did in Israel. So we must not jump to forbidding all teaching and tasks to women; and we shouldn't assert all sorts of specific tasks are off-limits when the bible doesn't give such details; it is better to say that women can do everything that a man who isn't an elder can do."
- You may feel a tension with that. And if you do that's because the bible doesn't adapt to what our culture says, instead we are to adapt our lives to what it says. And in present day there are two cultures that both get frustrated by what I just said
- One will tend to view women as the less capable gender that doesn't have access to certain giftings. The other will view no distinction between the genders at all.
- But the bible puts forward a vision of the genders that says they are **equal but not equivalent**. They are both created by God and God says both

are of equal value yet created differently for different tasks and that is a good thing!

So to our women let me say this:

1. **Do not shrink back from the calling God has on your life.** We most certainly need more Deborah's who will speak & live God's truth courageously into our day. Our daughters need role models and our church needs you to use the giftings God has given you.
2. **You can do that while honoring God's divine order.** Deborah and Jael were both identified as wives. That's an indicator in Hebrew culture that they were submitted to the leadership of their husbands. And listen: submitted to the headship of her husband was a good celebrated thing that didn't limit Deborah fulfilling her calling.

Ok there is so much more so let's look into Deborah's song for a few more lessons. Next one is right in verse 2

[2] When the leaders lead in Israel, when the people volunteer, blessed be the Lord.

Deborah is drawing out an important lesson to remember from this epic battle and she's going to reinforce it throughout the song. And its for the leaders of God's people...

## **2. When leaders lead, God's people flourish (Judges 5.2,9)**

A huge theme in this song is Deborah looking back on the battle and basically doing a roll call of who showed up and who didn't.

- Ephraim came down (v. 14)
- Benjamin came down (v.14)
- Princes of Issachar (v.15)
- Zebulun and Naphtali (V.18)
- Reuben remained by the sheep pens & Gilead remained by their ships (16-17)

While this is for all of us let me talk specifically to the men for a second. Because there is a message here you need to grapple with. We are in a moment where you cannot hang back by the ships. Listen: IT IS SAFE to hang back by the ships and back by the sheep pens. AND YOU CAN MANIPULATE THE MOMENT TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE THE SPIRITUAL THING TO DO IS HANG BACK.

[16] Why did you sit among the sheep pens listening to the playing of pipes for the flocks? There was great searching of heart among the clans of Reuben.

Reuben's leaders searched the heart...Listen to me...

THEY WERE CALLED BY GOD TO GO TO BATTLE AND THEIR RESPONSE WAS WHAT...."WE'LL PRAY ABOUT IT"!?! That's not spiritual maturity. THAT IS Self-preservation WRAPPED IN SPIRITUAL CLOTHING.

\*\* The Illustration of the CHAIR. Faith is resting your weight in the chair. A lot of Christians are squatting over the chair making it look like they are sitting in it when they are actually still standing in their own strength. And they look ridiculous.

One of my greatest concerns for us Mercy Church is not that our church is filled with bad guys who do bad things. My fear is that our church is filled with timid guys who do NOTHING. And I need to tell you something that a pastor told our staff team this past week: Church

is not a picnic, church is not a show, church is not a social club...Church is a battalion.

WE ARE AT WAR AGAINST AN ENEMY WHO WANTS US TO LOSE THE BATTLE FOR PEOPLE'S SOULS. THIS BATTLE IS REAL, IT IS URGENT. AND 1 PETER Tells me there is a devil who is very real and he is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. And MEN if you don't step out and lead, that someone might be your WIFE. That someone might be your KIDS. That someone might be your brother or sister in your community group. I PROMISE HE'S GOING TO ATTACK! HE's Coming after me, hes coming after our leaders, he's coming after your family. GET OFF THE DAD-GUM COUCH, GET OUT FROM BEHIND YOUR SCREEN AND GET IN THE FIGHT!!

- There is a small army we call Mercy Church and we are a few hundred strong, coming down the mountain against an enemy who has a stronghold on this city. Get in this battle!

The last thing I'll say on this is that standing on the sideline in God's kingdom is not a neutral position. Look at verse 23 "Curse Meroz," says the angel of the Lord, "Bitterly curse her inhabitants, for they did not come to help the Lord, to help the Lord with the warriors."

They didn't do anything bad, they just didn't step out and fight. They did nothing. And I tell you all the time Christianity is not a spectator sport. Usually I'm telling you about all the rewards you are missing out on when you sit and watch and that's true. There is a deep

reward in your soul when you obey God's commands and start serving others. BUT, this passage says that spectators in God's kingdom will ultimately be cursed. Especially those who are spectating when the battle is waging.

There is no such thing as a Christian spectator. The idea you can be OK with God without obeying him? That's a lie that sometimes creeps in under the disguise of gospel-centered theology. Yes, it is by faith alone you have been saved. But faith without works...it aint faith. Its dead. **There are no Christian spectators, only followers and rebels.**

Listen what we tell our kids is that there are a couple ways you can be disobedient. One is when you do what is wrong. But the other is when you find yourself in a situation and you fail to do what is right. When you sit by and watch when you should have acted. Jesus didn't say come and WATCH me he said come and FOLLOW me.

Ya'll we are in a BATTLE right now. I've encountered more spiritual warfare in the last 3 weeks than at any one point since we launched Mercy Church. Missionaries in trouble, staff families suffering loss, conflicts, marriages in trouble. NOT SUPRISING because we are about to open a location that will allow us to preach the gospel to twice as many people. OF COURSE the enemy wants that to fail. GET IN THIS BATTLE! I mean today you need to reach out to our pastors and say: PUT ME IN THE FIGHT. We

### **3. God uses willing, faithful people**



I told you last week the running theme in the book of Judges is that God is going to use unlikely people to win the victory so that he gets the glory. First it's a female judge who steps out in faith believing God is going to supply an army that at present just doesn't exist. Then it's Barak. The guy she entrusts to lead the army. There's nothing mentioned especially impressive about him. The important thing is...he shows up. In the end, that's all he does! He shows up ready to die for the sake of the name of the Lord. That's all God needs

Jael...Deborah calls her most blessed among women. Even gives her a few lines in the song. “[26] She reached for a tent peg, her right hand, for a workman's hammer. Then she hammered Sisera — she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple.

What were her credentials? Nothing. She was faithful and willing and when the moment came she didn't wait on Barak...she took action for the glory of God with the tools available to her.

This is how God works in all of scripture! Think about Mary who was a young virgin, got some big news from an angel and just said “OK, be it to me according to your word.” Faithful and willing.

Listen lets cut straight to the bottom line: The next opportunity God puts in front of you that requires a sacrificial leap of faith: DO IT! Don't hang by the ships trying to preserve your false sense of control. Come run down the mountain.

#### **4. God will bring about justice for all people**

The end of the song seems to mock Sisera's mom. It says she is looking out the window wondering why he isn't home yet. A couple of princesses say Oh, they are just dividing the spoil. “A girl or two for each warrior.” Which means they are expecting and celebrating their men raping the women of the other nation. And Deborah is villainizing these women in this song so she can say “Not Today!” Today justice was served. And we all love her closing line [31] Lord, may all your enemies perish as Sisera did. But may those who love him be like the rising of the sun in its strength.

But the reality is...not all bad guys get the justice they deserve in this life. There are plenty of predators who are never going to get what they deserve.

But listen while that's true in this life, it isn't true in eternity. This story, like all stories in scripture, is giving us a glimpse of how God is going to bring Justice for all people.

Like Deborah and Like Jael, Jesus is going to be the unexpected savior who takes the enemy by surprise.

- And that savior guarantees eternity for those who follow him and Revelation 21 describes it as a place where there is no more mourning, no more pain or tears. There is complete peace and joy in the presence of God. And he promises in that same verse, and in Romans 12, that he will serve justice on all wrongs.

- Which means listen: I don't have to. listen in here:  
The promise of God to Christians is that every wrong done against me is either paid for on the cross or in hell. God will get justice. That justice is HIS burden. If I carry it around, I'll always be bitter because vengeance never works. Dr. King famously said hate can never drive out hate, only love can do that. in Christ, I can release my vengeance.

Watch this: Jesus took the pegs of justice that were owed to ME for MY SIN and he allowed them to be driven into his hands and feet. That is not justice...that is undeserved grace.

And that recreates my world yall. It gives me eternal security and a deep sense of peace. It fills my soul with joy instead of anxiety.

And experiencing that forgiveness melts my pride and even empowers me to forgive people I would never forgive otherwise.