

August 14, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Judges
Community Baptist Church
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SONGS OF PRAISES Judges 5

Judges is a discouraging story, a sad accounting of human unfaithfulness. A cloud of disappointment hangs over the book. The story follows on the heels of Joshua's leadership in settling the land God had promised and had given to His people. Joshua declared, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" And all the people agreed wholeheartedly saying, "Yes and us too." "*All that the Lord commands we will do.*"

Then Joshua died, and the next generation of God's people weren't all that keen about keeping the covenant God had made with their forefathers. And so began the cycle of sin, being sold to the enemy, suffering, crying out to God, experiencing God's miraculous deliverance, enjoying peace, and falling back into sin. Part of the reason this cycle of sin, forgiveness, peace, and sin again is so discouraging to us is because we are all too familiar with it in our own lives. That cycle is like a dark cloud hanging over the book called Judges.

That is why this song of rejoicing from Deborah almost takes us by surprise. Compared to the rest of the story, this song is like a brilliant ray of sunshine bursting through the clouds on a rainy day. It is in many ways the only bright spot in the book. It is a wonderful reminder to us who have been delivered from bondage to sin that we too should sing of the mercies of the Lord forever. We have more reason to exalt God's work of grace than Deborah could ever imagine.

It is significant that songs of praise and thanksgiving to God are a bit rare in the Old Testament, with one exception which we will consider in a moment. In the New Testament, the norm for the

Church is to sing songs, hymns and spiritual songs that reflect on God's character and work in our behalf. We are even to teach and stir each other up with our singing. For the most part, folks in the Old Testament age didn't meet each week to engage in that kind of edifying corporate worship of God.

However, the story of the Bible reveals how at the beginning of God's work with the nation of Israel, Moses and the people sang a song praising God for deliverance from slavery in Egypt and the destruction of their task masters (Exodus 15). Arriving at the end of the Bible and the culmination of God's relationship with His covenant people, we discover that we will be praising God for His work of deliverance for eternity (Revelation 5:9). And nearly in the center of this wonderful book, this Bible, that spells out the details of God's eternal work of deliverance, we have a collection of 150 songs (the Psalms) that praise God for His many mercies.

God's people ought to be singing people. We ought to focus on God's person, character, and work as we sing about the amazing deliverance from sin and Satan He offers us through Christ. Deborah's song can serve as an example for us in many ways.

The Reason for the Song.

There was a day according to the first verse. *Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day (v.1).* That day came after deliverance from the enemy was certain. On that day, Deborah composed this song. It appears that this was a duet with Deborah and Barak. However the Hebrew reveals that the verb "sang" is a feminine singular. On that very special day when God granted His people deliverance from the oppressive enemy, His messenger, Deborah, composed this song of praise. The composing and singing were driven by "that day." Had God not delivered, there would have been no song.

God's deliverance was necessary because the people sinned. As the cycle goes, great suffering resulted when the people chose "new gods." Deborah sang, *When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates (v.8a).* The history of God's people shows they had a penchant for embracing false gods. While they were the objects of the

one true God's special favor, they always seemed to be intrigued by the little, make-believe gods of their neighbors.

Israel was an accurate but sad illustration of God's people today. Especially in America where it is easy to be identified with Jesus, His professed followers are often fully engaged with the gods of the culture. How many professing followers of Jesus don't bat an eye about forsaking the gathering of true worshipers of Jesus in order to gather with worshipers of sports or movies or celebrities? One of the most pernicious gods of the modern culture is "self." Professing Christians are regularly found worshipping that god in many different manifestations.

What happens when God's people *choose other gods? War is within the gates* (v.8). God does not allow people who are in a covenant with Him to live peacefully with competing gods. The story of Judges is "sin will bring trouble" for God's people. God had communicated His plan on this matter early on in Israel's history. *Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you* (Deuteronomy 8:5). The people knew this rule. But God's people generally didn't believe him until there was war within the gates.

That is the story for professing Christians. God's plan for His response to sin in our lives is still easy enough to understand. He said, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent" (Revelation 3:19). God's reproof and discipline takes many different forms. Sometimes He simply takes away the peace in our hearts. At other times, it feels like there is war within the gates. It is all God's effort to arrest our attention and draw us back into fellowship with Him.

There was sin in Israel, which led to war within the gates, and so it soon became evident that all was not well among God's people. People tried to keep a low profile. *In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways. The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel* (vv.6-7). As the surrounding nations began to encroach, Israelites began to try to stay out of sight. This was much like the case we will read about in Gideon's day when the people threshed wheat behind hills so the Midianites would not see them.

The nation who walked out of fellowship with God and was now oppressed by pagans was certainly not ready for war with those pagans. So Deborah asked, *Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel?* (v.8b). This almost sounds like the poor Israelites didn't have any weapons. Sometimes they did not have access to weapons as when the Philistines did not allow them to have swords (1 Samuel 13). But here it appears that shields and spears were available. It's just that no one had the courage to use them against the encroachers.

When God's people are at odds with Him, they lose courage to stand for Him. Grieving the Holy Spirit who lives within us never leads to confidence. Rather, we are afraid to stand for Him who we deny by our faithless living. God's people need to be delivered from such a fearful state. God's people need God's grace, kindness, and mercy to relieve us from the consequences we bring on ourselves through neglect and disinterest for our Master.

In that day, Deborah sang about God's deliverance. It was a day of victory because it was a day of deliverance. *Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, break out in a song! Arise, Barak, lead away your captives, O son of Abinoam. Then down marched the remnant of the noble; the people of the LORD marched down for me against the mighty* (vv.12-13). Deborah sang because the Lord marched down against the mighty. God did this marching against the enemy in steps. First, God raised up Deborah. It wasn't like she was born in Aaron's family of priests and was therefore qualified for this job. It wasn't like she had gone to prophet and warrior school to train for the job. We are left to believe that Deborah was just a pretty normal person who God picked out to be His messenger and preacher.

Second, God gave Deborah His message. God told her to tell Barak to get an army together. *She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, "Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, 'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun'"* (Judges 4:6). That would be a fearful command to people who had been held in cruel bondage by Jabin the Canaanite for the past 20 years.

But Deborah and Barak had no reason to fear because God was true to His message. On that day . . . *Deborah said to Barak, "Up!*

For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him (Judges 4:14). Is not victory over the dreaded, oppressive enemy cause enough to sing? It was a sufficient cause for Deborah and it should be for us also. We sing because the Lord marched victoriously for us. Has God delivered you from the oppression of sin and Satan? Has God been true to His word to forgive your offenses against Him and cleanse you from all guilt? Is God preparing you even now to live with Him for eternity? God's faithfulness to His promises should be cause for us to sing. What do we sing about? Do we stop to think about what we are singing? Is our song really praise to God, or is it simply entertaining to us or therapeutic for us?

The Focus of the Song.

The battle is the Lord's. Deborah made it very clear in her song that *Yahweh* is the victor. *Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing; I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel (v.3).* We notice that twice in this verse Deborah referred to God by the name *Yahweh* (in the Hebrew text). That is the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses. When Moses wondered how he should tell the Israelites that God had met with Him to command him to lead His people out of slavery, God used this name. *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14).* This meeting taught us that *Yahweh* is the self-existing, eternal God who never depends on anyone or anything for His existence or ability to do. *Yahweh* is the God who promises to keep and provide for His people.

Therefore, because God is able to do what He promises to do, Deborah (and us) was able to sing. She sang, *I will make melody to the LORD.* The word translated *melody* refers to pleasant music. It is not just an emotional outburst, like a cry, but is work, like the work of a craftsman.

When we sing and rejoice about victory and deliverance, we must sing about God (*Yahweh*). We should direct glory and praise to Him as Deborah said, *Bless the LORD (v.9b).* To bless is to kneel down and adore. It is to acknowledge God's mighty power in our

behalf, which is a humbling experience. That is the right attitude for us as we endeavor to tell the story. *Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets and you who walk by the way. To the sound of musicians at the watering places, there they repeat the righteous triumphs of the LORD, the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel. Then down to the gates marched the people of the LORD (vv.10-11).*

Our songs should tell the story of God's amazing grace. We not only sing about God's grace, we must tell about it. Go down to the gates of the city where you find the people gathered at the markets and tell someone about God's amazing grace. The most effective way for us to do this is to establish relationships with people who need to hear.

We should always be impressed with the Bible stories that reveal that the Lord can use whatever He chooses to bring victory. All creation is at God's disposal as was the case in God's battle against Sisera. *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 (vv.4-5).*

Earthquake and rain are mentioned in these verses. In fact this might be a reference to deliverance God had already granted to His people. *The region of Edom* can be a reference back to God delivering His people from slavery in Egypt. In that case, God used the stupendous miracle of making a path through the Red Sea.

But in the greatest deliverance from evil in all eternity, God used the human body of God the Son to deliver us. He delivers us from slavery to sin and Satan by the life, death, resurrection of the Seed of the woman. The Christ lived a perfect life in a body like ours. He shed blood like our blood which contains the life (Genesis 9) to redeem us from sin. That very real blood of Christ is the only acceptable covering for our sins. God chose to picture that deliverance through life blood with multitudes of sacrifices under the law. The Jews and us should have figured out the picture by now.

God also used the natural and expected things to deliver Israel. *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! Then loud beat the horses' hoofs with the galloping, galloping of his steeds (vv.19-22).

God enlisted the stars of heaven in some way to defeat Sisera's army. God used a deluge from heaven. There are multiple stories in the Bible of God using rain to destroy the enemy, not the least of which is Noah's flood. Practically, floods that cause mud render 900 fearsome chariots useless. Let our songs praise God for His mighty works of deliverance.

Relationships in the Song.

Notice how Deborah expressed thankfulness for the help of others in the battle. Leaders, commanders, and people in general willingly gave of themselves. The leaders set the example of sacrifice. *That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD! (v.2).* Our heart goes out to the volunteers who worked to bring us to the understanding of our deliverance. We agree with Deborah who said, *My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people (v.9).* While our songs of thanksgiving are directed to God for His glory, is it okay to acknowledge those who God has used to help us? We do that in an old song like "Faith of our Fathers." Our forefathers were like the leaders of Israel. *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 (vv.14-15).* Some people risk their lives to death to be used by God to deliver. *Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death; Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field (v.18).*

But let's be sure to bless the Lord when people volunteer! Say with Deborah, *bless the LORD! (v.2).* Though we are very thankful for brave souls who tell to good news of deliverance, it's not about them. They tell the good message because God convicted them, drew

them, saved them, and gave them the message. Praise God in song for those who "Love to Tell the Story."

And while we are so thankful for the people God uses to deliver, at the same time because we deal with humans, we can experience disappointment with others. Some folks were not interested in helping in the deliverance. Folks in Reuben thought about it and decided to stay home with the flocks. *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 (vv.15b-16).* Folks in Gilead stayed on the other side of the river. *Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan (v.17a).* Danites stayed with the boats at the coast. *And Dan, why did he stay with the ships? (v.17b).* Asher stayed at the beach house. *Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, staying by his landings (v.17c).*

Gospel songs that upbraid the timid or slothful are rare. Maybe the closest we get is to admonish ourselves, "Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease; while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?"

God chooses to use people in His work even though we are not always dependable. And worse is that sometimes people can put themselves in a precarious situation by not helping in the work. Deborah sang about a curse on Meroz. *Curse Meroz, says the angel of the LORD, curse its inhabitants thoroughly, because they did not come to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty (v.23).* The absence of Merozites in this battle was a serious issue. That divine writ would curse the people for eternity indicates the seriousness of the matter. We don't know who they were or what they did, but we know it was bad.

All failure in the Lord's will is serious. Consider the warnings in the letters to the seven churches of Asia. To the church in Ephesus Jesus said, *"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent" (Revelation 2:5).* To the church in Smyrna He warned, *"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will*

have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

To the church in Pergamum Jesus said, “Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth” (Revelation 2:16). And to Thyatira, “But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess” (Revelation 2:20). To Sardis, “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead” (Revelation 3:1b). To Philadelphia Jesus warned, “I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown” (Revelation 3:11). And to Laodicea, “So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:16). A warning from Jesus should help us realize how serious it is not to participate in the work in a way that honors Him.

A Contrast in Results.

On one hand, we along with Deborah thank God for Jael and the part she played in the deliverance of God’s people. God used this woman to deliver His people from the wicked warrior. *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 (vv.24-27).* We cringe at such graphic descriptions, failing to remember our battle. We wrestle against the unseen enemy (Ephesians 6:12). Sin and Satan desire to do us eternal harm. Show him and his evil deeds no mercy.

At the same time, we must have pity for Sisera’s mother. Sisera never arrived home. *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?’ (vv.28-20). And most people are never delivered from the slavery of sin.

Conclusion.

May God’s enemies perish! “*So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might*” (v.31a). The first part of this oath is unacceptable to the modern world. However, both parts taken together reveal the balance of God’s work. God is loving beyond comprehension. God loves to give us friends to strengthen and build us up. But in all of that, God still utterly hates sin. May the perennial enemy of sin and Satan perish forever!

And the land had rest for forty years (v.31b). The rest was longer than the burden. The people had been burdened for twenty years and enjoyed rest for forty years. Nevertheless, we know that the rest was not permanent. The next chapter begins with these words: *The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years (Judges 6:1).* What a contrast to that is our eternal rest. Because Christ has delivered us from sin, we look forward to the eternal rest the writer to the Hebrews talked about. *So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience (Hebrews 4:9-11).* We should sing about it. We should praise God in song for the rest He has won for us through Jesus Christ.