

Read Judges 4:1-10.

So I need to give you a little bit of background here to the book of Judges. Because the Israelites are now in an interesting season of their communal life together in the Old Covenant time period where things are really going a bit haywire.

Last week, when we looked at the death of Moses, the Israelites were on the threshold of stepping into the promised land. Here in the book of Judges, they've already settled in the land but are consistently falling into patterns of evil and failing to uphold God's commands.

And this is in large respect because of the other people groups who live around them, influencing them with their religious traditions and gods, which led to Israel's 'faith' in Yahweh, *their* God, becoming rather washed down and synchronized with these other gods.

Look at earlier on in the book of Judges: *"After that whole generation had been gathered up to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them."*

There's actually an ancient document—found within a cache of inscriptions—that was found in the Sinai area that speaks of Asherah, the Canaanite goddess, as being a consort or spouse of Yahweh. Perhaps you already know this, but divine marriage was never on God's radar.

And so Israel is caught up in this cycle of falling into idolatry, God delivers them into the hands of foreign oppressors, they cry out in repentance and ask for help, and then He sends a deliverer to bring back the peace.

Well, this situation with Deborah is quite unusual. Because if you haven't noticed, she's a woman. And to be clear, the text gives no indication here that this was a bad thing. Or that she was only leading Israel because there were no suitable men to be found.

Again in Judges 2, it states that *"Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge...."* God is with her, which clearly others believed as well, including Barak.

And Deborah's actually the only judge in this whole book who functions in a judiciary kind of way. The other judges were more-or-less military leaders; but that naturally couldn't be Deborah's role. Deborah was given the role of acting literally as a judge for Israel.

V. 5: *"She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided."*

What this means is that, in all likelihood, Deborah is operating as a judge, a lawyer, a real estate agent, a financial advisor, and a spiritual guide—all wrapped up in one. She's even got a palm tree named after her.

But the situation in Israel right now is a gongshow. Because this King Jabin, as the King of Canaan, has 900 iron chariots and likely controls all of the major trade routes, which means that thievery is probably rampant, and the Israelites can't feel safe going anywhere.

And not only that, but there is no law at this point in Israel's history. 'They've forgotten it. This was a time period where 'everyone did what was right in their own eyes.'

Deborah is the only one who is stewarding the Lord's authority and seeking to speak to the people on behalf of Him. To remind them of His holiness and power.

Remember last week, Moses' role in the life of the Israelites community was to mediate between God and the people. That's what priests do. That role—in the history of Israel—was always passed down to someone, be that a prophet, a priest, a king.

Here, that person is Deborah. And no doubt being a leader in ancient times came with a significant challenges, threats to her life, unwanted male advancements, the whole gamut.

But the way that she embodied her leadership role, which we'll talk about in a bit, enabled her to speak prophetically—and not just in a spiritual way, but politically. God uses Deborah to instruct Barak, Israel's military general, on what he is to do.

She literally says to Barak, "This is what the LORD commands you...." The ESV translation actually reads the Hebrew here with much more urgency. "*Has not the LORD commanded you...?*" As if this isn't the first time that Deborah has had this conversation with Barak.

Almost as if Deborah's asking him, why are you still here? The LORD has given you His command: Go! He has given Sisera, as well as all his army and chariots and weapons, into your hands.

Notice the trust that she has in what God is able to do. The health of her leadership was dependent upon this kind of trust. She was a strong leader *because* she possessed this trust—this dependent and confident trust—in who God was for Israel, and in what He could accomplish *for* Israel.

And yet, I think *Barak's* response here is probably more relatable. And even sensible. He says to Deborah in v. 8, "*If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go.*"

In other words, I trust that God is with *you*, but not so much with me. I don't trust that He will follow through on this promise if I don't have some kind of certainty or assurance.

Seems a bit cowardly. But again, I think it's a fairly human response. Israel's opponent is the king of Canaan, and he's kind of a big deal. There is a reason why, back in verse 3, the text mentions that Sisera, this commander of the Canaanite army, has *900 chariots*. And not just of wood but of iron.

That's like if you were to take your little '98 Honda Civic to a racetrack and beside you pulls up a whole fleet of brand-new luxury Ferraris.

You'd feel pretty insignificant.

To have chariots in the ancient world was a huge advantage. It's why God was repeatedly telling the Israelites *not to fear the other nations' chariots*. Because that's what the *other* nations and armies and kings trust in.

Not so with you, says the Lord. *You* don't trust in your own tools and machinery and influence and strength. You trust in *mine*. Which is why Israel *never* goes to war in the Old Testament with the advantage. They were *supposed* to be the underdogs.

Because as soon as you go into war with the upper hand, you walk out victorious saying, "My, my, my, weren't *we* so strong." But when you go into war as the underdog, with a significant disadvantage, coming out victorious means that *somebody else* was strong for you.

Deborah knows this, which is why she urges Barak to trust in the LORD's words. You *will* be victorious. He *will* do it. He's done it before; He'll do it again. Crazier things have happened.

But Barak doubts. He's comparing the size of his army to the grandeur of Sisera's army and it just doesn't match up. Once they start losing, some of his soldiers might even cross over and join the other side. They're stronger, bigger, probably have nicer outfits.

See, Barak and Deborah are in direct contrast here in the way that they respond to the impractical instructions of God. But that's because what Deborah knows and Barak fails to realize is that the key to success in this situation *has nothing to do with the size of Barak's army*. It's not about him. It's not about how good of a military leader he is, or not.

What is required of us when we are faced with situations that demand our courage to keep moving forward is *trust*. Trust that the Lord will show up and demonstrate that He is the one who is ultimately in control of who or what succeeds or fails.

And yes, sometimes to test out this trust looks very impractical. But if we don't test it, we won't know it.

What is something that you need from the Lord today? Where do you need to see Him pull through? I want to challenge you to lay that before Him, in prayer, right now. And then test Him in it. You're allowed to do this.

Look at what He says in Malachi 3: "...*Test me in this,*" says the Lord Almighty, "*and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.*"

This passage is actually in the context of tithing, and that's probably the simplest example of this—although I'm sure we could all share stories of God coming through, sometimes at the last minute.

Isn't this what tithing is all about? *Trusting* that He will bless us and provide for us even if giving away our money and loosening our grip on our finances it doesn't seem practical?

Isn't that what Sabbath is all about? *Trusting* that our work will get done even though it doesn't make logical sense to take a day of rest and being reminded of the work that *He* does?

Guaranteed it comes far more naturally to us to live and look at our lives like Barak rather than see things as Deborah does. And that's simply because trusting God takes practice and discipline.

But we don't have time. Or we don't make the time to actually see if God will pull through for us.

Or, and this happens more than we want to admit, we're too pressured by other's voices—telling us to hurry up and make a decision, do more, take it on yourself, speed up the process—we don't feel like we *can* wait on God. We don't feel like we have that option. The pressures around us are too strong.

Now, I have no doubt that Deborah received pushback and even persecution in this role that she was asked to play. No doubt she had to deal with people's anger, their disagreements, their gossip, their malignments of her character. No doubt she was pressured to give more practical advice.

But for her to calmly and willingly go with Barak into the heat of battle—despite his fear—to be God's presence for Barak, to help him develop that kind of trust, it demonstrated a depth of Kingdom reliance that we just don't see very often.

When everyone else in Israel forgot, Deborah *knew* that the Lord was King. She *knew* who was ultimately in charge. She was not wavered by the pressures around her and the unlikelihood of success, by the fact that it didn't make *any practical sense* for Barak's troops should go out against the grandness of Sisera's army.

Deborah demonstrated what courageously trusting in the Kingdom of God looks like. What trusting in the presence-of-God-come-near looks like.

And before we start thinking that this story is only for people in leadership, let me remind you that prophetically mediating God's presence and embracing spiritual gifts like prophecy through the Holy Spirit is now the task that has been given to *all of us*.

And going through seasons of uncertainty where we *have* to depend on God is vitally important for the building of our trust. We may not necessarily enjoy those seasons, but having seasons of uncertainty when we *don't* know the outcome or end result is an opportunity to draw back to the assurance that is Jesus Christ.

What Deborah did for Barak is what Christ now does for us. In our wrestling and doubts, He walks with us, assuring us again and again that the Father will not abandon us.

Again, to trust Him does not come naturally to us. We are much more inclined to trust other things. And the last thing we want to do is synchronize our faith—like the Israelites did—with something else, with our own strength, with what's 'practical', with a kind of 'I-did-it-my-way' mentality.

Our strength to trust is *dependent upon* the strength of Christ within us. Nothing else.

Characters like Moses and Deborah foreshadowed the kind of Beatitude posture that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5. Because they foreshadowed the poverty and purity of Jesus Himself. The One for whom the most trust was required.

And really, is that not what all the Beatitudes ask for? Does it not take trust to be poor in spirit? To mourn? To bring our grief before God? To be meek? To hunger and thirst for righteousness? To be merciful? To seek purity of heart? To be a peacemaker? To allow yourself to go through persecution?

Is not the whole Bible basically a cry from God asking us to trust Him?

Writer and speaker David Miller writes about a conversation between him and God in his book *Reflections*, and I think it highlights some—if not many—of the difficulties we have in living this out.

"Quit," he heard the Voice say.

Quit what?

"Quit trying."

Quit trying to do what?

“Quit trying to be a Christian.”

What? Are you insane? Do you know what people would say if they hear me say that? How can you ask me to quit? I have to do my part. I have to do your will. I have to be holy like you are. You said so yourself.

“Walk with me.”

I don’t know how.

“Try putting one foot ahead of the other. Don’t look way down the trail. Start with one foot in front of the other.”

But where are we going?

“Does it matter?”

Of course it matters! What if I don’t go where I am supposed to go? What if I mess up everything by wandering off?

“If you are wandering off with me, can you really mess up? How wrong can you be if I am walking with you?”

You don’t know what others say about me or might say.

“Which is it? What others say? Or what others might say?”

A bit of both, I guess.

“How much of your life do you live in fear of what others might say?”

A lot, actually.

“Why do you think that is?”

Because I want them to like me. I want to be valued. I want people to think I’m wise and smart. I want to feel like I’m good at something and that my life has meaning... I’ve spent my whole life believing that I had to measure up. What do I do if I don’t have to prove my significance?

“Try putting one foot ahead of your other one.”

That’s it? That’s all you’re going to tell me? I need to know what I need to do. I need to know where I am going. I need to know the expectations that I have to fulfill so that I don’t screw it up

and end up looking foolish or worse, stupid, incompetent, immature – just ordinary David.

“How far down the road did you just run? I can hardly see you you’re so far away. From my vantage point, you are already down in that far away valley and you ran there all by yourself, alone. You can’t see Me there because I didn’t walk with you there.”

I just want to know I am doing it right. I don't want to have more failure in my life.

“I love you David.... I love your brokenness. I love your struggle, even when it took you to sin. I love your heart and the genuine desire to know me. I love your confusion that resulted in your chasing down roads that left you dirty and sometimes bleeding. Ultimately, you dead-ended in places where you knew you needed to retrace your steps back to this place.”

And where is this place exactly?

“It is where I AM. [The place where you need to be is where I am.]

See, courageous trust *implies* that we walk *at* God’s pace *in* His presence. There is no other way. There’s no jumping ahead, and there’s no going off on our own.

Jesus demonstrated for us exactly what this looks like. He walked with the Father the whole way—through death, and out the other side.

And He wants to do the same for us.

As Deborah walked with Barak and served as the assurance that Barak needed, Jesus now walks with us and is the assurance for us. The only assurance that we need.

The only assurance, the only certainty, the only clarity that we will ever need.