

Judges 4; Exodus 14:21-31; “The Impotent and the Female Judge” I. Deborah’s Lofty Role II. Barak’s Humble Victory III. The True Victor

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, today we find a passage of victory and crushing defeat. Winning a victory feels good- and the glory that comes with it! There is a sense of pride and accomplishment when we are stronger than our opponent on the sport’s field or on the ice. But have you ever won a victory by default? Perhaps your opposing team failed to show up on time. Although you won- this victory does not hold the same appeal. It feels empty because you really did not beat them- the opponent was not able to meet you on the field. We read something similar in our passage today- although victory was secured, it was not a crushing victory for Barak- the glory was not his. Today we read of Israel being sold into slavery- v. 2. Children, I want you to listen for the similarities between our passage and the exodus of Israel out of Egypt. The first similarity is that Israel is sold- like a slave is sold to bondage. But this time the ruler is not Pharaoh but Jabin. Jabin was the king in Hazor and was a Canaanite ruler. Remember that Joshua had conquered this very kingdom some 200 years earlier- now instead of casting out the Canaanites the Canaanites are casting out the Israelites. Israel was supposed to crush and rule over the inhabitants of the land- but now the inhabitants are ruling over them. V. 3 illustrates how powerful Jabin was- he had 900 iron chariots. Chariots were the most advanced form of warfare- like our present-day tanks. Foot soldiers were little match for this fast moving and strong army. In the book of Exodus, Israel lived under the mighty Egypt. A super power. In our text, Sisera was the commander of Jabin’s army- and he ruled over Israel with an iron fist. The oppression was harsh- as v. 3 says- they were severely oppressed! Finally, note when deliverance is secured. We see both Egypt and Sisera pursue with chariots. But the LORD fights for His people- clogging their wheels so that they cannot attack. And the similarity in the response- in both Exodus and in our book of Judges- is that the Israelites respond with a song of praise to the LORD for He is mighty to save- the Song of Moses and the Song of Deborah! Our passage opens to a familiar theme: Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. Here Israel suffers for 20 years- oppressed and beaten Israel finally cries out for mercy- calling upon the LORD for help. Today we see that the LORD calls out the foe to crush him by His mighty hand. We see a unique deliverance- where Barak starts as an impotent judge, and Deborah as a female judge, while those who crush Israel in the end get crushed themselves.

I. Deborah’s Lofty Role

Our passage begins by identifying again, as we have already seen, an uncommon source of courage and deliverance. Deborah is identified first as a fit tool in the hand of the LORD. Now remember back to Judges 1 where we found out that Judah was supposed to go out against the inhabitants of the land- Judah was supposed to be the sword's tip if you will. But today we find that not only are we missing Judah- we are missing men- we start with a complete lack of male leadership! This is a striking void! Where are the spiritual fathers- where are the heads of the household and the elders of the land? Can any be found?

Although it is a great blessing to have wise and godly spiritual mothers- the church languishes without male, spiritual leadership! Let the church and our families learn this lesson well! Is it a coincidence that as Israel was serving the fertility cults of Asherah; that when the men were enslaved to passions and pleasures of the flesh- that there was a failure to lead in the home, in the church and in society as a whole. Contrary to any women's liberation theology, we need men who are willing to serve- who are strong, courageous and bold!

So Israel is literally a flock without a shepherd! Choosing their own gods- as 5:8 says. This contrast is striking- the godliest person in our passage- and perhaps in the whole book of Judges- is Deborah- she is raised to a lofty role! She is called a prophetess in v. 4. Through her the voice and will of the LORD is made known. When she speaks- it is as if God was speaking to His people. She is also referred to as a judge- one who judged Israel at this time in v. 5. She is like Miriam, Moses' sister in Ex. 15. Part of her role as a prophetess meant that she could discern what God's desire for Israel was- people would come to her with questions or disputes, and she would sit as a judge giving a verdict. She is also referred to as the mother of Israel in 5:7. She is like a mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wing- God has granted her the spiritual insight and ability to lead Israel and give direction to His people- and it is through her word that deliverance would be promised to Israel. The LORD then speaks to and through Deborah to call a military leader- as Barak is summoned in v. 6. She seeks to stir the men of Israel- do you work- lead the people- has not God called and commanded you? It is fitting for godly woman to seek- even demand godly leadership!

II. Barak's Humble Victory

So Barak comes forth from the land of Galilee and meets with the prophetess- and Deborah instructs Barak that he has been chosen- commissioned by God to go out and lead God's people to victory. Barak is sent by God to lead Israel's army and to throw off the fetters of bondage. Deborah states very clearly- God has

commissioned you- God has sent you. Through Deborah the LORD says in v. 6-7; Go- and I will draw Sisera out and I will give Sisera into your hands. Barak is called in no uncertain terms to be the commander of the LORD'S army- he is called to go to battle and he is promised a decisive victory over his foes. But Barak is not so sure- he wants a further guarantee. Barak is not quite willing to go and rely on God's promise and on God's word- Barak wants something more. Remember that with each judge, they show a little less piety and a little more timidity as we go through Judges. A similar event will be found with Gideon and was also found with Moses- although these men are numbered along with the great heroes of the faith in Heb. 11- they all fail to fully believe and obey right away. They want someone else to go with them- they want further proof that God's Word is reliable. So Barak says to Deborah- I will go if you go with me. For Barak, obedience is conditional! Barak is timid- he shies away from the task. Barak is impotent- hesitant and timid at first. He fails to believe and trust in God's promises alone- he hesitates and thus lost his opportunity for honor. God is going to take the glory of victory away from Barak- the honor is now going to go to the women of our story. The victory will be won- but not by him! Women rulers and soldiers are here used to humble the men- women leading and protecting men- is a rebuke to his hesitant leadership. He should have held to God's word as sufficient- trusting in the promises- but he failed to fully believe and act. He needed his assurance first- he wanted Deborah to go with him. Barak wants Deborah to hold his hand- he is filled with uncertainties and his faith is weak. So then, after Barak receives his assurance- he goes out to battle. He collects 10K troops and gets ready for war.

Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, is told of Israel's massing of troops- and he rides out with the whole army to meet this uprising. Here in the valley of Kishon, the battle takes place. And it is here that the LORD gives Sisera into the hand of Barak (15). The LORD routes the Canaanite army- chapter 5:19-22 further explains how God defeated the foe. Here in the valley, the LORD opened up the sky and rained water upon the battle. The dry riverbank becomes a flood, and the troops of Sisera are swept away. Their chariots become stuck in the mud and are rendered useless- because the LORD was fighting for His people. Sound familiar? Just like the battle that took place in the Red Sea- stuck chariots and a flood covers the foe. So, as v. 15 says, Sisera abandons his useless chariot that was stuck in the mud and he flees on foot. His army is defeated, and he flees to the Kenites. The Kenites were a nomadic people- the descendants of Jethro;

Moses' father in law. The lady Jael comes out of her tent and invites the fleeing Sisera to come in. Jael covers Sisera, feeds him some milk and stands guard. Sisera falls into a deep sleep- exhausted from the pursuit- and Jael creeps over to finish what Barak had started. As a Bedouin tent wife, Jael was accustomed to setting up tents and driving in tent pegs. She takes a peg and drives it through Sisera's skull. To kill the captain of an army was a high honor that usually brought great reward- but this glory was not given to Barak. A tent-dwelling lady finishes Sisera off- as ch. 4:9 says- Sisera was sold into the hand of a woman. The one to whom Israel had been sold in v. 2, was now humbled so low to be sold to an unarmed woman. What started as Sisera crushing Israel- ends with Sisera being crushed himself! The LORD called Israel out to battle- then the LORD called Sisera out into Israel's hands!

III. The True Victor

Our passage has been unique to say the least. Who is the true victor in our passage- to whom is given the conquest? At first glance we see the important role that woman play in our text- from beginning to end woman play a primary role in Israel's deliverance. The honor truly has gone to the woman of our passage- they were raised to a high position indeed! But this passage is not alone in Scripture- from Ruth to Rahab; from Lydia to the sisters of Lazarus- woman have an important role. Remember who was the first witness of the resurrection- who first met the glorified Jesus? It was a group of women! This does not mean that the offices of the church are open to both woman and men- but it does mean that our LORD cares for and gives great spiritual gifts to both men and women within the church. As Gal. 3 says- both men and women; Jew and Gentile- all are one in Christ! But are Deborah and Jael the true victors in our passage? What does our text say- 4:7- I the LORD will give Sisera into your hand. Again in ch. 5:4 and 5:19- the LORD went out to battle- the LORD caused it to rain, stopped up the chariots and routed Sisera. 4:14- 4:15- The LORD went before then –the Lord routed the army of Sisera before Barak. 4:23- God subdued Jabin until Jabin king of Canaan was destroyed. Although God may use unlikely means- as we have seen before- the LORD is still the one who wins the victory! It is God who comes to His people's aid and delivers them from bondage! It is the LORD who intervenes. God thunders against His foe! 4:15 really is the crux of this chapter- the center of this narrative- It is the LORD who routes the enemy. In this we learn that God's people are called to live by faith. Yes- Barak and Moses are listed as people who lived by faith. But it is God who is the

warrior who saves and delivers- and we are called to follow Him and obey. We also see a contrast between fallen, sinful leaders and our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus as the perfect husband who leads us with love- He is strong and courageous- even mighty to save. We cannot see the head of Sisera crushed without thinking about the crushing of the serpent's head! In our series in Judges, the oppression becomes longer, the time of rest shorter- and the judges themselves more weak, timid and even rebellious. Praise God that He has sent the perfect Saviour and Deliverer- who was not impotent- but rather mighty to save!

In conclusion, we see the cycle of sin and rebellion again this week. Yet God is and remains in control- each generation needs to see God's mercy- each generation needs to call upon God for grace and forgiveness. We are not in bondage to Jabin or Sisera- we are sold in bondage to our sins! But the good news is that Jesus Christ has come to deliver us- He has routed our enemy and delivered us from the clutches of death! We are called to hear and believe- trusting God's promise of victory! If we balk- if we delay- if we call into question God's ability or promise we are just like Barak. Our passage displays God's grace and power- even over a superpower with great military might! Barak was commissioned by God to deliver His people- Barak was a king of sorts. Barak came from the land of Galilee and he went to battle in a valley near Megiddo. Although this Galilean king did win a victory in valley near Megiddo- this ruler hesitated. The victory and the honor did not belong to him- rather the battle belonged to the LORD. It is He who crushes the head of every foe! It was our great God who swept away the enemy with a flood- it was the LORD who defeated sin and Satan and delivered His people. The glory and honor will not go to another- but belongs to Him alone! It is this King who subdues the enemy by His mighty hand and delivers us from slavery! It is Jesus the perfect prophet and judge, who will lead, protect and save us from the mighty foe- to deliver us from the hand of the enemy. It is He who crushed the head of our enemy and set us free!