



# INCREDIBLE PRAISE

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 Judges 5:1-31  
 Sixth Message  
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Five weeks ago we began this series in the book of Judges on a negative note. We talked about oppression, sin and slavery. Our key verse was this: "In those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did what was right in his own eyes." Israel did not drive the enemies out of the land, and another generation grew up who did not know the Lord nor the deeds that he had done. As a result, the nation began to experience a vicious cycle of sin. But today we will end on a positive note, one of victory, celebration and praise.

Last week we looked at chapter 4, the narrative portion of the story of Deborah and Barak. Jabin, the king of Canaan, and Sisera, with his 900 iron chariots, had oppressed Israel for 20 years. Finally, Israel cried out to the Lord and God raised up a judge named Deborah, a prophetess. She summoned Barak and encouraged him to call upon the nation and lead them against the Canaanites. Ten thousand men responded to the call, and at Mount Tabor, at the end of the Megiddo Valley, they took on the Canaanites and gained a miraculous victory. Our focus this morning, therefore, is praise and thanksgiving. We will look at the song that Deborah offered in thanksgiving for the victory.

Chapter 5, verse 1:

**Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying,**

**"That the leaders led in Israel,  
 That the people volunteered,  
 Bless the LORD!  
 Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers!  
 I—to the LORD, I will sing,  
 I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel.  
 LORD, when Thou didst go out from Seir,  
 When Thou didst march from the field of Edom,  
 The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped,  
 Even the clouds dripped water.  
 The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD,  
 This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel. (5:1-5, NASB)**

Israel responded to the victory in a very public way, lifting up their voices in worship of God. They didn't schedule an appreciation dinner for a month later; they did it on that day. And they sang so that the kings and the rulers of all the nations could hear of what God had done in their midst.

They praised God for two reasons. First, they praised him because the leaders led and the people volunteered. The victory was not just the work of one or two people; it was the work of the entire community. Second, they praised him because he had unleashed all the forces of creation to bring salvation and peace to the land. God had moved across the plain from the south, from the wilderness where he had lived with his people, across from Seir

through the land of Edom, through the Megiddo Valley and right to Mount Tabor. The heavens opened up, and the Kishon river flooded, neutralizing Sisera's 900 chariots. In her song, Deborah compares this presence of the Lord to the way God shook the earth when he delivered the law to Israel on Mount Sinai. God had fought on their behalf and freed them from their oppressors.

As we continue through this we find the story of Deborah and Barak retold in poetic form. First, in verse 6, we have the results of the oppression which Israel was suffering.

**In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath,  
 In the days of Jael, the highways were deserted,  
 And travelers went by roundabout ways.  
 The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel,  
 Until I, Deborah, arose,  
 Until I arose, a mother in Israel.  
 New gods were chosen;  
 Then war was in the gates.  
 Not a shield or a spear was seen  
 Among forty thousand in Israel. (5:6-8)**

The highways were deserted, there was no communication, no travel. The "peasantry ceased"; in other words, everybody moved to the cities; there was no agriculture. There was no loyalty to God as new gods were chosen. There was no security because there was war in the city gates. There was no defense, not a single weapon was to be found among 40,000. There was no Israelite leader until Deborah arose in Israel. Shamgar and Athniel are mentioned, but they were not Israelites. Thus we have described the barren and fruitless condition of Israel as a slave to sin. All the joy had been sapped from their life.

But verse 9 is an invitation to rejoice:

**My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel,  
 The volunteers among the people;  
 Bless the LORD!  
 You who ride on white donkeys,  
 You who sit on rich carpets,  
 And you who travel on the road—sing!  
 At the sound of those who divide flocks among the  
 watering places,  
 There they shall recount the righteous deeds of the  
 LORD,  
 The righteous deeds for His peasantry in Israel.  
 Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates. (5:9-11)**

An invitation to rejoice is given because the people volunteered. And the invitation is given to rich and poor, those who have wealth and ride on white donkeys, and those who simply walk in the city streets.

When Deborah and Barak went out to face Sisera, they

called on all of Israel to fight. We discover that some came and some did not. Verse 12:

**Awake, awake, Deborah;  
Awake, awake, sing a song!  
Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of  
Abinoam.**

**Then survivors came down to the nobles;  
The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors.  
From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek came  
down,**

**Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples;  
From Machir commanders came down,  
And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office.  
And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah;**

**As was Issachar, so was Barak;  
Into the valley they rushed at his heels;  
[But] Among the divisions of Reuben  
There were great resolves of heart.**

**Why did you sit among the sheepfolds,  
To hear the piping for the flocks?  
Among the divisions of Reuben  
There were great searchings of heart.**

**Gilead remained across the Jordan;  
And why did Dan stay in ships?  
Asher sat at the seashore,  
And remained by its landings.**

**Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even  
to death,  
And Naphtali also, on the high places of the field.  
(5:12-18)**

Some tribes came with an eager spirit to volunteer on behalf of the nation. Ephraim came, following Benjamin. “Machir” refers to the half-tribe of Manasseh, on the west side of the Jordan. Zebulun, the text tells us, despised their lives even to death. Issachar came right on the heels of Barak. Naphtali was willing to take on the high places; they wanted the toughest part of the battle. But some of the tribes did not show up. Reuben had great resolve of heart, but he took no action. He stayed with the sheep “to hear the piping for the flocks.” Gilead refers to Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, who stayed beyond the Jordan. Dan stayed in their ships. This is an obscure phrase. Bruce Waltke translates it thus, “Dan stayed at ease”—where it was comfortable. “Asher sat at the seashore,” we read. One commentator writes, “None of these tribes ever again made a significant contribution to the cause of God. Asher virtually vanished, except for a brief involvement with Gideon. Dan nosedived into apostasy. The two and a half tribes on the east side of the Jordan were overrun repeatedly. The chief victims of the reluctant spirit were the possessors of that spirit. They lived for themselves, refusing to risk what they had and, as a result, they lost what they had.”

In verse 19, Deborah describes the battle itself.

**The kings came and fought;  
Then fought the kings of Canaan  
At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo;  
They took no plunder in silver.  
The stars fought from heaven,  
From their courses they fought against Sisera.  
The torrent of Kishon swept them away,  
The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.  
O my soul, march on with strength.**

**Then the horses' hoofs beat  
From the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds.  
'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD,  
'Utterly curse its inhabitants;  
Because they did not come to the help of the Lord,  
To the help of the LORD against the warriors.' (5:19-23)**

Deborah and Barak had led the 10,000 men down to the Megiddo Valley and up on Mount Tabor. Sisera and Jabin heard of the rebellion and they responded with their 900 chariots, probably licking their chops at the prospect of the victory to come. Suddenly, “the stars fought from heaven.” The heavens opened and a torrential downpour transformed the dried-up Kishon riverbed into a wall of water. Sisera and his army of chariots were routed. The flooding of the Los Angeles River following the rainstorms of the past few days is a reminder of how rapidly this phenomenon can come occur.

Next, we discover Sisera’s fate. Verse 24:

**Most blessed of women is Jael, The wife of Heber the  
Kenite;**

**Most blessed is she of women in the tent.  
He asked for water and she gave him milk;  
In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds.  
She reached out her hand for the tent peg,  
And her right hand for the workmen’s hammer.  
Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head;  
And she shattered and pierced his temple.  
Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay;  
Between her feet he bowed, he fell;  
Where he bowed, there he fell dead. (5:24-27)**

This is rather gory, but this woman Jael was blessed because she came to the help of the Lord. In contrast, the inhabitants of Meroz were cursed because they did not do so.

Verse 28 details the scene as the mother of Sisera waits for her son to come home from the battle:

**Out of the window she looked and lamented,  
The mother of Sisera through the lattice,  
'Why does his chariot delay in coming?  
Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?'  
Her wise princesses would answer her,  
Indeed she repeats her words to herself,  
'Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil?  
A maiden, two maidens for every warrior;  
To Sisera a spoil of dyed work,  
A spoil of dyed work embroidered,  
Dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the  
spoiler?' (5:28-30)**

As the mother awaits Sisera’s delayed arrival, her imagination begins to take over. She thinks, “They’re probably just enjoying the maidens; two maidens for every warrior. And they’re dividing the spoil. I can see my son now with the spoil of dyed work. No, it’s a dyed work embroidery—dyed work of double embroidery!” But she will be wearing sackcloth and ashes of mourning, not dyed work embroidery. What a contrast between the mother of Sisera, who will be lamenting the death of her son, and Deborah, the mother in Israel, who will be rejoicing at the salvation of God.

Verse 31 concludes the poem on a note of praise and triumph:

**“Thus let all Thine enemies perish, O LORD;  
But let those who love Him be like the rising of the  
sun in its might.”  
And the land was undisturbed for forty years.**

As we saw earlier, there are two reasons given for the praise, and they are service and salvation. Why did Israel praise God? And why can we as a body of believers praise him? The first reason for Israel's praise is that the leaders led and the people volunteered. That phrase is repeated twice in our text, in verses 2 and 9. The great thing about the victory is that the entire community of faith was drawn together. They had faith together, they experienced victory together, and they praised the Lord together. There was praise for the service they entered into.

This is one reason why we can praise God and why we should praise him when we see the community of faith functioning as the body of Christ and using their gifts. We come here on Sunday mornings, we talk to people out in the foyer and we see life happening. Whether it's formal or informal, we see people who are investing in each other's lives. When I see this, my natural response is to praise God for the community of those who love the Lord. We see people excited about God and using their gifts, and it gives us reason to praise him. An executive was once asked, “What was the happiest time in your life?” The man thought for a moment and then said, “The three weeks I spent in the hospital in a strange city, ill with typhoid fever. The hospital was crowded and short of nurses, and we patients were a difficult and a demanding lot. But there was one nurse on our ward who, though overworked and tired, took our complaints with a smile and served us as if we were royalty. She never entered my room without bringing joy and love with her. I asked her how she could always be so happy, and she said she was only trying to give to others what God had given to her.” Service is making a decision to invest our lives in the heart of the community, and that gives us a reason to praise God.

There are many wonderful characteristics of service in the text. First, the priority of service. It was mandatory. Some of the tribes volunteered for service and they experienced life together. But there were other tribes who did not respond, and they were rebuked. We learn later that it was in their own best interests to come because the result of their not coming was devastating. Serving within the community is not really an option. “You are not your own,” Paul reminds us, “you have been bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:19-20). This is why God wants us to enter into what he calls us to do. Paul writes in Romans 12:1, “I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship.”

The next thing we see is the requirement for service. And the only requirement is willingness. Over and over again we learn from the book of Judges that God was able to use ordinary men and women of faith who were simply willing to show up. At times we say, “What can I do? I feel inadequate, incapable.” Well, that's the point at which God can use us. The requirement at that point is simply willingness. If we are willing, God is capable.

Next we have the motivation for service. Verse 23 mentions the fact that the inhabitants of Meroz did not come to the help of the Lord. When we think of service we think of serving God, coming to the help of God instead of being

motivated in other ways. Oftentimes what we want is to please other people or to get something out of it for ourselves. Meroz did not come to the help of the Lord, but Jael was blessed because she did.

Then we see the attitude of service, which should always be one of eagerness. This is implied in the word volunteer. Sometimes there's duty but little love in our service to God. We serve grudgingly or reluctantly, or we do it to gain something for ourselves. We say, “If I'm drafted, then I'll serve. Maybe if I enlist early, I'll get an easy job.” Or we say, “If I'm not in charge, then I'm not interested.” But service in the body of Christ is to be accompanied with eagerness. Listen to this word from 1 Chronicles 29:9, “Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they had made their offering to the Lord with a whole heart.” Peter says to elders, in 1 Peter 5:2, “Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.”

Finally, our service, our investment within the community of faith, has a direct effect on other people. We can affect people either positively or negatively. If we are willing and eager to be used by God, that affects other people and fills them with joy. But if we respond with a negative, grudging spirit, that has a negative effect on others. The congregation begins to manifest a selfish attitude. But, just like the tribes that did not respond to Barak's call, if we do not respond positively we will injure ourselves and shrivel up in our own little shell. Our sense of worship and praise depends upon our priority and attitude toward investing our lives in the community of faith. A farmer was working in his field and a stranger passed by. The traveler said, “What kind of people live in the next town.” Without pausing from his work the farmer replied, “What kind of people live in the town you just left?” “They were horrible,” the traveler said. “People were dishonest, selfish and inconsiderate.” Looking up, the farmer shook his head. He said, “I'm sorry to say that's probably what you'll find in this town, too.” The stranger groaned and walked away. Later, another man happened down the same road. When he saw the farmer, he called out, “What kind of people live in the next town?” Without looking up the farmer responded with a question: “What kind of people live in the town you just left?” “They were thoughtful, friendly and kind,” the traveler beamed, “I hated to leave them.” The farmer pulled down his hoe, extended his hand and smiled, “I'm pleased to say that that's about how you'll find folks here,” he said. Our attitude and perspective towards service has a great effect on how we view God, our circumstances, and other people. If our body is willing to serve, then we have reason to praise God because we become a worshipping community.

The second reason they praised God was for his salvation. Israel was oppressed and enslaved; the life of the nation was barren. They cried out to God, and God delivered them through the work of Deborah and Barak and the 10,000 who volunteered. The chains of bondage were broken; there was freedom and rest in the land. This gave cause for public singing and praise.

The judges, as we have seen, are a type of Christ and his work in delivering us from slavery to sin and to the flesh. In fact, each judge portrays a slightly different representa-

tion or manifestation of the person and work of Jesus Christ in our lives. If we take all the judges as a group, we get a composite picture of the person of Christ. Othniel, for example, had the right family line, as did Jesus, who came from the line of David. Ehud was ruthless with sin in the same way that Jesus was uncompromising. Shamgar used a weapon of wood to remind us of the cross, the weapon that Christ used. Deborah was an encourager. She manifests the encouraging and supportive ministry of Christ to help us do what we never could imagine doing. And we will discover Samson was born in a miraculous way, as was Jesus. These judges delivered Israel in the same way that Christ delivers us and saves us from bondage to sin.

Now just as Israel praised God for salvation, we, too, as a community of faith have much cause to praise God for his salvation. We can readily identify with the enemies we let live in the land and with the cycle of sin we see manifested in our lives. The word of God encourages us to take a hard look at sin and to root these areas out of our lives. But at times we tend to dwell on these and become preoccupied with the negative side of our life. We all struggle with sin and areas of weakness, but I would venture to say that every believer here this morning has experienced God's salvation in some way, shape or form—so you, too, have reason to praise God! Maybe it happened just last week. Perhaps it was six months, even a year ago. But you know the work of God in your life. As a result, like Israel, you can lift up your voices and praise him. Perhaps God is acting right now in some miraculous way to deliver you from an enemy. We need to have balance in our worship. At times we need to confess our sin, but then there are times when we should praise God for his deliverance. There is a time to weep, but there's also a time to sing. There is a time to mourn, but there is also a time to dance.

The NBA All-Star game last week was really a celebration for Magic Johnson. He had a terrific game and was selected the game's most valuable player. But what was all

the praise for? Was there a victory to be celebrated? It seemed to me that the praise was an illusion. It was not born out of truth or repentance or a heaviness of heart. The real issues were being ignored, I felt. What a contrast when the community of faith praises God! We can have genuine and real praise as we dwell upon what God has done in our lives, not what we have done or are capable of doing. We might have traveled some dark roads, we might have been enslaved to some powerful enemies, but the book of Judges tells us that God can free us when we have faith in him. Our sorrow can turn into joy.

Now how do we praise God? Sometimes we praise him in private. That's a right and proper thing to do. But Judges 5 encourages us to praise God as a community and to share our praise publicly. When God does something, we need to share it. This is what encourages the whole body. We can share it with our family, with our church family, or with our home fellowship group. Perhaps we should build a memorial stone, or hang a picture on the wall. When God does something in our life, we need to put a road marker in our path so we're not just reminded of the down times, we're also reminded of his marvelous work. Then, when we see these things, just like the song of Deborah, our hearts will be lifted up into worship and praise of God. Can you imagine what heaven is going to be like? Can you imagine not having to think about your failures and being free to simply praise God? We can begin to experience that even now. Praise and worship should be a very real response when God acts to deliver us.

The psalmist put it best:

I will bless the Lord at all times;  
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.  
My soul shall make its boast in the Lord;  
The humble shall hear it and rejoice.  
O magnify the Lord with me,  
And let us exalt His name together. (Psalm 34:1-3)

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