

Judges 5:6-11 – Rise Up

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The theme for this morning's message is, "Rise Up".

The uncertainty of things today due to the disclosure this week of a COVID-19 variant has led to much anxiety about the future. The state of things around us, and in our nation has led me to the following passage in Judges that we will work through: Judges 5:6-11.



The slide above shows a pictorial view of the battle of Judges 4. The victory gained was turned into a song in Judges 5. Barak would not go without Deborah, needing the assurance of the presence of the LORD. The victory was nothing less than an act of God, and the glory of the final blow went to a woman, Jael, who sided with the people of God, and put an end to Caisa, the general of Canaan's army who had become the sole survivor.

“6 In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the roads were abandoned; travellers took to winding paths. 7 Village life in Israel ceased, ceased until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel. 8 When they chose new gods, war came to the city gates, and not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel.

9 My heart is with Israel's princes, with the willing volunteers among the people. Praise the LORD!

10 "You who ride on white donkeys, sitting on your saddle blankets, and you who walk along the road, consider 11 the voice of the singers at the watering places. They recite the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel. "Then the people of the LORD went down to the city gates.””

The downward cycle of the book of the Judges

The background to the book of Judges is the story of a downward cycle of Israel's relationship with Yahweh their God. The diagram shows that after turning away from God, they would fall into idolatry, and become oppressed by a foreign ruler. Their cry to God for mercy and help resulted in God raising up a Judge to bring deliverance, and a time of peace while that Judge lived. But in time we turn from God again, and the cycle would continue.



The problem with the cycle through the book is that the people would not return each time to the state they were in before. They spiralled down. Their downward slide is a serious lesson for us today. If we take God's mercy for granted, we gradually lose the light of the knowledge of God until what we think of Him is not the true God at all. By the end of the book there is no resemblance between their understanding of God and the One they knew when He brought them out of Egypt.

Paul warns about the peril of being darkened in understanding due to the hardening of the heart (Ephesians 4:18). The warning for us is that over time they lost

- (1) the peace of God and the fellowship of that peace;
- (2) the assurance of God being with them in their troubles; and
- (3) the knowledge of God, even though the Judges brought better

times after times of foreign oppression.

The danger is that God becomes such a stranger to us; and that we find He and we are on different sides. This hit home to me when I was in a bad place. I realize that I was my own worst enemy, the evil one was no doubt against me, and that I was not on God's side – it was like Hell beginning.

This story in Judges 5 is good news, for such, because Deborah shows how to rise up when one is spiralling down.

Deborah saw what was happening to the nation. She balked against the trend, and said that things were growing darker and darker, “until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel” (5:7).

It is time to rise up and make sure that God and I are not on opposite sides. Jesus died on the Cross, bearing the cost of being on the opposite side of God, in His body, in our place. He rose so that we may live in Him, at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1f), and in fellowship with Him, increasing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10), instead of growing darker in our understanding of Him.

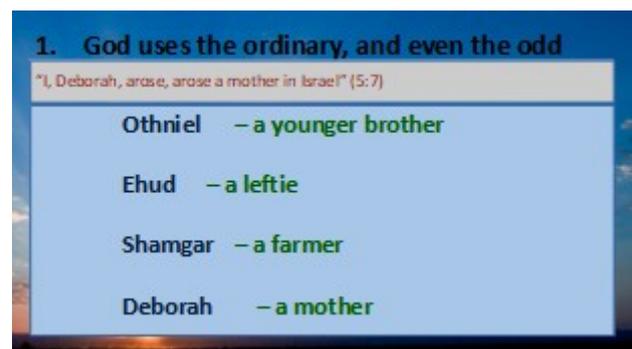
How do we rise up, like Deborah, in a dark and difficult day?

1. God uses the ordinary and even the odd

“Until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel” (v7)

“My heart is with the commanders of Israel, with the people who gladly volunteered. Praise the LORD!” (v9).

Judges 3: The ordinary and the



odd – Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar

Othniel (a younger son in his family, not the favoured Caleb) – From the South he rose up and defeated the oppressor from the North;

Ehud (a leftie) – He recovered Israel from the heavy oppression of Moab, after making an end of King Eglon,

Shamgar (a foreigner who identified with Israel, somewhat like Uriah the Hittite, one of David's top 30) – He painfully held his ground with the only weapon available to him, a farmer's oxgoad. He endured a formidable ordeal against a run of 600 Philistines who were determined to destroy him;

Now Deborah, "A mother in Israel" – odd and ordinary

The last things said about Shamgar was true also of Deborah.

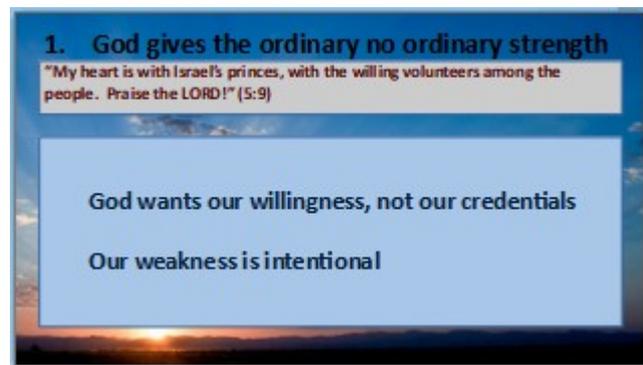
They were faithful in God in their ordinary post, but God expanded their influence to be a blessing to the nation. Can you find encouragement in what God can do with ordinary people?

When we agree with God as First Love and our Best and highest priority, our reason for living, there is nothing God and I cannot handle together.

2. God gives the ordinary no ordinary strength.

"My heart is with Israel's princes, with the **willing** volunteers among the people. Praise the LORD!" (5:9)

God does not need our credentials, He wants our willing hearts.



Deborah praised God for the willing hearts among His people. We can try and impress God with all that we are – and has He not

given us much – but all of that is of no interest to Him if we withhold from Him our hearts. It is to those who love Him with heart and soul and mind and strength in Christ that He may give His Spirit.

Here we read consistently, that when God had a work to do through someone He had chosen, their abilities were of no account with the power of God on them. So, we read,

(1) “The Spirit of the LORD came upon them” (3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, et al), or

(2) They had a clear word from the LORD that He had given the battle into their hands (3:28 [Ehud]; 4:14 [Deborah]; 7:15 [Gideon]), or

(3) The LORD had gone before them (4:14 [Barak]; 2 Sam 5:24 [David]).

Our weakness is intentional. Our weakness spirals us down. It is meant to do the opposite!

God led the ordinary into odds too big for them, to compel them rely on Him. The power of God is very real to those who are utterly cast upon Him.

Are you weak in what you are facing because you are relying on your own strength? This is to be expected, isn't it?

Are you quitting from what you facing because it seems too much for you?” Is that not a good place to be? Perhaps now you are ready to know the Lord as your strength, as Shamgar and Gideon, and Deborah and Barak did.

Will you not take to heart the word in Hebrews 11:

“32 What more shall I say? I do

“32 What more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies...” (Heb. 11:32-34)

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Is it not time to identify with David who said to Goliath: “45 ‘You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied’” (1 Sam. 16:45)?

The lesson of Judges 5 is that times get tough. That is normal. But do not let these things take us down. It is a time to rise up in the strength of the Lord – to make Him number 1 in our lives, our reason and purpose for living.

The willing take “the vow of the loosed head”, that is “We will not tie up our head again until we have accomplished the task before us.”

2. God gives the ordinary no ordinary strength

"My heart is with Israel's princes, with the willing volunteers among the people. Praise the LORD!" (5:9)

God wants our willingness, not our credentials

Our weakness is intentional

The willing take "the vow of the loosed head" (v2)

In Christ, we may join in the spirit of Deborah and agree that we will not back off from Jesus as our reason for living until God has accomplished His purpose through us for the glory of Jesus Christ – till the day we stand before Him in His glory.

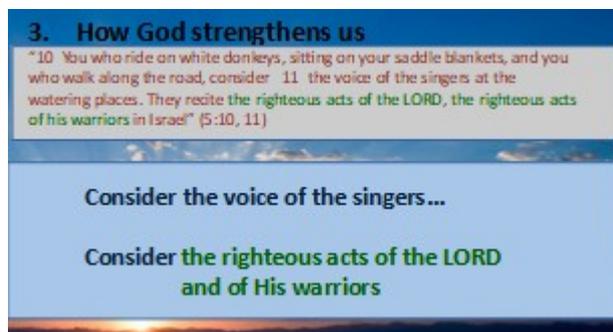
Not only does the Lord use the ordinary and the odd; He also is your strength. How can we recover our strength?

Let me introduce a little “match” theology.

3. How God strengthens us

“The Match Head” - Recover the Word of God into your “village life”.

“10 "You who ride on white donkeys, sitting on your saddle blankets, and you who walk along the road, **consider 11 the voice of the singers at the watering places.** They recite the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel”



The watering places were the news-gathering places. Deborah says that something new is taking place: “They recite the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel” – This calls for the story of God among us. We need to relate and listen to His Word, His great acts in Scripture, and our own stories of His works in our lives are needed to help us to rise up.

The match ignites when the head is aflame.

The great acts of God in history are like the match head aflame.

Deborah urges the people to rise up and recover their strength to face the city gates and what has come against them by turning again to the stories of God’s works in the past.

(1) These are the accounts of God’s Word – shared in services like this, in Home and Small Groups, and in the watering holes of your village life – the coffee times together with others.

God’s Word is for the recovery of the knowledge of the Lord.

This knowledge is lost over time as it was in the days of the Old Testament, when people stopped meeting together.

Have you lost the knowledge of God? Is it possible that what you have of Him is not the true God but a distorted, warped or insulting view of God that He might say to you is more like an idol of our own making? Do you really know Him?

The Bible School is there to help us not only become acquainted with God's Word, but also to check our understanding of God, and what we know of Him and His ways.

Belonging to a small group is critically important. Remember the urgent plea of the the writer of Hebrews, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another" (Heb. 10:25).

(2) We are also to encourage one another with our own stories of the clear acts of God. This keeps faith up to date and fresh. I have been inspired in the last weeks listening to some you share. I hope that you see now the importance of Deborah's word, "Consider the songs of at the watering holes, of the acts of the LORD."

Not only are we to know God from a "match-head" perspective of His Word, but we are also to learn the patience of His timing and less dramatic work.

4. "The match shaft". Accept God's training for the 600th

"They recite the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel"

The problem with match-head theology. If you only expect God to work in match-head ways, you may struggle terribly with His quiet and hidden ways.

The match shaft is a gradual burn. It does not have the bright

drama of the explosive head. Yet it is the shaft that gets a reluctant fire going. This is to illustrate a less dramatic way of God's work for us.

Deborah's appeal went like this:

"You who ride on white donkeys, sitting on your saddle blankets, and you who walk along the road" (5:8).

Some of you sit on white donkeys, having visible evidence of the powerful blessing of God on your life. You have match-head testimonies that are a marvel to hear.

But some of you are like the others that Deborah called to. "You who walk along the road" means those who have no visible evidence of the dramatic work of God. These are still in the unrewarded slog of a difficult life, where things go wrong, and loss, breakdown, heartache, and unrelenting disappointment are your nearest companions. Life seems to know no reward for labour, and God seems to be favouring others over you. To such, I urge, listen to God's Word to you through Deborah, "Consider the songs of the watering holes that speak of the great acts of God." The same God who makes dramatic stories is the God who gives strength to the burdened and disappointed; to the weary and worn; to the frustrated and beaten down.

Remember David's testimony. He was driven out from house and home, and found himself against enemies too strong for him, and companions that could not be trusted. Yet his relationship with the Lord strengthened, as He drew nearer to God and got to know Him better. He broke the downward spiral, as you can, by taking every hardship as the training of the Lord for His glory.

"He trains my hands for war; I can bend a bow of bronze" (Psalm 18:34)

Is God training you to strengthen you, to toughen you, to harden you? What a story! Put your hope in God, make Him your First and Best, give yourself to Him until He accomplishes what He has raised you up for. Rise up, and join with Paul, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Philippians 3:12). Rise up! "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 3:13).

There is the possibility of entering, then, into the blessing with which Deborah ends her song, "So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength." Then the land had peace forty years" (5:31).