

Title: Keeping His Promise
Text: Judges 3.31 – 4.24
Theme: God's unlikely salvation
Series: Judges #5
Prop Stmtnt: God is going to keep his promise, no matter what.

Read Text:

So, there is this guy named Shamgar who takes out 600 Philistines with an iron-tipped hardwood tool that was used to prod oxen. Given the nature of the tool, one can see how this would be an effective weapon. But, wow, one verse! That's all this guy gets. What are we to think about this? Why is this here? Actually, there are some clues that are imbedded in the text and other things that are communicated because they are not said.

Remember that our Bibles have chapter and verse divisions. This was not how these books were originally written. With the exception of the Psalms that were written as specific songs, the chapter/verse divisions of the books were added around 1,000 A.D. and for the most part they are helpful. But, there are times when a chapter break creates a division that probably should not be there. And I think that is the case here. I think that this one short verse about Shamgar sets us up for the account about Deborah and Barak. Together, these accounts remind us that God is going to keep his promise, no matter what. That is the sermon in a sentence. And because God is going to keep his promise to his people, no matter what (big idea), he is going to (#1) bring deliverance in ways they could not have imagined and (#2) he is going to rescue them through unlikely people. So, there you have the sermon. Let me show you that from the text.

1. **God brings deliverance in unlikely ways.** (3.31)

There is a reason why there is only one verse about Shamgar. The guy was not an Israelite. The author of the book of Judges didn't know anything more about him. His name is not Hebrew, but what is more telling is the fact that he is identified as "son of Anath". Anath was a goddess. She was, in Canaanite and ANE mythology, the consort of Baal, meaning, she reigned alongside of him. Baal was the god of fire and weather; Anath was the goddess of war.

A little history helps. The Philistines were not native to the land. They were a sea people, who came by sea to this region and landed in what is now Lebanon and were working their way down the coast in order to launch an attack on Egypt. Anath was a goddess, officially recognized by the Egyptian pantheon and was called "the personal protectress of Pharaoh. Anath was not a goddess that was in the Philistine religion. To be a "son of Anath" was a term that probably meant that this guy Shamgar was a mercenary, hired by Pharaoh and designated by this warrior title (Son of Anath) and charged with fighting and stopping the Philistines, which he did. So, this non-Israelite, fighting on behalf of the Pharaoh, attacks and kills 600 Philistines, whether he did that personally, or is credited with that because he led a band of soldiers, I cannot tell. But the point is, because he was successful in defeating the Philistines, their loss brought some relief to Israel. He saved

Israel, although his intent was to protect Egypt. God is going to bring deliverance to his people in ways you cannot imagine and Shamgar was one of those ways.

So, while this one verse says very little about Shamgar, it says a lot about Israel. At this time, no one was willing to step up. There was no leader. Dads were not leading and as a result their sons were not leading. There was a crisis in this country because the men had no character, no honor, and no integrity. I think that it is safe to speculate that the overt sexualization of the culture through Baal and Ashterah worship created a climate where men lived for their own gratification and therefore, the ideas of honor, sacrifice, commitment and faithfulness were no longer categories in their thinking. It was so bad, that God raised up a leader from another people to fight for his own people.

Do you see what is going on around you? Do you see what you are in the midst of? How many guys are into video games and internet gaming? I am not saying that it is all evil, I am saying that an undiscerning use of it creates a false world that competes with the real one. Video gaming is a \$23 billion+ industry just in this country. Video games may help some hand-eye coordination, but in terms of critical thinking skills, fitness, discipline and real world leadership and above all, godliness, they are useless and detrimental. Some of you are literally wasting your life. You are a warrior in a fantasy world that is sucking true leadership out of your soul. If you are more excited about reaching the next level on Counter Strike or Call of Duty than you are about sharing Christ, or seeing the gospel penetrate a lost people group then your heart has been deceived. Video games give the illusion of power, but instead of creating leaders, it creates addiction. It is not real and when you give yourself so much to something that is not real, then you are not ready for what is real. The same thing applies at an even deeper level to pornography. Pornography gives the illusion of intimacy, but crushes one's resolve and honor and so distorts one's view of others, and one's view of self, that our culture is left with boys who do not want to grow up, do not want to marry because no woman can measure up to what is offered 24-7 on-line and do not have a sense of commitment and discipline so that businesses are finding it difficult to find young workers who will show up on time, follow instructions and do their work. Last week the New York Times had an incredibly disturbing report on the influence of pornography on junior high and high school students. It's beyond epidemic. Kids, if your parents filter and control your electronic devices, you need to go to them after the service and hug them as tight as you can and thank them for loving you. It would be so much better for you to drink out of a community toilet than it would be to have unfiltered access on your phones, tablets and computers.

Dads, teach your boys to honor their mother, to respect their sisters, to treat all women with respect. Teach them about sex from God's beautiful perspective. Teach them to make promises and to keep their word. Teach them that sacrifice and laying down one's life for others is what men do. Teach them that your word is your bond. And sons, listen to your dads. Listen to God's Word. But know this, if you are going to be a follower of Christ, you are going to be different. You are going to stand out. You are going to say no, when everyone it seems in your world is saying yes. You are going to be ridiculed. You are going to be marginalized. You are going to be resented. It is not fun, but it is good, because in so doing you will feel the pulse of Jesus beating in your veins. There will be

times when you are standing alone that you will be terrified, that is okay. Jesus has you and by God's grace, your church will have you.

This church has existed since the late 1800's, but that is history. We are one generation away from extinction. At this point, when Ehud had died, God looked throughout the land, and there were no leaders. There were no men who were willing to sacrifice. No men who were willing to lead. No men who were willing to believe God. No one loved God; they all loved themselves. Anyone can do that. But, even that didn't stop God.

2. **God brings deliverance through unlikely people.**

In chapter 4 once again Israel has a problem and the problem is not Jabin, king of Canaan and Sisera commander of his army. The problem is theological. The people again, did evil in the sight of God. They were going after the Baals and other gods, and as we will see they were still claiming to follow God. So, the author of Judges states the problem first so that we, the readers would understand that any military or political problem was first a theological one. Jabin reigned in Hazor. Hazor is just a bit north of the Sea of Galilee. This guy was not that big of a deal and while the 900 chariots of iron were intimidating, it is obvious from the account that if the people would just take God at this word that chariots of iron are not a big deal either.

In recent years, we look at some of the people running for major political office and we say, "Are you kidding me? This is it?" At least there are some people willing to run. In Israel, there was a decided lack of leaders.

It is very hip and culturally savvy to champion Deborah and Jael as two women who overthrew the male patriarchy of their day and become champions of women's rights and blaze a bold trail for women to follow. The text champions these women, particularly Deborah and therefore, we are going to honor her and champion her. However, these women are not championed because they threw off the bonds of male patriarchy and control. The problem was not stifling male leadership, the problem was, there wasn't any. And in the absence of men doing what God has called men to do, God raised up a woman, praise God, who was willing to follow God, be bold for God and in so doing, she was the catalyst for a man to step up, even hesitatingly, and lead into a battle.

The Bible is fascinating. Every story has clues and subtle nuances that are intended to give the reader hints and clues. For example, there is nothing about Deborah, Barak or Jael in the opening of the chapter or in the conclusion of the chapter. God is the agent. God is the Sovereign controller and God is the hero. In the conclusion we read that God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan, even though God had sold his people into Jabin's hand at the beginning of the story. This means that whatever happens in between the beginning and the end, we are to understand as God keeping his promise to his people even though his people are not keeping their promise to him.

Louis the IV, king of France died in 1715. The king gave himself the title, "the Great." His funeral was intended to be a demonstration of his greatness and so the cathedral was

lit dimly while a single candle was lit above his golden coffin to draw all eyes toward him. The enormous crowd waited in silence for the service to begin. The officiate of the funeral was Massillon who later became Bishop of Claremont. He began the service by slowly reached down and blew out the candle and said, "Only God is great."

This message is clearly impressed upon the reader of Judges 4. The account is full of unlikely events. Reinforcing this theme that you get what you worship, the children of Israel going back to their idols have once again gone back into bondage. The bondage is worse than the 8 years they spent under the tyranny of Cushan-rishathaim, or the 18 years they spent under Eglon. They are "cruelly" oppressed for 20 years and humanly speaking they have no hope of escape. The writer draws our attention to the 900 chariots of iron that were a very effective form of terror and oppression. How could Israel ever escape this? That seems to be what is on their mind and the text states that a woman by the name of Deborah, a prophetess, a wife and mother was judging Israel at that time. A prophet is one who represents God before people. Deborah was the mouthpiece of God to his nation at this time and the people of Israel (presumably the remnant of believers as well as those who were repenting) were seeking her council and wondering if there was any word from the Lord. This only underscores the unusual nature of things. There is no mention of a priest or his role as the divine mediator. The high priest had a specific outfit that housed (in a pocket of sorts) two stones called the Urim and Thummim that the priest was to consult God with.

What likely started as a trickle probably turned into a steady stream of people who would have been counseled by Deborah to repent of their sin, cry out to God for forgiveness and deliverance and encourage others to do the same. So, the people are crying out to God, looking to God, waiting and praying that he will act. They have no other option. This is the setting, when Deborah receives a message from God and she acts upon it.

A. Barak's unlikely call and hesitant obedience (4-10)

God calls Barak to be a leader. God, through Deborah calls him to deliver Israel and the message that Deborah delivers is rather detailed. Barak is clearly ordered by God to gather his men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 soldiers from the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. Then God says that he will draw Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, out to meet Barak for battle by the Kishon river and yes, Sisera will bring his chariots as well as the rest of his army. This will be a big battle, but no worries, God says, "I will give him into your hand." Israel is dying for a leader and here is an incredible opportunity to completely reverse the course of a nation and, quite frankly to rise to a position of influence and good in a way that generations will talk about. You have the chance to be the hero, but in this case, being the hero means that you have actually believe what God says. What will Barak do? His response is not exactly inspiring. He says to Deborah, "I will go, if you go with me, but if you don't go, I'm not going." Is he that much of a coward that he has to be constantly propped up by Deborah? I do not want to let Barak off the hook, because clearly he missed stepping up like he could have. At the same time, I think that his response can be understood as a request for God's presence to go with him since Deborah was a representative of God at this time. And, honestly Moses' initial

response to God's call was worse than this and Gideon's response will be worse too. So, he has a measure of faith, but it isn't an impressive, motivating, let's storm this castle kind of a faith. He is a reluctant leader, but in this book of Judges, were glad for the moment that there is at least this much.

What convinces me that this is the right way to understand this is Deborah's response. She says, "I'm in. I'm going with you, however, the road you are traveling will not lead to your glory, because the LORD is going to sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." At this point in the story, we would assume that woman to be Deborah, which of course only sets us up for another unlikely twist. Well, true to God's word, Barak sends out word and 10,000 men show up. And then this...

Verse 11 seems like a really odd insertion into the story and we're tempted to think, "What on earth does that have to do with the price of tea in China?" Well, back in 1.16 we are told that the family of Moses' in-laws settled with Israel in the wilderness region of Judah which would have been in a more dry and arid region of the south. Now, we find out that Heber, one of the members of that clan broke away and decided to be a Yooper. He moved up north of Hazor, where Jabin ruled and Heber lived near a city called Kedesh. That seemingly random fact is thrown in and then the main story about the actual battle continues. What are the chances of a double-clutching, untried, unknown guy defeating an experienced general who clearly has superior military technology? Barak's victory appears very unlikely, but it is Sisera who is defeated.

B. Sisera's unlikely defeat. (12-16)

Sisera was notified that Barak had assembled an army in an attempt of a rebellion, so Sisera came out with everything he had, just like the LORD said. We can assume that this was quite terrifying for Barak and the others, but it is Deborah who gives the charge to Barak telling him that since the LORD has promised this, it is already as good as being done. I love this girl's faith! Her charge goes to tell Barak that the LORD goes out before you – and he did. The chapter begins with the LORD and ends with the LORD and right here in verse 15, in the middle of the chapter is this pivotal verse that stands as the defining moment of the chapter. The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. The text states that the LORD did the fighting because it was done before, or in front of Barak. In other words, Barak and these 10,000 Israelite soldiers were not really needed. They ended up being witnesses to the power of God and v.16 describes them, finishing the job. And the victory is a total rout, except for one thing, Sisera gets away, and everyone knows that you aren't done if the enemy's leader gets away. Barak, now with a taste of victory, seems intent on finishing the job. Deborah is no longer in the story. So, maybe that thing about a woman getting the glory may not actually play out and Barak is on a mission to find and kill Sisera. The showdown is coming, but not like we think.

C. Sisera's unlikely execution. (17-21)

At this point, another woman named Jael is introduced. Her husband is Heber, the Kenite mentioned in v.11. Heber and Jabin have a covenant of peace between them. But Jael does something that is unconventional. She, a married woman, invites this man into her tent when her husband is not home. And here, she sounds so much like Ehud from chapter 3 that it is uncanny. She sweet talks him, she deceives him, she gets him to trust her and gets him into a vulnerable position, and then she executes him in a chilling fashion. She executes a man that her husband is sworn to protect. Hmmm – back to Barak

D. Barak's anticlimactic victory. (22)

What a deflating end! There is no climactic scene where Barak and Sisera are fighting hand to hand, where Barak finally and decisively is victorious and raises the head of his enemy in victory. No cheering hear! In fact, Barak is not recorded as saying anything. What can he say? Once again, a woman did what he should have done.

The epitaph of the book of Judges, is this: Every man did that which is right in his own eyes. But, there was at least one woman who didn't. Deborah is remarkable. She is the lone voice of faith and her faith makes the men around stand up a little straighter and fight a little harder. Girls, do not underestimate the influence of your faithfulness. You make the men of this church, better men. At the same time, men, we have a mission to be bold for God and we have the ultimate reason to be bold for God.

Over and over we have seen how God brings victory through an unlikely means. Do you see what this chapter is doing? This is not ultimately about how to have peace in your land, and win the battles in your life. This is about Jesus! How could God deliver us? How could God forgive us without compromising his holiness, yet how could God call us his people without forgiving us? What kind of a warrior would God send to inspire awe, to intimidate Israel's enemies, to stand bold, and demonstrate unsurpassed skill with weapons? What kind of organization and what kind of inspiring leader would rout the enemies? Jesus? He didn't look like much. He had no army, no organization, no headquarters and no discernible plan. He didn't even have a regular place to sleep. And yet, what did God do? It was Jesus who pulled off the most unlikely victory ever by living in our place and then dying in our place and by satisfying the Father's wrath against our sin, Christ was raised again from the dead. As Deborah inferred, if God said it, it is as good as being done.

Parents, please listen to me. Many of you only want your kid to have enough gospel to keep them from getting pregnant before marriage and really messing up their future. You want your kid to believe enough gospel to stop them from doing stupid stuff that will embarrass you, but you don't want a gospel that will send them to another continent to rescue souls from hell. Like Barak, you believe, but not that much. God is going to carry out his plan and he is going to rescue every single person that Christ came for. Either you will get out in front with him, or get run over by it, but he is going to do it. His call for you is to follow him and join with him and stand up for him no matter what. This call to join with him is an amazing call of grace. If you play it "safe" you will lose. If you lose it all for his sake, you win. And the victory never ends.