

Title: Defiantly triumphant
Text: Judges 5
Theme: Celebrating in order to remember
Series: Judges 6
Prop Stmt: God calls us to sing about what we ought to esteem so that we do not forget what really matters.

Read Text:

After the Revolutionary War, relations with Britain were not good. After a series of disagreements over trade, America declared war on Britain in 1812. Britain invaded our capital city, burned the White House, the Capitol Building and the Library of Congress, then went to Baltimore to continue the attack. During the fighting, William Beanes was taken prisoner by the British and held on a ship. A friend and attorney named Frank Key, found out where William was held and went to the ship, which was in the Baltimore Harbor and negotiated his release. The men were told they couldn't leave the ship until the bombardment of Fort McHenry was done. The British had to destroy the fort in order to attack the city. Through the night they bombed the Fort. In the morning, looking through an eyeglass, Frank saw that the American flag was still flying. He was so excited and relieved, he wrote down a few lines to commemorate what he saw. Frank was most likely tone deaf, but he was aware of a popular drinking song that had been sung in English pubs for years and wrote new words for it that he called, "In defense of Fort McHenry." You know the song as "The Star Spangled Banner."

Songs like these are written to celebrate victories, to remember heroism and to inspire future generations and people have been doing this with music for thousands of years. This is what Judges 5 is. This is a song that Deborah and Barak sang. The song is similar to the one that Moses led the children of Israel in after the Red Sea victory. But, when we step back from the text, we need to ask, why is this here? Why did God choose to put this text in the Bible? And I want you to face this head-on. This battle involved the death of thousands of Canaanites, and Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army died because a woman pounded a tent peg all the way through his temple and into the ground beneath. And in this song that event is described and re-enacted in what feels like a slow motion replay for dramatic and graphic effect that describes his execution in physical and emotive terms. This is the song that God chose to include in his Word. Can you handle this? You can handle this when you recognize and embrace the fact that...

1. **God does all things for his glory.** (1-5)

Let's go back and understand what is going on here. This is not a battle that Israel is fighting in order to gain her independence for taxation without representation. This is not her version of the Revolutionary War. On the surface it may look like this, but the real battle is between Baal and Yahweh. Israel rebelled against Yahweh because he was too demanding and she followed Baal because Baal promised to fulfill all of her desires and dreams. But, Baal, like all other gods, betrayed Israel and could not keep his promises and could not protect her. Baal could not protect Israel from Baal. Jabin, the Canaanite

king conquered the northern territory of Israel and put her into crushing servitude. V. 6 describes a portion of what life was like. The highways were abandoned because it was not safe to even go out and walk along the roads. Villagers ceased because husbands and dads could not protect their wives and daughters from the marauding, pillaging, raping and plundering Canaanites who did what they wanted. And yet, no one wanted to step up and lead a God-motivated revolt against Jabin, until Deborah came along. But, this was not ultimately about Deborah vs. Jabin or Barak vs. Sisera. This was, as I said, Yahweh vs. Baal. When Israel turned back to Yahweh, then God fought for them. What is helpful to understand is that before these battles took place, the soldiers would devote themselves to their “gods” because they knew that this was a battle of the gods. God fights for and defends those who trust in Him and when Israel did that, God wiped out the Canaanite army including 900 chariots of iron and then used a woman to kill their commander. This song, even with its somewhat gory details is good to be reminded of, because that is not only what happened to Sisera, but that is a picture of the end of those who trust in idols. Your idol will betray you. This song is good and necessary because ...

A. We need to esteem what God glories in.

Singing is a God-given gift to his creation so that we can revel in something good and enjoy it. Singing takes place in a different part of our brain than other cognitive functions which is one of the reasons why people who are aging can still remember the words to songs long after they have forgotten about everything else. God does things for his glory and we need to identify what those things are and we need to sing about them. For example, Psalm 19 says that, “*The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*” Songs like, “How great thou art” are wonderful gifts to us because when we look at the expansiveness of creation we have a wonderful means of esteeming God and reveling in his glory. We were created to worship and we sing as a means of esteeming and valuing something. This song is here so that God’s people will esteem what he has done and give him the credit and praise for it.

B. We need to remember what God glories in.

Songs help us remember and we need to remember the good stuff. We need to remember the good stuff, because sorrow threatens to snuff it out and life tends to distract us from what really matters. I know that you remember what we sing as a church long after you have forgotten most everything that I have ever said. This song is an example of that. God brought the victory and over time people will forget the details of the event and they will forget the hero of the event if they are not reminded and this song is a good way to remember. God wants you to sign because he wants you to remember what he has done.

C. We need to celebrate what God glories in.

Singing is amongst other things, celebrative. We were made to sing and we sing about what we esteem, what we love, what we remember, and what we celebrate. We sing about relationships, about cars, about places, about children, about sorrow, about war, about sickness and death. How much more should we sing about what God sings about.

We should sing about God and his glory. We were made for that. We not only sing about what we esteem, but in singing about something we choose to esteem it. There are times when I want to esteem God, and singing is easy, responsive, even reactive. There are other times when I feel heavy and burdened and I find it hard to sing. In those times, the songs of God's people are good for me to hear. I need to hear other people singing and reminding me of these truths and I need to sing as a means of preaching to myself in the moment. I need to sing by faith, particularly when it is not by feeling.

Have you ever wondered why Nathan exhorts us so much to sing? We need to be reminded that God is the good stuff to sing about, and if I know Nathan, he is not just reminding you, he is reminding himself, because he, like us is prone to discouragement and needs to remember what really matters when he is tempted to be burdened by other things. So, here is a song that God put in the Bible because singing is good, it is right, it is helpful, and it is a necessary response to God.

2. **God wants us to esteem, remember and celebrate honorable examples.** (6-8, 12-15, 18, 24-26a)

When you look at the emphasis of this song, along with the realization that God ordained for it to be in his Word, then you will see that the details of this song are here to do more than inform you. God wants you to know the details so that you will be challenged, encouraged and reminded of these examples that are worth emulating. What happened that is worth esteeming, remembering and celebrating?

A. Finally, there were some leaders who were willing to lead.

What is a leader? Better yet, what is a godly leader? Let's start with the first one. Simply put, a leader is someone who influences others by making promises and keeping them. A godly leader is someone who influences others by making good promises and keeping them. Now, I am going to potentially embarrass a few people, but I think that what they do is a huge example of this. There is a group of people in our church family who made a commitment to be on the funeral luncheon team. They plan, shop, set-up, decorate, cook, setout, serve, cleanup, and tear down a meal with salad, vegetables, rolls or potatoes, main course, dessert and beverages for groups of people anywhere from 50-200 and they do it on a couple of days notice. This is a ministry that we do for our members at no charge. This is a often an enormous relief for a family, but while it is an enormous relief it is inconvenient for those who do it. There is no way to get around it because while you can schedule a lot of things in life, when and how people die is not one of them. Those who serve in this ministry are people who have made a commitment. They have said, when you need me, I will be there. I will drop what I am doing, if humanly possible and I will do this. And they do. That is leadership. They influence others by making and keeping good promises. So, when I am talking with a family about funeral arrangements, I can say, on behalf of our church that we are willing to provide a luncheon for your family and friends if that would be helpful to you. I can offer that with confidence because I know that I can depend on this team. Because they are willing to make and keep promises, I can make a promise to this family because I know that it will be kept.

This is part of the culture of our church. This is part of what it means to love each other well and serve one another well. There are times when we need to provide meals for people, and many of you do that. You sign up for that and you do it, even though something may have happened on that day. That is leadership. Leadership is saying, I will serve and then doing it. We live in a culture that is so self-centered that it is unusual for someone to step up, make a commitment and then do it.

One of the most powerful ways that you can help your son or daughter learn to be a leader is to make commitments and keep them. Sign up to serve in the children's ministry. There are always opportunities for that. Then do something radical. Do something counter-cultural. Do something that will drive a flag into the ground and stand out in the face of our culture – keep your promise. Do, what you said you were going to do, even if it is inconvenient. That is what Jesus did for you. He did, what he said he was going to do at great cost and calls us to follow him. What happened here? Finally, someone was willing to lead, and it was incredible. They were willing to take risks.

B. Finally, there were some people willing to take risks.

I know that leaders are punished. I know what it is like to stand up and get shot at. It is not enjoyable. This is what happens when you lead, but if you don't lead people will not get home safe. There is something more important than your comfort. There is something more at stake. And when someone is willing to pay the price and lead, then they honor God, by pointing people to Jesus and I think that is the point. Your world, your heart, your culture, maybe even your family and friends tell you to sit down, go with the flow, take it easy, don't take risks, and don't rock the boat. Every person who lives that way is wasting his life. Don't waste your life. The most miserable people I know are those who live trying to protect their little comforts. Finally, finally, someone in Israel was willing to stand up and take a risk. Thank-you Deborah. Thank-you Barak. Thank-you 10,000 soldiers who showed up. And yes, we ought to write and sing songs about this because ...

3. God wants us to remember his salvation. (9-11c, 18-21)

Notice verse 9. Deborah sings, "my heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people." This verse is part of a stanza that connects the faith-driven leadership of the commanders to the victory brought by God to the triumphant re-telling of the story to everyone in the nation. It is right for us to sing about what God has done so that we remember his salvation. And, interestingly enough, this song has a stanza in it that describes musicians singing and playing this song so that God's victory is made known. Sing it to everyone you can. To the wealthy merchants on their white donkeys (CEO's in their luxury vehicles) and to the common folk who are riding the bus. Everyone needs to hear about what God has done. Everyone needs to talk about this. Don't forget. God saves, but Baal doesn't.

The victory of Yahweh over Baal pointed to a greater victory of Christ over sin. If God wanted his people to remember the victory over Jabin and Sisera, how much more does

he want us to remember Christ's victory over sin, death, hell and the grave? The people who believed in God's power to rescue them, were indeed rescued. That is eternally true for you, when you believe in what Christ has done, by dying on the cross the full and final payment for your sin. And by means of believing you commit your life to follow him. Remember his salvation! It never ends. Remember his salvation! It cannot be taken away from you. Remember his salvation! You cannot lose, no matter what.

4. **God wants us to know the consequences of sin.** (15b-17, 27-30)

A. **The sin of cowardice.**

Look at how this song describes the tribe of Reuben. "*Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.*" "Great searchings of heart." That is a very well phrased description. And with it repeated, it sounds like the person, or the committee or officials who deliberate something to death as an excuse for action. We are very adept at finding ways to excuse our disobedience. Here you get the idea that the tribe of Reuben has been called to come to the battle and there were "great searchings of heart." Should we go or shouldn't we go. If we go and we lose, and we will probably lose, things may be worse than ever. It goes. (play out) At the heart of it is a colossal failure to lead and the failure to lead is driven by a fundamental failure to believe God. In verse 16 Reuben is described as men who would rather sit around the campfire at night, while watching their sheep and entertaining each other with their music, instead of getting out of their comfort zone and doing something right even though it was hard.

One of the places where I worked as a very young man had two workers who were at odds with each other. The older of the two was in line for a promotion and the younger one wanted it and was doing everything he could to sabotage the older guy. The problem came to head and the area manager had to make a decision. After meeting with both of the guys, he announced his decision and he said, "I've decided not to decide." Now, I wasn't very old, but I had enough sense to recognize that he had just failed as a leader. Leaders have to lead! They have to make decisions even when those decisions are not going to be approved by all. The leader has to do the right thing. Reuben failed! Reuben had an opportunity to believe God and stand with her nation, but she chose to hide.

What task or responsibility do you need to do that you keep putting off? Reuben decided not to decide, and that failure had consequences. It marked them as a people who could not be depended upon when the pressure was on. How sad! It would have been such a wonderful gift to the future generations as well as to their fellow citizens to be a people that others know they can depend on. Gilead, Dan, and Asher hid and refused to stand up.

A few days ago, Jackie Hill Perry, who recently spoke at a women's event here, spoke at Harvard University. Jackie used to identify as a lesbian, but God rescued her from that and she graciously tells her story. She was invited by a student group to come to Harvard and speak and she did saying that people are not born gay, but they are born broken. They are broken by sin. Jackie is our sister. She is a modern day Deborah willing to speak up and take the heat and she takes the heat. So, I ask you high school and college students. If

you were a student at Harvard and your professors and classmates were among the protesters opposing Jackie, would you have stood with Jackie? Better yet, parents, if your child were a student at Harvard, would you counsel him/her to stand with Jackie or to play it safe and be quiet? How you answer that all depends on which kingdom you are living for and which god you are worshipping. So, I say to each of you who have opportunities to speak up at work and speak up to your family and in your school, and to your neighbors. Be gracious, be hopeful, but be clear and courageous. God does not have you here at such a time as this for you to be silent. That takes no courage. Be clear about what God says. Stand with the people of God. Speak up for the gospel. Do not apologize for it. And yes, you can expect to be persecuted for it. Don't ask for it, but expect it. I understand that there are those who want to shame us into silence and that our careers, comforts, grades, scholarships will be threatened. We live for another kingdom. Remember your baptism. Remember your public identification with Christ. Remember what you sing, "I'll stand with arms high, and heart abandoned, to the One who gave his all for me." Remember Deborah, Jackie Hill Perry, the apostle Paul, your brothers and sisters and above all, remember Christ.

B. The sin of idolatry.

The last part of this song is graphic because it is making you aware of what you will get when you put your hope in anyone other than God. Your idol will betray you and you will become like your idol. You will become like what you worship. Look at Sisera. Look at his lifeless body. Look at the tentpeg through his head. Look at this fearsome warrior now utterly humiliated at the hands of this woman. Look at his army, his chariots, his command and now his life in utter ruin.

The song continues to play out the scene with his mom wondering why he is taking so long to come home. Other women are assuring her that his delay is not because something bad has happened to him, but because he has won and he is celebrating his victory by raping a couple of girls, when it was a girl that took him out. This is where Baal will take you Israel. Why would you ever worship a god who cannot protect you and cannot keep its promises, no matter how much you sacrifice? "So may all your enemies perish, O LORD!" In contrast to that...

5. God wants us to know the promises of a friendship with Him. (31)

"But your friends be like the sun as his rises in his might." Who can stand before the sun?

And the land had rest for forty years. May God use your godly leadership to bring rest to those around you. What if someone wrote a song about you? Would they be motivated to praise God? Would your song be more of a warning of the consequences of sin or remembering and celebrating godliness? Would there be anything to write about? Would the song of your life celebrate your leadership, your example, your boldness and faithfulness? The song of your life may not be all that you want it to be, but by God's grace, there are more verses to write. Live that your song may celebrate the salvation of God and friendship with him.