

# Trusting God's Promise

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 17 September 2023

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word.

And we're continuing our series in the book of Judges. And this morning we turn to Judges chapter 4. You'll remember that the book of Judges is about a number of things. It's about the constant need for renewal and revival among God's people.

It's about our need for a faithful and true king. A king who can do what no human can do, which is to change the hearts of men. And it's also about the power of spirit-enabled leadership.

If you've been with us, you'll know that we have what we call the Judges cycle, which is that we have judge after judge who rises up, delivers God's people, gives them a time of rest, and then God's people, when that judge is gone, turn away.

[ 1 : 2 6 ] So last week we saw that pattern with Ehud. And now we turn again, turn now to the story in chapter 4 of Deborah and Barak. And as we turn to this next cycle, there's a very simple question that this passage presents us with.

What do we have to lose when we doubt God's word? What do we have to lose when we doubt God's word?

It's that question we turn now. You can turn with me in your Bible. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word.

And we're told in Proverbs chapter 30 that every word of God proves true. He's a shield to those who take refuge in him. And so that's why we read now Judges chapter 4, starting at verse 1.

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor.

[ 2 : 3 3 ] The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Herosheth, Hagoyim. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron, and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for 20 years.

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim.

And the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. She sent and summoned Barak, the son of Abinoam, from Kadesh Naphtali, and said to him, Has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you?

Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops.

And I will give him into your hand. Verse 8. Barak said to her, If you will go with me, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go.

[ 3 : 45 ] And she said, I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.

Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kadesh. And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kadesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him.

Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaananim, which is near Kadesh.

When Sisera was told that Barak, the son of Abinoam, had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him from Heresheth-Hagoyim to the river Kishon.

And Deborah said to Barak, So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.

[ 4 : 55 ] And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot.

And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Heresheth-Hagoyim. And all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword. Not a man was left.

I invite you to pray with me now as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again that you constantly speak to us and teach us and instruct us in your Word.

And we ask that you would do that very same thing this morning, that you would show us your grace and our need for it. You'd show us your power in the midst of our weakness.

That you'd show us that your Word can be trusted and rested on. And we ask most of all that you would change us, that you would help us to see Jesus for who he is in all his love and joy and holiness and power and authority.

[ 6 : 05 ] And that you would use that to change us, that we would look more like him. And we ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. At the beginning of this chapter, we see what is becoming a formulaic statement in the book of Judges.

Verse 1, The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. We've seen that statement at least twice before, because that is the exact same statement that started out the story of Ehud last week.

And it's the same statement that started out the story of Othniel. So this is the author of Judges' way of telling us, look, the cycle is starting again.

The spiral has begun. It's the pattern that we discussed a few weeks ago that was set out in Judges 2, verse 19, which told us each generation they were more corrupt than their fathers.

They did not give up their stubborn ways. And that pattern is part of why I've been telling you over and over that one of the themes of the book of Judges is the constant need for renewal and revival among God's people.

[ 7 : 14 ] Every time we see that statement, it reminds us, oh yes, God's people are faithful for a time, and then they fall away. They need to be constantly drawn back. It also reminds us why one of our themes is about our need for a faithful and true king, a king who can do what no man can do, which is to change the hearts of men.

It's one of the main points that we see in the Judges' cycle, or we might call the Judges' spiral because things continue to get worse. Again, we see the same language, chapter of verse 2, that we saw back with Othniel, the Lord sells them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan.

It's that selling language that reminds us that God is the one who's in charge. God is the one who determines the length and the power of the enemies who come up against Israel.

In fact, we find out that the oppression here is worse than it's been before. You might remember chapter 1, verse 19, we were told Judah failed to take part of the land because, oh no, they had chariots.

Well, here they don't just have chariots, they have 900 chariots of iron. Just in case we forget, by the way, we're told the same thing in verse 13, 900 chariots of iron.

[ 8 : 24 ] So we don't just have some chariots like we saw in chapter 1, we actually have a lot of chariots. Even more than that, we see that they have been oppressed cruelly. Again, this is verse 3 for 20 years.

If I'm remembering correctly, it was 18 years last time with Ehud and eight years before with Othniel. And so the oppression is getting worse, just as Israel's faithfulness is getting worse with every single cycle.

So we see the same things we've been seeing before, but suddenly we see a break in the pattern in verses 4 and 5. Instead of God raising up a judge, we find out we already have a judge.

We have a judge and her name is Deborah, who is a prophetess. Now, I told you before that when we think about judges in the Old Testament, we are thinking primarily about military leaders, not someone in black robes like we might think of today who decides civil cases.

Deborah is the exception to that rule. Deborah is not a military ruler, not a military leader. Instead, she seems to be someone who provides wisdom to God's people in challenging situations.

[ 9 : 30 ] And so she is a prophetess here more than someone who leads God's people in battle, which of course makes sense. It would not be appropriate for a woman to lead the armies of Israel.

And so we meet this unusual judge who is already established, and instead of being the military leader to deliver God's people, she instead gives God's word as a prophetess to call.

Barak is the one to fulfill that role. That's what we see in verse 6. She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kadesh Naphtali and said to him, Has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you go?

All of this, up to this point, is good. Deborah is already there. She summons a military leader to do what she cannot do.

And then she provides him with two things from God. She provides him with a command, and she provides him with a promise. It's not a judge then that's raised up.

[ 10 : 32 ] It's a warrior. And this warrior is being asked to do the impossible. This warrior is being asked to go up against 900 chariots with 10,000 men.

This is not a fair fight. Barak has every reason to believe that this is a fool's errand.

And he has every reason to quake in his proverbial boots, which is why we see the command and the promise, verses 6 and 7. Verse 6, the command, he is to go and take 10,000 men, a fool's errand, without the promise in verse 7, which is this.

I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, and I will give him into your hand. Verse 6, without verse 7, is reckless and foolish.

Verse 6 with verse 7 should lead to confidence and obedience. We should expect Barak at this point, if he's a faithful Israelite, to receive God's word with joy, knowing that he is going to go on this mission that by all earthly terms is impossible, and yet his success is guaranteed.

[ 11 : 55 ] It's that point, though, that we are disappointed. Verse 8, Barak falters rather than having faith. He says, if you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.

In other words, Barak says, I will obey if. I don't believe that God's word is actually enough. I don't trust that God's promise is sufficient.

I would like to take out an insurance plan, and I believe you, Deborah, will serve as that insurance plan. As a prophetess, as God's representative, you can add to God's word.

You can add to God's promise, and then maybe, like, God's promise and you combined will actually be enough for me to have confidence. So he speaks out of both sides of his mouth here.

As some have noted, he says, I will go. I will not go. And we should expect this to a certain sense because we've been told there's going to be that decline with each cycle of judges.

[ 12 : 57 ] Things are going to get worse and worse. Ehud was willing to go. Barak hesitates. It's not Deborah that shows the decline, by the way. Deborah has confidence and faith in God.

It's Barak who hesitates and falters. And so this passage reminds us, warns us, of the failure of men to take God at his word.

The failure of men to trust that God will do what he said he's going to do. Barak here meets this revelation from this prophetess not with courage, but with cowardice.

And he says it all here in verse 8, if you go with me, I will go. He puts conditions on his obedience.

Brothers and sisters, how often do we put conditions on our obedience to God? I will obey God if it doesn't require a change in my lifestyle.

[ 14 : 13 ] I will move towards my spouse if she moves towards me first. I will stand for what's true if it doesn't jeopardize my job.

I will be generous if I already have X amount in my bank account. It's the same thing we saw in Judges chapter 1.

God's commands, God's promises are not enough. We need to add insurance. And what are we told, though, in Psalm 20, verse 7?

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. That's what Barak forgets here.

He forgets the courageous obedience that comes from great and unshakable confidence and trust in God. And it is not courage for courage's sake. It is courage that comes from believing that God will do what he has said he will do.

[ 15 : 34 ] And so that's why Deborah reminds him, verse 14. This is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?

Words for Barak and also words for us. When we're tempted to cut corners on what God has commanded us, we need to be reminded of this.

Does not the Lord go out before you? Is not the Lord the one who holds the foundations of the earth together? Is not the Lord the one who has numbered the very hairs on your head?

Is not the Lord the one who cares for the lilies of the valley? How much more will he care for you, O you of little faith?

Barak's reluctance here makes sense. He is in over his head. And I don't want to throw him under the bus completely. Deborah goes with him.

[ 16 : 45 ] And Barak does obey. He doesn't run away. He's not a Jonah who refuses to go to Nineveh. With his insurance policy in place, he goes into battle.

And so God prevails. God honors his word despite Barak's half-hearted obedience. He gives his promise in verse 7. I will give him into your hand.

And he fulfills that promise in verses 15 and 16. Verse 15. And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword.

Notice the subject of the sentence. And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots. At the end of the day, Barak is merely or simply God's instrument.

At the end of the day, it is God's power made perfect in weakness. At the end of the day, God is the one who wins the battle.

[ 17 : 54 ] So Barak has no need to be afraid. In other words, Barak does obey. He needs a kick in the pants to obey. But he does do it.

He does go into battle. He does lead 10,000 men against 900 chariots. He does do what would be seemingly impossible. And God does honor his obedience.

In fact, he shows up. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 32. He's listed in the hall of faith as someone who has great faith. And so you might say, okay, well, that's great.

Barak ends up in the hall of faith. Imperfect faith is fine. I can falter at God's word. I don't need to trust him all the way. I can sort of half trust him and everything will turn out okay.

I can have God's word and I can have my insurance policy and it's going to be fine. And yet that's not what this passage leaves us with. Remember my question was this.

[ 18 : 51 ] What do we lose when we doubt God's word? And Barak loses something. Barak, because of his failure to take God at his word, misses out on the blessing.

In fact, that's what we see in verses 8 and 9. Verse 8, we have the problem. Barak's lack of faith. If you will go with me, I will go. So, verse 9, we have the punishment.

Deborah says, fine, I'll go with you. But because of how you've handled this, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.

Barak is in many ways faithful and obedient. He still has the victory. And he forfeits the blessing. Barak is faithful in many ways.

He still has the victory. And he loses the glory. He gets to go down as the man who sort of believed God. In fact, in verses 16 and 17, we see he's still chasing for that blessing.

[ 20 : 07 ] He's headed after Sisera. He thinks maybe there's a chance that he will be the one to take him down, even though Deborah has already spoken. It is not the end of the road for Barak.

It's not the end of his story. And it is a real consequence. Barak misses out on everything that God would have for him.

Christian. Christian. Christian. Christian. Have you forfeited God's blessing by refusing to obey?

Have you failed to receive everything that God has for you because you hesitate to trust what he has said?

If we fail to pray for our neighbors to know Christ, God will use someone.

[ 21 : 09 ] But it may not be us. And you forfeit the joy of watching God work. So we have to remember God's promise that he is already calling people to himself.

We remember what he's told us, that the fields are plentiful and the laborers are few. If we fail to be generous and instead we surround ourselves with trinkets that will never satisfy or pile up wealth to convince ourselves we're safe, we will forfeit the joy of knowing that it's better to give than to receive.

We'll forfeit the joy of being used by God to bring his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

What does it take to be generous? It takes believing God's promise, his promise that I will never leave you nor forsake you. If we fail to show hospitality to strangers, we miss out on the joy and the connection and the growth that we gain from others.

We miss out on the joy of being used by God to show his great love. Brothers and sisters, that's what we lose when we doubt God's word.

[ 22 : 54 ] One commentator says this, God in his goodness is constantly looking for opportunities to give good gifts to men and women. Yet because of their lack of faith, they forfeit these blessings that God would freely give.

God will accomplish his purposes. The word of the Lord will actually stand.

Will he use you? Excuse me. God will accomplish his purposes. Will he use you to the full?

Do you want to receive God's blessing? Do you want to know his joy? Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Will you trust him? Will you believe him? Will you give him everything? Or will you hedge your bets and look for insurance?

[ 24 : 18 ] It's God's power that's at work in all of this, as I've told you over and over. A thousand men versus 900 chariots is not a wise scenario to walk into unless you have the 900 chariots.

And yet, what do we see in verses 15 and 16? God is faithful. God keeps his word. He honors his promise.

Christian, God will be faithful to you as well. God will keep his promises to you against overwhelming odds.

God can use your 10,000 men to defeat 900 chariots. But you must trust him. You must believe his word.

You must follow him in obedience. God will keep his promise. God will keep his promise. God will keep his promise. God will keep his promise. What we see in the judges cycle is certainly the great need of God's people.

[ 25 : 31 ] They're in constant need for renewal and revival. What we also see is God's great commitment and love to his people. We see God's perseverance.

We see God over and over again coming and saving his people in the midst of their sin, in the midst of their half-hearted obedience, in the midst of their insurance policy.

Israel gets worse every cycle. God remains the same. It's what Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

It's what the Jesus Storybook Bible calls God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love. At the end of the day, in the midst of Barak's hesitancy to obey, the fact that he falters is not the end of his story.

It is not the final verdict. He is still used by God. Christian, God has not given up on you.

[ 26 : 46 ] He continues to work through imperfect and flawed and doubting people. And, we want to be people of great courage.

We want to be people who believe what God has said. We want to be people who think and act as if God is more powerful than the rulers of this world.

How do we do it? We remember what 2 Corinthians 1, verse 20 tells us. I told you this in chapter 1 of Judges as well. All the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ.

When we doubt that God is going to be true to his word, when we question if he is going to be true to his word, if he is going to do what he said he is going to do, we remember he has already proven his faithfulness.

We remember that his greatest act of redemption has already happened. We remember that God's greatest power has already been revealed, the power that is talked about in Ephesians chapter 1, the power that raises the dead.

[ 27 : 57 ] God has kept his greatest promise to us. He has kept his promise to redeem and restore his people. He has sent his only son, our Lord Jesus, to live the life we should have lived and to die the death that we deserve.

Will he not keep every other word? Remember what Romans 8 tells us. If God is for us, he who can be against us, he who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Christian, God has kept his promise in Christ. He will keep every other word. He has been faithful to you in Christ.

He will be faithful to the end. When I was a college student, I went to a Presbyterian church that was about 30 minutes away from where I was in school in the, I think it was the arts district of Charlotte, North Carolina.

And that church had a little bit more soul than we have. And they would sing this song called He is Able. And the chorus went like this. God is able to do just what he said he would do.

[ 29 : 26 ] He's going to fulfill every promise to you. Don't give up on God because he won't give up on you. He is able.

Christian, he is able. So we trust him and we follow him no matter what. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word, which warns us and encourages us.

We ask that you would make your promises in Christ real to us, that we would trust you and believe you more than we trust and believe anything else, that we would see your power and we would understand that it's greater than the power of anyone in this world, that you would use us as your instruments, that we would have the joy and the blessing of obedience, not because it earns anything from you, it proves anything to you, but because we love you and we want to serve you.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.