

Celebrate, Participate, & Savor

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Date: 05 November 2023

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[0 : 00] So, as many of you may know, I am not Matthew. I am Drew Arrington, and I am a minister in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and my family attends here as we are stationed at Fort Carson.

And I really could not have written a better introduction to today's sermon in light of Army's trouncing of Air Force.

Because I don't normally talk about college sports from the pulpit, but half of you probably don't care.

A quarter of you, well, maybe in this town a little less than a quarter of you, are super excited that Army won. And the other portion of you are dejected. And if you're an Army fan, you probably celebrated a lot yesterday.

Because this was a rivalry game. And what's true of the Army Air Force game is true of many others. And, in fact, there are probably many of you who would classify yourselves, maybe you wouldn't classify yourself, but your significant others, family members, friends would classify yourself as a super fan.

[1 : 33] And what I mean by that is that you, in some way, not only cheered on your team, but you participated in your team's victory.

And that may look like anything from watching the game, thinking that because you watched, they won. Or perhaps you're wearing the jersey for your team while they play or leading up the game day because you feel that your support for them makes the difference in their performance.

Or perhaps throughout the game you played with the referees, challenging some of their calls. Or maybe you verbally disagreed with the coach when he called for a running play when he should have called for a passing play.

But chances are, college football is probably not your jam. So this whole introduction hasn't really struck you yet.

But maybe you celebrate, participate, and savor something other than college football. Maybe it's not even a sport.

[2 : 45] Maybe it's a celebrity. Or a group of celebrities. Or maybe it's the stock market. Or maybe an author. But the real question is, not do you celebrate, participate in, and savor these things, but do you savor, participate, and celebrate God's sovereign deliverance?

And that's the call that we see here in Judges chapter 5. It's also known as Deborah's song. And in this song, she calls the reader to celebrate, participate in, and savor God's deliverance.

You know, this is one of the greatest poems in existence from this time period that we have. It's a remarkable insight into the culture and the people of the ancient Near East.

And when some read it, they have misgivings about the deception, the brutality, and the mockery that is in the passage.

Others get lost in the minutiae examining the poetical license and language that the author takes.

[4 : 12] But this morning, I hope to address the misgivings that many may have while not getting bogged down in poetical analysis.

And to keep us on track, I'd ask that we consider this one big controlling idea. Because God rescues his people, Christians can celebrate, participate in, and savor God's sovereign deliverance. Well, as we get ready to read this poem, which is rather lengthy, let me give you a couple of road signs as you read.

In verses 1-11, we're going to see the call to celebrate and the context of that celebration. In verses 12-23, we see commendation and condemnation.

In verses 24-30, we see the contrast of two women. In verse 31, it's Deborah's closing cry. So let us turn in our scriptures to Judges chapter 5.

[5 : 45] Then sang Deborah and Barak, the son of Abinoam, on that day. That the leaders took the lead in Israel. That the people offered themselves willingly.

Bless the Lord. Hear, O kings. Give ear, O princes. To the Lord I will sing. I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel.

Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled. And the heavens dropped. Yes, the clouds dropped water.

The mountains quake before the Lord. Even Sinai before the Lord, the God of Israel. In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath. In the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned.

And travelers kept to the byways. The villagers ceased in Israel. They ceased to be until I arose. I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel.

[6 : 49] When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates. Was shield or spear to be seen among 40,000 in Israel? My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people.

Bless the Lord. Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys. You who sit on rich carpets. And you who walk by the way. To the sound of musicians at the watering places.

There they repeat the righteous triumphs of the Lord. The righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel. Then down to the gates marched the people of the Lord.

Awake, awake, Deborah. Awake, awake. Break out in song. Arise, Barak. Lead away your captives. O son of Bo-Ben-Aim.

Then down marched the remnant of the noble. The people of the Lord marched down for me against the mighty. From Ephraim, their roots, they marched down into the valley.

[7 : 58] Following you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen. From Mahir, marched down their commanders. And from Zebulon, those who bear the lieutenant's staff. The prince of Iskar came with Deborah.

And Issachar, faithful to Barak. Into the valley, they rushed at his heels. Among the clans of Reuben, there were great searchings of heart.

Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds? To hear the whistling of the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben, there were great searchings of heart.

Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan. And Dan, why did he stay with the ships? Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, staying by his landings.

Zebulon is a people who risked their lives to the death. Nephtali, too, on the heights of the field. The kings came.

[8 : 59] They fought. Then fought the kings of Canaan. At Tanakh, by the waters of Megiddo, they got no spoils of silver. From heaven, the stars fought.

From their courses, they fought against Sisera. The torrent Kishan swept them away. The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishan. March on, my soul, with might.

Then loud beat the horse's hooves. With the galloping, galloping of his steeds. Curse Moroz, says the angel of the Lord.

Curse its inhabitants thoroughly. Because they did not come to the help of the Lord. To the help of the Lord against the mighty. Most blessed of women, BIL.

The wife of Heber the Kenite. Of tent-dwelling women, most blessed. He asked for water, and she gave him milk. She brought him curds and a noble's bowl.

[9 : 58] She sent her hand to the tent peg. And her right hand to the workman's mallet. She struck Sisera. She crushed his head.

She shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet, he sank. He fell. He lay still. Between her feet, he sank.

He fell. Where he sank, there he fell. Dead. Out of the window she peered. The mother of Sisera wailed through the lattice.

Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots? Her wisest princess's answer. Indeed, she answers herself.

Have they not found and divided the spoil? A womb or two for every man? Spoil of dyed materials for Sisera?

[10:59] Spoil of dyed materials embroidered? Two pieces of dyed work embroidered for the neck as spoil? So may all your enemies perish, O Lord.

But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might. And the land had rest for 40 years. So this is a call to celebrate God's sovereign deliverance.

And the question is, why? Why are we to celebrate? Well, it's pretty quite easy. Right? God won the victory. So therefore, his people are to celebrate because they have been redeemed, rescued from their persecutors and oppressors.

But what's not here, noticed, is that we are also the why are we to celebrate? We are to celebrate because there are people who joined willingly in God's work of sovereign deliverance.

[12:10] We see this in verse 2 at the very beginning where Deborah commends the leaders and the volunteers of Israel. And as we read longer and deeper into the passage, we'll see that she talks about these leaders in many different places and facets.

But really, up in verse 2, she says, thank God that they took the lead. That leaders didn't sit on the sidelines. That they actually led.

That they exercised the authority and practiced the responsibility that God had given them. She also speaks of the volunteers, the people, the commoners, who volunteered willingly.

That they did not sit on the sidelines while the leaders led. No, they saw what God was doing and joined willingly in participation with God's sovereign deliverance.

That they were not guilting into participation. They weren't cajoled into participation. But that they saw God at work and joined with those leaders in bringing about God's sovereign deliverance.

[13:32] So the question is, yeah, why do we celebrate this?

Well, because God did it. And we can understand celebrating what God has done. But the question is, why, often asked, why do we need to celebrate the people? Well, we saw that in our New Testament reading where Paul celebrated the believers to whom he was writing.

And it wasn't just a one-off occurrence for Paul. Many of Paul's letters start off with, I thank God because of you. And why is this?

Why are we to celebrate people? Matthew Henry there, and I think it's at the beginning, maybe page 8, is a quote regarding this.

And he says, though God is chiefly to be glorified, instruments must have their due praise. Not for building them up, but for the encouragement of others.

[14:40] When we praise men and women who exercise the leadership that God has given them, when we praise and honor those of us who join together in God's work within this community, we aren't doing that to help them feel good about themselves.

We are doing that to encourage those who are on the sidelines, who are not thinking about supporting. But by commending those who support God's sovereign deliverance, we build a stronger bench and a better community of those who are willing to join in the effort.

But it's not only why we celebrate it, who celebrates. And Deborah, in this, calls people from across all spectrums of life to celebrate God's sovereign deliverance.

And that is true of us as Christians. We are called to celebrate what God is doing. We are called to celebrate God's sovereign deliverance, no matter where we are in life.

We see in verse 3, Deborah calls the surrounding leaders to give ear to the praise that she is about to give God. In verse 10, we see a very quick, concise description of the entirety of Jewish culture.

[16:17] We see a very quick, concise description of the story. We see the wealthy merchants, those who ride white horses, very rare animals, would have only been afforded by, only the wealthiest could have afforded to have them and own them.

And so here we see businessmen and women who are successful, called to worship and to praise God for his sovereign deliverance.

We see respected judges, those who sit on rich carpets, sitting usually within the city gate, where they would hear the concerns of the people and then meet out a judgment on the situation to provide some sense of justice.

So those who are in government and leadership positions within communities are called to celebrate God's sovereign deliverance. And then those who are in government and leadership positions within the city gate, who needs to celebrate, who needs to celebrate, but how we are to celebrate.

In verse 10, she says, speak of it. So go about, and the reference here is to go into the watering hole. So water cooler talk at the office.

[17 : 59] We need to speak about God's sovereign deliverance. And in verse 11, she talks about singing of it as you go about your day. So speaking and singing of God's sovereign deliverance.

And if Deborah calls the Hebrews to sing of God's provision over a temporal power named Sisera, how much more, how much more, how much more should we as Christians sing and speak of God's provision of salvation through Jesus Christ?

The one who defeated not only a enemy, but the enemy. The one who brought not only rescue from oppression, but rescue from condemnation because of our sin.

The one who not only restored Israel for a matter of years, but the one who restores us for all eternity. And this should prompt joyful worship.

We should worship joyfully both in speaking and in singing of God's great sovereign deliverance.

[19 : 29] Well, this celebration of worship is a rightful expression, and it also builds a thick community of faith. But Deborah's song also calls Christians to participate in God's sovereign deliverance.

Not just celebrate, but participate. And one of the great, actually the quote on the back of the bulletin is from Teddy Roosevelt and a speech that he made in 1910 in Paris, in which it is commonly today called the man in the arena speech.

And here he charges people, he charges those who hear, to not be those who are content to sit on the sidelines, but to jump into the arena.

To address those concerns and issues that were surrounding the society at the time. But basically to risk their effort.

To risk failure for the chance of being successful. And we do not risk as Christians much in this way.

[20 : 50] It's a great encouragement. And yes, we should seek to be involved with God's deliverance. But it's in a different way. Teddy Roosevelt's addressing it men, and there's the opportunity here that man would fail and that he would fall greatly.

And it's trying to cajole people into that position. But we participate in God's sovereign deliverance because we have a historical record of God's faithfulness to his people.

We can participate in God's sovereign deliverance because we know, based on that historical faithfulness, that he will be faithful to us in the present as we seek to bring about his work and his kingdom here on this earth.

And we know that he will be faithful to us in the future because he has promised to come and establish his kingdom. So with that, we are called to fully participate in God's sovereign deliverance.

And Deborah, in this poem, lays out for us kind of the good, the bad, the ugly in this fight against Sisera. And she does that in verses 12 through 18 and verse 23.

[22 : 06] So we see the good. These are the tribes that heard the call. heard about God's sovereign deliverance, that it was beginning to gain steam there in Israel against Sisera.

And they dedicated their talents, their gifts, and their abilities to the effort. And that's the goal for us. That we would not sit on the sidelines. But that we would use the gifts, the talents, and the abilities with which God has blessed us and put them to whether to work in a community to bring about God's sovereign deliverance.

But also in there, we see the bad. And those are those tribes of Israel that decided to sit on their hands. They decided, you know what? It's not worth it for us. We're going to sit this one out.

Yep, yep, God has given us many great things. But you know what? We would rather tend to our flocks than come to the aid of the people in our community.

[23 : 16] You know what? We would rather take care of our own than to stick our neck out and risk ourselves to help somebody else. You know, we are content with manning our ships, making sure that we keep trade going rather than participating in God's sovereign deliverance.

We would rather sit by the coast, tend to our docks to make sure that they're good, rather than come to the aid of our kinsmen and support them as they are fighting to overthrow the tyranny of Sisera.

Isn't that the temptation for us today? Isn't that the temptation for us today? To find some reason, some excuse, some self-justification for not coming to the aid of others.

For not participating in the community of Christ in which God has placed us. For not participating in the aid of others.

Well, if that wasn't bad enough, in verse 23 we see the ugly. It's the city of Meraz. They are so close to the battle, yet they refuse to participate in God's sovereign deliverance.

[24 : 47] They are right there on the cusp of the battle. They can perhaps hear the swords clanging. And they decide to wall themselves in, close up the gates, and pretend that they don't hear it.

It is so egregious that the angel of the Lord pronounces judgment on that city.

It is not Deborah that casts that judgment on them. It is the angel of the Lord. And time does not allow us to go into that.

But some scholars would say that that is the pre-incarnate Christ himself passing judgment on this city for not coming to the aid.

And then that, they are quite the opposite that we read of the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan passing by the Hebrew who was on the side of the road in Luke 10 was an agent of God's sovereign deliverance for that person.

[26 : 03] Because he saw the need and he ran to the point of need rather than walling himself off. Dale Ralph Davis puts it like this.

It speaks ill of us when we are satisfied to rest secure while our brothers and sisters are struggling and suffering. And that's the call of being a thick community.

Right? It's being that community that doesn't wall ourselves off. That doesn't rest satisfied and secured. But instead, tries to find out how we can support our brothers and sisters through their struggles and in their suffering.

Well, not only are we called to participate in God's sovereign deliverance, Judges 5 calls us to also savor God's sovereign deliverance.

To savor the way in which he rescues and redeems his people. And that really presents a challenge for us here.

[27 : 30] In verses 24 through 31, really what we see is what we would say a tent peg salvation. We see a wailing and weeping mother.

And then we have a final call that God would do the same to all his other enemies. And some people see a real stickiness in that.

A real challenge to savoring the way in which and how God sovereignly delivers his people. And let's take for a minute a look at this tent peg salvation at the hand of J.L.

And we understand from previously that this was no accident. This was preordained by God because the leader of Israel abdicated.

He refused to not go into battle without the help of Deborah. And so God said, you know what? You're not going to get the glory.

[28 : 42] Somebody else is. And it's going to be a woman. So here we see in this account a slow motion savoring of the deliverance that God has promised to his people.

And it is filled with deception. She welcomes him in like an ally as he would expect because he has, Sisera's boss has the treaty with Heber the Kenite.

So she welcomes him into the tent. Gets him set up with a good hearty warm milk drink. Covers him with a blanket.

Acts like she's standing guard. No thought at all. Pure deception on behalf of J.L. And then there's the brutality with which she ends his life.

Tent peg. And we're not talking about if you go camping today, the small little things that we get to push into those two-person tents. You know, that maybe are the size of a writing instrument or smaller.

[30 : 01] No, this would have been a sizable peg. Probably we're talking in the magnitude of more of a spike than a peg or a nail that we might use in tents today.

And then she took that and drove it through his head into the ground.

And many have questions and concerns about that passage. Questions and concerns about the method God used to deliver his people from the hand of Sisera.

The method that God used to execute justice upon a man who was acting counter to God's principles.

Who was acting counter to the way that God expects people to treat others. And they have a problem with it because they see it as running counter to God's mercy and God's grace.

[31 : 11] And then also people have concerns about savoring this. About the fact that we are, that this is in the Bible at all.

And that JL is called the most blessed of women. How is it? Why? Why can we savor this when it is such a celebration of deception and brutality?

And those are good questions. Why can we say that when it is such a celebration of justice? I think if we take a look at verses 28 through 30, we might catch a glimpse of how the people who heard this could celebrate and savor Sisera's death.

And we get to the glimpse of that with the queen. And again, this is Deborah's imagining what is happening with Sisera's mother back at the palace.

Where she's looking through the lattice of her window. And she is noticing that it has been some time since her son went off to war. And she is wondering, where?

[32 : 23] Where is he? Why hasn't he returned yet? What's gone wrong? And then rush in the advisors.

Who tell her what she wants to hear. The advisors who say, no, no, no. It's not that they're defeated. It's that the men are off enjoying the spoils of war.

And the way in which Deborah portrays it really does use poetic language to describe something that's quite horrific.

We hear what we hear in the passage, but really she is describing murder, rape, and pillaging. She is talking about men of a foreign army taking advantage of women and children because of the absence of men who were either defeated on the battlefield or murderously executed afterwards. So yeah, can we celebrate the fact that Sisera's army has been routed? And that he lies dead at the foot of a woman who drove a spike through his head?

[33 : 51] Absolutely. Because it means that God has heard the cries of his people and has responded in a way that has brought the highest of heights of leaders to the very low that they can be brought.

The crown or the head that wore apparel of great honor now wore a spike that anchored him to the ground.

Completely humbled and utterly destroyed. And so with that, we can call on God and we can ask God not only to, that we can not only savor the fact that Sisera died, we can call upon God and ask him that he would mete out similar justice to those who counter his will and his plan.

And that is what we see in verse 31. And again, this may be a challenge. In fact, there were some commentators who actually wrote that this type of plea has no place in Christianity today.

Which is quite counter to the opinion that Dale Ralph Davis has on page 9.

[35 : 18] Which he says, Someone may think that this is being vicious.

It is not. It is being pious. Naturally, you can disagree. If so, you can claim more refinement but less faith.

And what he's saying there is exactly that. That we can either have faith in a God who brings sovereign deliverance to his people, or we can cling to our modern sensibilities and say, Oh no, that's too brutal for the God I worship.

We can have more faith, or we can have more refinement. But it's clear from our readings today in the confession, that the Lord's Prayer also calls us to savor God's sovereign deliverance.

Because that is what we pray when we pray, Your kingdom come. We're asking that Christ the King would conquer, defeat all of his enemies. That he would destroy every last vestige of those who would oppose his will, both on this earth and in the kingdom to come.

[37 : 01] So today, we can petition God through prayer, that he would execute his sovereign deliverance. In conflicts such as the one ongoing in the Middle East, we can, yes, we can pray for restraint.

Yes, we can pray that God would protect the civilians that are there. We can ask and petition governments to be considerate of civilians on the battlefield.

But we can also pray and ask that God would bring his sovereign deliverance to those politicians, who are standing up for the most vulnerable among us.

Children who are not yet born. That as they continue to fight on the behalf of the sanctity of human life, that God might protect them from the attacks of human beings who would see them destroyed, and from the temptations of Satan who would love to derail their credibility.

But not only do we petition God in these areas, we can savor God's sovereign deliverance here and now.

[38 : 50] We can celebrate God's sovereign deliverance as exemplified in the recent conviction of SBF. Sam Bankman-Fried, the dude who ran a corrupt cryptocurrency and cheated billions of people out of hundreds of thousands of millions of dollars.

We can celebrate that. We can savor that. But not just white-collar crimes. We can savor, and I want to be careful because I know that there are a lot of other contributing factors to this, but the fact that the shooter in Maine ended his life before he killed more people, we can savor that God delivered more people from potential death through that action.

And oh, we can savor the demise of so-called professionals who sacrifice the most vulnerable among us on the altar of convenience, through abortion, or who mutilate people who are confused about how God created them.

And it's okay to do that. Because God is at work rescuing his people. God is at work defending himself.

And God is at work bringing about his kingdom. Now that may seem odd to our modern 21st century sensibilities, but the witness of Deborah, the counsel of Scripture, and the history of Christian thought commends us to not only pray for God's sovereign deliverance, but to also celebrate the demise and the destruction of God's enemies.

[41 : 03] Well, in closing, I want to make sure that you don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that you can pray for the demise, well, you Air Force personnel, you can't pray for the demise of Army next season.

That's not what we're talking about here. You can't pray for the demise of the celebrity that garners more recognition than your favorite celeb. Okay? What I am saying is that as a fervent witness to God's sovereign deliverance, Christians are called to speak God's victory over sin and death more than we are to tout the triumph of a team, a celebrity, or even our stock portfolio.

And why do we do this? We do this because the Holy Spirit has convicted us of our sin and convinced us that we need a Savior who is Christ the King.

And because he's Christ the King, we know that Jesus has redeemed his people, that he will deliver his people, and that he will subjugate all of his enemies under his feet.

And we, his people, are free to celebrate, participate in, and to savor God's sovereign deliverance at his hand.

[42 : 28] And in doing so, we are fervent witnesses to and participants in his coming kingdom. Well, let us pray before we stand and sing of God's deliverance and observe communion.

Gracious Heavenly Father, what a challenging passage. God, that you have called us to celebrate even the demise of your enemies.

you've called us to celebrate your sovereign deliverance. You've called us to participate in the way in which you are bringing that deliverance around.

And God, you have charged us to savor, to savor your great deliverance of us and of all of those who know, love, and serve you.

God, may we do this to your great glory and honor. Amen.