

**Don't Sweat the Big Stuff****Judges 4:1-10**

I appreciate the opportunity to preach today. I hope that what I share will be encouraging to you as you live in this world. There seem to be many problems around us in our society and in the world. If you think too much about them you can get very discouraged. Or you might get so focused on the big problems that you aren't paying enough attention to your own affairs.

This passage today is just the first part of a wonderful story. Deborah was a strong woman led by God to bring about a miracle for the people of Israel. I think it is inspiring to read if you are a man, and especially if you are a woman. Because of time today, we won't read to the end of the passage to see how things turn out. If you don't remember how it ends, you will have to read it on your own sometime. But we can draw some good wisdom from just the first part.

**Let's read the passage now.**

**Judges 4:1-10 ESV**

**“ 1 And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died. 2 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.**

**3 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 twenty years. 4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.**

**5 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.**

**6 She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-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.**

**7 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’?” 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.”**

**9 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 Kedesh.**

**10 And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him.”**

These were difficult times for the nation of Israel. God had blessed them with a land flowing with milk and honey. He gave them some simple commandments. If they lived by these commandments everything went well. They had plenty of food, their children grew healthy and strong, and they were able to live at peace. But history shows that the nation of Israel had times when they obeyed God and lots of times when they didn't. They had a lot of ups and downs. I used to read about them and think, how could they have been so stupid? Couldn't they see, just do what God wants and everything goes fine? Whenever they disobeyed, God would punish them. So why didn't they just keep obeying?!

Then I realized that just as the nation of Israel had ups and downs in following God, so do Christians now days. In the same way as God disciplined them as a nation, He disciplines Christians now who stay away from what He wants. It isn't that God is just power hungry for people to obey, but the things He commands are good for us. We just don't realize how good it is. So as a loving Father, He disciplines us.

Israel had once again slid down in moral values. Verse one simply says that they again did evil in the sight of God. This evil usually had to do with worshiping idols, treating God's day, the Sabbath, as any other day, and refusing to help the helpless. So God used Jabin, the king of Hazor to discipline them.

When we as parents discipline our children we may lecture them, make them sit in a chair for awhile, slap their hands, deny privileges, or maybe even spank them. When God disciplines a nation he causes another nation to invade them and take away their crops, butcher their animals and require them to pay taxes.

In this case Jabin had a special crack commander named Sisera. Sisera is given special mention so he must have been good in battle. Not only was he a clever commander but he had a vastly superior army. Technologically they were way beyond the nation of Israel. Israel had some spears and swords, but not enough. Sisera had chariots! Not just a few chariots, but 900 of them. His army had 900 iron chariots. **(picture 00Chariot)**

Chariots were a big step up in fighting ability. Chariots came in various sizes and styles, but the ones here were probably pulled by two horses. There would be two soldiers in the chariot. One drove the chariot, the other would use a bow and arrows to shoot the enemy. They could also use a javelin when the enemy was close. The chariots could move around in the battle, run through enemy soldiers or keep their distance and shoot arrows.

If they were to launch an attack by riding side by side, this many chariots would make a line over a kilometer wide. Any army opposing them on foot wouldn't have a chance. The foot soldiers would be shot by arrows at a distance, stomped by the horses as they came together, smashed by the chariots or slashed by the sword. There was no way to fight against them on foot. In an attack they were a thundering wave of destruction.

They were a thundering wave of destruction as long as the battle was on flat land in the plains area. Because Sisera ruled the plains the Israelites had to sneak around on the mountain trails instead of using the main roads. This was a time of national crisis. They were under the foot of Jabin and his commander Sisera. They were hungry and there was no hope of deliverance. There were no friendly nations to come to their aid.

### **(01picture of distressed young woman)**

In a sense we too are in a time of crisis today. We hear news from around the world, there are so many distressing things happening. People in the Middle East are targeted and brutally killed, just because they are Christians. This is happening in other areas of the world too, but we often don't hear about it. Terrorists attack innocent people, regardless of who they are, just to get noticed.

### **(02picture of family in distress)**

In the spiritual and social realm we are in crisis too. Many families are falling apart and the ones that aren't falling apart are often dysfunctional. There is no love and security in the family. There are examples in the news often of abusive relationships. We are finding many cases of husbands beating their wives and there are many more cases that we don't know about. Children are growing up without any foundation, drifting in society, irresponsible and turning violent. They grow up with a feeling of emptiness and no sense of value in themselves. The enemy with his chariots is upon us. Look at our society. What are we as Christians supposed to do?

### **(03picture of Deborah)**

Let's look some more at Deborah and see what we can learn from her life. First, she was an ordinary person. She wasn't a queen or princess. But Deborah was also a Godly woman. She spent time with God praying and listening to Him. God communicated with her. She was known as a prophetess. If you had a problem and needed God's wisdom about a matter, go and ask Deborah. She would be able to speak for God.

Her heart must have been troubled to see the oppression of Jabin and his commander Sisera. Why did God let this happen to Israel his beloved people? It was because the people were doing evil and God was disciplining them. But what could Deborah do about that?

What should she do? What should we do in these days when we see the problems around us? Should we launch organizations to collect money for peace? Should we march with signs in the street? Should we try to make laws against wrong doing?

What Deborah did was pray and obey God in doing what He had for her to do. She continued to work as a peacemaker. She would listen to people's problems and give wise counsel. This was good, but how could this help Israel as a nation?

We often want to change the world, but God wants us to work on the everyday things He's put in our lives. This is what He's given us to do.

So the first thing we can learn from Deborah is do whatever God has given you to do, even though it may not seem to be changing the world like we think it needs to be changed.

I once read of a Christian teacher who was invited to a special conference. When he got there he looked at the list of duties each person was given. Some were to speak in the meetings. Some were to lead special group discussions. His job was to clean the film on the overhead projector. **(04picture of overhead projector) CLEAN THE FILM ON THE OVERHEAD PROJECTOR?!**

Some of you remember the old style overhead projectors with the roll of clear film that you could move across the screen by turning the little handle. When you filled one section up with writing, you could roll to a fresh section. Later someone could clean off the writing and you could reuse the film.

This was a cleaning person's job. This Christian teacher felt overlooked. He was offended that they didn't have him doing something more important. He was disgruntled. He went through the week not saying much and not paying particular attention to his job of cleaning the overhead. Then one day toward the end of the week in one of the main meetings a man was speaking. He went to use the overhead projector to write some notes. He turned it on. He turned the handle to get some clean film to write on, but the crank wouldn't turn. It was at the end of the roll. He turned the other handle. All that came up was film that had already been written on. He turned some more and only more used film appeared. Finally he gave up.

This Christian teacher realized he had failed in his duty. It was just a simple duty, but he hadn't done it. So in front of all these people his carelessness was exposed. It is important to do what God has put before us to do, no matter how insignificant we think it is.

You have things like this in your life too. Maybe it is at work or in your home. Maybe it is doing the laundry or washing the dishes, or listening to your children or friends. Maybe it is church involvement, attending, giving, encouraging others, or telling other people about it. It is all significant in God's eyes. In the New Testament it says, **"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men," Colossians 3:23** Do the small stuff God gives you to do and let Him handle the big stuff.

Next God gave Deborah a special vision of something that needed to be done. It was not her idea, but His. God does have special duties for us. Usually He puts the need on our hearts for something to be done. Then He shows us how to do it. We have to follow along in this.

There is a true story I read in the book, "Stories for the Heart" compiled by Alice Grey, that illustrates this well. I'll tell it from a different perspective than she did. There was a young woman missionary working in Israel shortly after World War 2. One day she got off the bus at the wrong stop and found herself near a park. As she walked she noticed a dirty old emaciated man on a bench in the park. **(05picture of man on a bench)** He had a deep sadness in his eyes. She felt like God was wanting her to speak to him. So she went to him. When he noticed her he growled, "What do you want?" She replied, "Sir I wasn't even supposed to be here in this park. I got off the bus at the wrong place. But when I saw you, and the terrible sadness in your face I just couldn't leave without telling you something."

“Why don’t you get back on your bus and leave me alone!” he snapped.

“Sir, I was afraid to come over here, but I feel like God is nudging me to tell you something, before I get back on my bus. I wish I knew how to say it better but, well, sir. Jesus loves you. He loves you. He really does.”

The man couldn’t believe his ears. This young woman who had probably never had a hard day in her life was telling him God loved him? He wasn’t sure whether he was outraged at her audacity or moved by her effort to talk with him. When he looked back up at her and saw tears streaming down her cheeks he began to weep as well.

The young girl didn’t know his story. He had been a wealthy Jew in Eastern Europe before the war, married to a Non-Jew. When the Nazis came he thought he was safe, but then one day they came for him. His wife had turned him in after having an affair with the chief of police. Five years he languished in prison, full of bitterness. When the war ended and he was released he went back to his hometown to find his son. His son and wife had both left. He went to the park to live. The police picked him up and sent him to Israel, to Tel Aviv where he had a brother. When he showed up at his brother’s door he hadn’t eaten for five days. He was sick, and his body was only skin and bones. His brother didn’t recognize him and told him to get proof of who he was and come back. He was so discouraged that he gave up and went to the park to die. He had been on the bench for several days when the young woman came to him.

As she talked with him somewhere deep inside belief grew. He prayed with her to ask God for help. She took him to the home where she was staying and the family nursed him back to health. He reconciled with his brother, found a good job and got his own apartment. **(06picture of old man working)** He says that when He gets to heaven he wants to be the one to offer everyone a glass of water. It is the only way he can think of to show his gratitude to Jesus for what He did for him. He says the one thing that staggers him the most is that the young woman was right. “Jesus loves me. He really does.”

That day when she stepped off the bus at the wrong stop that woman was just going about her regular duties. Doing the things that God had given her to do. But in the midst of this she was ready to be used by Him in a special way too. When God prompted her to go and talk to the derelict man on the bench she obeyed.

She did just what Deborah did. First, she was doing the day to day things God had given her to do, and secondly, when He gave her something special to do she obeyed.

The third point is that, Deborah, being certain of her inspiration worked in the proper way. Deborah knew that God wanted to deliver Israel from Sisera. She could have tried to call the army herself, but instead she went to Barak, the man God wanted to be his general. Deborah didn’t want the glory for accomplishing the job. She would let others have that. She was just obeying God and following the proper procedure.

Sometimes we get impatient with powers that be in our lives. We see what needs to be done, but they aren’t moving toward it or they are moving way too slow. We want to go around them and get the job done. For Deborah, the problem was Barak. He didn’t seem to trust the message from God that Deborah brought him.

Instead he tells Deborah that he will only go if she goes too. This was not the best thing for him to do. It shows his lack of trust in Deborah’s word, or perhaps even in God’s deliverance. But Deborah agreed to go. She warned Barak though, that he wouldn’t get the glory for the victory, a woman would. It was as if to say, if you want a woman to go to battle with you, then a woman will be the one to get the victory.

I wonder if Deborah felt impatient with Barak. He didn't seem to have faith. He only did what God had for him to do under certain conditions. Deborah might have been tempted to criticize him and push him out of the way. But instead of that she worked with him and trusted God to bring the victory.

In our lives we sometimes run into obstructions. You may believe God has given you something to do, but circumstances or people hinder you in doing it. How do we handle them? This is where we need to be careful to not only do the right thing, but do it in the right way.

**(07picture of Map Japan and Korea)**

In 1994 I was the chairman of a mission group here in Japan. We had just established ties with a church group in Korea who had joined our denomination. In Korea the church was on fire! We hoped that some of that fire would spread to Japan. There was a certain female Korean pastor that wanted to come to Japan as a missionary. I thought this was great! Just what we needed! There also happened to be a small church that had been started by a missionary ten years before in need of a pastor. The mission held the contract for the house where the church was meeting, so as mission chairman, I had power in the situation to make it happen the way I thought it should.

I still remember the meeting of the evangelism committee we had to discuss the situation. As I look back I am embarrassed by the way I handled it. The Japanese on the committee seemed to be dragging their feet about having this woman come from Korea. I saw it as a heaven sent opportunity. It was to be a joint decision of the committee, but as mission chairman I power over the outcome. Some of the other members tried to point out problems that could and probably would arise from the arrangement. They weren't against her coming, but they didn't think this church would be a good fit. However, I pushed on ahead. I just knew this was what needed to be done.

Just as I had hoped and worked for, the pastor came from Korea and took over at that church. But it didn't work as I had imagined and eventually the church closed. Maybe bringing the missionary from Korea into Japan was the right thing to do, but it was done in the wrong way. By my insisting that she be used at the church, the church was hurt and the relationship between the Korean and the Japanese conferences in that denomination was damaged.

In retrospect I should have been more willing to patiently work with the evangelism committee. I had a good idea, but they had collective wisdom. It wasn't my place to push through my own agenda. In the same way, Deborah patiently worked with Barak to muster an army from Israel. When Barak resisted and sounded weak, Deborah could have just pushed him aside and done it on her own. But instead she worked with him, and in the end a great victory came for Israel.

Deborah did the right thing in the right way. If we want to be faithful in these troubling times as Deborah was faithful in her troubling times then we should remember to 1) Do what is before us to do, even if it seems small and insignificant; 2) Listen to God's leading each day and be prepared to follow, if and when He gives us special tasks; and 3) Do the right thing in the right way. Then trust Him, that in the end it will come out right.

In so doing we will have peace of mind and heart and give glory to God.

PRAY