

AS ONE AT 10
DEBORAH TRUSTED GOD
Sunday 14th March 2021

As Deborah takes centre stage in the book of Judges, it is not hard to imagine this story being made into a Hollywood Blockbuster, with at least a 15 rating and a serious warning of violence. The people of Israel are in crisis. They've been oppressed under the Midianites and Amalekites for years and continue as verse 1 tells us to do 'evil in the eyes of the Lord'. They are faithless, and weak; being lured away from the God who rescued them from Egypt and instead of driving out the morally corrupt Canaanites from the land God had given them, they were repeatedly serving other Gods and being drawn into the godless culture around them.

It would take an exceptional person to step up and lead these people, to deliver them from their enemies and to bring them back to serving the living God.

And yet, this is exactly what Deborah does! She is an exceptional woman - A Judge, a prophet, a leader, a wife, probably a mother and a wise and faithful woman of God. She has a heart for God's people and serves them as one who trusts God, is obedient to Him and who is concerned only that His people might flourish under his rule and as He intended. She is a leader who trusts God and who we can all learn from as someone whose priorities were to bring about God's purposes and to see him praised and glorified.

She was *FAITHFUL TO HIS CALL* had *CONFIDENCE IN HIS WORD*, and was *DEVOTED IN HER WORSHIP*.

Firstly, she was *FAITHFUL TO HIS CALL*. Deborah is the only woman to exercise public leadership in the book of Judges! She stands alone as Judge and Prophet, leading Israel in chaotic and dangerous times as they were cruelly oppressed by King Jabin and Sisera (Chapter 4). She is called by God to bring healing to Israel's brokenness, and to be a key part of the solution to it. She is courageous, willing to obey what God is calling her to, not to fly solo but to draw Barak and others to work alongside her as they seek together to unite Israel against their enemies and to bring the people back under God's rule. Her concerns are God's concerns, and she listens to Him, has confidence in Him and does as He asks, stepping out as Judge to settle disputes between the Israelites with boundless energy and wisdom that stems from knowing she is being obedient to God's call on her life.

I wonder how much Deborah was in her comfort zone as a Judge over Israel – She was leading at a time when men ruled, men went into battle and men had high standing in society. There would have been a domestic call on her life as a wife, and possibly a mother and alongside that she had a civil responsibility to the people of Israel and a wider brief to draw the tribes of Israel together to unite and fight their enemies. Her wholehearted

service of God took everything she had – her time and her energy. It was hugely challenging!

We have been in awe of parents in the last year juggling their work, teaching their children and coping with everyday life. For others of us we often feel exhausted and constantly challenged by the next ‘thing’ to get on with, solve, sort out – But just as God equipped Deborah as Judge, when we trust God, he equips us! We may feel out of our depth, inadequate and weary but when we step out and follow Him faithfully amidst the demands of life he gives us all we need to face the next thing. Deborah knew that, she experienced it and so can we. He equips those He calls, he speaks to those who listen and he has called us to wisely serve him and love others even when it is sacrificial and costly.

Secondly Deborah was *CONFIDENT IN HIS WORD*. Deborah the Prophetess took God’s Word seriously reminding us that when God speaks, he is to be listened to, and obeyed. Barak wasn’t so quick to do as the God of Israel commanded. He reminds me a bit of a petulant child in verse 8 declaring that he won’t go into battle unless Deborah goes with him. Where is his trust? Where is his confidence in the Word of God? It seems that unlike Deborah he needs reassurance, and to learn to trust the hard way.

Sadly, Christians are increasingly less likely to spend time daily with God in his Word. One recent piece of research suggests that only 5% of Christians live lives centred on God’s word, allowing it to “transform their relationships and shape their choices.” And nearly 50% of Christians barely give time to Scripture at all. But that’s bonkers...The Bible is God’s primary way of speaking to us – it is his living God-breathed word, His truth, given to us that we might be thoroughly equipped for every good work he has called us to. (2 Tim 3 vs 17). We can’t be the men and women of God he has called us to be without paying attention to it and obeying it.

We need God’s Word in our imperfect, broken and sinful world – Just as Deborah and Barak needed to hear the voice of God in order to stand firm against God’s enemies, so we will not stand firm against the enemies of God today unless we allow His word to speak to us, to guide us, to lead us, and to challenge us. Sometimes as we obey it, we will be flying in the face of everything the rest of culture is saying, but in the same way that the Lord had gone ahead of Barak so too the Lord has gone ahead of us...preparing the way that we might stand for him in a hostile world.

Please can I urge you to pick up your Bibles, ask for some help if you are not sure where to start in reading it, make the most of your Life Groups as you study it together and let God speak to you and grow you in confidence in Him and in Jesus his son.

Lastly, Deborah was *DEVOTED IN HER WORSHIP* of God. The whole of chapter 5 is a song of praise that she and Barak sing together in response to the wonders that God has done in once again rescuing Israel. Perhaps it seems surprising to find a song in the midst of such a

grim book when there are so many dark and depressing things going on. But the reason for Deborah's song is because something amazing happened on the day mentioned in verse 1...on *that* day! The people have been delivered and are free again. God has saved them from their suffering. What Deborah had said about the Lord going ahead of Barak was true....God had done what he had said he would do. He is completely trustworthy. The enemy had seemed too strong for Israel, but nothing is impossible for God. Deborah had a great deal to worship Him for. She had trusted God and he was faithful to his Word – and so she gave him praise!

We've often said in the last year how much we have missed singing – we still do! It's hard not to be humming away behind our masks. We were created to sing praise – The Bible is full of singing and Christians throughout history have sung together - it's not just an added extra to the Christian life but central...

Deborah's worship of God here in chapter 5 celebrates God's work of deliverance. It is about him. How much more do we long to sing praise of the great victory that God has won for us in Jesus Christ – there are so many wonderful songs to sing full of biblical truth and celebrating the cross and resurrection! Let's pray that soon we will sing together again and in the meantime why not fill your homes with songs about Jesus, and sing your hearts out.

CONCLUSION

Deborah was an exceptional woman. She was a great leader, and team builder and a Prophetess. She was full of courage and common sense, and a Godly Judge. Here is a woman of God, a woman who inspired bravery and loyalty, who wasn't afraid to challenge others and speak out against injustice. She was inspirational yet humble and most of all her heart was that others might hear and obey God. It's easy to feel inadequate.

But Deborah was not perfect, and we have no idea about her private life – whether her marriage was happy, whether she had children or not. She may well have been a mother in the normal sense, but as we finish on this mothering Sunday I am struck that she, in her song describes herself as a 'Mother in Israel' (vs 7).

Barak is the one in Hebrews who is honoured for his faith rather than Deborah – she receives no recognition for quietly doing what needed doing, with no fuss yet drawing others around her and encouraging them to step up and do what God is asking of them. She would have dealt with serious matters on that hill between Ramah and Bethel, leaving smaller matters to be settled at the town gates. Deborah was a woman with responsibility, a godly character and authority. She drew people to her, not like a celebrity but in her own words 'like a mother'.

I know we can't all testify to having a great Mother – for some Mothering Sunday is a painful reminder of the mother we have never had, or the mother we have never had the opportunity to be. But, as we finish I am reminded of my good, but not perfect Mum who

as she brought me up, would humbly gets done what needs to be done, would constantly be multi-tasking, listening and seeking to resolve all kinds of disputes between me and my siblings but who primarily loves Jesus, and whose first call on her life is to serve, trust and obey Him through the ups and downs of life, whatever that throws at her. For me, that's the kind of Mother Deborah was, the kind of Mother I want to be, and most of all that's the kind of Christian I want to be...one who is faithful to God's call, confident in his Word, and devoted to Him in worship.