

Message - Deborah a Portrait of Courage

We're looking at the lives of Old Testament believers as we think about characteristics God wants to develop in us.

We talked about Noah and faith, Abraham and obedience, and Joshua and Caleb, and commitment.

Today, we're looking at courage. A good, biblical definition of courage would be, "the strength to obey God even when I'm afraid and things are difficult."

So today, we're considering the example of an often overlooked woman from the Old Testament, Deborah. Let's see what we can learn about courage.

I. The need for courage - vs. 1-5

The people of Israel were living in fear of a foe. For 20 years, Sisera, the commander of the army of a Canaanite king, Jabin, had oppressed them.

But the time came when God told Deborah that Israel needed to face their fear, challenge their foe, and change their lives for the better. This required courage.

We've said in this series that God calls us to stretch ourselves beyond living in the comfort zone to living in the character zone.

That's what He was doing with Deborah. Deborah was definitely living in the comfort zone. She lived after Moses, but before the Israelite kings; in a time when each town had a judge - a respected person who would hear the disputes of the people and render judgment. Deborah held court under a palm tree. This was unique because women in those days didn't have the same rights as men. For her to become a judge and eventually lead the nation, means she was a woman who was greatly respected. So life was good for Deborah

She was in the comfort zone. But God called her to commit herself to stepping out in faith and obedience to the call of God. God issues the same call to us. He does so in two ways.

A. God calls us to face our fears and challenge the foes that keep us in bondage.

There's always something we need to change about our lives on our journey to become more like Jesus; and often those changes involve facing a fear and challenging a foe.

What fears might God be calling you to face? What foes might God be calling you

to challenge? What changes might God want to make in your life?

Stepping out in faith and obedience and commitment to face our fears and challenge our foes in order to change our lives requires courage.

It was 1947 and nobody had broken the sound barrier. Some thought that it couldn't be done. Some thought that it literally was a wall. 760 mph. Some thought that no matter how well a plane was built, it would literally be smashed to pieces. Chuck Yeager was invited to be a test pilot that broke the sound barrier. Colonel Body, his superior, said, "Nobody knows for sure what happens until somebody gets there. Chuck, you'll be flying into the unknown."

After nine attempts on October 14, 1947, Yeager finally broke the sound barrier. He later wrote, "I was thunderstruck. After all the anxiety, breaking the sound barrier turned out to be a perfectly paved speedway.. After all the anticipation it was really a let down. The 'unknown' was a poke through Jell-O."

Dr. Adrian Rogers, in his wonderful book, "What Every Christian Ought To Know," identifies the three foes of every Christian.

They are the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The world is our external foe. The flesh is our internal foe. The devil is our infernal foe.

The world attacks our soul. The flesh attacks our body. The devil attacks our spirit.

When these foes attack, they seek to hold us captive to fear, like Sisera did the Israelites. At such times, God calls us as He did Deborah, to face our fears, challenge our foes, and change our lives.

B. God calls us to face our fears and challenge the foes that keep others in bondage.

Deborah was to lead the nation to face their fear, challenge their foe and change their lives.

Likewise, we are called to encourage believers to walk in the freedom they have in Christ; and to lead those who are without Christ to recognize that God has worked to provide them with salvation and deliverance, by sharing the Good News with them.

Too many of us are hesitant to share Jesus with others because of fear. We let fear of failure, not finding the right words, or rejection, keep us from challenging the evil one's hold on friends, neighbors, co-workers and classmates. We need to face our fears, challenge the foe and share the Good News so other's lives might be

changed by the Gospel. Even Paul had to face his fear when it came to sharing the Good News.

"I was unsure of how to go about this, and felt totally inadequate - I was scared to death, if you want the truth of it - and so nothing I said could have impressed you or anyone else. But the Message came through anyway." - 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (The Message)

"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong." - 1 Corinthians 16:13 (NIV)

After all God the Holy Spirit will be with us.

II. The source of courage - vs. 6-7

If courage is, "the strength to obey God even when I'm afraid and things are difficult." What is the source of that strength? Our love relationship with God.

"There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears has not reached perfection in love." - 1 John 4:18 (HCSB)

The believer's enemies are all about punishment and tormenting us with fear. But our God is all about teaching us discipline and setting us free by giving us the courage to commit to responding to God's call with faith and obedience. We grow in our love relationship with God by:

A. Relying on His promises - v. 6a

I will be with you always even until the end of the earth.

An ocean liner left a British port during WWII and headed for a harbor in the U.S. Enemy ships were everywhere. The captain was given secret directions charting the route. Added were these instructions: "Keep straight on this course. Turn aside for nothing. If you need help, send a message in code." After a few days at sea, the crew spotted an enemy cruiser on the horizon. It appeared to be trailing them. The captain immediately sent a coded message: "Enemy cruiser sighted. What shall I do?" The reply came from an unseen vessel: "Keep straight on. I'm standing by." No friendly ship could be seen, but the captain kept the liner on course until it safely reached port. Within a short time, a British submarine glided quietly into the same port. Although it had been out of sight, it had been present all the way.

B. Relying on His presence - vs. 6b-7; v. 14a

"Have I not commanded you (promise)? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever

you go (presence)." - Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

We have said that "Courage is the strength to obey God even when I'm afraid and things are difficult." That strength comes from God.

"But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." - Isaiah 40:31 (NKJV)

"If the Lord be with us, we have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, His arm over us, His ear open to our prayer – His grace sufficient, His promise unchangeable." - John Newton

III, The results of courage - vs. 8-23

A. Fears are faced - vs. 8-13

"Of whom shall I be afraid? One with God is a majority." - Martin Luther

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

B. Foes are conquered - vs. 14-16

"Fear knocked at the door. Faith answered. No one was there." - Anonymous
In fear we often act like God is dead.

The great Christian reformer, Martin Luther, in fact, once spent three days in a black depression over something that had gone wrong. On the third day his wife came downstairs dressed in mourning clothes.

"Who's dead?" he asked her.

"God," she replied.

Luther rebuked her, saying, "What do you mean, God is dead? God cannot die."

"Well," she replied, "the way you've been acting I was sure He had!"

C. Folks are changed - vs. 17-23

Here we find the wife of Heber, who we are told was an associate of Jabin, the king Sisera served, kills the commander by driving a tent peg through his skull. In other words, one who had been in league with Israel's enemy, chose to come to the side of the people of God. One who was an enemy of God had become a friend of God.

This reminds me of a story I have told to folks who need to settle the issue of their salvation. A farmer went to a revival meeting and went forward at the altar call, knelt and gave his life to Jesus. The next day, the devil came by and told him it wasn't real. So that evening, he returned to the revival meeting and made the same decision. Again, the following day, the devil came by and said it didn't count. So again that night, the farmer went to the meeting and again gave his life to Jesus. The next day, the devil came by with the same old "song and dance." But this time,

the farmer went into his barn and returned with a hammer and a stake. He knelt down in the devil's presence and surrendered his life to Jesus. Then he drove the stake into the ground and told the devil, "Look there, I've nailed it down. Now get lost." And the devil left him.

Our community is filled with folks who need to know that they can know they are saved and right with God. Folks who need to be set free from the curse of Satan and the bondage of sin through faith in Christ. Some of you who are here today may need to know that certainty as well.

But they will only be inspired to turn to Christ through the witness and testimony of the people of God who find the courage to rise above their fears and challenge their foes. Believers who are progressing in their walk with God and becoming more like Christ; and who are rising above their fears of sharing their faith and telling others the Good News about the freedom found in Christ.

Deborah's courage to respond to God's call inspired Barak to find the courage to respond to God's call, which inspired the men of Naphtali and Zebulun to find the courage to respond to God's call, which led to Jael finding the courage to respond to God's call.

Conclusion: Notice verse 15: "At Barak's advance, the Lord routed Sisera." God only moves in response to our commitment to respond to His call with faith and obedience. What is God looking for from you today? What are you waiting on? Look to Him. Trust in His promises and His presence; and find the courage to face your fears, challenge your foes, and see your life and the lives of others changed.

Let me close with one last story. The boy sobbed, "But Dad, I want my ball..." "You can play with your ball," I said, "but you'll have to go downstairs and get it yourself" Now the tears flowed.

Tony's playroom held the stuffed animals, toys, and games that four-year-old love. He spent hours there. But to turn on the basement light, you had to descend the darkened stairway, step into the shadowy playroom, then reach for the light switch. "Tony," I said. "You know what's in the playroom. Everything in there's the same in the dark as it is in the light." "B-b-but Dad," he sniffed. "I'm s-s-scared of the dark."

"Okay," I said. "I'll stay at the top of the stairs so you can hear my voice while you go down. How's that sound?" A grin replaced Tony's tears.

He got up and bravely started down the stairs. Then, partway down into the darkness, I heard him hesitate. "Dad?" he called out. "Yes, Tony?" "Nothing." Seconds later the light was on, and Tony was happily throwing a Nerf basketball through a hoop.

Simply knowing his father was nearby gave him the courage to face and overcome his fear of the darkness.