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**Winners and Losers**  
*Messes. Choices. Faithful God Series*  
**Judges 4:1—5:31**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

So which do you think is more important: to be winning at half time or to be winning at the end of the game? And if we know who wins at the end of the game, shouldn't that affect the choices we make today? That's what we're going to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible turn with us to Judges Chapters 4 and 5. I'm just going to tell you in honor of the Fourth of July holiday, we are offering our own fireworks in the text this morning.

The challenge of this particular story is that it is told twice. Chapter 4 is the narrative version. Chapter 5 is the poetic version. And the best way to understand this is to take the two chapters and lay them over one another in order to understand the story. So that's what we're going to do, a little bit of back and forth between Chapters 4 and 5. So we're actually going to start in Chapter 5, verse 1:

**Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying, "That the leaders led in Israel, That the people volunteered, Bless the Lord! Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I—to the Lord, I will sing, I will sing praise to the Lord, the God of Israel. Lord, when You went out from Seir, When You marched from the field of Edom, The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, Even the clouds dripped water. The mountains quaked at the presence of the Lord, This Sinai, at the presence of the Lord, the God of Israel. (\*NASB, Judges 5:1-5)**

So this is like our intro. The first verse is something to celebrate. God has done something amazing followed by, listen up all you kings and rulers. Because the same God that led the children of Israel out of Egypt across the Red Sea to Mount Sinai where God shook the earth is the same God that rescues His people during the time of the Judges. So that's the intro to the story. Back to Chapter 4 verse 1:

**Then the sons of Israel again did 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; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. The sons of Israel cried to the Lord; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years. (Judges 4:1-3)**

So Ehud has died and now we enter into the next cycle. Again, introduced the people did evil in the sight of the Lord. As a matter of fact, it says the people *again* did evil in the sight of the Lord. It's a reminder that nothing that follows was necessary. All of it was avoidable if they would have chosen to be obedient to God, but they chose evil, and choices have consequences.

So now they are oppressed. This oppressor is Jabin, the commander of the Cannanites. He was king in a city called Hazor. Hazor is up in the north, about nine miles north of the sea of Galilee. It was a major city, the most significant city in the north. It was right on the trade route from Egypt to Mesopotamia. So we're talking about a powerful king with a lot of resources. His commander was named Sisera, and he commanded the troops and made their lives miserable. Again verse 3, **the people cry out to God**. This word **cry** again doesn't mean repentance. It's a cry of agony. It's a cry

of pain. But God because He's merciful and He's gracious and He's forgiving is going to raise up a deliverer to set these people free.

We're told that Sisera has 900 chariots. He dominated the coastal plain. Chariots required 900 horses, which requires food, it requires pasture, it requires training. It had to be a significant operation to have 900 chariots. Humanly speaking, they were absolutely unbeatable and they oppress the Israelites for twenty long years. How bad is it? Chapter 5, we pick it up in verse 6:

**In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, and travelers went by roundabout ways. The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel. New gods were chosen; then war was in the gates. Not a shield or a spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel.** (Vs. 6-8)

So just a reminder, these stories don't necessarily go in a linear fashion, one at the end of the other. We're talking about different regions, and certainly some of them overlap. So the story of Shamgar and the story we're looking at today overlap. We're told that it was so dangerous you couldn't even travel down the road. You were likely to be robbed, to be mugged, to be killed. So if you had to go somewhere, your only option was to sneak around the hills in order to avoid the violence. In verse 7, **peasantry** is probably an unfortunate translation. What it's talking about is the people that lived out in the rural areas: farmers growing crops, providing food for the people. Literally the Hebrew hears "the unwalled people". In other words, the only chance you had was to live in some sort of a city where there was a wall for some protection from the violence. You could not live outside the wall.

So there were no farmers, there were no crops, there was no way to provide food. The reason, verse 8, **new Gods were chosen**, they chose the Gods that the Canaanites, that turns into violence and war, and you couldn't even find a weapon among the people of Israel. The situation is about as hopeless as it could be.

I love the language in the second half of verse 7, **until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel**. So there's a little boy on the playground of the grade school, and he's being bullied, and that's going to continue until the little boy's mother shows up, and something is about to change. That's the idea there. Starting in verse 9, 10, and 11—I'm not going to read that for the sake of time—but it describes that something happened when Deborah shows up on the scene that will once again make it possible for people to live in freedom as they had once known. Alright, back to Chapter 4, verse 4:

**Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment. Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, "Behold, the Lord, the God of Israel, has commanded, 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.'" (Vs. 4 - 7)**

So God raises up Deborah. She's not just a prophetess. The Hebrew says she's a prophet woman. It's underscoring the fact that this is a woman. We talked about last week the book of Judges is all about God using the most unlikely people to do the most amazing things. In an ancient culture, especially an ancient Israelite culture, the last thing we're expecting is for God to raise up a woman to defeat

this undefeatable army. So she's a prophet woman, a judge who does business in Israel. She actually lived down in the hill country right in the area where Ehud blew his trumpet to gather the troops. So she's quite a ways out of the oppressed area. But God calls her to go to visit Barak, who's in the oppressed area. What she says to him is actually, "Has not the Lord the God of Israel commanded you?" Implied in that is God has come to Barak to raise him up to be a hero, but he's not willing. So He sends Deborah, and Deborah says, "Has not God commanded? Listen, fella, it's time to be obedient."

The plan is to have 10,000 troops meet on the top of Mount Tabor. Tabor's kind of a cone-shaped mountain in the north. It is the traditional site of the transfiguration of Jesus in the New Testament. Here was a logical meeting place. Everyone knew where it was and the chariots could not come up the mountain. So this is Deborah's plan: "I'll tell you what, you assemble the troops, by the way the troops have no weapons and I'm going to go stir up Sisera and his 900 chariots and make him really mad and draw him out and then you fight him." It's a bit like saying, "David, you go up the mountain. I'm going to go poke Goliath until he's really mad, then you fight him." Verse 8:

**Then Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." She said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him. (Vs. 8 - 10)**

So Barak says, "Alright, here's the deal, if you come with, I'll do it. If you don't come with, I won't do it." Now it's easy to be critical of Barak, but let's stop and think about this. He is being asked to go to war with 10,000 soldiers primarily unarmed against a seemingly unbeatable foe. This was absolutely a suicide mission. So the fact that he is willing to go is quite remarkable, and shows a significant amount of courage and faith. He believes that God is with Deborah and if Deborah goes, then God goes. So Deborah agrees. I would say Barak is amazing. Deborah is really amazing. So she says, "I'll go, but here's the deal. Because of that decision, you will not get the honor killing." The honor killing had to do with at the end of the battle one commander kills the other commander in an honor killing and that is the final defeat. So what Barak is told is that will not come to you, but rather will be a woman. Our assumption at this point is that is going to be Deborah.

In chapter five, verses 13-18, there's an overview of who joins in with Barak and who doesn't. I'm going to let you read that at your leisure because of time. We pick it up then in Chapter 4, verse 11:

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

Verse 11 is what we would refer to as an editorial comment. It just is kind of inserted in there. It doesn't advance the story. We read verse 11 and we're kind of like, "Who cares? Whatever." What's being said is there's this man by the name of Heber who is a Kenite. We learned about the Kenites in Chapter 1. They had joined the tribe of Judah. So they lived way in the south. But somewhere along the way, Heber decided, "I think it looks like the Canaanites are going to win because they are way out ahead at half time. So I'm changing teams." So he moves way up north. That's all we know right now. It's a bit of a teaser. Verse 12:

**Then they told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. Sisera called together all his chariots, nine hundred iron chariots, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. Deborah said to Barak, “Arise! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the Lord has gone out before you.” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. The Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. 16But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left. (Vs. 12 - 16)**

So Sisera sees that Barak is assembling the troops, he calls out all of his troops, he calls out his chariots and it's time for war. Deborah is watching and at a strategic moment she says, “Arise.” I believe this is the moment where she sees the storm clouds forming in the horizon. I'll come back to that in just a moment. Essentially, again, what she says to Barak, “Has not the Lord given you Sisera into your hands?” Again, what's implied is that there's hesitation. This by all human standards is a suicide mission. He's terrified. It's not hard to understand why. But Deborah reminds him, “Hey, God is in this.” So I would say with great faith and courage he goes down Mount Tabor and engages Sisera in war. God routes them literally, God confuses them. Sisera sees that they're going to lose, jumps from his chariot, and flees on foot. Alright, over to Chapter 5, starting in verse 19:

**The kings came and fought; then fought the kings of Canaan at Taanach near the waters of Megiddo; they took no plunder in silver. The stars fought from heaven, from their courses they fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. O my soul, march on with strength. Then the horses' hoofs beat from the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds. (Vs. 19 - 22)**

So this is very helpful to understand what happened. Verse 20, **the stars**, this is poetic language, divine intervention, something happened from above. In Verse 21, it's talking about the Keshon river. This area where the battle took place was a flat area ideal for chariots that had the Keshon river flowed through it. Most of the year, the Keshon was a little creek completely insignificant. But during the rainy season, it would flood the valley. As strange as this seems to us today, they actually had seasons for war, and it had to do with the weather conditions. So this is the summer. Everything is dry. It's perfect for chariots. But in an unexpected mid-summer storm, God sends rain. This is why I think when Deborah said, “Arise”, she was seeing the storm clouds. It was time to rumble. The rains come, the Kishon floods, the chariots get stuck in the mud, they are of no use, the horses are confused, and the Israelites route them. This is why it says Sisera jumped out of his chariot and fled on foot because his chariot was stuck in the mud.

Now we want to remind ourselves that the Canaanite God Baal was supposed to be the God of the weather. As a matter of fact, he's pictured with a club in one hand, which is thunder, and a spear in the other hand, which is lightning. But of course, Baal is no god. But the God of the Hebrews is the Creator, God of the weather, and God defeats and routes the enemy. Alright, back to Chapter 4, verse 17:

**Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.**

This is very important to understand the story. Somewhere along the way Heber decided that, “It looks like the Canaanites are going to win, so I’m changing teams.” So he and his clan go up north and he becomes friends with the oppressor, Jabin, the king of Canaan. Jael is his wife. Verse 18:

**Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, “Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid.” And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. He said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him. He said to her, “Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, ‘Is there anyone here?’ that you shall say, ‘No.’ ” But Jael, Heber’s wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died. (Vs. 18 - 21)**

So this is very much like the Ehud story. You have almost no details of the battle, but you have a very graphic murder scene. In this case, Jael has a choice to make: she knows that her husband has changed teams and he’s now with the Canaanites, but she’s smart enough to figure out, “Wait a minute, it looks like the God of the Hebrews must have won, because Sisera is on the run.” So this is the moment of truth. She has to decide which team are you on? So she chooses in this moment to pledge her allegiance to the God of the Hebrews. When she invites Sisera in, the language has sexual overtones. This is kind of a theme here moving forward. She’s kind of luring him in. You have to understand that when we’re talking about oppression, we’re talking about horrific oppression, especially to the women. So in an unexpected twist, God is going to raise up two heroic women to put a stop to it. Her own husband has sided with the oppressors. But she’s going to go against that and make her decision for the God of the Hebrews.

So she invites him in. She refers to him as “her master”. It’s the same word that was used of the servants of Eglon when they found their master dead. It’s reflective of this is the master of the Canaanites but she’s choosing the God of the Israelites. She lays him down, covers him up, he wants some water to drink. It’s not a bottle of milk, it’s a skin of what we would refer to as yogurt. It’s still served in the Middle East today. When he says to her, verse 20, **stand in the doorway of the tent and it shall be if anyone** the actual Hebrew here is, *if a man, male, comes and says, ‘do you have a man with you in the tent?’* Again, it carries the idea of a woman having an affair with a man in her tent, and her husband comes home and says, “Do you have a man in there with you? Make sure you tell him ‘no’”. It carries this idea that she’s going against her husband, and she’s choosing the God of the Hebrews.

So, Sisera goes to sleep, she picks up a tent peg, she picks up a hammer. In that culture, the women were responsible for putting up the tents and taking down the tents. She was no stranger to tent pegs and to hammers. And she drives the tent peg through his temple all the way through and pins his head to the floor of the tent. And he’s dead. Very graphic. Pick it up in verse 22:

**And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” And he entered with her, and behold Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple.**

Now this, like the Ehud story is the discovery scene. Again, **behold!** This is what happened. It is likely Barak thought in spite of what Deborah said, he could have the honor killing, so he’s chasing Sisera down. Jael comes out, invites him into the tent, I’m sure he expects he’s going to have his

moment and behold! Surprise of all surprises! There he is, dead on the tent floor with a tent peg driven through his temple into the floor. Just as Deborah had prophesied.

It's very interesting how many people in the 21st century America are quite critical of Jael. "That wasn't really very nice." Let's be honest. It's easy sitting on our padded chairs with our air conditioning headed to the restaurant and then to our safe homes to be critical about a culture we know nothing of. Life under these oppressors was absolutely horrific, and it was most horrific to the women. Women were systematically raped, tortured, and killed, and finally God raises up two heroic, courageous women to put a stop to it. Jael is not condemned. She is celebrated. Chapter 5, verse 24:

**Most blessed of women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; most blessed is she of women in the tent. He asked for water and she gave him milk; in a magnificent bowl she brought him curds. She reached out her hand for the tent peg, and her right hand for the workmen's hammer. Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head; and she shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay; between her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell dead.** (Vs. 24 - 27)

Very graphic language. As graphic as the English is, it's quite a bit more graphic in the Hebrew. Verse 27 has strong sexual overtones. It's like, what is the deal with him laying there between her legs, dead on the floor of the tent? Again, understanding the oppression and the violence that was happening to women in this culture. Here is Sisera, the one behind the oppression, and now he lies dead at the hands of a woman, at her feet, between her legs. God's had enough of this and He uses a heroic woman to finally put a stop to this horror. It's the imagery, it's very graphic here. Starting in verse 28, now it's Sisera's mom, and she's waiting for her son to return because she wants all of her stuff. The whole point was the spoils of victory. She wants more.

**Out of the window she looked at lamented, the mother of Sisera, through the lattice.**

Lattice carries the idea that while Israelites were in tents, the Canaanites were in luxury.

**Why does his chariot delay in coming? 'Why does his chariot delay in coming? Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?' Her wise princesses would answer her, indeed she repeats her words to herself, 'Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil? A maiden, two maidens for every warrior; to Sisera a spoil of dyed work, a spoil of dyed work embroidered, dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the spoiler?'** (Vs. 28 - 30)

So Sisera's mom is wondering, "Where is he? Why is this taking so long?" The princesses are his harem, and they are essentially saying to her, "It's probably because there's so much plunder. There's so much stuff to be collected and brought back, it's just taking a really long time." Now, when they say, **a maiden, two maidens, for every warrior**, the Hebrew is *a womb, two wombs*. It's talking about the soldiers raping the women. Again, it's reflective of how horrific this oppression was. Now think about this: Sisera's mom and his harem are actually celebrating that part of the plunder is a womb, two wombs for soldiers, and they need to do that before they come back. It's just an insight as to what was happening. Verse 23 of Chapter 4:

**So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the sons of Israel. The hand of the sons of Israel pressed heavier and heavier upon Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin the king of Canaan.** (Vs. 23 - 24)

And then the last verse, verse 31 of Chapter five,

**Thus let all Your enemies perish, O Lord; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might. And the land was undisturbed for forty years.**

Verse 31 is what we would call the *big idea* or the *exegetical idea* of the story. The wicked perish, and those who love God shall be blessed. It's a theme that runs throughout the Old Testament.

So here's a question: Why is this passage so graphic? Why not a nice, cleaned up, sanitized Bible story? Answer: Because evil is evil. Because wickedness is wickedness. It's not cleaned up. It's not sanitized. These were real people enduring a horrific situation because of the foolish choices they made. The people chose evil. The theme is *everyone did which was right in their own eyes*. That doesn't lead to paradise. It leads to wickedness, which is the path our culture is on. Many women around the world live in situations like this. Wickedness is wicked. Evilness is evil. And when people choose to do evil in the eyes of God, life becomes horrific.

This is not a video game. This is not a reality TV show. This is the real world of what happens when people choose evil. So God in His grace and mercy raises up two heroic women, willing to be jealous for the reputation and glory of God and to trust Him and to put a stop to this evil. And as a result, these people would live in peace and safety for the next 40 years.

We are reminded that Heber, who halfway through the game was convinced 'the Canaanites are winning! I think I want to change teams,' represents far too many Christians who are getting caught up in the gods of the Canaanites, the gods of the culture. I grant you it looks like the culture is winning, and there's far too many Christians who are deciding, "I think the culture is winning, and I so want to be accepted. I so want to fit in. I so want to belong. I think I'll change teams. And I think I'm going to bow and worship the gods of the Canaanites."

But at the end of the story, God wins. We're on a mission this summer to raise up people, heroes of the faith who are jealous for righteousness, who are passionate about the glory and reputation of God, who are willing by faith to take their stand for that which is right. We're on a mission to encourage people to have the faith and courage to face your stuff. Deal with your sin. Deal with what is evil and unacceptable in the eyes of God. Have the courage to deal with it, and to face it, and to experience the grace and the forgiveness and the freedom that God offers through Jesus the Savior. At the end of the story, there's going to be winners, and there's going to be losers. What's it going to be for you?

*Our Father, we're thankful this morning that when we were lost in our sin You sent the ultimate deliverer, Jesus, to be the Savior of the world. God, may we not get caught up in the current of the culture. May we take our stand for righteousness. May we be a light in the darkness that others might come to know the Jesus who has set us free. In Whose name we pray, Amen.*

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