



Sermon Series: More Than a Sidekick: Serving Alongside Others

To be used with Session 2: Barak

Sermon Title Possibilities: “The Comeback”; “Down but Not Out”

Scripture: Judges 4:4-8,12-16; 5:1-5

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the Bible study “More Than a Sidekick: Serving Alongside Others,” this sermon will remind the congregation about the grave consequences of sin. Listeners will examine the historical components surrounding the disobedience and subsequent oppression of the Israelites at the hands of King Jabin of Hazor. Conversely, the congregation will learn how God—through grace—strategically assigned leaders to bring deliverance and restoration back to the Israelites. Listeners will be introduced to Barak and Deborah and invited to identify the unique and necessary characteristics they possessed that helped them bring victory to Israel. Additionally, the congregation will learn how Deborah, Barak, Zebulun, Naphtali, and ten thousand warriors worked together to defeat Jabin and ultimately liberate the Israelites. The congregation will be inspired to engage in collaborative leadership as a means to fulfill their God-given purposes in the world.

Introduction: Many basketball enthusiasts have regarded the 2016 NBA Finals as one of the greatest NBA finals in history. The best-out-of-seven series was held between The Golden State Warriors and The Cleveland Cavaliers. This rematch from the year prior was a highly anticipated matchup. Steph Curry’s Warriors dominated LeBron James’ Cavaliers for the first four games and gained a 3-1 series lead. Many people assumed that the Warriors’ victory was inevitable. The Cavs were up against seemingly impossible odds: they were down 3-1 (no one had ever overcome that large of a deficit in the Finals), and if they made it to game 7, it would be played on the road (no one since 1978 had won a game 7 on the road). The Cavs were down, but they defied the odds and secured the victory because they worked together as a team to defeat the opposition. Similarly, we may find ourselves up against insurmountable obstacles for a myriad of reasons; however, just like the Cleveland Cavaliers, we can clinch victory even with the odds against us when we align ourselves with God and work as a team.

1. Encourage One Another (Judges 4:4-8)

Judges 4 opens by informing the audience that the Israelites were subdued by King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The Israelites were subdued as a result of their evil doing. We all should remember that although we are beneficiaries of God’s grace,

scripture clearly shows immense consequences for our engagement with sin. Verse 3 reports that the Israelites cried to God, and God responded by sending a deliverer. God's grace prevails even during punishment. In the words of that great hymn, God "hears our faintest cry and answers by and by." According to verses 4-6, Deborah—a prophetess and judge—charged Barak with leading the Israelites to victory. Barak's assignment was great and seemed to initiate fear and anxiety in him. We all have experienced the fear and anxiety of embarking momentous tasks. However, scripture confirms that we have not been given a spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7). As a response to the anxiety, Barak requested that Deborah go with him, and she obliged. Barak's request reminds us that everyone, even leaders with high callings, need encouragement. Scripture is saturated with examples of support partners who encouraged one another: David had Jonathan; Naomi had Ruth; Paul had Silas; Daniel had Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; and Mary had Elizabeth. Encouragement is a biblical mandate for followers of Christ. Believers are commanded to encourage and build up one another (1 Thess. 5:11). Fulfilling this mandate not only supports our fellow brothers and sisters but also strengthens the body of Christ.

2. Work As A Team (Judges 4:12-16)

The details surrounding Judges 4 remind the audience that strategy is a prerequisite for victory. Barak and Deborah devised a clear strategy to defeat Sisera—the commander of the Jabin's army. The ultimate goal was to draw out Sisera for defeat. The execution of this strategy required clear communication, placement, and collaboration; every person had to work as a team to ensure victory. Judges 4 reports that Barak and Deborah went up together to Mount Tabor; Zebulun, Naphtali, and ten thousand warriors were stationed together in Kedesh—all waiting for the signal. They were unified, executed their plan, and ultimately secured victory and deliverance for the Israelites. Similarly, we must commit ourselves to teamwork if we desire to experience victory in every area of our lives. In fact, disciples of Jesus must work as a team in order to fulfill our charge to establish God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). We can never give space for division; we must all be in agreement, united in the same mind and same purpose (1Cor. 1:10). This is why Paul refers to our team as the body of Christ. Paul writes that "there are many members but only one body" (1 Cor. 12:27) and *working* as a team is one of the most powerful and feared weapons we can use to confuse and destroy the enemy.

3. Give God The Credit (Judges 5:1-5)

Judges 4 reports that the Israelites defeated King Jabin, Sisera, and all of Hazor. The oppressive hand of King Jabin seemed unconquerable to the Israelites at first. Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly for twenty years (Judges 4:3). However, God empowered the Israelites to conquer all of Hazor. Judges 5 captures the lyrics to a song of victory rendered by Deborah and Barak, which is believed to have been composed after the defeat of Jabin. Similarly, we all have stories

of victory over seemingly daunting and hopeless situations. Indeed, we should rejoice exceedingly when we are triumphant. It is easy to take credit for our success when we have invested much sweat equity. In this case, credit could have been given to Deborah, Barak, Zebulun, Naphtali, or the ten thousand warriors. Each person played a pivotal role in securing freedom from oppression. However, in Judges 5, Deborah and Barak gave God all the credit for the conquest of Jabin. This text causes us to consider to whom we attribute credit for success. When Paul found himself at the center of a similar debate, he declared, I planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the growth (1 Cor.3:6). May we never forget that no matter how hard we have worked, invested, or sacrificed, it is God who ultimately deserves all the credit.

Conclusion: There is no way to escape the consequences of our sins. Sometimes we may fail, and sometimes we may fall. In fact, those moments can make us believe that God's hands have been permanently removed from our lives. Fortunately, no matter how low we may feel, God's grace always meets us at those broken places of humility. In many cases, God gifts us support systems to help us recover from those low places. Even leaders need support. However, it is our job to embrace those systems and work in sync as a team in order to achieve victory. God will ensure our team is victorious, but we must never forget to give all the credit back to God.

Author Bio

Dr. TERRENCE CHANDLER-HARRISON serves as the Lead Pastor of The Liberty Church—Clarksville, TN. He is a graduate of Morehouse College and Vanderbilt University Divinity School. Terrence earned a Doctorate of Education from The University of Southern California and his research was awarded the dissertation of distinction merit. He is a professor of Bible and Theology and Dean at The Historic American Baptist College—Nashville, TN. Terrence and his wife Anjelica are the proud parents of Ellie Grace and Timothy James. Check out Terrence's latest work, *Spiritual Cross Training: The Book of James* on Amazon and Barnes and Noble.