

HOW TO OBTAIN AN UNCOMMON PEACE (Judges 4:1-5:31)

You may have heard about the man who had been stranded on a deserted island in the Pacific for five years. Then one day, a boat came sailing into view. The man frantically waved and got the attention of the skipper who then sailed his small boat into the natural harbor of that little island. He beached his boat, got out, and greeted the now smiling castaway.

After introductions, the rescuing sailor asked the man, “What are these three huts you’ve built?”

The stranded man explained, “That first hut is my house. And that one in the distance is my church.”

“Your church?” the skipper asked with surprise in his voice.

“Yes, I’m a pastor,” the man replied. “I preach every Sunday morning and Sunday night, and I lead a prayer service on Wednesday evening. I even go out on visitation on Thursday night.”

“But aren’t you the only one who lives here?”

“Yes, but you never know,” replied the bearded man with tattered clothes.

The rescuer asked, “And what is that hut in the middle?”

The man hung his head said, “I don’t want to talk about.”

“Oh, common,” urged the visitor.

“It’s too painful,” he protested.

“Listen, I’m rescuing you. You’ll never have to come back here. What’s the middle hut for?”

“Well, that’s the church I used to pastor.”

Conflict. It’s everywhere. You can’t escape it. It is found within churches, between churches, and it ravages entire denominations.

Conflict, dissension, discord, is standard fare in the world of politics. Disagreements, clashes, and skirmishes are common between political parties and even within a party.

You find the same battles and fights in marriages and in families, businesses and corporations. You will find such problems plague our schools, and neighborhoods, and cities. Conflict is rife within our culture, and it escalates between people’s and countries.

What’s even worse, is we find conflict within our own heart. We have competing loyalties, and at times, a divided mind.

Where can we go to find rest and peace in our turbulent, troubled world?

We are going to look at two whole chapters from Judges this morning, but I want you to notice the last sentence of the last verse of the second chapter we are going to examine. We will be focusing on Judges 4 & 5, but let’s start with the end of 5:31. We are told, “And the land had rest for 40 years.”

You might consider that as a throw-away verse. We’ve seen a couple of verses like that already, and we are going to see it again. It is all part of this four-fold cycle seen throughout Judges—**disobedience, discipline, despair, and deliverance**. When God delivers His wayward people, they enjoy peace for a time until they abandon Him and are

subjugated once again by one of the neighboring people groups. In chapter two, God used the King of Mesopotamia and then the King of Moab. Here in chapter four, it is the King of Canaan. In chapter six, it will be the Midianites.

After being troubled by the Canaanites and before being overpowered by the Midianites, Israel enjoyed 40 years of relative peace and calm and rest. What were the ingredients that went into the making of this peace? Yes, we know God gave them peace, but specifically, what did He do in them and for them for this peace to be realized? That is what we are going to look at today.

We are never going to know complete, unbroken, perpetual, abiding, absolute peace this side of heaven. We were born into a world at war. God has enemies, and if you stand for God, you will be shot at by those enemies. You will become a target. In the midst of this war, however, you can be at peace with God, at peace with yourself, and at peace with those who follow God. What can we do to help that happen?

In Romans 12:18, Paul wrote, “If possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” The fact of the matter is that sometimes, living peaceably with all is not possible because it doesn’t always depend on us. Sometimes, there are those who are bound and determined to be at odds with us, and at such times, there is not much you can do to stop that from happening.

As we look at Judges 4-5, we are going to find there are four things we can do to obtain an uncommon peace.

When Judges 4 opens, we discover that Israel has forfeited the peace they had enjoyed for 80 years according to Judges 3:30. The people had backslidden into ungodliness, and as a result, God allowed them to be subjugated by Jabin, the King of Canaan.

Sisera was the Commander of Jabin’s army, and Sisera kept the Israelites in check for 20 years because he had 900 chariots of iron at his disposal. The Israelites didn’t any chariots much less chariots of iron.

The Israelites taking on Sisera and his army would be like you having only ground troops, maybe a couple of jeeps, and you go up against another army that has 900 heavily armed M1 Abrams Tanks or Bradley Fighting Vehicles. Your forces are going to be mowed down.

This brings us to v. 4. Let’s read Judges 4:4-10. We come to the first things we are to do to obtain this uncommon peace.

We Are to Follow Our God-Following Leaders

Deborah was a God-follower, and God had made her into a leader. Some people take issue with the fact that Deborah, a woman, was leading men. If you have a problem with that, take that up with God, not me. The Bible clearly refers to her as a prophetess and that she served as a judge.

As far as I can tell, in the days of the OT, there were three chief offices—Prophets, Kings, and Priests. There were women prophets. They were called prophetesses. There were women kings. They were called queens. There were no women priests. None. There was not a single woman who served as a priest.

In the NT, there were women prophets. According to Acts 21:9, Philip had four daughters who possessed and exercised the gift of prophecy. A case can be made that there were women deacons or deaconesses. In Romans 16:1, Paul mentions Phoebe whom he refers to as a deaconess or a servant of the church at Cenchreae. In Timothy 3 Paul gives qualifications for the deacons, and then in 3:11 he uses a much-debated word. It can be translated either “Their wives” or “the women.” If you translate the word as the “the women,” what follows is qualifications for the women deacons. If you translate it as “their wives,” that means to qualify as a deacon, your wife must live her life this way and not that way.

The interesting thing is that in the very next verses that list the qualifications needed for someone to serve as a pastor, nothing is said about how his wife is to live.

It is my opinion that in the church, women are to use their gifts, whatever their spiritual gift might be. Some might have the gift of teaching or leadership or service. Some women might serve in numerous different roles, but just as there were no women priests in the OT, I don’t believe there are to be women pastors or elders or overseers in the NT church. The office of priest was reserved to men in the OT, and the office of pastor, I believe, is reserved for men in the NT.

Yes, men and women are equal, but they are not equivalent.

In the case of Deborah, she was a godly woman, and she was called by God to serve His people in a time of need. She exercised her gifts of leadership and wisdom. The people recognized her as a leader because they took their disagreements and disputes to her, and she determined who was right and who was wrong.

Her most important “case” was whether Israel’s fighting men should go to war with Sisera. She had received word from the Lord that they were to do so. God also made her privy to the fact He had already told Barak to take the troops under him into battle. Barak, however, was sitting on the sidelines doing nothing.

Deborah, summoned Barak to her courtroom, so to speak. She rendered her verdict, “You are guilty of not doing what God told you to do. He has already told you to go, hasn’t He?”

Barak seems to be a bit of a sissy. He says, “OK. I’ll go, but only if you go, too.” He is not asking her to go into battle, and she doesn’t go into battle, but she says she will go and reminds Him that God promised to draw Sisera out to the battle.

Look at vv. 12-14 and how Deborah encourages Barak. Look at the result in v. 15. We will see how God won that victory for His people a little later, but the victory was made possible because Barak and his men followed their God-following leader.

All of us need a leader. We need a leader in the home. We need a leader in the classroom. We need a leader at work. We need leaders in the various levels of government. We need a leader in the work of the church. We need a leader in our spiritual lives. Sometimes, we ourselves are that leader, and more often than not, we need to follow the leadership of someone else.

We need to pray that God would give us godly leaders. When you find a leader who is following God, follow that person insofar as he/she follows God. We need God-following parents. We need God-following bosses and employers. We need God-following

politicians. We need God-following church leaders.

The author of Hebrews wrote, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7). He is saying, “Follow the leader.”

There are many traits shared by good leaders. They are good at vision casting, decision making, seeing the big picture, and on and on we could go. There is another trait shared by good leaders, and it one well worth noting. Good leaders have good followers. If you want to make your leader a better leader, be a better follower. Pray for your leader, encourage your leader, and if your leader is following God, make sure you follow your leader.

There is a second thing we want to do if we want to obtain an uncommon peace.

We Are to Assume Our God-Determined Role

There were likely times that Deborah didn't feel comfortable in her role as a leader. “Why has God made me a judge? Why do I have to call out Barak? Why can't God get someone else to do this?” Yet, she knew she was doing what God called her to do.

Barak felt even more uncomfortable. So much so that he wasn't doing what God called him to do. He needed a little kick in the pants to get going, but eventually he did assume the role God wanted him to play.

After Israel won their victory, Deborah and Barak sang a duet of sorts. Chapter 5 is a poetic song of victory. Look at 5:1-2. Look also at v. 9. They thank the LORD for those who did what they were called to do.

Later in the song, they point out those who did nothing. Look at 5:17. In v. 18 they go back to giving attention to those who stepped up and helped out.

There is one important person in this story we haven't mentioned, yet. Her name is Jael. Let's look at the vital part she played in this story. Notice 4:17-22. It wasn't the army led by Barak that killed Sisera. It was a woman who wasn't even part of the battle. There was a peace treaty that existed between Sisera and Jael's husband. You would not have expected Jael to do what she did. Sisera certainly didn't expect it. Why did she?

She had opportunity, means, and motivation. Consider the opportunity. Jael didn't go out looking for Sisera. God brought Sisera to her tent giving her the opportunity to make a difference.

She had the means. She didn't have a sword or a dagger or a spear. She had a tent peg and a hammer. One commentator observed that in the culture of that day, it was the job of the women to erect the tent. They were used to driving tent pegs into the ground. Tim Keller wrote, “The tent peg and a hammer were essentially a woman's household appliance!” Jael used what she was used to using just like David used a sling and a stone.

Finally, she had motivation. Let's go back to the song that followed the victory. Interestingly, the song imagines Sisera's mother wondering what is delaying her son's return. What is taking him so long to get back home? One of her attendants provides a supposed answer to the question. Look at 5:30. Sisera's mother is led to believe that her son is dividing the spoil of war with his troops. Part of that spoil is Jewish women or

teenage girls.

Conquering soldiers of that day routinely raped the wives and daughters of the people they conquered. Essentially, Sisera was capturing girls and putting them into the sex trade business. He was guilty of using and abusing women and often young women.

This would have been no secret. Jael would have been quite aware of the kind of man Sisera was. Now, she had opportunity, means, and motivation to get rid of him, and she did.

I wonder: Do you have the opportunity, means, and motivation to serve the Lord?

The Church of God is strong when the people use their gifts. When those with the gift of leadership lead, when those with the gift of teaching teach, when those with the gift of serving serve, when those with the gift of mercy show mercy, when those with the gift of evangelism evangelize, and when those with the gift of encouragement encourage, that's when God will do great things in, for, and through His Church.

Let me tell you a story involving an English actor named Charlie Hunnam. He has made millions of dollars acting both for television and in motion pictures. In 2020, due to the Covid pandemic, he was out of work. Instead of acting, he started writing. He could begin at 6 in the morning and write until 7 in the evening, 13 hours a day. He explained:

When I write, I feel as though I'm honoring the innate gifts that God gave me. I feel like I really can do this at a high level. And that's a feeling that I've never had in my life before, in any regards. I feel like we all have one or two innate talents, and a task of life is to identify those and then do that as much as you possibly can. Because that's where the joy and the presence is going to come from. That's where the grace is going to come from.

Find your talents, your gifts, your God-given role, and let Him use you to accomplish His purposes. That's where the joy, and His presence, and His grace is found.

We Are to Let God Do What Only God Can Do

Do you remember that Sisera had 900 chariots of iron at his disposal to obliterate any troops that marched against him? Even though that was the case, Barak led his troops into battle trusting the Lord to show up and fight on their behalf. That is exactly what happened, but what exactly did God do?

Look at 5:4. God caused rain to fall and not just a little rain. It wasn't a sprinkle. It was a gully washer. Look at 5:19-21.

The name of God only shows up a few times in chapter 4. Look at one such instance—4:7. In chapter 5, however, the name of God is found everywhere. Notice a few instances (vv. 4, 5, 11, 23, 31).

The hero of this story is not Barak. It is not Deborah. It is not even Jael. The hero of this story is God.

Listen to what Keller wrote:

Truly, this was God's victory. Sisera would never have arranged his chariots next to a river if he had been expecting rain. This must have been the dry season, not the wet; but God, through Deborah, told Israel just where to fight (4:6), luring Sisera's army to the place where He would destroy them (v. 7; 5:21-22).

What is the lesson for God's people? That God wins—and so blessing is to be found in fighting for and with Him, putting ourselves in His service whatever the odds or cost.

It was God who caused Sisera's chariots to either get mired in the muck or get swept away by the waters. It was God who led Sisera to the tent of a woman who would gladly and without remorse, kill him. No amount of military planning could have accomplished what God did that day.

More than once, I have quoted the pastor who said, "When we work, we work, but when we pray God works." If you want to see God work and do what you cannot do, pray. Prayer is the key that unlocks and unleashes the work of God on our behalf. God can accomplish in moments what we could never do in a lifetime.

Earlier, I mentioned that we were born into a world at war. It is a war between Satan and God. Listen to the words of the late Adrian Rogers:

God's warfare is against the devil. And how does God intend to win the war? Through the prayers of His people. Isn't that strange? God intends to win the war through the prayers of His people. Omnipotent deity has limited itself to our prayers. And God moves when we pray, and prayer is warfare. The devil understands that.

The devil doesn't mind if we meet here this morning, not at all. He doesn't mind if this choir sings. The devil doesn't mind if you do everything except pray. The devil mocks our schemes. The devil laughs at our organization. The devil sneers at our building. But the devil fears our prayers. The devil will do anything he can do to keep you from praying. The devil will even encourage you to read the Bible if it will keep you from praying. The devil will encourage you even to go to church on Sunday morning if it will keep you from praying.

This morning we sang, "Faith is the victory." I think we could rightly change the lyrics to read, "Prayer is the victory." Prayer is where the victory is won.

There is one more thing we are to do if we are to obtain this uncommon peace God want to give us. We've looked at following our God-following leaders, and assuming our God-appointed role, and letting God do what only God can do. Finally . . .

We Are to Ponder What God Has Achieved for Us

It is instructive that while chapter 4 is history, chapter 5 is poetry. While chapter 4 tells us what happened, chapter 5 causes us to reflect on how it happened, and it reminds us that God was the ultimate cause in all that took place.

Recently, I came across a great quote: "Great minds discuss ideas; average minds

discuss events; small minds discuss people.”

I think this is also true in the area of faith. If we want to be people of great faith, instead of talking about people or events, let’s talk about and think about God. People of great faith focus on God, who He is and what He has done.

About five months before Covid-19 became a household word, *The New York Times* published an article entitled, “Are We Living in a Post-Happiness World?” The article noted the fact that *joy* is often used as a marketing gimmick. It is used to sell boxes at Ikea. It is included in ads for drinks at McDonald’s, and there are T-shirts that tout joy as “an act of resistance.” Books are being published yearly devoted to joyful living.

Politics in America has divided into two camps: angry and angrier. Our world is threatened by climate change. Racial justice warriors are on the march. People are worried about the economy.

We may truly be living in a post-happiness world. According to the World Happiness Report happiness in the United States is declining. Americans said they were less content in 2018 than a year earlier, ranking No. 19 behind Australia and Canada. The 24-hour news cycle, combined with the onslaught of natural disasters, social upheaval, and political strife, has left Americans exhausted. All of this was written before the pandemic. Since then, it has gotten much worse

Sadly, many are also living in a post-peace world.

Gladly, God’s people can have both joy and peace. They come through a relationship with Jesus. Do you know Him?