

Judges: Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons
Ordinary People/Extraordinary God

A woman who had locked her keys in her car at a mall. She didn't have the money to call a locksmith so she prayed and asked God to help her. Within a minute or two, a rough looking guy who saw her looking like she was in trouble comes up and asks if she needs any help. She told him that her keys were locked in her car; and in no time, the man used a wire and lifted the lock. The woman thanked him and said that he was an answer to prayer and an angel. The man said, "Oh, I am not an angel, ma'am. I just got out of prison." The woman looked to heaven and said, "Oh Lord, You are so good! You sent me an expert!"

One truth you'll find woven all through the Bible is that God uses people to fulfill His plans and answer prayer. Sometimes they're people we least expect. From Genesis to Revelation, God used ordinary people to accomplish His purposes.

From farmers to shepherds to bakers to carpenters the extraordinary God of the Bible used ordinary people to get His work done.

In fact, the Bible says that God delights in using nobodies for a very important reason.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (I Corinthians 1:26-29)

God delights in using ordinary people so that He gets the credit instead of them. Our human nature wants to acknowledge anything and any one, except God.

God is the glorious One. He's the Creator and Sustainer of all. Without Him we wouldn't be here. He's the one who should be the target of our acknowledged worship, service, and allegiance. He should be the center of all our consideration and contemplation.

In Isaiah 42:8 God says, *I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to*

another.

God is the Lord and we're not. God is the Lord and that means He's above all.

Think about it, if you know your God how could you make anything less than yourself the most important thing in the world?

If God is the greatest thing and He didn't call us to make our lives about Him He would be failing us. He wouldn't be loving.

If He would let us make our lives about some transitory, minute earthly thing or person what kind of loving heavenly father would He be?

He says, "Make your life about me." Not because He's short on worship and needs us to fill in. He was doing fine in eternity past without any of us.

God, in his grace, calls us to what's best. He says, "I created you and I'm calling you to really see me. And when you do you're going to be totally blown away, because there's nothing greater than Me."

You know what? When our life, our reputation, our efforts, our passion are all for God, we find this amazing sense of completeness.

God will be OK without our worship but we won't be OK without worshipping Him.

God says, "Everybody worships. I want to see you live your life for the best, and nothing less."

"I'm demanding, I'm calling, I'm challenging you to make your life about Me. I'm the best. Don't settle for anything less."

And so God would be cheating us to direct our allegiance to anything less than the most important thing, and that's Him. So God uses ordinary people so that it's obvious that it's not the people who are accomplishing great things, it's God who is working through them.

Last month we started a series in the Old Testament book of Judges we're calling *Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons*.

God wants us to enjoy life and live it to the fullest. Our problem is that we mistakenly think that must mean God wants us to live easy lives. You can search the Bible from

cover to cover and no where does God promise us an easy life. What He promises is that we can experience life to the fullest if we live it for Him.

There will be suffering. There will be trials. There will be temptations. But if we have faith that God is our Savior and we honestly let Him lead us, then the joy of the Lord will be our strength. We'll live life abundantly because we'll have joy, peace, patience, and most of all, purpose.

The Book of Judges is a warning and a challenge to us about how easy it is to miss that life that God has for us. It's like life lessons about God's people who had chance after chance to experience real life but who gave it up for something far less.

Judges covers about 300 years of Jewish history. At the time of Judges the Jews, who were brought up out of slavery from Egypt, had now come to the land that God had promised them.

The people who lived there went under the general title of "Canaanites." There were variations, but generally they worshipped fertility gods and goddesses, sacrificed their children, and revered their deities by performing vile, sexual, perverted acts.

They weren't exactly the kind of neighbors you'd choose to have! God said, "drive them out."

Now, you'd think that with all they'd been through, the people of God would just run to obey God. You'd think they'd have no trouble doing what God asked. Unfortunately that's not the way things worked.

And if we're not careful that can be us running away from God instead of towards Him.

So with that in mind this morning lets turn to **Judges chapter 4, page 220.**

Tragically, the book of Judges records a long and shameful series of sinful rebellions against God by the Jewish people. The cycle goes like this: Rebellion, retribution, repentance, and restoration. That cycle is repeated over and over in Judges.

1. It Doesn't Take Any Of Us Very Long To Get Away From God If We're Not Careful

In Judges 4 it's happening again. **Read 4:1-3**

Here were God's people slipping right back into the cycle. Verse 1 is rebellion, verse 2

is retribution, verse 3 is repentance, and verse 4 reveals God's method of restoration.

Read verse 4

Here's the first of 2 ordinary people that God uses in extraordinary ways.

We don't know much about the woman named Deborah except that God calls her a prophetess in the Bible. This definitely wasn't a time in history in which women were recognized as having much to add to society but God is no respecter of persons.

Apparently she was open to God and so God used her to get His message out.

At this point God's people would have had the books of Moses, but of course most of the Old Testament wasn't written yet. The events hadn't even happened yet. So God used prophets to get His message to His people.

In this case, He uses Deborah. I don't want to read too much into the fact that she was female but I have to wonder if God wasn't using Deborah to say to his people, "You're not listening to Me but I haven't stopped speaking. I'm going to use unlikely people and unlikely circumstances to demonstrate my glory."

If you think about it, this is one of the most amazing displays of the character of God you'll find anywhere in the Bible.

Here's a bunch of people, who for the most part, rated destruction, not grace. But God had a plan to bring His Son into the world through these people. God had a plan to bring the Bible to the world through these people.

There was something that God was doing that was way more important than the average Israelite would have ever imagined. So here He is showing grace.

That's the God of the Bible. That's the kind of God that we worship. His plans for us and for this world are huge.

He's calling out a people for Himself. He's building the Body of Christ out of redeemed sinners. He's preparing the world for His coming kingdom.

He's doing this so that all people will give Him worship. He's doing this so all creation will praise His name. He's doing this so that the eternal focus will be on the Glorious One, not anything or anyone less.

So God chooses Deborah to be His mouthpiece. Remember, God works with and through people.

What's God's message at this point, and who's it for? **Read verse 6-7**

God's message is ultimately for His people, but it starts off being directed to another ordinary guy named Barak.

This isn't Barak Obama, this is the Jewish military leader Barak.

Now remember, the Jews may have had fighting men, and Barak may have been a leader, but apparently he hasn't been doing too much leading. For 20 years they had been under the thumb of Jaban, king of Canaan.

There wasn't any fighting. There wasn't any gorilla warfare. There weren't any Israeli national heroes. Just 20 years of humiliating domination by Jaban.

Now God responds to the cry of His oppressed people. Finally they've come to the place where they understand that they've ignored the true and living God and it's got to stop.

So what does God do? He uses Deborah to tell Barak to gather up troops and head down to the area of the river Kishon and fight Jaban's army which is being led by a man named Sisera.

Sounds good, right? The Jews are humble before God, God has heard their cry and is going to route the invaders.

There's just one little problem for Barak. Jaban had 900 chariots of iron. Barak might have had 10,000 men but hey, you can have 10,000 foot soldiers but if you're up against 900 tanks you're done for.

That's the same thing that's happening here. And not only was God telling Barak through Deborah to go fight against iron chariots but he was telling them to make themselves completely vulnerable.

While Jaban and Sisera did terrorize Israel for decades, the Jews had one important advantage. The mountainous high ground northwest of Galilee kept them safe. They were protected by the cover.

But now God is commanding them to move out of that protection and down toward the river Kishon, which flowed through the valley of Jezreel onto the plain of Megiddo. Barak's men would be totally vulnerable out in the open. You may have 10,000 guys with swords, sticks, and slings but that's no defence against 900 iron chariots bearing down on you.

By the way, the valley of Jezreel and the plain of Megiddo have tremendous spiritual significance in the Bible. The final battle of this age will take place there as Jesus Christ returns to defeat the armies of the Anti-Christ. We know it as Armageddon.

Har in Hebrew means mountain. Armageddon means the mount of Megiddo. What's going to happen in Judges 4 is just a foretaste of what will happen at Armageddon. God will be the victorious one.

Barack goes on to tell Deborah that he won't go into battle without her and she agrees.

I. It Doesn't Take Any Of Us Very Long To Get Away From God If We're Not Careful

II. God Has A Plan To Restore Us If We'll Simply Take It

In the end God does exactly what He promised He would do and gives His people success. **Read verses 14,15**

What happened? How did the Israeli army defeat an army with 900 iron chariots out on an open plain where they were completely exposed and vulnerable? Chapter 4 doesn't give us any details but chapter 5 gives us a clue.

Read 5:1-5

This is Deborah and Barak's song of thanksgiving to God for victory over their enemies. They start off by drawing an analogy to another event from Israel's past.

God had come down from Mt. Sinai where He gave the commandments to Israel. At that time the earth shook and the thunder roared, and apparently the rains fell and gushed down the mountain side.

Now look at verse 21.

Here's what I think happened. And remember, this is something that Barak would

have no way of knowing ahead of time. It rained like crazy down on the plain of Jezreel. The earth trembled, the heavens poured, the waters gushed and the river Kishon flooded its banks.

If your on foot you can deal with mud but if you're in an extremely heavy iron chariot you've in trouble.

Once they got stuck those chariots weren't the super weapons of their day. They became death traps, iron tombs for their drivers.

Israel obviously saw God's hand at work and ended up turning back and serving Him. But there's an interesting postscript to the story of the battle.

Read 4:17-24

Chris Vogel writes, "These events remind us that the Bible is not a children's book of morality tales, but will challenge our preconceptions every time we turn its pages."

It's amazing the events and circumstances that the Bible describes. It never sugar coats the reality of sin. We're not told why Jael chose to nail Sisera to the floor. It could be because she saw who had the upper hand now and she wanted to be on the winning side. We don't know.

But look back in verse 9. Barack had told Deborah he wouldn't go into battle with out her and she said something very interesting. **Read 4:9**

By the end of the chapter Barack is successful. He's the victorious general who led his troops to victory. But Deborah instructed him and an enemy's wife put an end to the guy on his 'most wanted' list.

- I. *It Doesn't Take Any Of Us Very Long To Get Away From God If We're Not Careful*
- II. *God Has A Plan To Restore Us If We'll Simply Take It*
- III. *The Key To Doing Extraordinary Things For God Is Faith*

In a lot of ways Deborah and Barack weren't that much different than you or me. So why did God use them? How come God uses ordinary people to do such extraordinary things at times?

Here's the key. Both Deborah and Barack trusted God. They both knew that if God said

something they could believe it no matter how unlikely it looked.

The children of Israel came to Deborah for God's wisdom. They didn't come because she was so smart or insightful. They came because she was a prophetess.

Barack didn't respond to her invitation to talk because he figured she was the greatest battle strategist around. He came because he knew God was speaking through her and he believed God.

Barack went into battle the way he did because God's word through the prophetesses told him to.

We call Hebrews chapter 11 the great faith chapter of the New Testament. It's a list of some of the great men and women who did extraordinary things for God. Barak's on the list.

Almost every verse in Hebrews 11 starts with the words *By faith*.

I have to believe that part of the reason God used women to accomplish some of the things in Judges 4 was just to reinforce to Barak that it wasn't about him or his glory. Deborah even said to him in verse 9, "there will be no glory for you."

In the song of Deborah it says, *When leaders lead in Israel, When the people willingly offer themselves, Bless the LORD! Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes! I, even I, will sing to the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel.* (verse 2,3)

Deborah didn't brag about herself or praise Barak. Deborah called everyone to worship and praise God.

Think about the character qualities our society uses to determine who's great. Think about the measure of success.

It might be education, it might be skills, it be strength, it might be the ability to get other people to buy into our ideas. Whatever they are, they always exalt the one who has them. In the end they always make that person stand out as the prominent one.

What a radical difference when it comes to God's definition of greatness.

You start working your way through the pages of the Bible and checking out the lives of the men and women that had the greatest impact for God and you'll find over and over again the thing they had in common was a faith that took God at His word and trusted Him to do what He said.

God delights in doing big things through ordinary people so that they can get the blessing and He can receive the glory.

You might be thinking, “Wait a minute Ed, God isn’t doing any extraordinary things through me.” Just remember, sometimes He does big things through us and we never even know they happened. We don’t need to know. We just need to be faithful.

In 1886 a little girl named Hattie May Wiatt lived in Philadelphia. She lived near a church where the Sunday School was very crowded and there often wasn’t room for all the children.

The pastor there, Russell H. Conwell told her that one day they would have buildings big enough to allow every one to attend who wanted to. Later, Hattie May Wiatt became sick and died. Rev. Conwell was asked to do the funeral and the girl's mother told him that Hattie May had been saving money to help build a bigger church and gave him the little purse in which she had saved 57 cents.

Conwell brought 57 pennies to church and told the congregation the story of little Hattie May and sold the pennies for about \$250. Fifty four of the original 57 pennies were returned to Rev. Conwell and he later put them up on display. In 1886 57 cents was no small savings account for a little girl from a poor family.

Some of the members of the church formed what they called the Wiatt Mite Society which was dedicated to making Hattie May's 57 cents grow as much as possible and to buy the property for the Primary Department of the Sunday school. A house nearby was purchased with the \$250 that Hattie May's 57 cents had produced and the rest is history.

The first classes of Temple College, later known as Temple University, were held in that house. It was later sold to allow Temple College to move. Today Temple University and Temple University Hospital stand as a testimony to a little girl with a heart for God.

You can read Conwell’s sermon where he explains the miracle of Hattie May on the Temple University web site. He concludes with these words:

“When that little lad brought five loaves and two small fishes to be used of Christ for His great work of feeding the five thousand, it was precisely the same thing that Hattie May Wiatt did when she brought her 57 cents, and that lad and Hattie May Wiatt are now in

the land on high. “

“It is one of the great comforts of life that every person is used of God, that every individual is loved just as closely and in careful detail as though he were the only person on this earth. Think of that, my brother, my sister, if there were not another person living on earth God could not take any more individual care of you than He now does. He sees and knows you; though you may think your life is humble, unknown, hidden, yet God sees all, and your life has probably just as great an influence for the uplift of mankind and the progress of His kingdom as has been the life of those who are seemingly great, seemingly famous in this world. There is no difference before God. The humblest of His Christian servants is doing just as much for His kingdom, when waiting, or doing faithfully their little duty, as are the seemingly great.”

A lot of people would mock the idea of faith as if faith was something with no substance. With no content. Popular atheist authors like Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins want us to believe that faith is for people who have no facts. They want us to believe that only logic and reason are trustworthy.

Of course the truth is, we all live our lives by faith.

I look at the evidence and say I see the hand of a Creator in the complexity of the universe and in the uniqueness of human life. That evidence leads me to say, by faith, that there's a God.

Dawkins and Harris look at the same evidence and say by faith that everything just happened by chance and has no purpose or meaning. That's not reason or logic. It's simple, pure faith.

We all live by faith. What's important is where that faith is directed.

God is calling you and me today to live by faith. God is calling us to respond to Him just like Deborah and Barak. He's calling us to believe that what He says is true.

The Bible says, *Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.* (Hebrews 11:6)

Faith makes the difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Faith brings glory to God.

We begin our Christian life by faith and we serve God by faith.

The Bible says, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8,9)

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.
(Titus 3:5)

God forgives us on the basis of Jesus death on the cross. We can't add to the cross. We can only, humbly trust Jesus finished work for us.

We believe, we exhibit faith, and God gets the glory.

Then we serve God by trusting Him to accomplish great things through us. There's no glory for us in the journey we're taking. The glory and honor all belong to God.

One truth you'll find woven all through the Bible is that God uses people to fulfill His plans and answer prayer. Sometimes they're people we least expect. From Genesis to Revelation, God used ordinary people to accomplish His purposes.

From farmers to shepherds to bakers to carpenters the extraordinary God of the Bible used ordinary people to get His work done.

In fact, the Bible says that God delights in using nobodies for a very important reason... *that no flesh should glory in His presence.*

Is God being worshipped and honored through your life today?