

May 7, 2023

“The Lord Goes Out Before You”
Judges 4:1-24

FCF: Our deep rooted fear

PROPOSITION: (magnet) God fights for His people.
(anchor) We need to trust Him to save us.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Ed Welch is a licensed psychologist and faculty member with the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation and has written a good deal on fear and anxiety ([READ quote](#)):

Look around and see that your fears are everywhere. They live under words such as *stress, worry, jittery, on edge, pressure, and dread*. They are tied to guilt and so many other everyday struggles. If you feel guilty, you fear judgment. If you feel shame, you fear being seen and exposed before others. Anger is often fear that has some fight left in it. It sees that something you love is at risk, though it is inclined to take a stand rather than freeze or run. Depression can be fear that has given up. Today, it says, is dark and unbearable. The future is worse. It is dark, unbearable, and hopeless. Or consider post-traumatic stress disorder. It describes those of us who have had a brush with destruction, either in the form of physical danger or the evil actions of other people. The fear is that these memories will intrude, or the past will repeat itself in the future. Something bad has happened and something bad will happen. And then there are all our addictions. Addictions are desires that refuse boundaries, but if we look more closely, we'll see that many of them also hope to distract or anesthetize us from a mind that is reeling, a body that can't stay still, and a future that is bleak. Addictions are powerful but ultimately ineffective ways to keep fears and anxieties at bay.

Fear is at the root of many of our struggles. And it can play itself out in powerful ways.

What assurance might get down deep to the root of fear? That brings us to Judges 4.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Judges 4:1-24](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

There is a new “Indiana Jones” movie coming out soon. It looks promising. There have been great moments in the series. Think of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Indy is chasing after the Holy Grail. But so are the Nazis. When one of them shoots his father, Indy has to retrieve it not as an archeological relic but as a cup of healing. At this point, there is a line by the Nazi general, “It’s time to ask yourself what you really believe.” This tension comes to a climax as Indy reaches a chasm, a seemingly bottomless canyon with no bridge. It’s a step of faith. He has to trust his life to the instructions his father found. And so he steps out, only to have his foot land on a bridge invisible from the edge. Only by stepping out could he see it. So he crosses.

Which brings us to Judges 4 and a theme throughout the Bible - the call to trust in the LORD. How? On what basis? The LORD fights for His people. That is the central point of the central verse of our text. Deborah has sent and summoned Barak to gather an army to do battle with a cruel oppressor of Israel. Barak is hesitant but complies. When the time comes, she then urges him on ([READ Judges 4:14](#)). The image here is of a great king leading his army into battle. God fights for His people. So we need to trust Him to save us. What do we learn about this salvation in our text? Three things. First, its need. Second, its source. And third, its means.

I. THE NEED

First, the need. This runs so deep, far more than we can possibly dare to imagine.

A) *Its Nature*

1. Physical

We see something of its nature just physically in the opening verses. The people are utterly terrorized, forced to live in the hills for fear of the soldiers and chariots down on the plains.

2. Spiritual

All of which is reflective of a deeper spiritual need. Why had this come about? Because of yet another rebellion - forgetting and abandoning the LORD, doing what is evil in His sight.

B) Its Cycle

1. Repeating

It's the ongoing cycle of Judges. A repeating cycle of recurring events. They are caught in this.

2. Worsening

But it's not just repeating. It's worsening. We see this in the growing length of these times of oppression. Later we will see it in the deepening depravity not just of the people but the leaders.

In all of this, we see something of the need we all have of the Lord's salvation.

Application:

It's worth noting what the narrator says (**READ Judges 3:1-2, 4**). It was to test, reveal, expose what is there. To whom? To the people. Why? As a warning, a restraining, a rerouting, driving them away from their idols to the Lord. He still does this. He loves us enough to bring severe mercy into our lives. It's not cruelty but a kindness. Have you known something of this?

The Lord's salvation means He fights for His people - even so as to show us our need.

II. THE SOURCE

Which brings us to the source of this salvation - not in anyone but the Lord alone.

A) His Greatness

1. The trial

Think of the ways we see His greatness on display here. How does this testing, this trial, begin? (**READ Judges 4:1-2a**). This could only come about this way through God's sovereign hand.

2. The battle

So that's the beginning. What of the outcome, the battle? (**READ Judges 4:15, 23**) There are so many soldiers involved, so many parties in play. But only one is rightly named as the victor.

B) His Glory

1. Not to Barak

God's greatness then brings us to His glory. It doesn't go to Barak, the Israelite commander. He was to go. And for his hesitancy, Deborah declares he will be robbed of any battlefield glory.

2. Not to anyone

So who does the glory go to? Not to anyone. There are three actors - Deborah, Barak, and Jael. That's the one time we see this in Judges. It's not that the glory is shared. It all goes to the Lord.

The source of our salvation is our great and glorious God. It can be found nowhere else.

Application:

Our need is far too great for any of us to fix. Many of our daily struggles are pointers and dramatic reminders of this. The problems and pains of life are often too much. Well, the reality of our guilt and shame before God is too much. We need a greater judge, deliverer, and savior.

The Lord's salvation means He fights for His people. And it comes through Him alone.

III. THE MEANS

Which bring us to the last point, the means of our salvation. Which can be surprising.

A) *Through Small Things*

1. A move

It can come through small things - even a move. Think of what we see with this random mention in v.11 of a move by Heber's family. But that serves as a major plot point as the events unfold.

2. A storm

It can come through a move. Or a storm. We'll see more about this in Deborah's song in the next chapter. This is why the chariots were so ineffective. Defeated because of rain and mud.

B) *Through Strange Things*

1. Deborah as ruler

So this salvation can come through small things. Or even strange things. Think of Deborah as a ruler of God's people (**READ Judges 4:4**). Literally, it reads, "a woman, a prophetess, a wife" - the emphasis being that this was a woman out front leading. And that was unusual for those times. But she proves to be the most godly of all the judges. And the Lord speaks through her.

2. Jael as warrior

Then you have Jael as a warrior. Her hospitality harkens back to Ehud. She defies convention, shattering expectations as she shatters General Jabin's skull. And yet God works through her, reminding and reassuring us of yet another skull crushing to come (**READ Genesis 3:15**).

All of which points to the surprising means God uses to bring about His salvation.

Application:

He specializes in this sort of thing - not just in who He works through but in what, where, when, and how He brings it about. His salvation comes through surprising means. We see this especially at the cross. Paul speaks of this quite pointedly (**READ 1 Corinthians 1:18-25: 2:9**).

The Lord's salvation means He fights for His people - often through surprising means.

CONCLUSION:

(**READ Judges 4:14b**) This is, of course, a rhetorical question and very much an abiding reality. He has, He does, He will go out before us. Jesus is the great Warrior King leading the charge, taking and absorbing the worst and the uttermost of the enemy's fight and fury. Which then brings us to the Table, His table. The Lord has given this to us as a sign, something He uses to help us to remember. But He has also given it to us as a seal, something He uses to reassure us, to press it not just into our minds but upon our hearts. For He really has gone out before us.

He has gone out before us as the judge and deliverer to save us not from some oppressive king but our oppressive sin. He has come to set us free from sin's penalty. He has come to set us free from sin's power. And one day, He will return to set us free from sin's very presence.

Jesus fights for His people. We can trust Him. We need to trust Him to save us.

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