

Place: Lurgan Baptist 12:10:2002

Reading: Judges 4:1-24

HEARTS OF IRON, FEET OF CLAY

4. ISRAEL'S WOMAN LIBERATOR

Someone has said there are only three kinds of people in the world, *those who watch what is happening, those who make things happen, and those who scratch their heads and ask, "Hey, what is happening?"* The ability to make things happen is the gift of leadership. Perhaps Harry Truman defined it best, he said, "***Leadership is the ability to get men to what they don't want to do and like it.***" That ability is a precious commodity in the modern world. In the past number of years, the Western world has had its faith in existing leadership shaken badly, and few Western democracies have escaped major political scandals. But its not only in the political realm that leadership is a crucial issue, for surely local church life is directly affected by the quality of its leaders. One group of churches in the North West of the USA did a study of growth patterns in about sixty churches.

They studied statistics for attendance, age, and income, and then surveyed the attitudes and thinking of various leaders. *They discovered that whether a church was static or growing depended directly on the attitude of*

its leaders. Where the church leaders were positive, flexible, confident, cheerful, and goal-oriented, the church was growing. But where the leaders had little vision or creativity, and no clear goals the church was standing still. On an even more basic level, there is a critical need for leadership in our family life. Too many of our Christian homes are drifting because there is no one exercising leadership. The power vacuum is filled quickly by the children, and a result a kind of anarchy pervades our school system and society. When we as parents abdicate our God-given responsibility disaster is inevitable.

Now as we read the Word of God we become convinced that the Lord has called every Christian to exercise a leadership responsibility. Some types are very obvious such as elders and deacons. There are also God given responsibilities in the home. On a more personal basis the Lord Jesus has called every believer to be a disciple, and that involves each of us as we build into someone else's life. *Leadership is a spiritual issue of great importance, and we need to acquire a clear, biblical concept of God's standards for leaders.* We want to do that by looking at an exceptional leader. She is the only woman in biblical history who has a major God-given leadership role. That immediately marks her out as an uniquely gifted individual, a leader of distinction from whom we can learn a great deal. That person, of course is Deborah. We meet her in (Ch 4)

Now remember in the Book of Judges we are on the merry go round in which the same things happen time and again. In Deborah's time the cycle goes round for

the third time thus we read in (4:1) Notice therefore:

(1) THE TIMES THAT DEBORAH ENCOUNTERED

The " *times*," in which she served God were dark. As long as Ehud judged Israel, the people remained faithful to Jehovah, but when Ehud died a fresh outbreak of idolatry began. Do you notice again the cycle in the opening verses ? (1) Sin: (4:1) (2) Suffering: (4:2) (3) Supplication: (4:3) (4) Salvation: (4:4) My sin is a boring routine, not a fresh excitement. The fast lane becomes an old rut. Evil never lends itself to originality. Thus the time in which Deborah lived was a time of:

(a) SPIRITUAL DECLINE:

Look at (4:1) Do you see what it says in (5:8) ? " *They chose new gods.*" The people had turned away from God to the Baals and the other gods of Canaan and as a result, the power of God had gone from them. The days of blessing have departed, and the days of shame, compromise, and declension have come in. The days of Deborah were the days of " *new gods.*" My such is our day. It is a day of new religions, new gospels, new Bibles, new theologies, new ecclesiastical politics. There is a craving like the craving of the Athenians for some new thing. " *They chose new gods.*" Times have changed but lets not imagine that idolatry is dead. This modern world is full of it. You see, if we trust in anything more than God we're

making a god of it, if we love anything more than God we break the first commandment. My your god is what you love, seek, worship, serve and allow to control you. An idol is anything we put before God.

Did you ever think of some of the 21st century idols ? Possessions ! " *The principal false god of our time,*" according to Dr. Standford Reid " *is our standard of living.*" Possessions ! What about Money ? What about Family ? People ? Shortly before his marriage CH Spurgeon arrived at a hall where Spurgeon was to preach. He and his fiancée got separated in the jostling crowd as thousands poured into that hall. Arriving at her home after the service he found her sulking. " *I'm sorry,*" said Spurgeon, " *but perhaps what happened was providential. I did not intend to be impolite but whenever I see a crowd like that waiting for me to preach I am overwhelmed with a sense of responsibility. I forgot about you. Now it will have to be the rule of our marriage that the command of my Master comes first, you shall have the second place, are you willing as my wife to take second place, will I give the first place to Christ ?*" A wise woman who genuinely loved the Lord, answered, " *Yes, I'll take the second place.*"

" *They chose new gods.*" Have you ? What are you putting before the Lord ? (a)

(b) POLITICAL DOMINANCE:

For when a nation declines spiritually its affects the social and moral life of the nation as well. Now

Canaan was made up of a number of city states, each of which was ruled by a king. (Joshua Ch 12)

" *Jabin*," was the official title or name of the King of Hazor. (Jos 11:1) he was also called " *King of Canaan*." Joshua had burned Hazor (Jos 11:13) but the Canaanites had rebuilt it and occupied it. Now lets take a moment and get the geography of this story into our minds. The main action here is taking place in the North. (4:2) Hazor is 10 miles North West of the Sea of Galilee. Sisera is operating out of Haroshesh certainly in the Galilee region near the Plain of Esdraelon, also known as this valley of Megiddo where this battle took place. Now if you turn to (Ch 5) you will see Israel's desperate situation more clearly. Do you ever thank the Lord that you live in a free country ? How would you feel if this land were occupied by an enemy nation, and you were held as a prisoner in your home ? Well, thats exactly what Israel experienced under Jabin and Sisera. Look at (5:6-8)

* *The main roads were empty*, when you wanted to travel to see your friends or do business you had to sneak around the back way.

* *The people who lived in villages* had to leave their homes and move into the cities. (5:7)

* *Even the cities were not safe* for (5:8) says war came to the city gates. The cities were under siege and the people were totally unequipped. Not a shield or spear was seen among 40,000 in Israel.

* *The army had been reduced* until there were only 40,000 available men.

My for 20 years Jabin and Sisera had completely dominated the country. By this time you would that God's people would be starting to get the point. " *Hey, have you noticed. Every time we get mixed up with Baal and Canaanite religion, and all these sexual orgies, some foreign king comes along and jumps all over us. But when we turn to the Lord, we get delivered. Maybe we should just stick with the Lord.*" The Master Teacher had made the lesson painfully clear, but unfortunately, people do not usually learn obvious lessons quickly. So sin leads to servitude. (Jn 8:34) My one of Satan's great lies is that sin is liberating. " *Come on try it you'll like it. Why are you tied up with those old-fashioned ideas of morality ? Live a little. Be free !*" But the truth is that sin enslaves. The Lord Jesus said, " *Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.*" And when the Israelites turned to Baal worship the Lord sold them into the hand of a Baal-worshipping King. (a) (b)

(c) *MARTIAL DIFFICULTY:*

Militarily Israel hadn't a hope. Now 900 chariots (4:13) might not sound that much in a world that spends more than 400 billion dollars every year on armaments but they represented the very latest in military technology. Israel were outmanned, outgunned, and outpositioned, they not only lacked chariots, they virtually lacked all weapons. (5:8) A nation without arms was helpless before a nation that

was armed to the teeth.

Yet Israel's real problem was not military but spiritual, their real need was not iron chariots but a living faith. If Israel would only trust God He would deliver them from the most impossible situation. Indeed (4:3) they "*cried unto the Lord.*" Do you see how patient, long-suffering God is with us ? We reject Him, ignore Him, disobey Him, offend Him, and then with our backs against the wall, we use Him. God does a very unusual thing here, He chooses a woman to be the Deliverer of His people. (1)

(2) THE TALENTS THAT DEBORAH ENJOYED

While not a woman's Libber Deborah was a liberating woman. Her name means "*bee,*" and accurately describes a busy, efficient, productive woman. Indeed just as a bee is capable of stinging its enemy so Deborah was God's instrument who delivered a fatal sting to the enemies of Israel. Now 3 important things are said about Deborah in this passage.

(a) As to the Lord: Deborah was a PROPHETESS:

Look at (4:4) Its interesting that her function in *relation to God is mentioned first.* God seemed to have the first place in Deborah's life. As a prophetess she received revelation from God and delivered God's message to the people. Now a number of women in the Bible are mentioned as being a prophetess. There was Miriam the sister of Moses (Exod 15:20) Huldah a woman who spoke for God in the time of Josiah.

(2 Kings 22:14) Nodiah who was in league with the enemies of Nehemiah. There was the wife of Isaiah (Is 8:3) Do you recall Anna who gave thanks in the temple for the baby Jesus ? (Lk 2:36) What about the four daughters of Philip ? (Acts 21:8-9) Yes, it was to a woman Deborah that the Lord communicated His mind, and it was through this woman that Berek, whose name means "*lightning,*" was encouraged to fight the battles of the Lord.

Now for God to raise up a woman judge was an act of humiliation for the Jews for they lived in a male-dominated society that wanted only mature male leadership. God said, "*as for My people, children are their oppressors and woman rule over them.*" (Is 3:12)

For God to give His people a woman judge was to treat them like little children, which is exactly what they were when it came to spiritual things. *Did Deborah live in a day when men abysmally failed in their role as men of God ? Do we live in a similar day ?*

Undoubtedly some women are wanting the place that Scripture has given to men. So today we have women ministers etc.; Now lets remember that when we think about men and women we must distinguish between their position as individuals before God and their role in the structure of the Church and the Family.

You see, *the same God who has revealed areas of equality has also revealed areas of different and distinct responsibility.* We have to have authority and submission in the church. Men are to teach in the church. Why ? Because that is how God designed it.

(1 Tim 2:12) Women are not to be the public teachers when the church assembles, they are not to fill the role of the pastor or teacher.

Does that mean they are inferior ? Of course not. My ... woman have touched the globe in a way men could never have. But in the church and in the home God has given the leadership to the man. Now some women are wanting the place that Scripture has given to men. But do you ever think about the men who remain silent and act like women ? How many brethren in the church there are whose voices are never raised in prayer, in worship, in ministry ? (a)

(b) As to the Home: Deborah was a WIFE:

" *The wife of Lapidoth.* " (4:4) In (Ch 5) she refers to herself as a mother in Israel. Before Deborah became a leader in Israel she was a home-maker. Its interesting that the Bible does not say that Lapidoth was the husband of Deborah, but Deborah was the wife of Lapidoth. You see, though she had a prominent place in society she assumed her proper place in the home as a wife and a homemaker. Today's Christian career woman should seek the same balance. (b) Tell me, as a wife do you take seriously your role in the home ? Its interesting that some Christian woman are prepared to accept the leadership of men in the church, but not in the home.

(c) As to the Nation: Deborah was a JUDGE:

" *She judged Israel at that time* " (4:4) Now only

one other person in the Bible was both judge and prophet. Samuel. (1 Sam 3:20 7:17) As a judge Deborah was the political and judicial head of the nation. She held court under the palm tree of Ephraim 8 miles north of Jerusalem. There she heard disputes and handed down legal decisions. She was some woman was she not ? (a) (b) (c) Now all of this indicates the glorious place of women in the economy of God. My ... the idea of inferiority of women to men is completely dispelled by Deborah. But her talents cannot be said to argue for the ordination of women in the church, or 50-50 marriages in the home, for the Lord has given the leadership to the man. (1) (2) But lets move a little further in the story. Look at:

(3) THE TRUTHS THAT DEBORAH ENDORSED

This was a remarkable lady. Not only was she was a prophetess, a wife, a judge, but she led Israel in one of its times of apostasy. Indeed embodied in her life were some tremendous principles of leadership. Lets look at them. Principle number one, there was:

(a) COMMITMENT TO GOD'S WORK:

Deborah saw a need and she was committed to do something about it. (4:6-7) In (4:6) we have *Human Responsibility*, but in (4:7) we have *Divine Sovereignty*. Now Deborah was not the only to see the problem but she was the only one to do something about it. Do you see what she says in (5:6-7) ? Now is this not the first mark of a leader ? Deborah was

realistic about the situation. She saw a need and was committed to do something about it. Isn't it amazing how many folk come to a crisis in their marriage and then say, " *Why didn't I see it before ? Now it is too late.*"

Often as parents and church leaders we seem to be almost blind as to what is really happening until the timebomb has exploded and only the rubble remains. John Gardner, former Cabinet minister under the late President John Kennedy has made a perceptive observation. *He talked about uncritical lovers and unloving critics.* He points out love without criticism brings stagnation, but criticism without love brings destruction. What is needed is a loving criticism, a loving realism about our churches and families. But Deborah went beyond critical evaluation, she had a clear goal to rid her land of the enemy. Now let me challenge you all. Are you committed to God's work ? When you see a need are you committed to do something about it ? What about us elders ? Have we goals for this church ? Do we know where we are going ? Are we committed to do that ? (a)

(b) CO-OPERATION IN GOD'S WORK:

How realistic Deborah was. Israel had a military problem and Deborah needed a military helper. So she went up north for the best person she could find, Barak. She was perceptive enough to know her weaknesses and Barak's strength. Dr. Campbell Morgan put it like this: " *Barak was a strategist and adviser. Deborah without Barak would have kindled enthusiasm, but would have*

accomplished nothing." Is this not the other mark of a leader ? He knows his own limitations, he recognises the talents of others, and he goes about building a team.

Is this not what Barnabas did ? (Acts 11:24-26) Barnabas has got a situation on his hands which thrills him on the one hand and awes him on the other and so he says, " *this job is too big for me. I'm perfectly willing to put my oar in and do what I can, but I need help. I know where there's a man who got what this situation needs. I am going to go and get Paul.*" " *Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus for to seek Saul.*" (Acts 11:25)

Do you know something ? A smaller man, a meaner man would not have done that. Have you met preachers and pastors who have said, " *I'm going to be a big duck in the puddle. I've got all this to myself.*" But not Barnabas ! He recognises his limitations and he utilises his resources. He enlisted and encouraged Saul in the service of the Lord. Is that not what Deborah did ? Indeed what an encouragement she was to Barak.

(4:8-9) I have known the ministry of spiritual Deborah's down through the years. Sisters in Christ who have encouraged me when I have been weak and failing.

Thank God, for godly women who seek in their sphere to encourage the brethren. (a) (b) But there was:

(c) CONFIDENCE ABOUT GOD'S WORK:

Look at (4:14) She is depicting God as the warrior

who fights for His people. While Teddy Roosevelt was a student at Harvard, he taught a Sunday School class. One day a boy came to class with a black eye, admitting he had been in a fight. On Sunday no less. A bigger boy had been pinching his sister, the lad said and he got into a fish fight with him. Teddy said, "*You did perfectly right,*" and gave him a dollar. The officebearers of the church thought this was going too far and released Teddy Roosevelt from his Sunday School duties.

How typical of the contemporary church who think that God should always be gentle, soft and nice. But the God of the Bible is not the wimpy graven image of current western imagination. But the Strong Lord who "*in righteousness doth judge and make war.*" (Rev 19:11)

And had not Deborah a bold, dynamic faith in this God ? "*A faith that laughed at impossibilities and cried it shall be done.*" My look at the situation ! Israel was outmanned, outsupplied and apparently outpositioned. But Deborah gave the order and Barak with 10,000 men rushes down the slopes of Tabor to face a powerful enemy. What happened next was a miracle of divine intervention ! Look at (4:15) How did such a thing happen ? (5:21) At this time of the year, Kishon was a dried up a creek bed. How could it be called a river ? The answer is that suddenly at the right time, God caused a violent storm to sweep through the area. The downpour turned the ground into a muddy quagmire, the chariots got bogged down. Sisera's major weapon became his greatest handicap as the enemy was defeated. God was on the side of Israel,

and my God is still on the side of Israel. Now in (Ch 5) Deborah and Barak sing to the Lord, they praise Him for His mercies and deliverance and in so doing we see:

(4) THE TRIBES THAT DEBORAH ENLISTED

If you like, what we have in (Ch 5) is a roll call of the tribes. Deborah tells us that:

(a) REACTION of some Tribes was GLORIOUS:

Deborah mentions Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, the half tribe of Manasseh living west of the Jordan, Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali. Their reaction was spontaneous. In (5:2) *the People* willingly offered themselves, in (5:9) *the Princes* willingly offered themselves. There was no holding back, no counting the cost, the leaders led, the people followed but the response to God's call was a personal one. (5:18) It was wholehearted, enthusiastic, risk taking. My how have you responded to the call of God to do battle for Him against the hosts of Satan ? We can respond to God's call in a number of ways.

* I can give the grudging reply of duty and say, "*Well, I guess I'll have to serve.*"

* I can have the spirit of the mercenary and say, "*What's in it for me ?*"

* I can exhibit the attitude of the glory seeker, "*If I'm not a general I'm not interested.*"

* Or like these tribes I can make a willing,

wholehearted enthusiastic commitment to the Lord. One of the sad things about the evangelical church today is that we see so little of this kind of wholehearted response to the call of God. You say, " *what moved these men to gave themselves willingly to the Lord ?*" (5:31) My is this not where the problem really lies ? Its not the Quantity of our Service thats really decisive, its the Quality of our Relationship with the Lord. Thats why the Lord comes to us as He came to Simon Peter. " *Simon lovest thou Me, more than these ?* " *Yea, Lord: Feed My sheep.*" (Jn 21:15) Thats the order. Do you love Me ? Serve Me !

Does the Lord have to put a question mark of your love for Him, for that love is not being seen in willing service ? (a)

(b) The INACTION of some Tribes was OBVIOUS:

1. Reuben had the Theoretical Approach:

Look at (5:16) It wasn't that Reuben didn't think about coming to Tabor. No, they talked a lot about it, but it was not a good time to leave the sheep. Their hearts were moved, but their feet never went.

2. Gad and Manasseh had the Individual Approach:

" *Gilead abode beyond Jordan.*" (5:17) That is, they never crossed Jordan. They cut themselves off from active fellowship. Mark it down, lack of fellowship produces a lack of zeal for the work of God.

3. Dan had the Carnal Approach:

(5:17) Back in (Ch 1:34-36) the Amorites forced them up to the mountain country. In fact, they moved to another area far to the North. Dan had never developed spiritual growth. (18:1) You see, a believer who does not have a vibrant Christian life will not have a volunteering spiritual attitude.

4. Asher had the Material Approach:

Look at (5:17) They just kept at their business, they were engaged in the cod war, while there was another war they should have been waging. Yes, on the part of some tribes action, on the part of others inaction. On the part of some willingness, on the part of others, unwillingness. My which of these tribes is a picture of you ? As God's call to battle comes to you afresh this how will you respond ? In June 1953 the coronation of Queen Elizabeth took place. Prior to this the Queen had sent out invitations to her friends and various Commonwealth dignitaries. The invitation read like this;

" We greet you well. Whereas we have appointed the second day of June 1953 for the solemnity of our coronation, these are therefore to will and to command, all excuses set apart, that you make your personal attendance upon us, at the time above mentioned, there to do and perform such services as shall be required of you."

The striking phrase in that invitation occurs in the very middle, " ***All excuses set apart.***" For when a monarch issues her command, her subjects respond without hesitation or excuses. My the King of Kings and

Lord of Lords has expressed His will and issued His call to battle ! *Will you set aside your excuses so that you might willingly gave yourself to Him ?*