

Introduction

It's really easy to read a text like ours and reduce it to a battle of the sexes. We can read the story of Deborah and Barak and approach it very superficially and come up with all sorts of arguments for men and women in the church and in the world today. To be fair, we do see differences between men and women in our text, but those differences are not the point of the text. Many have used this story to insist that each one of us should play to our strengths, so to speak, that each one of us should “stay in our lane” and do what is within our particular power and ability to do. If we approach our text this morning from this perspective, we will miss the profound meaning of it.

What if the text were not about strengths and weaknesses, though it addresses them? What if the text were not about being the best you that you can be, but is instead about something far more amazing? What if the text isn't about us *doing* great things, but about us *receiving* great things? We're in Judges 4 and 5, though instead of reading chapter 5, I will make references to it throughout.

^{Jdgs 4:1} And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died. ² And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. ³ Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ⁵ She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. ⁶ She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, “Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. ⁷ And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand?’” ⁸ Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” ⁹ And she said, “I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰ And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him.

¹¹ Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh.

¹² When Sisera was told that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, ¹³ Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. ¹⁴ And Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. ¹⁵ And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. ¹⁶ And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

¹⁷ But Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. ¹⁸ And Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Turn aside, my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid.” So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. ¹⁹ And he said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him. ²⁰ And he said to her, “Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, ‘Is anyone here?’ say, ‘No.’” ²¹ But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died. ²² And behold, as Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” So he went in to her tent, and there lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple.

²³ So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel. ²⁴ And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Judges 4:1–24

Cruel Oppression

From the very beginning of time, God has been seeking to reveal himself. The very reason he created the world was to create beings—humans—with whom he could share his goodness. He created the world to be the place where he would walk with these humans who were created in his image, after his likeness. You know the story. The first man rebelled against God and brought death and destruction into the world, with all its cruelty and wickedness. Rather than a world that brought about human flourishing, the world became a place of suffering and pain.

God wasn’t giving up, however. In time he made a covenant with Abraham and promised through Abraham’s offspring God would, essentially, restore all things. He would remake the world. Abraham’s offspring became a great nation, but was suffering under the cruel authority of Egypt, so God rescued Israel from their slavery.

He led them to Mount Sinai where he made a covenant with them. That covenant consisted of commandments—instructions that were intended to be God’s self-revelation.

Rather than compare their behavior to a list of rules, Israel was to see what the Lord is like and then imitate him. How would they know what he is like? The commandments revealed his character.

By keeping the law, that is, by becoming like the Lord, Israel would show the nations around them what God is like, and the nations would be invited to worship the God of Israel. We see this in a variety of ways, whether the mixed multitude of people who joined ethnic Israel in the exodus or foreigners like Caleb and Rahab who become full-fledged members of Israel. We see it in heroes like Othniel who, though a Canaanite by birth, is presented as the ideal Israelite—full of faith and obedience.

When they entered the land all Israel had to do is faithfully obey the Lord. The prosperity that would result would show his glory to all. When faced with hostile forces, all they had to do was enter the battle and God would give them the victory. What did Israel do, however? They refused to faithfully obey him. They refused to enter the battle. When they did have military superiority, what did they do? They put the Canaanites to forced labor. What this effectively communicated is the opposite of what they should have communicated. They were saying, “You want to know what our God is like? He’s harsh and overbearing. He’s cruel and lays a heavy burden on your backs.”

In his mercy, God gives Israel over to foreign oppressors to cause them to turn to him in faith. If they would just turn to him in faith and if they would just faithfully obey him, they would not be in the various messes they find themselves in.

We come to our text and we read once again that Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. That is, they worshiped false gods. They worshiped the gods of the Canaanites. To discipline them, God sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. In Joshua’s day, Hazor was the greatest army Israel faced. Because Israel entered that battle *in faith*, God gave them overwhelming victory over this vastly superior army.

Decades later Joshua is gone. Another Jabin reigns as king. (“Jabin” is a title, not a name, similar to “Pharaoh”.) This time the people have iron chariots. They could simply trample down foot soldiers. Nine-hundred iron chariots could easily wipe out an army of 10,000 foot soldiers. With this sort of power, it’s not surprising that we read Jabin king of Hazor oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.

Judges 5 is a song of Deborah that retells the events of chapter 4. We read of some of the cruelty in that song. At the end of the song, Deborah mocks the mother of Sisera. She says his mother is staring out the window, wondering when her son will come home. Then she and her friends laugh it off, knowing why they’re not home yet:

Jdgs 5:29 Her wisest princesses answer, indeed, she answers herself, ³⁰ ‘Have they not found and divided the spoil?—A womb or two for every man; spoil of dyed materials for Sisera, spoil of dyed materials embroidered, two pieces of dyed work embroidered for the neck as spoil?’

Judges 5:29–30

Here they joke that the delay is because her son and his army are still dividing the spoils of war. Throughout history, after a battle soldiers would pick through the fallen for valuables. They would then rape and pillage the towns and villages. Notice how cruelly she—his mother, a *woman*—jokes about this: “A womb or two for every man”, as if a woman

can be reduced to her reproductive organs. His mother reduces women to mere objects to be possessed, like finding fine fabric. She dehumanizes the Israelite women to mere objects, spoils of war.

This is indicative of the sort of treatment at the hand of Jabin king of Hazor and the commander of his army, Sisera. Previous oppressors laid heavy taxes on Israel. Jabin and his minions are laying heavy *hands* on them. This goes on for twenty years. Think back twenty years—back to 2004. That’s a long time. George W. Bush won re-election as president that November. The movie “The Passion of the Christ” was released. A tiny website named “theFaceBook” launched at Harvard University for its students. US forces launched an assault on Fallujah in Iraq during the Iraq war. Hear this one: broadband internet finally overtook dial-up in 2004. *Twenty years is a long time.*

Because Jabin and his commander Sisera had vastly superior military technology, they were able to rape and pillage God’s people for a very long time. Thus one of the nations God did not drive out rose to power and brought harm to the people. In that same song in chapter 5, we read that “the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways”. If Israelites had no choice but to travel, they kept to the back roads because of the cruelty of these Canaanites. They could be attacked at any moment.

In verse 3 the author says the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help. It took them twenty years! At this point we would expect the text to tell us about a deliverer God raises up, but it doesn’t.

Deborah

Instead of telling us about a warrior who will rescue Israel, the author goes out of his way to tell us about a different sort of person—an unexpected hero. The translators of the ESV dropped a word from the Hebrew, probably because it’s redundant, but I think that’s the point. Verse 4 says, “Now Deborah”—that’s a *woman’s* name, a *woman*—that’s not in the ESV, a prophetess—the feminine form that only refers to a woman, the *wife* of Lappidoth. Deborah, a *woman*, a *prophetess*, a *wife*. There is nothing manly about her!

This Deborah is, in fact, judging Israel. Remember, a judge is one who imposes justice. Being a prophetess, she hears from the Lord and speaks on his behalf and renders judgments in disputes between Israelites. This same woman sent for and summoned a man named Barak. When Barak arrives she asks him a rhetorical question: hasn’t the Lord commanded you to summon an army and gather them at Mount Tabor? And hasn’t this same Lord told you he will draw out the commander of Jabin’s army to meet you by the river? And hasn’t this same Lord told you he will give Sisera and his vastly superior army into your hand?

It is telling that Barak doesn’t respond by saying something like, “Oh! I didn’t know!” He knows he has been summoned by the Lord. This is not the first time he has heard this command. In fact, Israel has been suffering under Jabin’s oppression for twenty years precisely because they continue to disobey—and because men like Barak continue to disobey. If they had simply gathered an army and in faith stood up to Sisera at any point during these twenty years God would have given them the victory. Now he is no longer willing to allow Israel to be stuck in a prison of their own choosing. Now he will act to break down the door keeping them in so he’s forcing Barak’s hand.

You see, Barak is a coward. He is afraid. We see this in his response: “If you will go with me”—into battle? *Deborah, a woman, a prophetess, a wife*—if she will go with him, “then I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” Think of how disordered this is. I know popular movie tropes, particularly those of women engaging in hand-to-hand combat with men and winning, affect our understanding of the world, but this is absurd.

The truth is men—as a whole—are bigger, stronger, and faster than women. I don’t think I’m saying anything controversial here: *a* woman may be bigger, stronger, and faster than *a* man, but men as a group are bigger, stronger, and faster than women as a group, and for a reason. We read of this reason in Genesis 2.

Gen 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Genesis 2:15

The first man was given a specific task: he must “work” the garden and he must “keep” the garden. To work the garden is to serve it. Adam is to improve the garden, to work in such a way that he brings flourishing into God’s good world. To keep the garden is to watch over it, to preserve it. Adam is to *protect* the garden, but protect it from what? There is no drought or disease. There is no natural disaster that will come. You might think the danger in the garden was the serpent, but at this time the serpent, being a creature, was completely under Adam’s authority. The truth is the only danger present in the garden is Adam! Only Adam can bring death and ruin into God’s good world.

God has baked into the DNA of men these very things. Men are bigger, stronger, and faster than we might use our God-given strength to bring blessing into this world and to protect this world, first from ourselves, but since the fall of Adam, also from any others who would bring evil. Into this same world God brought forth Eve, who would assist Adam in his work. Like God, Eve would be a helper for Adam, enabling him to do his work of working and keeping.

In our text we see Deborah engaging in the work of bringing protection and flourishing. She is assisting “Adam” in his work. She is imposing justice by hearing from the Lord and speaking on his behalf. This includes calling out Barak who has been abdicating his God-given role to raise an army to rescue God’s people from the bad guys. Not only was protection and service his general calling as a man, he has been specifically called by God to be a judge over Israel—to impose justice by engaging in battle with Israel’s cruel oppressors.

Deborah is judging in the tribal territory of Ephraim and Barak is called to judge Israel further north in Naphtali and Zebulun. Deborah is the only judge who was not called to pick up a sword. In a real sense, this was men’s work. Deborah imposes justice differently, by giving wisdom from God to the people of Ephraim in order to settle their disputes. Rather than engage in “men’s work”, Barak acts like a little boy who won’t go outside without mama holding his hand.

When Barak says he won’t go to the battle without her, she agrees to travel with him. She won’t engage in battle, but she has a word from the Lord for Barak: Sisera will be defeated, but he will be defeated by a woman. This means the glory in battle is not Barak’s. In an honor/shame culture like the Ancient Near East, when one is honored, another is shamed. Because a woman will be honored, Barak will be shamed.

As she promised, Deborah traveled with Barak north to Kedesh, which is a few miles north of Hazor. On the way Barak finally called together the army he was supposed to call together. The author then inserts an odd comment. He mentions the non-Israelite tribe of Moses' father-in-law. They were not Israelites but many of them worshiped the God of Israel and so we're told they settled among the Israelites while remaining a distinct people.

God Goes to War

When Barak and his army reach Mount Tabor, Sisera is informed that Israel has assembled an army to fight him. As God had promised, he drew out Sisera. Deborah tells Barak the Lord has given Sisera into his hand—Sisera and his 900 chariots of iron! The good news is Barak and his army are on the mountain. They have the high ground. They have the advantage in hand-to-hand combat. Chariots can't fight in the mountains! It makes a lot of sense to stay on the mountain. Remember, Judah took the hill country but "could not" take the plain because of iron chariots. Deborah tells Barak to leave behind his advantage on the high ground. He must embrace "weakness" on the battlefield! In verse 14 we read "Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him".

If you know nothing of this story other than 10,000 men were facing 900 iron chariots, you would assume the 10,000 men were marching into a wood chipper. The battle would be over quickly. Nine-hundred chariots would make quick work of this "army". Besides, Sisera had far more than just chariots. Verse 15: "And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot."

In this narrative account we're not given many details. The Lord God of Israel routed Sisera and Sisera, in fear for his life, left his chariot and ran away on foot. Why would he leave his chariot? Surely running from the battle on a chariot would be faster! This is where the song of Deborah fills in the gaps.

Jdgs 5:19 "The kings came, they fought; then fought the kings of Canaan, at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they got no spoils of silver. ²⁰ From heaven the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera. ²¹ The torrent Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. March on, my soul, with might!

Judges 5:19–21

The Canaanites worshiped Baal, the storm god. Being the storm god he controlled the rain. However, the "stars fought". In Canaanite mythology the stars were believed to be the source of rain. YHWH God of Israel is the one who controls the weather—not Baal. He summoned "the stars" to fight and the rain caused the river to overflow. Iron chariots are heavy. They became useless in the mud. The reason Sisera got down from his chariot and ran is he was a sitting duck in his chariot.

Sisera finds himself running past the tent of a woman named Jael. She was a Kenite—that's the tribe mentioned earlier—and the text says the Kenites were at peace with the Jabin king of Hazor. There was no hostility between them as peoples. Jael calls Sisera to seek shelter in her tent. He went into her tent and she hid him under a rug. Sisera was thirsty,

which is understandable so Jael brings him some warm milk. Then, like a good mama, she tucks in her little boy for a good night's sleep.

Before he falls asleep, in verse 20 he tells her to keep watch. The ESV renders it more generically but it literally says, "If *a man* asks if *a man* is in the tent, tell him, 'No'". Sisera then, exhausted from the battle and from fleeing on foot, falls fast asleep.

In the Ancient Near East the responsibility for setting up and taking down tents was women's work. I recently watched a video on the nomadic Nenet people in Siberia. They move their tents every four days, following the reindeer herds, and the men are not allowed in the tents until there is smoke coming out of the tops. In that culture it falls entirely to the women to set up the tents and take them down, and make them into a home. It was similar in the Ancient Near East.

This means tent pegs and tent peg hammers are women's tools. While Sisera was sleeping all tucked in with a belly full of warm milk, Jael killed him with what were essentially household tools. Why wouldn't she have used Sisera's sword? There is no mention of his sword! If he were fleeing for his life, clamboring through the mud, a sword would just weigh him down. Besides, what are the odds she knew how to wield a sword? How many times had she driven a tent peg into the ground with a single blow? Countless times. If she misses, she almost certainly won't get a second swing. She drove the tent peg through his skull and into the ground beneath. I love the author's clarifying comment: "So he died".

Sometime after, Barak shows up, looking for Sisera. She offers to show him the man he's looking for, but as Sisera requested, there is no man in her tent. There is only the body of a dead enemy stapled to her tent floor. The chapter ends with the declaration God himself had subdued Jabin the king of Canaan. In response to this victory, Israel fought even harder until Jabin's army was completely wiped out.

One scholar pointed out the unlikelihood that Sisera would have brought out his iron chariots during the rainy season. He would have known the problems with a muddy plain. He said, therefore, it is almost certainly the dry season, which led to Sisera's decision to utilize them in the battle. What Sisera didn't understand is Baal is not actually in charge of the rain. YHWH God of Israel commands the rain. He causes the river to overflow. He made the mud and he gave Israel the victory.

There is no way Barak could have known this was going to happen. He couldn't download a weather app. He couldn't turn on the weather channel. He had no radar to check. All he had was God's promise that he—God—would give him the victory. How he would give that victory to Barak was up to him; all Barak had to do was trust that God remains true to his word, even when no one else will.

The Day of Small Things

In our text we have a rare occurrence: two genres of literature telling the same story. Chapter 4 describes the defeat of Jabin and his army through prose, a straightforward telling of what happened. Chapter 5 describes the same thing but through poetry, often using very earthy language to describe the overturning of the "natural" order of things. Whereas men often dominated women after a battle, roles are reversed and the commander of Jabin's army is dominated by a woman who uses the tools at her disposal—some warm milk, a blanket, and a tent peg.

This text is often used out of context in order to prove a side in a theological debate. Some want to see Deborah's role as a prophetess as an indication that women should be elders in the church. Others rightfully point out she was not able to be a priest, nor did she enter into the battle directly, so the analogue does not quite work. Many see in both Deborah and Jael—rightfully so—an inspiration for feminine strength women possess.

Many use this story as an argument to bolster and encourage God's people to utilize their own unique strengths and abilities. That is a valid application of this text. We should all serve according to our gifts and abilities. If we leave it there, however, it does not quite capture the point of the story. Yes, Deborah was a leader in Israel and imposed justice. Yes, Jael also imposed justice by destroying a military leader who, if left alive, would no doubt seek to muster his troops against Israel yet again. Yes, in Barak we see the negative example of allowing cowardice to rule the day rather than entering into the battle in bold faith. What is the point of the text, however?

I think the point of the text is this: God does not need us to be great in order for him to do great things. In chapter 5 the song praises Jael: "Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite". Here we are, more than 3,000 years later, reading about Jael and her courage and about Barak and his fear. But who truly gets the glory here?

Jdgs 5:4 "LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. ⁵ The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel.

Judges 5:4–5

God is the victor here. Yes, he used human effort, but what human caused the rain? Yes, he used human effort, but what human could stop an army of 900 iron chariots with a tent peg? Yes, he used human effort, but what human could give victory to an overwhelmed army that is outnumbered and has vastly *inferior* military technology and training? Only the Lord, the God of Israel could do such a thing. God didn't need Israel to be great in order for the Lord to do a great thing. This is the point of this story.

You see, God delights in using small things to accomplish big things. When Israel was in the wilderness, preparing to enter the land, do you remember what he said to them when he explained why *they* of all peoples were *his* people? He told them in Deuteronomy 7 it wasn't because there were so many of them. It wasn't because they were such a great people. It wasn't because of Israel that he chose them. It was because he loved them and called them to be his people.

Because the Lord loves his people he delights in using their weakness to do great things. God delights in showing his power to his people *through their weakness*. We see this in the prophet Zechariah's day. Judah had been taken into exile for 70 years. When they returned they set about the task of rebuilding the temple. As their leader Zerubbabel struggled to finish the work, God gave a series of visions to the prophet.

In one vision Zechariah sees a lampstand. On this lampstand are seven lamps. He asks the angel what it means. The angel confirms Zechariah does not know and then he says this:

Zech 4:6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. ⁷ Who

are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁹ “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. ¹⁰ For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

“These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth.”

Zerubbabel is feeling weak and unable to accomplish such a large task. God assures him he will accomplish his purposes, but “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit”. Notice carefully what YHWH God of Israel says: “Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel”—a mere man—“you shall become a plain.” Does this sound familiar? “Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.”

The reason faith can move mountains isn’t because of the greatness of the faith. The reason faith can move mountains is the greatness of the one being trusted. The truth is the Lord Jesus is the one who can move mountains. He can but speak a word and cause the universe to spring into existence; surely he can handle a mountain.

Application

What is interesting for the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel is the context. There he is faced with the task of rebuilding the temple but the temple was on top of a mountain. Hauling up massive stones was a considerable undertaking. Zechariah is assured that God can make the mountain as flat as a plain. In other words, mountains are not an obstacle to the Lord. God is assuring him the height of the mountain will be a trivial matter. God doesn’t need Zerubbabel to be great in order for God to do great things. Because God delights in working through our faith, God desires that we trust him.

Church, God delights in small things because when he works in and through the small things—our weakness—he is able to do great things. God turns the strength of those who hate him into weakness, just as he did by sending the rain. God turns weakness into strength for when we acknowledge our weakness and turn to him in faith, he can move mountains.

We are not a large church. We certainly don’t have a lot of money or influence. New City, God doesn’t need us to be great in order to do great things. God needs us to trust him. Instead of working through our strength and through *our* ability to do great things, God chooses to work through our *faith* and *he* does great things.

In the very last book of the Bible the apostle John has a series of visions. In them he sees the same imagery of a lampstand that Zechariah saw. In Zechariah’s day the temple was being built. In John’s day God’s temple was still being built, only John knows the church is that temple. John has seen every one of the apostles die. He knows the impossibility of the task Jesus gave to the apostles, that of being witnesses of his resurrection and proclaiming the gospel all over the earth. John no doubt had this prophecy in Zechariah in mind when he used the imagery of a lampstand for the church of Jesus Christ.

John knew then that it was not by might nor by power that the church would be built. Rather, it would be by God's Spirit working through his people and their faith in him. As the psalm says, unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Whatever God is calling us to do as a church, we don't have to be great in order for God to do great things. As we reach out into our community and seek to love our neighbors while remaining faithful to the truth of God in Christ, we are weak. As we seek to build relationships with friends and neighbors and coworkers in order to share Christ with them, we are weak. As we seek to muster an army to battle against the sin that occupies vast territories in our hearts, we are weak.

As we get closer to the season of Advent and Christmas, we are reminded of the great things God can accomplish through weakness, for God himself embraced weakness by becoming one of us. He embraced weakness by allowing the oppressive hands of evil men to do him great harm and then nail him to a cross. Out of his weakness, his power was revealed when he walked out of his tomb on the third day.

My wife recently shared a powerful quote from Joni Eareckson Tada that summarizes the point of our text.

If churches around the world would grasp the revolutionary truth that Christ's transforming power always comes through sacrifice and weakness, it would dramatically alter the landscape of the global church.

Joni Eareckson Tada

New City, God does not need us to be great in order for him to do great things. God wants us to trust him and follow him wherever he leads us, knowing that he controls the rain, that he can move mountains, that he can do whatever he desires to do, and that means he can use us.

It doesn't matter if you have a tent peg like Jael or an ox goad like Shamgar or the jawbone of a donkey like Samson—so long as you have faith like Deborah. It doesn't matter if the mountain you need moved is a stubborn father with health problems who will only hear the gospel through a child's story or it's uncertainty about the future and what ministry opportunities God will place in your path or it's uncertainty about your job. It doesn't matter if the mountain you need moved is a broken relationship or significant health problems. Whatever your weakness is, it is no obstacle to the power of God. The only obstacle to the power of God is a refusal to trust him, so let's trust him.