# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“The Story of Deborah”**

**Judges 4:1-10, 14-16**

 **July 9, 2023**

There are times in our lives when circumstances look totally hopeless. This morning we are going to explore a biblical example of a seemingly hopeless circumstance. I invite you to turn with me to the story of Deborah in Judges 4:1-10, 14-16

After Ehud’s death, the Israelites again did evil in the Lord’s sight. So the Lord turned them over to King Jabin of Hazor, a Canaanite king. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-haggoyim. Sisera, who had 900 iron chariots, ruthlessly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help. Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who was judging Israel at that time. She would sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would go to her for judgment. One day she sent for Barak son of Abinoam, who lived in Kedesh in the land of Naphtali. She said to him, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: Call out 10,000 warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun at Mount Tabor. And I will call out Sisera, commander of Jabin’s army, along with his chariots and warriors, to the Kishon River. There I will give you victory over him.” Barak told her, “I will go, but only if you go with me.” “Very well,” she replied, “I will go with you. But you will receive no honor in this venture, for the Lord’s victory over Sisera will be at the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. At Kedesh, Barak called together the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and 10,000 warriors went up with him. Deborah also went with him. Then Deborah said to Barak, “Get ready! This is the day the Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you.” So Barak led his 10,000 warriors down the slopes of Mount Tabor into battle. When Barak attacked, the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and warriors into a panic. Sisera leaped down from his chariot and escaped on foot. Then Barak chased the chariots and the enemy army all the way to Harosheth-haggoyim, killing all of Sisera’s warriors. Not a single one was left alive.

“The Israelites again did evil in the Lord’s sight.” From elsewhere in Judges we learn that they did three things: one, they worshipped foreign gods; two, they intermarried with foreign peoples; and three, they forgot God. Their worldview proclaimed: “Everyone does what is right in his own eyes.” God had promised them that if they did not follow him he would allow the Gentiles to rule over them and oppress them. Here, that Gentile is a Canaanite King named Jabin, and his military commander is a Philistine named Sisera. The Philistines knew the secret of making iron weapons, a secret they refused to share with the Israelites who were left with vastly inferior bronze weapons. Our text tells us that Sisera’s army had 900 *iron* chariots, a super-weapon in the ancient world. As a result, the Israelites were under Sisera’s power and had been ruthlessly oppressed by him and his army for twenty years. This is an overwhelming and seemingly hopeless situation. What will it take for this is change? How will the Israelites ever experience freedom and life and joy again? The key is in verse three: “The people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help.” And he delivered them.

The people had sold out to their culture, worshipping its gods and following its practices. They had neglected God, yet he was ready to deliver them. When they cried out to God, he used a woman who had not abandoned him; he used Deborah. It is often the case that God’s deliverance comes not through the expected channels of worldly wisdom or power but through the most unlikely source such as a woman prophetess whose actions lead to the defeat of a mighty army, or a humble son of a carpenter whose death on a cross leads to the defeat of sin and death. When you and I find ourselves in a seemingly impossible situation, our cry to God will bring about deliverance, but don’t assume that it will come in the way we would expect.

Deborah summons Barak and tells him what God wants him to do: Take men from two of Israel’s twelve tribes and go out to fight this undefeated army. I’m sure Barak is thinking something like, “We can’t match their weapons, we can’t match their standing army, and we haven’t had any military success these past twenty years. I really don’t want to do this.” His circumstance is too big and so is his fear. But, since it seems like Deborah knows something that he doesn’t, he’ll go if she goes. She does know something he doesn’t or, if he’s known it in the past, he’s forgotten it: “The Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you.”

Where will you and I look for help in the midst of overwhelming circumstances? We can try trusting ourselves or others to deal with them, or we can trust God. Overwhelming circumstances in your life will only have power over you if you let them. Give them to God, and watch his power deliver you from every seemingly impossible situation.