



Who Dares Wins (Judges 4)

Belt and braces. You've all heard the saying. Belts and braces are both means by which men hold their trousers up. All men will know that you don't need to have both - either one or the other. So therefore it's a very cautious man who wants to make doubly sure by wearing both his belt and his braces. And so the term belt and braces has been used to describe people who make doubly sure that things are safe - they are cautious people. Whatever they do - they always do it safely. In fact we live in a safety society. Everything is belt and braces today isn't it?



Belt & Braces

To make doubly sure or to double
the chances of success.

Being cautious.



During the last war the Americans were concerned at the loss rate of pilots over the Pacific. They had an investigation and to their surprise they found that they lost more pilots who were careful and played it by the book than those who took risks and did all sorts of things to their aircraft they weren't supposed to do.

You'll have already realised that the title of my sermon today is "Who Dares Wins". This motto belongs to one of the most famous regiments in the British Army – the Special Air Service – well known for its secret and daring raids. They may dare and take risks, but actually, they are risks based on intelligence, equipment, training and experience. They have faith in what they do and how they do it.

If we look back at Hebrews 11:1 we see a definition of faith which underlies all the stories of the great and good (and not so good) in the Old Testament which the writer to the Hebrews uses as examples of it.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

People acted (and should still act) in faith, not on what I call "National Lottery hope" (I hope I'll get lucky and win the jackpot!) but Biblical hope – a hope based on the promises of God and by the way that God had acted in the past and how He was blessing them in the present. Therefore they followed Him in faith and expectation. And what the writer of the Hebrews reminds us is that like the Old Testament we as God's people now are given eternal promises and we can know and be convinced of God's eternal promises by the way in which he works in our lives now.

You've already heard about a fair few of the people of faith in Hebrews 11 and we are down to the people that are just mentioned by name and we are left to fill in the details so to speak. Such is Barak. Barak? For some of you, this is maybe the first time you've heard of Barak. He wasn't actually one of the pre-kingdom Judges that we read about in the book of Judges. He was a military commander. He wasn't the greatest paragon of faith either. He wasn't a who dares wins person: he was Belt and Braces Barak!

The nation had sinned and God brought His judgement down on it by placing it under the tyranny of one Jabin, a king of Canaan. He had an army commander called Sisera who oppressed Israel for 20 years and was generally a nasty piece of stuff.

And the people cried to God to save them – and God heard their cry and provided them with a means of salvation – a Judge who would lead the nation in this time of trial. But as we shall see there were other people involved in our story - Deborah, Barak and Jael. And through their experience we learn a little more about faith.



So God gave them as a Judge – a leader – Mrs Lappidoth! Who? Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth. A woman? Surely not? They needed a strong military man to wipe out Sisera and rule the nation, didn't they? God gave them Deborah. She was unique. Look through the annals of classical history and you'll find very few women who led their nations, particularly non-hereditary leaders. She was also very successful and her activities brought 40 years of peace.

Why a women leader? Weren't there any men suitable? What about Barak? He was strong. You'll find no shortage of theories about this but as I was taught years ago, read what's on the lines not between them. If you look at the other Judges, you'll come to the conclusions that as a group they looked a rather unlikely lot with human frailties. In fact they were all – ordinary. Why did God use these people? Let me suggest what clearly comes through – Deborah like the rest, was prepared to listen to the voice of God and in faith, be prepared to obey Him. It doesn't matter how weak the person is – any person, when empowered by the Holy Spirit will do great things for God. And in His mercy and grace God took and used these people. He still does it.

And Deborah was an effective and godly female national leader in a world where that rarely ever happened. And as you read this passage, no-one questioned her authority. Nobody said "but..but..but... she's a woman!. Why? Because they could see the power of God was with her.

What does this tell us? Just this. God does not use the strong, the rich, the influential, the "great", the physically powerful or the worldly wise to do His will – he uses those like Deborah - who are prepared to listen to His voice and in faith follow Him. And that can be me; and that can be you.

William Carey – Expect great things from God – attempt great things for God

And if we know Jesus as our Saviour and Lord this morning, we are called to the same obedience and faith as Deborah. Why do we sometimes feel we don't succeed as individuals and as a church. It comes down to understand what God can do and in faith and obedience attempting to do great things for God.

Deborah is also a reminder to leaders –and others. Never write people off because of who they are. God can – and does – use anyone, so encourage people in their faith. Encourage one another. Similarly never say that God can't use other believers because they do things differently to us. Look and see how the Spirit is moving. It reminds me of that passage in Luke 9:49 where John said to Jesus, "*Master, we saw someone driving out demons in your name. We tried to stop him, because he wasn't a follower like us.*" Jesus said to him, "*Don't stop him! For whoever is not against you is for*

you.” Let's affirm what God is doing and go with it.

We still haven't got to Barak. He was Mr Belt & Braces as I said. He was powerful and strong and an army commander. He needed to learn a lesson of faith and he has been given to us as an example because the Bible always tells it warts and all because we can learn from him.

So Deborah calls for Barak and says *"The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: `Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. 7 I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'" 8 Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."*

It wasn't that Barak lacked faith - it was just that it didn't extend as far as God's command. The command didn't require Deborah – but he needed the confidence of having the prophetess alongside him as he went into battle. Look down to verse he even accepted her command to go into battle. Women didn't fight in those days, so it was wasted taking her from that point of view. Besides you'll notice that on the other side, King Jabin also did not lead his army, but left it to his strong man, Sisera. Barak had the word of God – he was to lead his men into battle. He needed no more than that – he had to trust God – he didn't need Deborah. But he didn't have the confidence to merely have the word of God, he needed the confidence of having the messenger. It came at a price.

9 "Very well," Deborah said, "I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman."

You know the rest of the story. Barak wins and got his blessing. He achieved the victory but he had to share the honour with someone else - and it wasn't the great leader Deborah, but the humble Jael.

Here's a quote from the well-known 20th century Christian preacher, Alan Redpath. The quote is a great one and follows our theme - if we want to know God more, then we need to surrender to Him and obey Him. But that's not why I put Alan Redpath's picture up



Alan Redpath

**The condition of
an enlightened
mind is a
surrendered
heart.**



In his youth Alan Redpath was called to be a missionary - he said "no". He always saw his very successful ministry as second best to what God had intended for him. God is gracious - he gives second chances, and third chances and the rest - but in doing so, we've missed out on the blessing God intended for us in the first place.

Maybe you've missed opportunities in life - by His grace God is offering you another chance today - just take it.

Finally we come to Jael. She's the sort of person who's handy on a campsite. Nifty with the hammer and tent pegs.

Joking aside, Jael was the one who showed true faith and courage. Sisera sought refuge in her tent because her husband Heber was a bit of a fifth columnist and stayed sweet with Jabin. She obviously didn't share her husband's sympathies and remained faithful to Israel and the God of

Israel. She clearly intended to entrap Sisera - very daring. He could have easily overpowered her. Yet she proved "who dares wins" and is the second woman of faith in this passage. SLIDE - tent peg in slide.

Jael was not a high profile person in the story, but she got the honour of the story. You've had a number of challenges this morning. God can and wants to use each one of us. He wants us to have the right expectations of Him and attempt great things for Him in faith.

One surrendered person and the Holy Spirit can change a family, change a workplace, change a neighbourhood, change a town, change a county - even change a nation. Whatever God intends that person to be you. Are you ready to obey and step forward in faith?