

UNSUNG HEROES

Part 5

“BARAK: For the Glory of God” Judges 4:1-24

ENGAGING the Audience

In 1647, English and Scottish theologians came together and produced the “Westminster Shorter Catechism.” Simply put, a catechism is a summary of theological doctrine presented in the form of questions and answers.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism is comprised of 102 doctrinal questions and answers. Contained within these questions are topics such as God as Creator, Christ as Redeemer, the Ten Commandments, Baptism & Communion, as well as the Lord’s Prayer.

Yet, of all the great doctrinal questions addressed within the Westminster Shorter Catechism, none are more famous than the very first question. In fact, theologians have long believed that the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is the most fundamental theological question of all. The question was simply - ***“What is the chief end of man?”***

Today, we might ask the question a little differently...

- ***“Why do we exist?”***
- ***“What are we here for?”***
- ***“What is my purpose in life?”***

Rick Warren sold over thirty million books by asking this fundamental question.

Honestly? There’s not a person here that hasn’t asked this fundamental question of life and meaning at some point in time. It is precisely this question that these 17th Century British theologians wrestled with before any other.

Is your purpose to work? Do we exist on this earth to make money and retire early? Are we here at such a time as this to evangelize the lost of our community and world? Is our primary design to get married and raise a family?

Do you know what answer these men came up with?

The answer was profoundly simple and, at the same time, simply profound. It’s an answer that has the potential to bring our lives to a screeching halt and force us to ask some probing questions about the way we’re living, worshipping, giving, serving, working, loving, and suffering.

The answer?

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

That’s it! Our greatest purpose in life isn’t work, evangelism, financial security, retirement, or marriage and family.

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, our single greatest purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Making the CONNECTION

Easier said than done, right?

Everywhere we turn, we're tempted to steal God's glory and make it our own.

Everyday, we're tempted to work for our glory, serve others for our glory, give for our glory, love for our glory, worship for our glory, and live life in general for our glory. Quite honestly, at the core of our flesh is a craving and thirst to be on the pedestal of glory.

Somehow, we've been deceived into believing that whatever success, advancement, financial gain, and acclaim we enjoy is the byproduct of our own ability, brilliance, ingenuity, and timing. We secretly start believing that glory is something we deserve. It's something we've earned. It's something that we have a right too. Yet, it's precisely here, when this kind of self-centered attitude infects our thinking and living, that we've attempted a coup against God and His glory.

Life is a daily battle between the flesh versus spirit and our flesh longs to glorify self. We love fame. We love recognition. We love applause. We love attention. We love the praise of man.

Exploring the SCRIPTURE

The "Unsung Hero" we're going to look at this morning only appears in one chapter of the Bible - Judges 4. In fact, in the story we're about to look at, he's not even the primary character. Yet, what makes him a hero is that he was willing to put aside his own glory for the glory and fame of God.

Let's take a look at the life of Barak.

[Read Judges 4:1-24]

This is a great story, isn't it?

Two weeks ago, we saw David decapitate the Philistine giant Goliath. Today, we see Jael hammer a tent peg through the temple of Sisera. Literally, Jael nailed Sisera to the ground through his head.

Understanding the CONTEXT

Now...before we go any further, let's make sure we understand the context in which Barak appears on the scene.

When Israel entered the Promise Land - better known as Canaan - God ordered Israel to conquer the competing nations that were currently living in Canaan. Unfortunately, Israel disobeyed God and didn't finish the task God had called them to.

Thus, in Judges 2:1-2, God says to Israel...

“I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their alters.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this that you have done? So now I say, ‘I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.”

So, instead of purging the Promised Land of threatening nations, God allowed these nations to remain in Canaan as punishment for Israel’s disobedience. These nations would eventually plunder Israel to the point that they were in “terrible distress.” (Judges 2:15)

And then, just when you think all hope is lost for Israel, God intervenes and shows His amazing grace and love for His chosen people. The Bible says...

“Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them.” (Judges 2:16-17)

Just a few verses later in verse 19, the Bible says...

“Whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.” (Judges 2:19)

So...here’s what we’ve got. We’ve got a flip-flopping Israel. In His grace and love, God raises up godly judges to guide and protect Israel. Yet, as soon as one of these judges dies, Israel runs back to the whorehouse of Baal. It’s an evil cycle Israel is in - one that brings them a lot of pain and loss and judgment.

When Barak arrives on the scene, Israel is once again in dire straits. Ehud, the most recent judge over Israel, has just died and Israel quickly reverts back to her evil ways. As a consequence, God allows Israel to be sold into the hands of Jabin, king of Canaan. Under Jabin’s command was a ruthless military commander named Sisera. Sisera led a massive Canaanite army that cruelly oppressed Israel for twenty years.

After twenty years of cruel oppression at the hand of Sisera and the Canaanite army, Israel’s new judge, a female prophet named Deborah, summoned Barak and commanded him to gather 10,000 men from the peoples of Naphtali and Zebulun to fight against Sisera.

When commanded, Barak gives an interesting response - a response that some believe reveals cowardice. Barak says to Deborah...

“If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.”

Some commentators have given Barak a hard time over this ultimatum - interpreting this statement to mean that Barak lacked courage and backbone. Yet, if we read the story carefully, we not only see a man who led an inferior army into battle; we also see a man who pursued Sisera and his chariots after Israel initially routed Sisera’s army. If anyone was a coward, it was Sisera - not Barak. When Sisera tried to run away, Barak chased after him and hunted him down like a dog.

Barak was no sissy. Barak was a man of courage and valor. More than likely, his ultimatum to Deborah was a way to confirm that her command was in fact God’s will. This wasn’t a

spineless request - it was a way to discern whether God would bless the military endeavor Deborah had just ordered.

Deborah's response is where we glean a clear perspective into the heart of Barak. Listen carefully to what Deborah says to Barak...

"I will 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."

This is a profound verse that should be underlined in every Bible.

In no uncertain terms, Barak was told that there would be no personal glory for him when Sisera and the Canaanite army were routed. There would be no parades though Jerusalem celebrating his courageous leadership. There would be no medals honoring his bravery. There would be no promotion to General of Israel's Army.

As God's spokesman, Deborah couldn't have been clearer. She looked Barak squarely in the eyes and said,

"Barak, if you do what the Lord commands to you to do, you're not going to get any glory, any recognition, or any fame out of this victory. In fact, in order to protect God's glory, Sisera will be captured and killed by a woman."

Honestly? How many of us would have done what Barak did? How many of us, especially men, would have put our lives on the line and gone into battle knowing that there would be absolutely no glory, no fame, no promotions, no monetary reward, and no praise? How many of us men would have fought valiantly against a far superior army if we knew up front that we'd get shown-up by a woman.

Yet, Barak didn't flinch. Here is what's intriguing about the story of Barak - there is no mention of Barak ever saying to Deborah...

"What's in it for me?"

All we see from Barak is immediate action.

How many times have we made decisions about our future that were predicated by this line of reasoning?

- How many times have we approached a job offer asking the question - ***"What's in it for me?"*** or ***"How will this job advance my career?"***
- How many times have we considered a request to serve within the Church or the community by secretly wondering - ***"How am I going to benefit?"*** or ***"What am I going to get out of it?"***
- How many times have we considered a request to give the money God has entrusted to us by wondering privately - ***"How will this gift advance what I want to see happen?"***
- How many times have we approached a business deal thinking - ***"This is the BIG one. This is the deal that's going to launch my career. This is the deal that's going to earn me respect and fame within my career field."***

All of those questions are ultimately about man's glory - not God's.

What made Barak a spiritual hero?

Barak wasn't interested in his own glory, his own fame, or his own advancement. Barak didn't flinch when Deborah told him he would get nothing from the victory God was about to perform. Barak understood that his life and his commission by God were designed to bring God glory - not himself.

Barak wasn't interested in advancing his own fame. Rather, Barak *was* interested in advancing God's fame.

Would you like to become a spiritual hero?

If so, you need to think and act like Barak. Embrace the reality that God didn't create you for your own glory. Embrace the reality that God didn't give you unique gifts, talents, and skills so that you could advance your own fame and your own earthly kingdom.

God created you, equipped you, and redeemed you by grace through faith in Jesus Christ to advance His fame, His glory, and His heavenly kingdom. This is our chief end. This is our greatest purpose in life. This is what we all were predestined to do.

Spiritual heroes advance the fame and glory of God - not man!

“Seven Ways You Can Glorify God”

Maybe you're wondering - **“What are some specific ways I can advance the fame and glory of God - instead of me?”**

That's a great question! Let me show you some specific ways the Bible instructs us to glorify God.

First, **CELEBRATE** your spiritual justification for the glory of God!

One of the hallmark doctrines of the Christian faith is “justification by faith.” Justification is a forensic term that means we who were once guilty of sin and condemned to eternal death have been acquitted by God through our faith in Jesus Christ. We are no longer condemned as lawbreakers. God, the Almighty Judge, has rendered us innocent and free of any guilt through our faith in Jesus.

In Romans 5:1-2, the Apostle Paul writes...

“Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

God, through His Son Jesus Christ, justified you for His glory - not yours. Bring fame and glory to God by daily celebrating your spiritual justification through faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, **WORSHIP “together” for the glory of God!**

Few things bring God greater fame and glory than when the redeemed come together and with one heart and mind worship Him in Spirit and in truth. When we minimize the significance of corporate worship, we cheat God of His glory, His fame, and His pleasure.

In Romans 15:5-6, the Apostle Paul writes...

“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The chief aim of corporate worship is to glorify God - not man. When we approach corporate worship from the perspective of - *“What am I going to get out of it?”* - we cheat God of His glory because our worship has now become primarily about us rather than Him.

When we neglect corporate worship by placing greater priority on other things, we also cheat God of His fame and glory. Can you imagine how God feels when His redeemed children neglect His house of corporate worship because they prefer the beach, the mountains, golf, extra sleep, and college football games? I believe such an attitude grieves the heart of God and paralyzes the effectiveness of the local church.

Listen carefully!

Independent worship is not enough for you and me. We were NOT created and redeemed to live and worship in isolation. We have been created and redeemed to live and worship in community. We have been designed and commanded to worship together on a weekly basis.

Bring fame and glory to God by placing a high value on corporate worship. Bring fame and glory to God by refusing to allow man-centered activities to interfere with corporate worship.

Third, **WORK for the glory of God!**

The purpose of your job is NOT to advance your career, your financial holdings, or your respect within industry circles. God has uniquely designed you with special skills and abilities - all of which are purposed to advance His glory and fame in your workplace.

Unfortunately, many of us use these God-given skills and abilities to advance our own self-centered kingdoms on this earth. We work to find significance in life. We work to increase our net worth and retirement accounts. We work to receive greater power and influence over people. We work to receive the applause and accolades of our peers. We work to realize our personal dreams. We work to buy bigger houses, second homes, faster cars, prettier clothes, and more exotic vacations.

Honestly, very few people - even Christians - are working for the glory and fame of God in their workplace. Rare is the person who views his or her job as a conduit for the advancement of the glory and fame of God.

Yet, that’s exactly why we should work. We should work competently, efficiently, and ethically for the advancement of God’s fame and glory - regardless of our job title, regardless of our pay grade, and regardless of the prospects for advancement.

In Colossians 3:23-24, the Apostle Paul writes...

“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

Bring fame and glory to God by working for His glory, His fame, and His influence in your workplace.

Fourth, GIVE generously for the glory of God!

Simply put, we all have the ability and privilege to glorify God through giving. In the New Testament, and under the banner of the new covenant, the emphasis on Christian giving is not a number or a percentage. Rather, the emphasis is on our attitude and heart.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-13, we are commanded to give with a generous and cheerful attitude. At the end of this passage, Paul writes...

“For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but it is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God...” (vs.13)

When we give generously and cheerfully to God, our giving brings glory to God and causes others to glorify God.

Bring fame and glory to God by giving generously and cheerfully for the advancement of His kingdom. Remember...the money you have in your bank and 401K is not yours - it's God's.

Fifth, MANAGE your body for the glory of God!

Simply put, the Bible says...

“Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

When people commit acts of sexual immorality, it is like stealing from God. Sexual immorality steals God's glory and fame and turns something He created into perversion.

Each and every member of our bodies has been uniquely designed by God to bring Him glory - even those members that are covered by clothing. Sexual intimacy was divinely designed and intended to bring glory and honor to God within the marriage covenant. When God's boundaries are broken for the sake of personal pleasure and self-centered gratification, God's glory is cheapened.

Bring fame and glory to God by keeping your body and mind morally pure.

Sixth, **SUFFER for the glory of God!**

In I Peter 4:12ff, the Apostle Peter writes...

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed....if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God...”

Suffering, tests, trials, and persecutions are part of the Christian life. God allows suffering to enter our lives to test and strengthen our faith. God also allows suffering in our lives because it is an unmatched opportunity to glorify God. It’s relatively easy to glorify God when life is great. Yet, when cancer, financial trouble, and tragedy strike, that’s a whole different story. It’s during our greatest seasons of trial and suffering that we have the greatest opportunity to bring fame and glory to God.

What makes the Prosperity Gospel so wicked is that it teaches people that suffering is primarily a consequence of sin and faithlessness. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Abraham was tested. Moses was tested for forty years in the Midian desert. Joseph was persecuted by his brothers and suffered innocently for thirteen years in an Egyptian prison cell. Ezekiel suffered the loss of his wife. Paul was tortured several times by Roman scourging. He was also afflicted with a thorn in the flesh. Jesus was persecuted, vilified, flogged, and crucified.

Did these godly men lack faith? I think not! Was God punishing them for sin? No!

Did Jesus lack faith? NO! Did Jesus sin? NO!

In each of these circumstances, God used tests, trials, and suffering to bring great glory and honor to His name.

The Gospel promises each of us trials, tests, and sufferings as followers of Jesus Christ. Bring fame and glory to God by rejoicing in your sufferings - whether they are financial, medical, or spiritual.

Finally, **LIVE daily for the glory of God!**

In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul writes...

“So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.”

Your entire life - everything about you - should be driven by the mission to bring fame and glory to God and your Savior Jesus Christ.

Our chief purpose is *not* to glorify self. Rather, our chief purpose in life is to bring glory and fame to God and His name.

Be a spiritual hero!

Bring glory and fame to God and His Son Jesus Christ.