

ABBAY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING

WORSHIP SERVICE

10.30 AM 11TH AUGUST 2024

Rev Dr Julia Binney leading & preaching

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Summer Series: Not Only for Heroes... Twelve studies on the lesser known heroes of faith from Hebrews 11

Theme 9: The Inspiration of Faith – Barak (Hebrews 11:32)

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Let us turn to God who is all goodness and love;

we will praise and worship him and give him all the glory.

We seek to walk in the steps of Christ;

in the steps of Christ our Lord and King.

He has shown us the way when we are strong and when we are weak;

he is our guide in everything.

He longs to bless us and renew us by his Spirit;

He is our life, our confident hope and assurance. Praise the Lord, O my soul!

HYMN BP&W 65:

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;

To his feet your tribute bring.

Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,

Who like me his praise should sing?

Praise him, praise him,

Praise him, praise him,

Praise the everlasting King!

Praise him for his grace and favour

To our fathers in distress.

Praise him, still the same for ever,

Slow to blame, and swift to bless.

Praise him, praise him,

Praise him, praise him,

Glorious in his faithfulness!

Fatherlike he tends and spares us;
All our weaknesses he knows.
In his hand he gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him, praise him,
Praise him, praise him,
Widely as his mercy flows!

Angels, help us to adore him;
You behold him face to face.
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
All that is in time and space.
Praise him, praise him,
Praise him, praise him,
Praise with us the God of grace!

HF LYTE (1793-1847) ALTD

PRAYER OF PRAISE, THANKSGIVING AND CONFESSION:

Lord God, our creator, the Lord of heaven and earth.

We come to you with open hearts and minds to worship and praise your holy name.

We thank you for your love and mercy, and for the grace and compassion to show to all you have made, people from every nation, tribe, people and language.

We come to you with open hearts and minds to worship and praise your holy name.

We thank you for your provision and protection, for watching over us and taking care of us.

We come to you with open hearts and minds to worship and praise your holy name.

For all you have done for us in Christ, in giving him to the manger and to the cross, for showing us how to live and for his atoning death to take away our sin and the sin of the whole world.

We come to you with open hearts and minds to worship and praise your holy name.

[pause]

And we confess that we do not give you the attention we should.

We are too caught up with our own business and our own needs.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us to focus more on you, on the needs of others and the life of your kingdom.

We receive your forgiveness in and through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: *You are invited to pray in your own heart language*

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours

now and for ever and ever. Amen.

FAMILY TIME: Cheering each other on

(The offering will be taken during the next song, and then the children will leave us for their own groups)

HYMN BP&W 530:

Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning
Give me oil in my lamp, I pray.
Give me oil in my lamp, keep my burning,
Keep me burning till the break of day.

*Sing hosanna, sing hosanna,
Sing hosanna to the King of kings.
Sing hosanna, sing hosanna,
Sing hosanna to the King.*

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising...
Give me joy in my heart, I pray.
Give me joy in my lamp, keep my praising,
Keep me praising till the break of day.

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving...
Give me love in my heart, I pray.
Give me love in my heart, keep my serving,
Keep me serving till the break of day.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

BIBLE READING 1: Judges 4:1-10

BIBLE READING 2: Judges 4:12-16; 5:1-3,31

HYMN BP&W 529:

From heaven you came, helpless babe,
Entered our world, your glory veiled;
Not to be served but to serve,
And give Your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow Him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.*

There in the garden of tears,
My heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not My will but Yours,' He said.

Come see His hands and His feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice;
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered.

So let us learn how to serve,

And in our lives enthrone Him;
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving.

GRAHAM KENDRICK © 1983 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC

SERMON: The Inspiration of Faith – Barak (Hebrews 11:32, Judges 4:1-24)

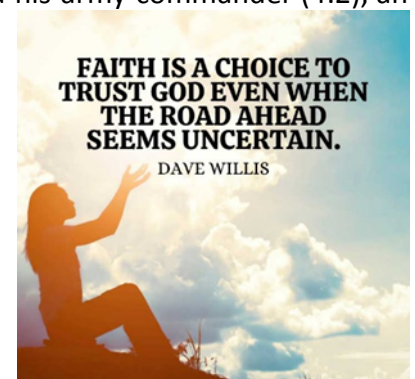
Today we continue with our series on Hebrews 11 where we read find the great list of Old Testament heroes of faith. Each hero illustrates a different facet of what it means to be a person of faith. These Old Testament heroes were called to a life of faith but faith is not only for heroes. It is for ordinary Christians just like you and me – which is why in this series we are concentrating on the lesser known characters in Hebrews 11 - because are **all** called to a life of faith.

This week we are looking at the story of Barak and The Inspiration of Faith. Barak is named in the 'honourable mentions' section of the list of the faithful in Hebrews 11:32-34: 'And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.' It is interesting to consider why the writer included the people they did?

From its style and content, Hebrews was written by a highly educated Hellenistic Jew, trained in the art of rhetoric. Perhaps they couldn't include everyone and the exploits of some are included but they are not named. A tool in rhetoric is used here to indicate that the list could go on and on and the readers of the day would have been well aware of the backstories of them all. But what was it about the faith of these particular people that the writer wants to illustrate? One factor to consider is to think the perspective of the writer. Who wrote Hebrews might offer some clues about their choice of hero. The book of Hebrews is the only book in the New Testament without a named author. Scholars think it may have been written by Silas or Apollos. But a theory, which has gained credibility over the years, is that Hebrews was written by Priscilla, a woman. Priscilla and her husband Aquila were apostles (Acts 18) but the Apostle Paul names Priscilla first (1 Corinthians 16:19).

If this is the case, it begs the question as to why it is Barak who is named and not Deborah? Deborah was the main person, the head honcho, a prophetess, a leader, a judge in Israel: 'Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time' (Judges 4:4). The book of Judges records the life of Israel in the promised land from the death of Joshua to the rise of the monarchy. It covers the period of time when 'everyone did what was right in their own sight' (Judges 21:25). So whilst God was the ultimate judge and leader over Israel, he set up certain people to lead Israel at strategic or particularly difficult times: 'Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of...' their enemies (2:16) – even though the people often didn't listen and carried on doing their own thing - prostituting themselves with foreign God's, not walking in the ways of God etc (2:16). One such judge is Deborah, a woman. At that time, the enemy was Jabin, a king of Canaan, and Sisera his army commander (4:2), an oppressive leader with a vast army (v.3). Holding court under a tree named after her where she dispensed justice, Deborah knew that the time had come to face the enemy in battle and that God was going to hand Sisera over to the Israelites and so defeat their army (v.4-7).

Just as God appointed Gideon, Samson, Jephthah and other great judges, God appointed Deborah as a leader over the nation of Israel. Deborah responded by faith to the prophetic word God had given her even as to how and where the victory was going to take place. Contrary to the views of most complementarian theologians, Deborah was not a punishment on Israel because male leaders failed to meet God's expectation. Nor was it that Barak was actually Deborah's husband as some traditions hold. She was a strong and wise woman and God raised her up to leadership. She was called and fully equipped for her task. She is a great example of how God used women, even in such a severely patriarchal society, and



God continues to raise women up to leadership today. Surely she should feature in the great faith hero hall of fame in Hebrews 11. It can't be because she was a woman – Rahab the prostitute is there! So why not Deborah? Why Barak and not Deborah?

Who was Barak? Deborah specifically sent for him to lead the Israelite army (4:6,7). He was a statesman and a soldier whose name means 'thunderbolt.' A good name for an army leader – not that he lived up to it! He is told by Deborah that this is God's time, God will give him victory, the nasty Sisera will be given over to him but his response seems to be the very opposite to that of a person with great faith. He wimps it: 'I will go if you will go with me otherwise I'm not going' (v.8). What a wimp! A wimp is a weak, cowardly or unadventurous person. Was this really a timid, even cowardly, response that showed a lack of faith and trust in God? Is this essentially an act of disobedience by Barak? The Apostle James states that those who know what God wants them to do and they don't do it, for them that is sin (James 4:17): 'In fact, if you know the right thing to do and don't do it, that, for you, is evil' (The Message). It would certainly have been seen as quite disgraceful to have to depend on a woman in those days. In that patriarchal culture, Barak's action would be perceived as weakness. So Deborah says to him, 'Because of the course of action you are taking, the honour will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman' (see 4:17-24). Is this our hero? What is inspirational about his faith?

Or is Barak's response really an act of courage which actually illustrates inspirational faith? Barak had courage to act contrary to the prevailing social norms of the day. This is inspirational for us. We are called to be in the world but not of it. We are to live distinctive lives based on God's priorities and morality which can often fly in the face of what is expected of us by the world around us. As the Apostle Peter exhorts us, you have spent enough time in the past living a God ignorant, drunken and profligate life. Do so no longer. And of those around you, 'they think it strange that that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead' (1 Peter 4:3,4). And so may we be encouraged and inspired by Barak and the Apostle Peter and countless other Christian heroes across church history to live differently, to live God-oriented lives, even if like them we are misunderstood, ridiculed, criticised, even persecuted. We are standing for and in Jesus Christ. As Peter put it, 'If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name' (1 Peter 4:16).

Barak's faith is also inspirational in his submission to Deborah. Barak refused to lead the army against Sisera when Deborah, in God's name, commanded him to but insisted that Deborah go with him. His refusal was an act of faith. He recognised Deborah as God's servant and spokesperson and a tangible symbol of God's presence with him in battle. Submission is a rather emotive word today but do we submit to God's word through people? Or do we think we know better and are not prepared to learn or receive from others? We need to be open to God speaking to us through those God has called and gifted to be his spokespeople. This is an act of faith for us.

Barak's humble faith should inspire our faith. In its context, Hebrews 11:32-34 gives us a reason why the specific men were listed. Their achievements were based on military and political successes. Military victory in the Old Testament equates to spiritual victory in the New Testament. Paul tells us that we fight 'not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Ephesians 6:12) and we are to fight this battle not with earthy weapons but with spiritual ones (2 Corinthians 10:4). We do not combat violence with violence but with prayer and humble service. Barak knew he would get no glory for the victory over Sisera, he wanted God to have the glory.

There are six words in Hebrews 11:34 that show us where Barak's faith is truly inspirational. The men included in the 'honourable mentions' list are those 'whose weakness was turned to strength.' This is where true faith lies. The author of Hebrews was not emphasizing gender preference for including Barak over Deborah. His inclusion is a wonderful illustration (like Gideon, Sampson, Jephthah, David and Samuel and others) of a person God uses to lead despite their glaring flaws. Church leadership or any role or sphere of service for Christ in the church or the world is not about our strength or our success but about God using us despite, or perhaps because of, our weaknesses and our failures. As Leonard Sweet powerfully put it, 'On the cross, leadership dies. On the cross, success dies. All of my strengths – nailed

to the cross. All of my weaknesses – nailed to the cross. All of my yearnings for bigger and better, for anything other than Christ himself - nailed to the same cross.'

Are you thinking that God cannot use you or you've read 1 Timothy 3 and you could not possibly think about becoming a leader in the church. Be inspired by Barak who may have been a bit of a wimp but God used him. God can use you because you **know** that you cannot do what God requires of you in your own strength. You **know** you need God and you also **know** that God will be with you through it all. You are just who God wants. Remember, 'God's power is made perfect in weakness... For when I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Corinthians 12:9,10). 'Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.' Barak would have been looked down on in his day, an ordinary man, with human frailties and weaknesses but he is included in with the great heroes of the faith. May he be an inspiration to ordinary, frail human beings like us who seek to honour God and serve him in our day. As the old hymn goes, and may this be our prayer:

*O use me Lord, use even me, just as you will, and when, and where,
Until at last your face I see, your rest, your joy, your glory share.*

TIME OF RESPONSE

(During which we will listen/sing to the following song)

Song: <https://youtu.be/PoRz4e2eEE4>

You call me out upon the waters
The great unknown where feet may fail
And there I find You in the mystery
In oceans deep
My faith will stand.

And I will call upon Your name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise
My soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours
You are mine.

Your grace abounds in deepest waters
Your sovereign hand
Will be my guide
Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me
You've never failed
And You won't start now.

Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders
Let me walk upon the waters
Wherever You would call me
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander
And my faith will be made stronger
In the presence of my Saviour.

Oh, Jesus, You're my God
I will call upon Your name
Keep my eyes above the waves

My soul will rest in Your embrace
I am Yours and You are mine

SONGWRITERS: SALOMON LIGTHELM, JOEL TIMOTHY HOUSTON, MATTHEW PHILIP CROCKER.

HYMN MP 857:

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry;
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
I will speak My word to them.
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if You lead me;
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them –
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone;
I will speak My word to them.
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame,
I will set a feast for them –
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts are satisfied;
I will give My life to them.
Whom shall I send?

DANIEL SCHUTTE © 1981, 2000 OCP

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION: Anne and Nigel

Loving God, we reflect on the violence that has taken place across the country this week. We remember those who have been hurt, have lost property and income, and who remain traumatised and fearful for their safety. We pray for peace, hope and healing. Guide us to celebrate our differences and to show love and hospitality to all that we meet
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for a world which struggles to live justly and in peace. We pray for those who have to search for daily food or walk long distances for clean water. We remember with sadness those whose lives are cut short by disease or violence, and those who have fled their homes in fear. We pray for those who meet persecution and torture with courage and dignity.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We thank you for those people who sustain us by their love and forgiveness. Thank you for the network of people who surround us and make up the fabric of our family and community life. Makes us alert to each other's needs and quick to serve and encourage one another.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for those who are laid low by suffering and those who are experiencing pain and distress. We name in our hearts all those known to us who are ill or in special need at this time. May the skills and knowledge of those who care for the sick be fully used to help and to heal. Comfort with your presence all those who suffer and give them courage and hope.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for your blessing to rest upon this Church. We are grateful for its worship and fellowship; for the care and teaching of children and young people; for its nurture and love. Help us to see the kind of church you need today. May we not lose sight of the many and varied needs of this neighbourhood. Hold up before us the vision of your kingdom, a kingdom of justice and mercy, truth and compassion.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Amen

HYMN BP&W 329:

Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine:
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God;
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

*This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.*

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture burst on my sight;
Angels descending bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blessed;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

FRANCES VAN ALSTYNE (1820-1915)

THE BLESSING:

Go now, in full assurance that the love of God the Father surrounds you,
the peace of God the Son is within you,
and the power of God the Holy Spirit strengthens you to live for him and for others.
Go now in the love, peace and blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

THE GRACE:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.**

Traidcraft Stall – today

Connect Group Leaders meeting – today after the service

Dates for your Diary:

Church Prayer Meeting – Friday 16th August at 10.30

Church Meeting – Sunday 8th September

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QR Code for Offering:

