

Judges 5

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[0 : 00] If you had to describe yourself in poetic language, how would you do so? You maybe don't even know where you would start describing yourself in poetic language, in a poem. If you had to compare yourself to something, what would that be in this unlikely composition? Well, how about, I'm like the sun when it rises in its strength. I imagine that if you wrote that and you showed it to somebody and said, this is a poem about myself, they would have reason to suspect that you were the victim of some kind of megalomania. Self-confidence is not a bad thing, but you might just want to tone it down a little. I'm like the sun when it rises in its strength. Well, these are the words that we find at the end of the song of Deborah. And in this song, a prayer is directed to

God asking that those who love the Lord might be like the sun when it rises in its strength. Now, that is some prayer request. If you've ever been to a prayer meeting where there's the opportunity for people to ask for prayer requests or to give prayer requests, you might have somebody asking that we would pray for Aunt Hilda's back or for Wee Johnny's job interview. Now, they're very important things to pray for. But I think it would be unlikely to hear somebody saying, let's pray that we would be like the sun when it rises in its strength. Well, this is what Deborah asks on behalf of those who love the Lord. Now, this morning, as I commented a few moments ago, we were considering chapter 4 of Judges where we have a descriptive account of the defeat of Sisera at the hands of Deborah, Barak, and Jael. All three had a prominent part to play, all instruments of God, but all having their own role in that victory. Our concern was to focus exclusively on Barak as it happens. Now, chapter 5, as I've already said, deals with the very same episode, but rather than prose, poetry is employed. And our concern this evening, as we think about this song, this song of Deborah, our concern is a relatively modest one. We want to consider this striking request on the part of Deborah in favor of those who love the Lord. Let's read again what Deborah says there in verse 31, and in the second half of the verse. But may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength. Now, we can order our thoughts under the following headings. First of all, we have here what we might call a people described, a people described, but we also have a people blessed.

And then where I want to end is with a question to be asked, a question for all of us to ask of ourselves. So then a people described, a people blessed, and then a question that I will leave you with that you can ponder on, I trust, and perhaps even go home to give further thought to.

First of all, then, a people described. Who are the people that Deborah prays on behalf of? Well, they are those who love you. But may they who love you. This is how they're described.

[4 : 04] These are the people who Deborah is praying on behalf of. They who love you. Well, who are they? Who are these people? Deborah, I'm sure, would have had people in mind.

This isn't something that she's just pulled out of the air. She has real people in mind as she expresses this prayer. To whom is Deborah referring? What characterizes or identifies they who love you are such people? Are such people to be found today? Deborah, I imagine, had in mind those of her own day who she could identify as those who love the Lord. But of course, the words that she expresses, and indeed the prayer that she raises to God is on behalf not only of her own generation, but subsequent generations, are such people to be found today. Are you among those so described?

They who love you. They who love the Lord. The Bible provides plenty material to answer the question, who are those who love the Lord?

But this evening, we're going to limit ourselves to the answers provided by Deborah in the song that concludes with this bold request. And what we're going to do is fleetingly scan our way through the song and find what it is that characterizes or identifies they who love you. But may they who love you be like the sun? And as I say, I think in the song, as we go through it, we'll find those

characteristics, those identifying features of those who love the Lord. And let's just do that. And beginning at the beginning and making our way through the psalm, this will involve jumping and leaving chunks unconsidered as we focus on this particular concern, identifying these characteristics of those who love the Lord. I think the first thing that we can say that would identify those who love the Lord is this, they are those who willingly offer themselves in the service of God. Notice there the very beginning of the song on that day, Deborah and Barak, son of Abinoam, sang this song. When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves, praise the Lord. When the people willingly offer themselves. Now, I have no doubt that when Deborah, as she closed the song, made reference to those who love the Lord, she was thinking of these people, these people who willingly offered themselves in the service of a God. Willing service is evidence of true love. And note what kind of service they were offering themselves for. The people were not signing up to help with the teas and coffees, important though that is, but to risk their lives in a battle with a terrifying foe. This is the task that they were signing up for willingly. [7 : 28] The people willingly offer themselves. And immediately before we move on, we ask ourselves the question, and I pose the question to you, what about you? Do you willingly offer yourself in the service of God, whatever the cost, however difficult that might be in terms of the time that it will involve, the emotional cost, the financial cost, the cost in terms of reputation and how others view you?

Are you willing to pay that price as you willingly offer yourself in the service of God? Such are those who love you. May those who love you be like the sun. Well, that's one feature, one identifying characteristic of those who love the Lord. Well, let's move on and find another, and we can say this, they are those who sing in grateful praise to God. In verse 3, we carry on reading the song, Hear this, you kings, listen, you rulers, I will sing to the Lord, I will sing, I will make music to the Lord, the God of Israel. Now, this singing that is spoken of here, this is not some kind of jovial sing-along or karaoke night, this is singing directed to God. It is the joyful expression of love on the part of those who love the Lord, directed to their Lord. It is singing born of a conscious decision, I will sing to the Lord. Well, again, I ask you and I ask myself the question, what about you?

Do you have reason to sing? Is it your desire to sing? Is it your decision to sing to the Lord? Such are those who love you. A people described those who love the Lord, those who willingly offer themselves in the service of God, those who sing in grateful praise to God, but also, as we continue looking through Deborah's song, those who see and acknowledge God's saving hand. Notice what continues in verses 4 and 5.

O Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water, the mountains quaked before the Lord, the one of Sinai, before the Lord, the God of Israel. And then, in a similar tone or in a similar manner, we have from verse 19, and following the description of this great rainstorm that led to the Kishon River flooding its banks and in that way facilitating the victory of Barak over Sisera and his chariots.

The language that is used at the beginning of the song seems to be more a reference to historic acts of God on behalf of his people. There's reference to God as the one of Sinai. And so, there is a looking back to how God had acted in the past. The point is that Deborah and Barak and those who shared their convictions see and acknowledge God's saving hand. You know, we read the passage and we say, well, of course it was God who secured this storm to allow for the victory, but I wonder if we'd been there and it had happened, would we have said, well, that was lucky. You know, it wasn't that good that the rain came just at the time that we needed it. It's one of these things. Perhaps today, that is the way we interpret events. Just one of these things. When what we are being called to do is to see God's hand and to acknowledge God's hand in our circumstances. Do you see the invisible God acting in love on your behalf, ordering all things for your own good as he orders all things for the good of those who love him?

[11 : 40] Who are those who love the Lord? Well, they are also those who see and acknowledge God's saving hand. And in a similar sense, we can say this also, that those who love the Lord are those who remember God's acts. Notice in verse 11, we read there the voice of the singers at the watering places.

What are they doing? They recite the righteous acts of the Lord, the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel. The picture here would seem to be of those who are celebrating not only the immediate deliverance that they have experienced by God's grace, but rather they're reciting the righteous acts of the Lord in history. In their song and in their singing, they celebrate all that God had done on

behalf of his own through the centuries, no doubt, going back to Egypt and Sinai and God's protection through the wilderness and the victories in the matter of the conquest of the promised land and the more recent victories that God's people had enjoyed. All these are recited, the righteous acts of the Lord. And so God's people, those who love the Lord, are those who remember God's acts. One constant call to be found page after page in the Bible is a call to remember. God's people are to be a remembering people. We are not only to acknowledge God's present help in time of trouble, but to remember all that he has done in history on behalf of his own people. Deborah and Barak are not content with celebrating only the victory they had played a part in, but also remembering his righteous acts in history. Such are those who love the Lord.

They are those who remember. I wonder, is that something that we do? Do we remember all that God has done? Do you remember God's ultimate act of gracious deliverance at Calvary? Do you remember the one who died on the cross on behalf of sinners? Do you remember that ultimate righteous act of Jesus for you?

We are called to remember all that God has done for us. Those who love the Lord are those who remember. But then let's just notice one final thing in this description, or as we seek to understand this description, those who love the Lord, well, what identifies such? One final thing. They are those who serve with zeal and urgency. I'm thinking here of verse 15, in a sense, there's an element of repetition of what we said at the very beginning, but I didn't want to leave Issachar unmentioned. There in verse 15, the princes of Issachar were with Deborah. Yes, Issachar was with Barak, rushing after him into the valley. This picture of this tribe who had joined with Barak and rushing after him into the valley. This is a picture of great zeal, of them acting with great urgency in regard to the matter. They would not be left behind in the battle. They were possessed of a zeal and an urgency in the defense of God's people and of God's name. What about you? Because such are those who love the Lord, those who serve with zeal and urgency. So, a people described, those who love you. But then there is this prayer on behalf of those who love the Lord, that they would be a people blessed. Deborah, as she closes her song, clearly has in mind the very people of God we have found described in the song that she composed. They are those who love you. But what is it that she asks of God on their behalf?

[15 : 58] Well, it is this. May they be like the sun when it rises in its strength. A people blessed. A people that may be like the sun when it rises in its strength. Now, this blessing that is sought, and we have no reason to doubt at all that it is granted, this blessing can be viewed or considered as both a gift and a challenge. It is principally a gift of grace that is sought and granted. But it implies or is accompanied by a challenge. And we'll come to this in a moment. But first of all, what does it mean?

What does it mean to be like the sun when it rises in its strength? It's grand language. But what does it actually mean? We're told that those who love the Lord are like the sun, or this is what is asked of them, that they would be like the sun. So the sun is serving as a symbol of certain characteristics of those who love the Lord and are blessed by the Lord. Well, what characteristics are brought to mind by this picture of the sun when it rises in its strength? Well, let me suggest three. First of all, it's a picture of strength, a symbol of strength here. We don't need to speculate or imagine. That's explicitly what is stated. May they be like the sun when it rises in its strength. The sun representing that which is strong and in that way describing what Deborah wishes would be true of God's people, that they would be strong. It's difficult to imagine a more potent symbol of strength than the sun. So here what is being asked is that God's people would be blessed with strength.

But what else does the picture of the sun conjure up for us? Well, there's another couple of things that are so evident. We could maybe go beyond these and think of others. But I think if we focus on that which is, I think, altogether clear strength, but also light, the sun is strong, but perhaps even more prominently, it is a source of light. The sun is that which dispels darkness. And this is what is being said, or this is what is being asked by Deborah of God, that those who love the Lord would be like the sun, that they would be strong, and that they would be those who reflect light dispelling darkness.

And then thirdly, one final thing concerning the sun or what it conjures in our mind is surely a picture of life. Without the sun, there would be no life. The sun is life-giving. As the sun sends its rays earthward, the crops grow. And as the sun shines, the weary are invigorated. We could perhaps add one more reality that applies to and enriches what we have already said concerning strength

and light and life, namely the permanence of the sun. It's always there. So what Deborah is asking for God's people is that permanently they would know what it is to be strong, that they would know what it is to be those who are light bearers, that they would know what it is to enjoy a life, a life that comes from God himself. Now I suggested that this picture that is painted in terms of what Deborah is asking for God's people, it serves to describe both that which is a gift and a challenge. It's principally a gift.

[19 : 35] It's the Lord who grants to his people strength and light and life. But it is also a challenge, as we are called to live and to serve in such a way that we might exhibit that strength, that we might shine that light, that we might live that life that is eternal in its character. So yes, we receive this from God, but as we receive, so the challenge is to live in a way that does justice to that which we have received from God. The language and what we can draw from it, this language of the sun as it rises in its strength is rich and suggestive, but we will only fully grasp its riches in the light of the person of Jesus Christ. Listen to what we are told by the prophet Malachi in chapter 4 and verses 2 and 3, and I'll just read these two verses.

But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall, then you will trample down the wicked. They will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things, says the Lord Almighty. The prophet looking forward to the coming of Messiah Jesus, the son of righteousness. He is the one who most perfectly is symbolized by the sun as it rises in its strength, though in the case, in his case, the sun hardly does him justice.

What are we to draw concerning Jesus as he is described for us by the prophet as the son of righteousness? Well, there is strength, the strength to defeat his and our enemies. There is light, the light of a righteous life that reveals and condemns all unrighteousness. And there is a life, or there is life, the life that brings healing and even resurrection in its wings. And so when we consider the blessing of being described as those who are like the sun when it rises in its strength, we are to do so in the light of Jesus. He is the light of the world, God's gift to his own people.

And he is the one we are called to be like and into whose image we are being transformed. So we can certainly say that we are a blessed people. Those who love the Lord, may they be like the sun when it rises in its strength. But let me finish with a question, a question that I want to leave with you. The question is a simple one, though a probing one. Are you of those who love the Lord? Now the song, Deborah's song, is stark in the alternatives that it presents, even if we limit ourselves to verse 31. So may all your enemies perish, O Lord, but may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength. It would seem that as far as Deborah is concerned, there are only two possibilities. Either you're an enemy of the Lord or you are among those who love the Lord. She does not seem to contemplate any other possibility. It's a stark contrast that is painted in this closing verse.

And yet the song also presents us with what seems to me to be a bit of a dilemma that I think we could helpfully ponder on, if only very briefly, as we close. And the question that I want to leave with you and leave you to think about is this. Where are we to place the tribes of Israel reprimanded by Deborah in this very song? You see, really what I'm trying to say is that those who offer themselves willingly to the Lord, clearly they are those who love the Lord. Sisera, that brutal general who is spoken of here as the one who, when he conquered and pillaged Israelite villages, he raped the young women, he is a nasty piece of work. He's very clearly an enemy of God. That's clear enough. But you see, in this song, there are, there is another group who are mentioned. Those who belong to the people of God, tribes of Israel, and yet they are reprimanded. Notice what Deborah says here in verse 15, in the second half of the verse. In the districts of Reuben, there was much searching of heart. Why did you stay among the campfires to hear the whistling for the flocks? In the districts of Reuben, there was much searching of heart. Gilead stayed behind the Jordan, and Dan, why did he linger by the ships? Asher remained in the coast and stayed in his coves. As I was mentioning in the morning, the oppression of the

[24 : 44] Canaanites was not across the whole of the territory. And in the southern parts especially, though not only in the south, it would seem they were not affected here. Reuben is concerned for his flocks. They're doing very well, thank you. Prospering. And there is this challenge of the Canaanite king oppressing their brethren in the north, and they're called to join in the battle. And what do they do?

Well, we're told that there was much searching of heart. Around the campfire, the elders of the Reubenites, what shall we do? Shall we go? Shall we stay? Things are going so well here. What about our flocks? What about our pastures? What about our families? No, we'll just stay. So they didn't go.

They were part of the people of God, but they said, no, don't count on us. We've got other things to do, and it wasn't just the Reubenites. Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan. Dan, he lingered by the ships.

Asher remained on the coast and stayed in his coves in safety and security and comfort. And so here we have this group spoken of, sung of in this song. They're part of the people of God, and yet when the challenge came, they fell short. And so we've described with the aid of the psalm what characterizes those who love the Lord. What about these tribes? Are they among those who love the Lord? Well, do they willingly serve? Do they sing in grateful praise? Do they see and acknowledge God's saving hand? Do they remember His acts on their behalf? Do they serve with zeal and urgency? Well, I let you give an answer to these questions. Can we then describe these tribes as those who love the Lord?

Lord, what do you think? Now, does that mean that they are enemies of God? I'm just throwing out questions here. I'm not giving you answers. Now, these are sobering questions, and they're sobering questions especially if we look at the tribes who went to battle and the tribes who stayed at home and ask ourselves, what am I like, and where do I stand? With which of these tribes do I most identify if I were brutally honest with myself? Am I among those who go to battle? Or am I among those who stay at home around the campfire, maybe pondering in my heart what I should do, but when it comes to the crunch, I'll just stay where I am. Thank you very much. Where do you stand? Who do you identify with? I pray that you would be among those who love the Lord, a tentative and a hesitant love, perhaps, certainly an imperfect love, but a heartfelt and genuine love for the one who first loved you.

[27 : 43] And so may you be like the sun when it rises in its strength. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that as we do give thought and consideration to it, you bring a word of challenge to us. We pray that we would take seriously the challenge that you bring to us.

Who are we like? Are we like those who willingly serve you, whatever the cost? Or are we like the Reubenites who pondered in their heart, who sat around the bonfire wondering what they would do, and when it came to the crunch, decided to remain apart, to remain in the comfort of their own safety, leaving their brethren to suffer, leaving others to do the work, leaving others to battle the Lord's battles. We do pray that as we consider these events of so long ago that they would have a word for us in our own circumstances and that we would ask these probing questions of ourselves. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.