

**Sermon**  
**CRASH TEST DUMMIES:**  
**SURPRISING LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF JUDGES**  
**“Crashing Head-On into Iron Chariots”**  
**Judges 4:1-22**  
**Sunday, January 21, 2018**

Did you know that the safest place to be is in church? That’s right, according to a recent insurance study only .001% of deaths occur in worship. At yet more people are afraid to come to church than they are to ride in an automobile where 20% of all deaths occur. If fear of dying while driving to church keeps you at home then you ought to be worried as well; for that same insurance report said that 17% of all deaths occur while at home.

It would appear that that which is safest for us is what crash test dummies like us run from the most: God.

However, the story of Deborah seems to give us hope for it not only challenges our assumptions therefore altering our patterns; it shows us how we can be liberated through the power of God. Through God, our constant crashing into walls can come to a stop as long as we allow ourselves to be set free from that which constantly throws us up against the wall.

In the days of Deborah what the Israelites feared the most was the iron army of the Canaanite King Jabin and his general Sisera. Talbot David says of the Canaanite army: they had “the most advanced technology of their day, cutting-edge weaponry. In other words, they were unbeatable. They have a large, professionally staffed, superbly equipped army. Anything the Israelites will be able to muster against them, by comparison, might as well be made in the neighbor’s garage and held together with duct tape.”

The Israelites’ fear of the Canaanite iron chariots was not only causing them to lose focus on God but forcing them to continue to live the lifecycle of the crash test dummy: getting into a car and slamming into a wall over and over and over again.

Are we any different when it comes to the iron chariots of our day?

There’s a story of a woman whose husband had booked a flight on an airplane for the two of them. The wife was really excited about the trip until she learned that they would be flying on a twin-engine propeller plane.

“I’m not going,” she declared.

“Why not?” her husband asked.

“Because I am not going on that tiny little private plane!”

“Honey,” the husband responded, “Your faith is too small.”

“No,” she said, “Your plane is too small.”

The husband really wanting his wife to come with him on the trip canceled the tiny plane and booked a major airline. This was enough for her to change for his wife to change her mind. Boarding the plane she said to her husband, “My faith grew because the size of the plane did.”

What the story of Deborah does for the Israelites as well as for us is to grow our faith. It grows because we see through Deborah’s journey alongside Barak into battle just how big God truly is. The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary says that as a result of Deborah’s journey we see God’s will for the world prevailing! The Commentary further adds, “As the people of God, we can be confident that God is at work in and through our lives and communities to accomplish God’s will, even when we may be unaware. Indeed, God may work through outsiders or those on the margin of our community in ways we would never expect. At the same time, we can be hopeful that the prayers, words, and actions of faithful individuals, leaders, and communities will be taken seriously and incorporated into the larger plans of God to bring about change and redemption in line with the purposes of God.”

Even when we fear the iron chariots of our lives Deborah informs us we have nothing to fear. Some commentaries believe that Barak feared the Canaanite iron chariots so much that he refused to go into battle unless Deborah went with him. After Deborah orders him to take ten thousand troops and go fight Sisera with his nine hundred chariots of iron, Barak pleads that a woman’s presence on the battlefield is all that is needed to

turn the tide. Talbot Davis in his book *Crash Test Dummies* imagines what must have been going through Barak's mind as he pleads for Deborah's presence on his journey into battle: appearing to deny his own manliness Barak like the cowardly lion from the *Wizard of Oz* says he will only go if you go with me... "Imagine what it must have looked like for a military commander to refuse to go to battle without a woman there to help him lead." These same commentaries argue this is why Deborah says that Sisera will not die by Barak's hand but by the hand of another woman.

However, there are another set of biblical scholars who believe Barak's plea for Deborah to accompany him into battle was not one of cowardice but one filled with great wisdom. Talbot Davis says of this approach: "Victory is more important to him than appearances. And it doesn't matter to him that he won't receive honor, that 'the Lord will hand over Sisera to a woman,' as long as the Israelites win. So maybe Barak's not turning in his man card after all. It could be that he's such manly man that he's willing to stop and ask for directions from a woman."

Psalm 91:5, 9-10 reminds us that regardless of our fears we are to take refuge in the Lord. The psalmist writes; "Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor fear the dangers of the day .... If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you." Peter Gomes in his book *Redeeming the Familiar* says, "God is. We are. In spite of our fumbles and because of God's grace, we are not daunted by the troubles of this age, nor are we fearful of what is to come. We do not bless God for our wealth, our health or for our feeble wisdom. We bless God that God is, that we are and that his promise and love shall be with us when time itself shall be no more."

Regardless of why Barak pleaded for Deborah to join him in battle, Deborah's story is a story that shows us how our faith in God grows in size by our reliance upon Him. I close with an article Kari Myers wrote for the United Methodist Publishing House several years ago. She says: "Some people are afraid of flying. Some are afraid of heights. I am afraid of centipedes — deathly, unreasonably afraid. Just the sight of one of those dark, hideous, primeval creatures paralyzes me. I am instantaneously reduced from a generally well-adjusted adult to a frightened child. I scream. I shudder. I abandon the area of the sighting. And then I wait until it dies or my husband (who puts up with an awful lot) "takes care" of it. It's shameful, even more so when my preschooler feels the need to reassure me: 'Mommy, God would want you to be brave! Remember how you tell me not to be afraid of monsters?'

Of course she is right. God does not want us to live in fear, though terrors are lurking in dark places all around us. You may not share my fear of centipedes, but there no doubt are other fears we share. It may be a fear of illness or death. It may be a generalized fear of the future. What is it that keeps you awake at night?

Whatever it may be, the psalmist reminds us that we have a choice. We can choose to live in fear or we can take shelter in the strong, loving arms of God where no evil can conquer us. When we place ourselves in God's care, when we trust him to protect us, we can rely on his promise."

This is Deborah's story for us crash test dummies.