

February 5, 2017
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Judges
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Judges 13.

1. Describe what it must have been like to live under the hand of Philistine oppression for 40 years.
2. Israel reaped oppression because they had rejected God. Are there similarities with the American culture today based on what previous generations have sowed?
3. Why did God choose Manoah and his wife to bear Samson the deliverer?
4. Who was the angel of the Lord?
5. Why did Manoah fear he and his wife would die?
6. What lessons can we learn from the response of Manoah's wife when she concluded that God would not kill them because he had promised the birth of Samson?

PROMISE OF GOD'S GRACE

Judges 13:1-25

The story of Samson is an enigma for people who love God. It is intriguing to the average person. It is the stuff from which flows great movies and novels. We who love the Lord might wonder why more space is devoted to Samson than to any other judge. We certainly wonder, as we did with Jephthah, why God listed Samson

as one of the examples of faith in Hebrews eleven. At what point in his life did he demonstrate such faith? How could a man who had faith in God live such a life of debauchery? On the surface, it appears that we would not even consider the possibility of allowing a guy like Samson to join the church, much less let him teach a class on trusting God!

Samson illustrates a common theme in this book. The divinely appointed judges were often as much a part of Israel's problem as the solution to it. Couldn't God come up with better leaders than this? Was the whole society of God's chosen nation so sunk in sin that men like Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson were the best He could raise up? None of them were shining examples of godly character. But maybe that was God's plan. Maybe God doesn't always use righteous people to accomplish His will.

One thing that stands out in the whole story of the judges is that none of these people delivered God's people from their sins. The repetitive cycle shouts out that while sin might have been suppressed for a season, it was always ready to jump up and devour God's people when they gave it the chance. And without fail, they gave it a chance.

All of this might lead us to wonder why God bothered. If the deliverers were going to live as such sorry examples, and if the people were going to fall into sin again, why did God bother? The answer to the question is one word. Grace! The story of the judges reveals the amazing depth and breadth and endless supply of God's undeserved favor. No one illustrates that better than Samson. And who needs God's grace more than we do? We cannot live without it. We have no hope in eternity without it. Why God is so incredibly gracious to us, we cannot tell. That He is incredibly gracious is to our eternal benefit and the cause for all our praise and worship of Him.

Announcement (vv.1-7).

The Lord announced that a special son would be born because another deliverer was needed. Here was the need: *And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years (v.1).* We should be growing weary of the word "again" as it talks about the people's sins in the judges story. The cycle shows that after God

delivered His people from their oppressors, they often lived in a certain level of fellowship with Him for a season. We read that the land had rest 40 years (3:11; 5:31; 8:28) which is about a generation. Or in one unusual case the people enjoyed peace for 80 years (3:30).

Even in our modern era, we are familiar with generational cycles. Two generations ago our culture fell into the rebellion of rejecting God's Word because we were told it was really not inspired and inerrant. A generation ago, young people rebelled against the authority of common morality in the sexual revolution, the authority of parents, and to some extent the civil authorities. Today we reap the fruit of all that sowing as we live in a culture where there is no respect of any authority among a large segment of our citizenry. We do reap what we sow.

Again the people sinned and again God raised up an enemy to oppress them. This time God opened the door for the Philistines to harass His people. The Philistine people group was located on the west coast for the most part and had already been a pest in Israel's history. From this point through the reign of David (a period of about 100 years), the Philistines were going to be a thorn in the side of God's people.

And again, God raised up a deliverer. But notice that this time, no one asked for him. No one cried out because of the oppression of sin. What a sad commentary on the spiritual condition of the people. They were so sunk in sin that the consequences did not even motivate them to petition God for help. Indeed, we are in sad spiritual shape when we concede to sin's domination of our lives. Yet many professing Christians have grown content to live with known sin in their lives. That is called grieving the Holy Spirit and quenching the Holy Spirit. We know nothing of fellowship with God if we are not willing to cry out to God to deliver us from sin.

But God is so gracious that sometimes He delivers us even when we do not ask. No one in Israel asked for a deliverer but God sent them Samson. Likewise, even you do not ask for deliverance, but God chooses to be gracious to you, He works in you to deliver you from sin. At those times of grace, you might actually be confused about the discipline that comes into your life, not realizing that God is delivering.

The LORD gave a particular promise to a certain woman (vv.2-3). The wife of a particular man was barren. *There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children (v.2).* The words, *there was a certain man*, highlight God's prerogative to choose His servants. He is identified by his city and his tribe. Zorah was on the west side of Judah, very near the Philistine border. Of the millions of people on earth at that time, God chose to work through Manoah's family.

Manoah had a wife and she was barren. In fact, Manoah's wife is the one who received the LORD's attention. That she was barren was a difficult but not an uncommon condition in that day. It was a very sad condition for a woman in a culture where continuing the family line was imperative and honored. Because God intended for the portions of the promised land to stay in the families who inherited it, having children was very important. Growing the nation of Abraham was fulfilling God's promise. How could his posterity be as numerous as the sands on the seashore if Israeli women were barren? The situation was stressful, and yet there is no indication in the story that Manoah and his wife pled with God to give them a child.

In her barren condition, Manoah's wife illustrated Israel's spiritual condition. They were spiritually barren. There was no life, no regenerative activity. Though they were the people of God, they produced no life.

At this time, Israel was needy and the LORD visited the needy. *And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son" (v.3).* We will learn later in the story who the angel of the LORD really was. Without invitation, without request, He showed up and spoke to this woman.

It might be a bit of a side note, but the place of women in this story is significant. That women figure significantly in this story is special in light of the fact that middle eastern cultures of that age held women in low esteem. It is a great reminder that God does not act like His people often act. Here, it is the woman of the household with whom the LORD has direct contact. In fact, it is a bit comical to watch Manoah try to be the leader of the family as he knows he should. But it wasn't working. The LORD talks to the guy's wife and gives her the instruction (vv.3-5). Manoah's wife finds him and tells him the story

(vv.6-7). Manoah prayed that God would send the messenger back again so that he can make sense of this incomprehensible thing (v.8). God answered his prayer and returned to talk to the woman again (vv.9-10). It is almost as though we observe poor Manoah running helter-skelter trying to get into the main stream, but it wasn't working. In the end, he appears to be the emotional basket case and his wife is the logical one.

Then standing in vivid contrast to this sensible, god-fearing woman are the women who wrecked her son's life. Though living in a culture where they were considered second rate, they managed to do first rate destruction of God's servant.

The Lord promised that Manoah's wife would indeed bear a son and that he would be a Nazarite. *"Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."* Then the woman came and told her husband, *"A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name, but he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death'"* (vv.4-7).

What was the Nazarite vow? First, we must understand that this was not equivalent with being a citizen of Nazareth or being a Nazarene. Jesus was a Nazarene. *And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene"* (Matthew 2:23). But Jesus did not take a Nazarite vow. Therefore, contrary to common pictures, He might not have had long hair. Most people are unaware that artists depicted Jesus with long hair because they mistakenly believed He had taken the Nazarite vow.

The scant details we have for the Nazarite vow are in Numbers 6:1-8. There we discover that the person who took the Nazarite vow was separated **unto** the LORD. *When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD (v.2). All the days of his separation he is holy to the LORD (v.8). At*

the same time the person was separated from anything fermented. *He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins (vv.3,4).* We probably cannot appreciate how important that sacrifice was in a culture where drunkenness was shameful and forbidden. Only the rabble got drunk. Nor can we appreciate the cost of the sacrifice in a culture where diluted wine was the normal drink at a meal. Or a culture in which the produce of the vine was considered God's blessing.

Furthermore, the Nazarite vow required a distinct look so that others would know the person was separated wholly unto God. *All the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long (v.5).*

And the person would need to be separated from certain actions to prove that he or she was separated unto God. *All the days that he separates himself to the LORD he shall not go near a dead body. Not even for his father or for his mother, for brother or sister, if they die, shall he make himself unclean, because his separation to God is on his head (vv.6-7).*

It is very instructive for us to consider just how the vow applied to Samson's case. First, we discover that he did not take the Nazarite vow, nor could his mother take it for him. God thrust it upon him before he was conceived. Nor was the vow for Samson a certain period of time as the law required. Rather, he was a Nazarite for his lifetime. He would have an appearance and live a life that marked him as one who was dedicated to the LORD.

In many ways, all the other judges were also identified as the LORD's servants. It is easy to see how these principles apply to us who say we love Jesus. Because we love Him, we keep His commands. His commands are not grievous, but they do mark us as distinct from the "normal" and acceptable world in which we live. In fact, because we love Jesus, and we do not want there to be any confusion, we separate from practices acceptable to our peers that can potentially compromise our separation unto the LORD. That should

not surprise us. Go back and compare God's rule for the Nazarite: *he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried.* That was extreme separation in a culture where wine was so common. And all God's people said, "We're not separated like that, are we?"

Affirmation (vv.8-19).

God gave the promise and then made a reappearance to affirm the promise (vv.8-14). Manoah practiced Jesus' instruction, "Ask and it shall be given" even though he did not know Jesus or have the New Testament. *Then Manoah prayed to the LORD and said, "O Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born." And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field. But Manoah her husband was not with her (vv.8-9).*

In a culture that abandoned God, it is refreshing to see a man who knew how to pray. He simply desired to have an explanation of this astonishing story his wife told him. God showed His grace again, condescended to Manoah's request, and revisited his wife. You have to love this. It is certainly true that God's plan for the human race is that the husband will guide and lead the family. But in no way does the indicate that the wife is inferior. So in a culture that suppressed the wife, God demonstrated His willingness to work with her.

We can assume from the story that Manoah had one question on his mind, "What is God's will?" *So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, "Behold, the man who came to me the other day has appeared to me." And Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the man and said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to this woman?" And he said, "I am." And Manoah said, "Now when your words come true, what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?" (vv.10-12).*

We can tell from Manoah's question that he is intent on knowing God's will for this child. *"Now when your words come true, what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?" (v.12).* That is a perfect question for every parent to ask God. We

should long to know what God wants to do with and through our children. This is part of training up our children according to their way so that they will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). Parents need to ask God to reveal to them what gifts, abilities, tendencies He has given to their children so that they can help them develop these things. Ask God to show you their weaknesses so that you can help them overcome those things. Generally, we will not be all that interested in knowing God's will for our children if we are not first interested in knowing God's will for ourselves.

So what is God's will? It was the same for Manoah as it is for us. Keep the LORD's commands. *And the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing. All that I commanded her let her observe" (vv.13-14).* Like Manoah, we keep the LORD's commands when we are careful regarding the words of the LORD. To be careful is to guard, watch over, observe and keep. The LORD's will is to protect God's word from addition and subtraction. It is to protect God's word from misunderstanding or misinterpretation. It is to do what God said.

Therefore, in order to know, rightly interpret and do, starting with Manoah's wife before Samson was even born. The rules were, don't even eat grapes, don't drink wine or alcohol in any form (no beer, no champagne, no wine coolers), and don't eat anything the law identified as unclean. Of course, that was a normal requirement for all Israelites. But because they were rebellious, the law was probably ignored and God needed to emphasize it to these Israelites.

In short, God's will was for them to do every word the LORD commanded. Not in order to be saved, and not even to be commended, but simply do what the LORD said because He is the LORD.

Isn't this the same thing Jesus taught us? *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my*

words. *And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me*" (John 14:23-24). *"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."* (John 15:10). *"You are my friends if you do what I command you"* (John 15:14).

The pending birth of Samson was a great promise because it was God's promise (vv.15-20). Recipients of the LORD's promises desire fellowship with the LORD. Therefore, Manoah said, "Let's have a fellowship meal." *Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "Please let us detain you and prepare a young goat for you."* *And the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "If you detain me, I will not eat of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD"* (For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.) (vv.15-16).

The angel of the LORD passed on the fellowship meal even though it was a kind expression of hospitality. Instead He instructed Manoah to offer a sacrifice to the LORD. Manoah did not realize he was talking to God (v.16b). But he was aware that whoever or whatever this messenger was, he was different. Which makes us realize that when the angel appeared to these folks, contrary to common pictures of beings in white robes, halos, and wings, he looked pretty ordinary. Maybe kind of like Jesus meeting with two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Manoah could certainly tell that he was not conversing with an ordinary guy. "You're different. Who are you?" *And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?"* *And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?"* (vv.17-18). We do not blame Manoah for being curious. In fact, he sincerely wanted to know something about this man he perceived to be a prophet sent from God. The LORD also refused to give that information to Manoah because he would not have been able to grasp the majestic grandeur of the LORD's holy character.

Though He would not try to help a finite human grasp the awesomeness of His character, the LORD uses miracles to prove His character. *So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching. And when the*

flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground (vv.19-20).

Manoah offered the sacrifice to the *One who works wonders* (v.19). To that end, he and his wife watched what would happen. The angel of the LORD ascended into heaven in the flame of the sacrifice (v.20). That was pretty miraculous. Manoah and his wife were impressed (v.20b). *They fell on their faces to the ground.* This is the picture of worship. True worship begins with an understanding of God's awesome character. Compared to God we are so unworthy, which drives our hearts to the ground in reverent worship.

Fulfillment (vv.21-25).

Was there any doubt the promise would come to pass? In light of the miracle they just saw, Manoah and his wife should have been certain that God can do anything He desires to do. Would that fearsome God kill them or give them grace (vv.21-23)? A true understanding of God is fearsome. They understood with Whom they had been talking and that was a serious matter. *The angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD* (v.21). Finally it registered with them that they had been talking to the LORD Himself. They knew that the amazing promise was God's promise for God's glory.

That being true, Manoah and wife assumed that death was imminent. Why? *And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God"* (v.22). This idea might go all the way back to God's warning to Moses. *"But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live"* (Exodus 33:20). Gideon responded the same way when he realized who the angel of the LORD is. *Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face"* (Judges 6:22).

Theologically Manoah was right. But they were dealing with the gracious God who is not bound by human conclusions. God's grace tempers His awesomeness. *But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now*

announced to us such things as these” (v.23). Logical wife said to emotional husband: “Wait a minute. Let’s think about this.” The Lord accepted their offering to Him. Besides how could God fulfill His promise about their son if He killed them?

And so God kept His promise and showed His grace for the special son (vv.24-25). The LORD blessed Samson. *And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the LORD blessed him (v.25).* The Spirit of the LORD stirred Samson. *And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol (v.25).*

Something unusual always happens when the Spirit of the LORD stirs someone. There is no doubt that God would be working through Samson. There is also no doubt that Samson did not deserve God’s grace. That is the nature of grace. That is the grace that the awesome, majestic, holy God pours out upon us. We should praise Him.