

God's Grace

Judges 13

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Big Idea- God delivers his people in his time and on his terms

Introduction

It is around 4 years ago and we have Sarah's parents visiting with us from Canada. We decide to head over to Stradbroke Island for the day to show them the beautiful scenery.

We walk down to Frenchman's Beach and are standing on the side of this point. We want to walk around the point to the other side. We have been to the other side before. But we haven't approached it from this side of the point before. It turns out it is high tide, and the waves are crashing against the rocks along the shore, making it too dangerous to get around the point along the shore.

So my sons, Andrew and David, and I decide to scout out an inland trail up and over the point to try to reach the sand dune on the other side, rather than going through the water. Sarah and her parents stay behind on Frenchman's Beach and wait for the word that there is a safe inland route to take.

The boys, as usual, are a lot quicker than me and I lose sight of them as they head up over the point. Eventually I find Andrew up on top of the point, but David is not with him. The boys had become separated and we're not sure where David is. I see him down at the beach, walking back towards where Sarah is and I race after him. I get down there and my heart stops when I notice him, IN the water up to his chest. He is clinging to the rocks with the waves crashing around him and this is a moment of absolute terror for me. Thankfully I yell out to him over the crashing waves, and he hears my call and comes out of the water and back to me. It turns out that because he had become lost, he thought he would try to follow the rocky shoreline in the water to get back around the point to Sarah on the beach. I try to explain to him the extreme danger that he was in, but at the time, he just didn't grasp that he was in a potentially life-threatening situation and needed rescuing.

Here he was in this terrifying position in high tide with waves crashing around him on the rocks but he had no clue of the danger, and thought he was fine on his own getting back to mum

I can tell you, as the parent there I can still feel the terror and fear of seeing David stuck where he was.

This morning is the first of a 3-week series on the final and best-known Judge, Samson. In the story of Samson, we are going to see how God stepped in and was gracious to a people who, like my son in the story, didn't see the need for Rescue.

This story of Samson is one of great strength, but also great weakness. It's the story of a man who was chosen from before birth to deliver Israel from the Philistines, but also someone who mocked the position he had.

It's a popular story to tell in Sunday school and kids' Bibles. One that is often associated with moral teaching about avoiding loose women and pride, but there is a lot more to the story than that.

Today we are just looking at the first chapter, chapter 13 and I must say I have found the passage quite difficult. We read passages like this and indeed in most of the book of Judges and it isn't like a Disney film, we don't have a clear-cut goody and baddy. It can be difficult to understand who each person is and what we can learn from them. I say this to encourage you to continue on in your Bible reading, even when the passage is difficult. Don't give up. All of God's Word has value and is there to teach us.

Our big idea today is that God delivers us in his time and on his terms.

We will divide it into three parts:

- 1- Grace without asking (v1)
- 2- Grace without being born (v2-5)
- 3- Grace without control (v6-23)

Grace is receiving something that we don't deserve or pay for. It is a free gift from God and comes totally from God, not reliant on anything we do or say.

Let's start with Grace without asking

Grace Without Asking (v1)

At the beginning of the series in Judges, Ben outlined how this book of the Bible is set out. It covers 12 Judges in Israel. Judges at that time were not in the sense of judges in a court of law today, but were considered deliverers for Israel from their oppressors. We mentioned there were 12 Judges, or deliverers, in the book, and Samson is the last. While the book isn't necessarily in chronological order, it does move from the model judge at the start of the book in Othniel and spirals down until we get to the last and the worst in the book Samson.

Now today we are in chapter 13 and we start once again with those words we have become very familiar with through the book of Judges: "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."

This isn't the first time we have read about the Philistines in Judges. What do we know about them?

They were a sea people and controlled an area near the sea. They were powerful and aggressive, and were considered technologically advanced. They had strong ability in agriculture but also in war.

And the Philistines were holding the Israelites in bondage

As we have gone through the book we have seen this cycle which we have summarised as A, B, C, D, E. Here we again see apostasy (they are doing evil), we again see Bondage (to the Philistines), but interestingly, this time, we do not see Israel crying out. Throughout the book we have seen Israel get to a point where they turn to God and cry out for help to deliver them from bondage, but it doesn't happen here. Why is it that they don't cry out?

They don't want a deliverer.

The people of Israel are now so hard that they seem content to let the Philistines oppress them without a whimper. They seem content in their bondage, which is a reflection on how far they have spiralled away from God in their apostasy and bondage. Perhaps they are accustomed to their misery, comfortable in their sin and disobedience to God.

We also read Samson's family were from the tribe of Dan. Dan was hardly an impressive tribe. If you recall from chapter 1 they were mentioned last of all the tribes, and in verse 34, instead of taking the plains that belonged to them,

they were forced back up into the hills by their enemy. Through Chapter 1 we read that God commanded the Israelites to take the land. We saw some Israelite tribes fight hard for their area, we saw some assimilate and live with the locals, and then there is Dan, forced by the locals to the hills, putting up no fight against the Philistines.

So we have here the weak tribe of Danites, possibly accustomed to their bondage to the Philistines, continuing in their evil practices, but they don't seem to mind the position they're in.

But, take note of this: even though the Israelites do not cry out to God for deliverance from their bondage, God provides them with a deliverer anyway. They don't ask for deliverance. They don't do anything to deserve deliverance, yet God shows them grace. He provides a deliverer for them without waiting to be asked.

God takes the initiative and delivers them in his time and on his terms. Israel wasn't looking for a deliverer. They were suffering and burdened, but they didn't care.

God showed this grace to Israel thousands of years ago, when they didn't ask, but we might wonder how this applies to us today. There's a verse in the New Testament that [helps?]. Romans 5:8 says:

Romans 5:8- But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ Died for us.

You see, just like Israel back then, people today don't want to be delivered either. It's easy to be happy in our disobedience and living life our own way, ignoring God. We suffer in our bondage to sin, but God steps in to rescue sinners without waiting to be asked.

God saves sinners in his time and on his terms.

Let's move on to our second point now, grace without being born.

Grace Without Being Born (2-5)

Now we move to the second verse and we meet Samson's father, a man named Manoah. What do we know about him?

Verse 2 says he was from the tribe of Dan as we spoke about earlier, and that the tribe was not known for its strong character.

While he may show glimpses of faith through the chapter, Manoah, like many other through Judges had most likely taken on the practices of the Philistines and worshipped many Gods, here he is most likely talking about the one true God as just another idol he was happy to worship with no real faith. We will see he certainly has trouble believing.

We are also introduced to his wife. Now she isn't named, which is interesting. That said, we can certainly see she is another woman in the book of Judges with strong faith in God

We also read she was barren. She joins a list of barren women in the Bible who our gracious God blesses with a child. Some other examples of barren women include Sarah, in Genesis, who gave birth to Isaac; Rachel, who gave birth to Joseph, Hannah to Samuel, and in the New Testament Elizabeth gives birth to John the Baptist and of course these births point forward to the most miraculous of all, Mary's birth of Jesus.

Samson's story begins with a promise of personal deliverance for Manoah and his wife. Deliverance from the distress of being childless in a culture where having no children was shameful. We would expect this woman to be profoundly sad that a child would never come, yet God gives Manoah and his wife a son. God is gracious toward this couple, fulfilling his promise to provide them a son.

Now this won't be just any son but will be one who is set apart. He is to live under the Nazirite vow. Nazar means to separate or consecrate.

The angel of The lord tells Manoah's wife that she is not to drink wine and not to have his hair cut. This is also known as a Nazirite vow and Samson is to be a Nazirite from the womb. A Nazirite is someone who dedicated themselves to the Lord by taking this 3-part vow. It is usually a voluntary vow and is usually for a set period, but Samson's vow to be set apart to the Lord is for life, right from the womb. To understand this vow, please turn back in the Old Testament to Numbers 6:1-8

6 *The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of dedication to the LORD as a Nazirite, ³ they must abstain from wine and other fermented*

drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or other fermented drink. They must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. ⁴ As long as they remain under their Nazirite vow, they must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins.

⁵ "During the entire period of their Nazirite vow, no razor may be used on their head. They must be holy until the period of their dedication to the LORD is over; they must let their hair grow long.

⁶ "Throughout the period of their dedication to the LORD, the Nazirite must not go near a dead body. ⁷ Even if their own father or mother or brother or sister dies, they must not make themselves ceremonially unclean on account of them, because the symbol of their dedication to God is on their head. ⁸ Throughout the period of their dedication, they are consecrated to the LORD.

This picture of being holy, that is dedicated or set apart to God, is exactly what the whole nation of Israel were called to. But Israel, like Samson, didn't live in obedience to God.

Time and time again through the book of Judges we have seen them do evil, time and again we have seen God be gracious and provide a deliverer, even when they don't see the need for one. Even when they aren't crying out, God still delivers His people.

Back to Judges 13, in verse 5 we read that Samson will take the lead in delivering Israel. It says Samson will begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. We will come back to this verse shortly.

Isn't it comforting to know that God chooses us before we are born too? As we read in the New Testament again, in Ephesians chapter 1 v 4: For he chose us in him before the creation of the World to be holy and blameless in his sight.

As we read through Samson's story, I want to be careful that we don't think this is about Israel and that we are totally different, in many ways, we aren't. The first point was that God gives grace without us asking, we also see in verses 2-5 that God gives grace before we are even born.

Now onto our third point, that it is grace without our control.

Grace without control (6-23)

Here the angel delivers the message that God is going to provide a child of promise. God has promised this woman that she will give birth to a son.

She also needs to follow instructions under the Nazirite vow. She is to drink no wine or other fermented drink and not eat anything unclean.

Notice the woman is by herself when the angel of the Lord appears to her and gives her the message. She then relays the message to her husband. If you look at verses 6-8, she relays what she was told, or at least, most of what she was told. If you look closely, you will see a couple of notable omissions. First, there is no mention of the hair and secondly, she doesn't mention that he will begin to save Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

Manoah misses out on meeting the angel of the Lord and prays to God that he would send him again.

What do we make of Manoah? Possibly Manoah is after the experience of meeting the angel. I don't sense any real faith here but, I think it is likely that he has embraced the practice of the Philistines and worshipped the Baals. He is seeing this messenger as one of many gods.

In verse 8 it says he prayed to the LORD- noticed LORD is in capitals meaning Yahweh, or God. But then he said O Lord, not capitalised. This means he is referring to Adoni, more like a prince.

God is gracious to Manoah and grants his request and sends the angel of the Lord again, albeit to his wife again and not to Manoah.

From verse 11 we have the interaction between Manoah, his wife and the man.

Manoah clearly wants to be in control of the situation. Twice he asks what he needs to do in bringing up the child and the Man advises Manoah that his wife must do all she has been told. His wife needs to follow instructions and must not drink any fermented drink or eat anything unclean.

Manoah didn't need to do anything himself. His wife was the one who had specific commands to follow.

Manoah then has a goat prepared and offers it to the angel of the Lord, who replies, “Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food, but...offer it to the Lord.”

Manoah tries to control the angel of the Lord, to detain him, but this isn't working either.

This interaction and response is very similar to Gideon in chapter 6 .

-Both prepared an offering for the angel of the Lord

- Both placed their offering on a rock

-Both offerings were consumed by fire a flame flared up

-Both realized this was the Lord

-Both thought that they were going to die

-Both didn't trust God (Gideon wanted a sign), Manoah wanted instruction

-Both wanted to be in control

In their response to God, Gideon is very similar to Manoah. Both men wanted to be in control. Both inquired of God and were told to trust.

Manoah is told here that he isn't the one in control, there is nothing he can do, it is all of God. This is a picture of grace isn't it? A free gift that we don't deserve and that doesn't depend on anything we do. (pause)

This interaction with the angel of the Lord brings Manoah and his wife face down on the ground, fearful and terror struck.

As they recover from the shock of meeting face to face with God, Manoah's wife remains calm and shows faith and clarity.

Manoah here finally understands that he was interacting with the one true God and he panics. “We will die!”, he exclaims. His wife understands that the angel of the Lord would not have promised them a son if they were going to die. The angel also would not have accepted the offering and then kill them.

Verses 24 and 25 show God delivering on His promise. Samson is born. As with other Judges, the Spirit of the Lord is on him and the Lord

blesses him and the deliverer starts to grow. We look forward to the remaining story of Samson's life over the coming weeks.

As we see, God's grace toward us does not come under our control. It has nothing to do with us. God offers us his grace as a free gift of God, delivered by him in his time and on his terms.

Now in conclusion there is a verse that I would like to return to.

Conclusion

As we get to the end of the chapter we might ask, what just happened. Well, God is graciously intervening at a time when the people of Israel were not crying out for any divine deliverance. And God is shaping a man, from birth, that he would set apart for himself to use to deliver his people.

This deliverance at the time of Samson is a glimpse of what is to come. There are a lot of different points to take from this chapter, but I want to take us back to verse 5- that God will raise a deliverer, Samson (reading from the ESV), **and he will begin to save Israel from the hands of the Philistines.**

Over the coming weeks we will see that Samson did interact with the Philistines and did *begin* the deliverance of the Israelites from the Philistines, but he didn't complete it.

Now jump ahead a couple of hundred years to another interaction with the Philistines: do you remember a shepherd boy named David? He fights and beats Goliath and the Philistine army. David delivers Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

Samson was to begin the deliverance from the Philistines and David was to finish it.

That said, while Scripture describes David as a man after God's own heart, his life is not perfect and so his deliverance is not final either.

Reading about the failings of human judges and kings reminds us that we need a better deliverer, one who is perfect, one who is 'mighty to save', one who provides complete deliverance.

Turn with me to Luke 1:26-38 and let's read it

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; **his kingdom will never end.**"

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[b] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ **For no word from God will ever fail.**"

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Well after Samson, and well after David, in the town of Bethlehem, there was another miraculous birth. Jesus, the son of God, was born and He lived a perfect life. He graciously, obediently and willingly offered his life up as a payment to deliver sinners once and for all from the punishment

that they deserve for their sins, so that they could be freed from their bondage to sin.

Sin means rejecting the ruler and trying to do things our own way rather than following God's way. The Bible says we have all sinned and all fall short of God's perfect standard and we all deserve to be punished for our sins. But Jesus took that punishment that we deserve on himself when he died on the cross.

The Bible says God loved us so much that he gave his Son and that whoever believes in him will have eternal life.

Jesus is the perfect deliverer. His kingdom will reign forever. While we get a glimpse of rescue/deliverance in Judges, we can look to the cross and marvel at this wondrous grace that God lavishes us sinners by giving his own son to die on the cross and deliver us from our sin.

If you don't know Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour, come to him today. He loves you and wants you to be part of His family.

We will shortly be having a baptism where our brother Stephen will share his story of how God has saved him from his sin, and the work God has done in his life.

Baptism is a time to publicly declare that we believe that he died for us and has forgiven us. And we have seen in the chapter today that God's grace toward us happened before we were born, without us asking and without our control. It is all from God, in his time and on his terms.

The great deliverer, Jesus, took the punishment and has given us eternal life with him., that's amazing Grace. Let's pray.