

The One Who Works Wonders

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name's Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace. And no one's so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

We're continuing our series in the book of Judges, and you'll remember that the book of Judges is about a number of things. It's about the need for constant renewal and revival among God's people. It's about the need for a true and faithful king, a king who can do what no human can do, which is to change the hearts of men. It's about the power of spirit-filled leadership, and it's about God's mercy to hard-hearted people, people like you and me.

[1 : 08] Last time we were in Judges, we finished the story of Jethwa, and you'll remember that it did not end well. There was disunity among God's people, so much so that they were fighting and killing one another.

This morning we move on to the story of the judge Samson. Samson's going to be the last judge we encounter in Judges, and so we've made it quite some time.

And you'll remember our principle, the main principle I've been pressing home in interpreting Judges, comes from chapter 2, verse 19, which tells us each generation was more corrupt than the one before them.

And so we see this constant downward trajectory or this spiral. So the very first judge, I told you, Othniel was the best judge of all time. Samson, the last judge, the worst judge of all time.

And so things are getting worse and worse in Israel, if that can be believed, that they're even worse than under the judge Jethwa. But in fact, that is the case. And after we end the story of Samson, we will see Israel continue in decline.

[2 : 16] And so our question this morning as we come to Judges chapter 13 is very simple. What is our hope when it appears that the lights have gone out?

What is our hope when it appears that people have forgotten God completely? What is our hope in our lives when we look and we see tragedy and devastation behind us?

Not just because of what other people have done, but because of what we have done as well. So with that, I invite you to turn with me to Judges chapter 13.

You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. Proverbs chapter 30 tells us every word of God proves true.

He's a shield to those who take refuge in him. And so that's why we read now Judges chapter 13, starting at verse 1. And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

[3 : 24] So the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for 40 years. 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.

And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, Behold, you are barren and have not born children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. 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 Nazarite 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. [4 : 35] For the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. Verse 8. 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 the Lord came again to the woman as she sat in the field. But Manoah, her husband, was not with her. 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.

Verse 12. And Manoah said, Now when your words come true, what is to be the child's manner of life and what is his mission? 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.

[5 : 51] Verse 15. 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. 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? So Manoah took the young goat with a 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.

Verse 21. 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. And Manoah said to his wife, We shall surely die, for we have seen God.

[7 : 05] Verse 23. 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.

And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahanadan, between Zorah and Eshtel. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you one more time that you have spoken to us.

You haven't left us to figure things out on our own, or to stumble around, but instead you've given us your Word to guide us and direct us. We thank you that it does more than that.

It doesn't just guide and direct, but it shows us your Son and our Savior, our Lord Jesus, who died for us even when we were still sinners. It shows us your grace and your mercy, which we have not earned, and we do not deserve.

[8 : 14] And we ask that you would remind us of those things this morning, that we would see them in a fresh way. We'd believe them more than before. We'd live with greater hope.

We thank you that we don't have to worry about whether we've earned these things or deserve them. We know that we don't, and we haven't. And so we simply ask for them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. If you've been with us through the book of Judges, I hope that you recognize the very first phrase that begins this chapter.

It tells us, and the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. And this is the phrase that begins basically every section. It's what we saw that began the story of Jethpah in Judges chapter 10.

It's the same phrase that began the story of Gideon. It's the phrase that began the story of Deborah in chapter four, and then Ehud and Othniel. We see the same thing, that there is this pattern in the book of Judges.

[9 : 12] And so hopefully you're getting used to it at this point, that the same things occur over and over. We find out also in verse one, what does the Lord do?

The same thing he does every time, right? When they turn away from him, he gives them into the hand of a foreign country. This time it's into the hand of the Philistines. We get a hint though, that something is worse than before because it is not like last time.

Remember when they're in the hands of the Ammonites, it's for 18 years. This time we get more than twice that. They are oppressed for 40 years. And so we've seen this before.

It might be tempting for us to go into autopilot as we read chapter 13. Okay, here's another judge and another cycle. We know what has happened before.

We know what's going to happen this time. Except suddenly there's a disruption. There is a deafening silence that we should feel here.

[10 : 16] There is something that has happened every other time that does not happen this time. There is something that God's people always do that they don't do.

There is something missing between verse one and verse two. The people of Israel do not cry out to God.

The people of Israel do not repent. The author of Judges is telling us this. Israel is closer to death than ever before.

Israel has become so bad that she doesn't even need to cry out to God for mercy. Israel has become so twisted in her view and understanding of the world that it feels normal at this point to have a foreign oppressor.

Of course the Philistines are over us. That's just how life is. Of course we live among a pagan nation. That's just how things go. Israel has finally come to the point where she is inoculated against the presence of foreign rulers and foreign gods.

[11 : 32] This is normal, right? This is just the way it should be. It's been this way for years in the past. It'll be this way for years in the future. This is the pattern that I've told you about all along.

Judges chapter two, verse 19 tells us every generation is getting worse. Every generation, the phrase is, is more corrupt than the generation before. They refuse to give up the ways of their fathers.

Things in Israel are very bad. Israel doesn't just need help. Israel really needs help.

Israel is not just wicked. Israel is really wicked. Israel is not just gone. She is real far gone.

And it's not because of the Philistines. That's not the ultimate problem. The ultimate problem is that Israel has forgotten her God. The ultimate problem is that they are removed from reality more than ever before.

[12 : 46] It's with that missing section there that we come to verse two and we find out there is not just a problem for the people and nation of Israel. There's also a problem being faced by this particular couple.

Manoah and his wife have a challenge. And the challenge is that they are not able to have children. And we might think this is somehow a coincidence, but in fact, these two things are meant to go together.

The problem of Israel and the problem of Manoah and his wife are intertwined with one another. You'll see this on page nine of your worship guide. Just as Israel was helpless and hopeless, so were Manoah and his wife.

Hopeless nation, hopeless couple. Not a coincidence. And so that returns us to our question, what does God do?

What is our hope when it appears that the lights have been turned off? What is our hope when things are so bad that Israel does not even know that she needs to cry out to God?

[14 : 01] Well, again, we see these two things going side by side, hand in hand. Verse three, the angel of the Lord appears to Manoah's wife and says, behold, you are barren and have not born children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.

Okay, great. That's a solution to the problem of Manoah and his wife. What's the solution to the problem of the people of Israel? Well, it turns out they are one and the same. Verse five, this son's going to be a Nazarite and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

What God does for Manoah and his wife is the same thing he's going to do for Israel. He is going to bring hope where there is no hope.

He is going to bring new life where there is despair. He's going to bring literal life to literal barrenness. He's going to bring spiritual life to spiritual barrenness.

Now you'll note here in verses five and seven, we're told that this son who's going to come as the solution to both problems is going to be a Nazarite. We're not going to talk a lot this morning about what it means to be a Nazarite because we have a lot of other things to discuss, but it is going to become incredibly important next week.

[15:28] So just remember a couple things. If someone is a Nazarite, they are set apart to God in a special way for a time of focus and dedication. And there are three rules that they need to keep.

Those are laid out here. They should not touch alcohol, can't cut their hair, can't touch dead bodies. Okay, just remember that. That's going to become incredibly important in chapter 14 and chapter 15 and 16 as well.

So we have this situation of barrenness. There's despair for Manoah and his wife and also for the people of Israel. God comes in in the midst of that. He intervenes. He brings life into those situations.

And then we're presented with the rest of this narrative, which appears to be simply a comedy of errors. Verses 8 through 14, Manoah is not happy, it appears, that the angel appeared to the wife, but not to him.

And so he starts praying to God like, hey, I want the angel to come back to us. So Manoah wants his own word. He wants to speak directly with the angel.

[16:35] And the angel, it says God answers his prayer, but either God or the angel or both seem to troll Manoah a little bit here. He says, I want the angel to come to us. God says, fine.

He sends the angel to his wife again. Manoah is cut out. And so then she has to run to Manoah and get him. And he comes and he says, look, I want all this new information.

Tell me about the mission. Tell me how we're supposed to raise the kid. And what does the angel do? He just repeats the exact same information over again. Manoah wants new things.

He gets the same things all over again. He seems to maybe have missed something in his wife's communication. The only time that's happened in the history of the world. He's asked in verse 12, what is this kid's mission supposed to be?

Well, we've already been told in verse five, his mission is to begin to save Israel. And so at the very best, Manoah seems to be very confused.

[17:37] He goes on to be afraid at the very end that they're actually going to die, that God's going to kill them because they've seen his presence. And his wife has to step in and remind him, this is verse 23, actually, honey, that doesn't make sense.

If God killed us, we couldn't have the kid. Okay, so these things are not adding up here. In the midst of that, Manoah decides it's time for him to offer this young goat as an offering.

And there's all kinds of debate about what is Manoah trying to do here? Is he simply offering hospitality because he's in the ancient Near East? Is he trying to exercise some sort of power play over the angels so he can get the upper hand in the situation?

Whatever he is trying to do, we know this. Manoah is very confused. Manoah is unclear on what's happening.

He doesn't even realize who this figure is that he's speaking to. He doesn't know that it's a representative of God himself. And so everything really that's happening in this section can be summarized.

[18:45] Verse 18, Manoah asks the angel for his name and the angel says, why do you ask my name seeing it is wonderful? In other words, not only do you not know what's going on, but even if I were to explain it, you would be confused.

This is way out of your league, Manoah. What is happening is above your pay grade. Okay? You can ask my name, but there's no point.

This is wonderful. This is more than you can wrap your head around. This is more than you are set up to comprehend and understand.

And so in the midst of all of this confusion and running around and drama and comedy of errors between Manoah and his wife, underlying all of the details is this.

Israel, Manoah, Manoah's wife, can thank no one but God. They are clearly not smart enough, competent enough, or good enough to deserve any of this.

[20 : 03] No, in the midst of Israel's rebellion, in the midst of her inoculation against foreign-occupied, God comes in and saves them.

And so as we look at all these details and these stories, we see this. They are not smart enough or clever enough to figure things out on their own. The point of the story is not Samson.

The point of the story is not Manoah. The point of the story is not the angel or Manoah's wife. The point is this.

Israel may have forgotten God. God has not forgotten Israel. In the midst of rebellion and dysfunction and sin and confusion, God is still at work.

Doesn't mean that there aren't consequences for what Israel's done. It doesn't mean they're not going to suffer for their rebellion and mistakes.

[21 : 17] Doesn't mean that their disobedience doesn't hurt them, right? We've seen it. We've seen the sobering effects of sin. We saw it in the story of Jethro. As we've gone through the book of Judges, we have seen the warnings are many and the consequences are real.

And so I'm not saying this morning that sin doesn't matter. What I am saying is this. There is still hope. God never gives up on his people.

In fact, we already sang it this morning. Because of his great love, we are not overcome. That brings us back to our question.

What is our hope when it appears that the light has gone out? What is Israel's hope when she has forgotten even to cry out to God for hope and help?

And our hope is simply this. God does not give up on his people. God does not give up on us.

[22 : 37] Even if it means life support, God is still there. God does not give up on us. God does not give up on us. What is our hope when it appears that the light has gone out?

Our hope is that it only appears. In the midst of sin and apostasy and rebellion and confusion, the sun still rises.

The sun still rises. Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us and our sin if we love and follow and trust Jesus.

God still brings hope to hopeless situations. God still brings life to barren places.

You might look at your own life and think about your ongoing battle against sin, things that you have said and you can't take back.

[23 : 54] People you've hurt, addictions that you've entertained and coddled. And the Bible says this, if you are still alive, the story is not over.

If you are still alive, God is at work. If you're still alive, there is still hope. You might be a parent and look back at your numerous failures.

And this passage reminds us that God is more powerful than your mistakes. His arm is not too short to save.

Those things do not have the last word. You might look at the disappointments, perhaps betrayal, that you've experienced in your marriage and wonder if it's all over.

And the truth is this, God has not abandoned you. We might look at the church broadly and around the world filled with confusion and division and disagreement and error.

[25 : 27] God is still at work redeeming a people for himself. You might look, not at the church around the world, you might look at this particular church, Cheyenne Mountain, in the midst of our preferences and disagreements and failures and mistakes.

God is still using this church to bring his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

God's grace is greater than our sin. And so we're reminded of the promise from 1 Corinthians 2, verse 9.

But as it is written, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.

someone about a month ago who is not a Christian asked me this question.

[26 : 36] He said, what do you think is going to happen to our world in 10 years? And he was asking me in light of all the wild things that are happening in politics and finance, what's happening with artificial intelligence, what's happening with people being changed by their phones and technology and media.

And part of his question was like, are we even going to be here in 10 years? And what I told him was this. I said, as a Christian, I believe that God holds our world together.

And so I have sort of this inherent optimism that in the midst of all of these things, God has not given up on his world. And then I told him the other side of the coin, I said, it's not just that I have this great optimism, it's also this.

I'm confident that if God was not holding us together, you and I would not be having this conversation because we would have already crumbled. Left to ourselves, we would have already destroyed this world.

So the hope of Christians is the same hope we're reminded of in Hebrews chapter 1. God holds the world together by the word of his power. That we are not victims of chance and circumstance.

[27 : 54] Yes, things are bad in judges. Things are bad in this world. Hope never disappears. God never gives up on his world.

God's people may forget him. God never forgets his people. Christian, God has not given up on you.

That's what we're told in verse 19. Manoah offers this offering to the Lord to the one who works wonders.

The one who holds the world together. the one who has not forgotten his people. The one whose eyes are still on you when you're distracted.

The one whose love is for you when you're worried. The one who works wonders. Now this great hope is coming to Israel.

[29 : 09] They're oppressed by the Philan. Samson is the worst judge of all the judges. Samson is going to prove to be incredibly disappointing. Samson is ruled by his lusts and his desires.

Samson is a misogynist who's also incredibly violent. He has no self-control. He seems to disregard God's call on his life and the importance of being a Nazarite.

And so as we go on here, our hope is not going to be lifted up by Samson. Yes, he's going to be used by God. he is going to kill a lot of Philistines.

But we're also given a hint here that Samson is not enough. Note on verse 5 what we're told, he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

In other words, as God intervenes to save and rescue his people, this fallen and sinful man will not be enough.

[30 : 11] Yes, God has remembered Israel and they will need something and someone much greater than Samson.

And so Samson reminds us once again of our need for a true and faithful king. A king who can do what no human can do, which is to change the hearts of men.

Samson's birth and the angel's visit to his mother points us forward to another visit by an angel to another mother. You may be wondering why we read the Christmas story this morning from Matthew chapter 1 and that's the reason because Samson tells us there is something more that we need.

We're told in verse 5 here he's going to begin to save Israel. If you go back on verse 3 of your worship guide, what are we told about our Lord Jesus? verse 21, he is not going to begin.

She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. Israel needs something and someone greater than Samson.

[31 : 27] They will not have it until this son is born. Jesus will not begin to save them. He will save them.

He will not just start. He will also finish. That's our hope as Christians. Our hope is not in Samson. Our hope is in the one who truly and really does hold the world together. What is our hope when it appears that the lights have gone out?

Our hope is what the children's storybook Bible reminds us of, of God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love. Our hope is what we're reminded of in 2 Timothy 2 verse 15.

If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you that we don't rely on earthly leaders and rulers.

[32 : 38] That as they always disappoint and fall short, as they always only begin to save, we have great hope in your son and our savior, our Lord Jesus, who doesn't just begin, he also finishes.

We ask that you would remind us of that, that it would grow our hope and our faith and our confidence in you, that we would follow you with joy no matter how dark our world seems. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.