

His Mercy is More

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[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 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.

Now, this week 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 faithful and true 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 : 09] Over the last several weeks, we've been in the story of Samson. We're actually going to finish Samson's story this morning. And last week, we saw that Samson's actions finally caught up with him.

Samson thought that he could have blessing without holiness, and he could for a time. He could not forever. But remember, we also saw the very end last week, God's great grace.

The very last verse of our section was verse 22, which reminded us, but the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. So Samson has been taken by the Philistines.

His eyes have been gouged out, and God has not abandoned him. And so this week, we get to dig into that even more, and our question is simply this.

What does God do with the mistakes of his children? What does God do with our mistakes? How does he redeem them?

[2 : 11] So with that question that we turn now to God's Word, I invite you to turn with me to Judges 16, starting at verse 23. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone.

You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that God tells us, Proverbs chapter 30, every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

And so that's why we read now Judges chapter 16, starting at verse 23. Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their God and to rejoice.

And they said, Our God has given Samson, our enemy, into our hand. And when the people saw him, they praised their God. For they said, Our God has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us.

And when their hearts were merry, they said, Call Samson that he may entertain us. So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars.

[3 : 21] And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them. Now the house was full of men and women.

All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women who looked on while Samson entertained. Verse 28.

Then Samson called to the Lord and said, O Lord God, please remember me, and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.

And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines.

Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.

[4 : 27] Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtel in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel 20 years.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you again. We thank you for your word that you've given to instruct us and to guide us.

And we also thank you for your great mercy and grace, the mercy that you showed to Samson in the midst of his sin and his failure, and the mercy that you showed to us in the midst of ours.

And we ask that you would remind us again this morning of the precious truths of your gospel. You'd remind us and show us places where we desperately need your grace.

And even more, you'd encourage us that you meet us with your mercy in those very same places. Most of all, we ask that you would help us to see Jesus, that we would see how good and beautiful and loving and holy and majestic he is.

[5 : 38] And we ask all of these things in his name. Amen. Hopefully, you noticed as we started this story, the very end of Samson's life, that we have a problem straight up front.

Verses 23 and 24, Dagon is gloating over Yahweh. And of course, we should know, if you're familiar with the Old Testament, that God is zealous for his honor and his name.

Far from it that foreign gods and foreign nations should gloat over Israel and even more, claim that they have defeated the one true God.

And so we know right at the start of this story, right up front, that is not going to fly. Of course, God is going to vindicate his name. There's a sort of foreshadowing here as we see them praising their false God.

It is not simply, though, that they are just gloating. There is also a big Philistine party. So verse 23, you may have noticed, they came there to rejoice.

[6 : 45] Verse 24, they praised their God. Verse 25, their hearts are merry. Their hearts are merry, presumably not just with the victory that they've had over Samson and their hope that they are going to be free from him forever.

But when the Bible talks about people's hearts being merry, it often means that there's alcohol involved. The Philistines are having a huge party. And we can understand exactly why it is that they decide it's time to celebrate.

What do they say? In verse 24, they say, look, we took out Samson. He's the one who has been ravaging our country, who has killed so many of us.

We have had this man bothering us. He's been slaughtering us. Finally, we are free from him. And who, best of all, to feature at this party as the main entertainment, the main show.

You'll remember from last week that Samson now has a disability. His eyes were gouged out. And so because of that disability, he's had to have a career transition. Samson was a warrior.

[7 : 56] Now he has to moonlight as an entertainer. So they bring him out so they can laugh and watch this man who is now a shell of his former self.

What better time for the true God to show his glory than during the worship of the false God?

What better time for Yahweh to remind the nations who is in control than when the nations are gloating about their power and their victory?

And so this story, the end of Samson, is actually just very simple, very straightforward. Last week, we saw the gig was up, right? Samson's consequences had caught up with him.

He was captured. He was blinded. He broke the rules. He lost his strength. He forfeited the blessing. Last week should have been the end of the story, the end of the road for Samson.

[9 : 00] We'd almost expect, hey, that's the way it ends, and then maybe we can jump to the very end of this passage. Verse 31, his brothers and his family came and took him down. Except for one thing.

Verse 28, Samson prays to God, and what does he say? Strengthen me one more time.

Remember me one more time. God hears his prayer. He honors it.

What happens? Verse 29, everything comes crashing down. Why? Why? It didn't come down crashing because God needed Samson.

He didn't. It didn't come down crashing because Samson performed some sort of penance. It doesn't come crashing down because Samson performed some great deed to prove to God that this time he's really serious.

[10:11] No, Samson doesn't do any of those things. As we've seen in the book of Judges and in the story of Samson especially, it comes crashing down because of God's great mercy.

God's mercy to hard-hearted people, people like you and me. It doesn't simply come down because of his mercy, though.

It's also not the end of the Samson story because God is a God who honors his promises. God is a God who does exactly what he said he would do.

Now, this was a minor detail all the way back in Judges chapter 13, but when Samson's mother, Manoah's wife, gave birth to Samson, you may remember that God made a statement, a promise about him.

And he said this. This is Judges chapter 13, verse 7. The child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

[11:18] Samson destroys the Philistines because God is a God of great mercy. Samson destroys the Philistines because God always honors his word.

God is a God who keeps his promises. The point, brothers and sisters, is simply this. Wherever you are and whatever you have done, if you are still alive, your story is not over.

Wherever you are, whatever you've done, if you are still alive, all is not lost. God's grace is really still at work.

Now, I'm going to tell you some of the very same things I told you last time, the beginning of Judges chapter 16. I am not saying that sin does not have consequences. Samson really does get to taste the bitter fruit of his actions.

Samson's story really could have ended in a different and better way. What I am saying is this, is that Psalm 27 is true. I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

[12:49] I'm not saying that we should be complacent about sin or excuse it or minimize it. What I am saying is this, is that Psalm 23 is true. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

I'm not saying that we won't or already do carry grief over the choices that we've made. What I am saying is that Psalm 23 is also true when it says, I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

I am saying that God's promise in Psalm 125 is true for us. Those who are like Mount Zion, those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

No matter where you are, no matter what you've done, if you are still alive, God is still at work.

Your story is not over. Christian, no matter what mistakes you have made, you still have a future.

[14:08] No matter what mistakes you have made, no matter how you've failed, no matter where you've sinned, it is not the end.

It's not the end for Samson. It's not the end for you. Now, much of what I just said is, in many ways, review of things we've talked about in Judges over and over again, right?

God's mercy to his people time after time. God's mercy to Samson time after time. This passage, this end story pushes us a step further. It doesn't just show us that God is merciful.

We've seen that in Judges before. The new twist in this one is it actually shows us how God is merciful. How is it that God takes our mistakes and our failures and turns them for good?

Remember, we talked in Judges chapter 14 that there's this broader pattern of the way that God works in the world. We saw it at the very end of the book of Genesis when Joseph confronts his brothers and he says, look, what you meant for evil, God meant for good.

[15:18] That God takes the things that are broken and twisted and sinful and messed up, and he uses them to actually, those very same things, bring his purposes to bear in the world.

God's mercy means that he takes our sin, he finds a way to use it for good. God takes Samson's stupidity, he takes Samson's pride, he takes Samson's lust, and he uses it to accomplish Samson's greatest triumph.

Verse 30 tells us this. It says, look, Samson killed more in his death than in his life. This was actually Samson's greatest accomplishment.

Now, it's not just that he killed the greatest number of people, although that is significant, but there's something different about this event that we haven't seen before. Before, Samson has just been

going around killing random Philistines.

Here, however, he has a strategic target that he's never been able to focus on before. Samson is able to eliminate some high-value targets.

[16:34] Look with me, verse 27. All the lords of the Philistines were there. And who gets taken out?

Verse 30. The house fell upon the lords. In other words, Samson, despite himself, has been able somehow to infiltrate the Philistines' top command and control group.

Samson, in this, whether he meant to or not, takes out the Philistines' sea too. He takes out their joint chiefs of staff. This is the sort of thing that brings a people to its knees.

Right? There's a reason that they say, strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter. Yes, this is a fun story about Samson getting his revenge and being strong enough to push over the pillars so that the temple comes crashing down.

And let's not miss the strategic importance of what happens. Samson wipes out all the Philistine leadership.

[17:45] The promise from Judges chapter 13 was that he was going to begin to free his people from the Philistines. What a fantastic way to do that.

How did Samson penetrate this inner group? How was Samson able to circumvent all the measures that would have been put in place to protect the highest level of leadership of Israel's enemies?

It was not because of Samson's cunning. It was not because Samson had superior intelligence that he was able to put together and he used the smarts that he had gathered throughout his entire life to make it into this inner circle.

No, Samson accomplishes this through his stupidity. Samson infiltrates command and control because he is blind and he has lost his strength.

It is not a bug. It is a feature. God uses Samson's sin for his greatest feat.

[19:03] How does God redeem the mistakes of his children? What does God do with our mistakes? What does God do with my mistakes and with yours?

God in his power and for his glory turns them to good. That, brothers and sisters, is how redemption works.

The point here is not just that Samson's story is not over.

And the point is not simply that your story isn't over. The point is that the story isn't over because God takes our failure and he turns it to success.

God redeems our mistakes and he uses them for good. Many of you know that I grew up in a Presbyterian church, a Presbyterian church in the same denomination as this Presbyterian church.

[20:14] And I grew up right outside Washington, D.C. in southern Maryland. And when I went to this church growing up that was in northern Virginia, right outside the city, there was a man of that church.

And his name was John Alba. And I taught John Alba's kids in children's church at one point. John was the chief of staff for a U.S. congressman. So John was a very powerful person who had a lot of access to influence and resources.

And in the early 2000s, he ran into some trouble. He got caught taking bribes. So John was peddling influence on Capitol Hill in exchange for certain types of gifts.

This ended up making national news. He was caught up in a bigger scandal. Some of you may remember the name Jack Abramoff. This is sort of related to all of that. This was around maybe 2003 to 2006.

And so this man, John, who went to my church, was accepting gifts that he should not have accepted. And then he was in exchange for that offering influence and access to people. And so you can imagine the shame of having your name end up in the New York Times of all places for your activities on Capitol Hill.

[21:23] John ended up losing his marriage. And he also lost his career. He had to go through a long court sentencing.

Long story short, he ended up in all places you can imagine in a halfway house in a city called Colorado Springs. One might say at that point that the hair of his head began to grow back.

This is a low point of John's life. Again, I said he lost his marriage. He lost his career. He pretty much lost everything that was in his life. He got out of this halfway house. Eventually, it was part of his sentencing.

I think he had a plea deal that ended up putting him there. And after he got out, he had this new understanding of what it meant to live life as a criminal, to be coming out of prison trying to figure out how to turn things right side up.

Having all these skills that he developed on Capitol Hill and through his life, he ended up starting a window cleaning business. And what this window cleaning business did was it was hire people coming out of prison who had access, difficult time getting jobs.

[22 : 29] And so this was a place for them to onboard, to be able to make money, to be able to have work. John then wrote a book on the value of work, and he would run seminars for convicts coming out of prison on the importance of being involved in business and earning a living for themselves.

He did that for a number of years, helping people like himself recover from crimes in their life. Very recently, when the war started in Ukraine, John ended up pivoting.

He became a missionary building houses for folks who have lost them in that country and distributing food. And now I get emails, and I think Scott Sage gets emails from John Alba saying, here's what's happening in the country of Ukraine.

I tell you that story to say this. God used John's greatest failure, God used John's experience being sentenced as a criminal and ending up in a halfway house, having lost his family and his career, and he turned it, and he used it for good, that he could minister to others in the same situation. John has more impact today than he ever had as the chief of staff for a U.S. congressman. John has more joy than he ever had working on Capitol Hill.

[23 : 54] And if you were to talk to John, he would tell you, he cares for power and money no more. John has more impact now than he ever had.

How does God redeem his children's failures? Brothers and sisters, the same is true of us.

God takes a woman who wrestles with sexual addiction, and he uses her experience to help lead other women to sobriety.

God takes a man who finally faces his anger, and he leads him to new places of humility and service. God took the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Paul's legalism and obsession with the law, and he does what?

He uses that so that Paul can become the greatest apostle and explainer of God's grace. God is the master of taking what is meant for evil and using it for good.

[25 : 15] If you've been with us for a while, you remember that for about two years we were in the Gospel of Mark, and as we were coming near to the end of the Gospel of Mark, I had this conversation with one of my friends from seminary, and he asked me this really piercing question.

He said, Has preaching Mark changed you? I thought, wow, that's a really good question. I'm going to have to think about that. I thought of a number of things.

I thought, man, I've really changed in this way, and the way I think is different. But I think about that even now, and I would tell you that the story of Samson has changed me more than any other story in Judges.

The story of Samson has caused me to reconsider how it is that God works in the world and who it is he chooses to use. That there are people we look at and we think, man, that person's life seems off the rails in so many different ways, and yet I don't really know what God is doing there.

I don't know how God might be using that person for his glory. I don't know where that person may be with the Lord and what purposes God is working out. God often surprises us with the people he chooses to use.

[26 : 26] And when we hear that a lot, people often say that, oh, God chooses the youngest instead of the oldest. He chooses the weak instead of the strong, and that's true. What we see in Samson is a little bit of a different angle on that.

God uses an absolute knucklehead. God uses someone who gets almost everything wrong, and yet this is the leader of his people.

This is the one he chooses to take out the Philistines. God really does use and choose people like Samson.

God really does use and choose people who are rough around the edges. God really does use people like you and me. I'm not saying sin doesn't matter.

I'm not saying we don't hold people accountable for their actions and their words. What I am saying is this, wow. God uses flawed, selfish, unlikely people.

[27 : 31] He uses people who aren't finished. You notice at the very end of his life, Samson is still selfish. What does he say in verse 28?

I want to crush the Philistines. He doesn't say, I want to crush the Philistines because of God's honor and his glory, right? He's not come to this perfected state where he finally understands everything he cared about before doesn't matter.

No, Samson says, hey, God, would you help me? Because I really want revenge. I want to get these Philistines. And I want revenge not for what they've done to your people. I just want revenge for my eyes. Just really mad about that.

Like Samson makes it to the end of his life and there's still so much work to be done. Samson comes to the end. He still needs to grow in so many ways.

Samson gets to the end. He is still selfish and self-centered. And God uses him. Samson's failure doesn't have the last word.

[28 : 38] Why is God's grace that big? How is God able to take our failure and turn it to success? It is because, and it is only because of Jesus.

Samson does not receive what he deserved because Jesus received what he didn't deserve. God shows great grace to broken and selfish and imperfect people because Jesus paid the price.

God uses people who are deeply flawed, who even at the end of their lives are still selfish and self-centered. God's grace really is that big.

Remember, the book of Judges is about many things. One of the things it's about is God's mercy to hard-hearted people, people like you and me.

It is true that his mercy really is more. And so that's why we're going to sing, praise the Lord, his mercy is more. Stronger than darkness, new every morn.

[29 : 55] Our sins, they are many. His mercy is more. True for Samson. True for us. Let's pray. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you that your mercy is more than we can understand or fathom or imagine.

We thank you for your promise in 1 Corinthians 2 that what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him. We thank you that you're faithful to us even when we lose the plot.

We ask that you would remind us of your mercy and your love and it would grow our obedience and trust and praise to you. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.