

Comfortable with Oppression

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is 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 are 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.
- This morning, we're continuing our series in the book of Judges. I will note, if you've been with us for a while, you know that we alternate between preaching books from the Old Testament and books from the New Testament. Judges is 21 chapters, and we're now in chapter 15, which means we're getting close to the end.
- So I'll just tell you, when we end Judges, we are then going to turn to the New Testament, and we're going to jump into the book of Romans. But we're not in Romans yet. We're in Judges.
- [1 : 0 8] And you'll remember that Judges is about a number of things. It is 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.
- And 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.
- This week, we're picking up again the story of Samson, which I believe is the longest story in the book. And last week, we saw that while Samson is a mess, God is still at work.
- Samson continues to be a mess this week, but we'll turn from just Samson's individual problems to the problems of the nation of Israel, and we'll see close up the danger of compromise.
- With that, I invite you to turn with me to Judges chapter 15. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide.
- [2 : 1 6] No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold. And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.
- And so that's why we read now Judges chapter 15, starting at verse 1. After some days at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat.
- And he said, I will go into my wife in the chamber. But her father would not allow him to go in. And her father said, I really thought that you utterly hated her.
- So I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead. And Samson said to them, this time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm.

So Samson went and caught 300 foxes and took torches. And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines.

[3 : 26] And set fire to the stacked grain and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards. Then the Philistines said, who has done this?

And they said, Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

And Samson said to them, if this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you. And after that, I will quit. And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow.

And he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Edom. Verse 9. Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi.

And the men of Judah said, why have you come up against us? They said, we have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us. Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Edom and said to Samson, do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us?

[4 : 33] What then is this that you have done to us? And he said to them, as they did to me, so I have done to them. Verse 12.

And they said to him, we have come down to bind you that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines. And Samson said to them, swear to me that you will not attack me yourselves.

They said to him, no, we will only bind you and give you into their hands. We will surely not kill you. So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the spirit of the Lord rushed upon him and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire.

And his bonds melted off his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey and put out his hand and took it. And with it he struck one thousand men.

[5 : 30] And Samson said, with the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps. With the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men. As soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand.

And that place was called Ramath-Lehi. Verse 18. And he was very thirsty and he called upon the Lord and said, You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant.

And shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised? And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi and water came out from it.

And when he drank, his spirit returned and he revived. Therefore the name of it was called En-Hakor. It is at Lehi to this day. And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

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 again that you've given us your word, that you instruct us, that you teach us, that you lead us and guide us.

[6 : 45] And we ask that you would do that this morning. That you would use this passage in the book of Judges to warn us and to encourage us. Most of all, you would use it to show us Jesus.

That we would see again that his grace is greater than our sin. That you're faithful even when we're faithless. We ask that we would see him as more beautiful and glorious and loving and powerful than we ever knew.

And we ask all of these things in his mighty name. Amen. Like a good drama, like any good drama, the author of Judges left us last time with a real cliffhanger.

If you remember the end of chapter 14, the very last verse, we were told this, Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his best man.

Okay, not just someone else. It's not just that there's another man with Samson's wife. No, we're told it is his best man. The reason being, the verse before, Samson leaves in anger.

[7 : 58] You may remember that he had this competition with the people of his wife and they had this bet, this riddle they were supposed to solve and they threatened his wife. So she revealed the answer to the riddle.

And so Samson is filled with rage, goes to town on the Philistines. What is very clear though, is that he and this woman are in fact married.

She is not his girlfriend. She is not his fiancée. She is his wife. And so his father-in-law has no business doing what he did.

He is completely out of line, having handed her off to another man. That sets the stage for our drama here in chapter 15. Verse two, the father makes this attempt at appeasement saying, hey, you can have another one of my daughters.

And you know what? Actually, you're gonna get a good deal out of this. She's actually more attractive than the woman that you married. So why don't we do that? And we can just call it good. Samson is not interested in appeasement.

[9 : 00] He actually sees an opportunity for revenge. And that's in fact exactly what he does in verses four and five. We might call this a disproportionate response.

Samson has been offended by one man. He goes after all the Philistines. There has been a private offense. Samson goes on a public campaign.

He picks these 300 foxes. He splits them into 150 pairs. And then he goes and destroys the Philistines' food supply.

I have a problem with one man. There's tension in one family. You know what? Let's wreck all men. Let's wreck every family. That seems like a really kind of proportion, measured, reasonable response.

Now, it's easy for us to focus here on the grain that he destroys. They're not going to have anything to eat. It's actually even worse than that. Note in verse five, he's not just going after the grain.

[10 : 04] He goes after the olive orchards. And if you're familiar with the Mediterranean, you know that olive orchards are a big deal. Not only are they a big deal, they take generations to build up and cultivate.

Many olive trees survive for 500 years. There's at least one olive tree that's known to have been in existence for 1,500 years.

Samson is out for revenge. Samson is out of control. Samson chooses a response that is wildly out of proportion to what has happened here.

To understand the severity of what Samson's doing, I'll remind you of something I told you a couple years ago. If you're familiar with Colorado gun laws, you know that to use lethal force, there needs to be a lethal threat.

In other words, if you are stealing my car, I'm not allowed to shoot you because you're not threatening my life. Okay, so I can end up in trouble for that, except in one circumstance.

[11 : 13] Colorado law says you can use lethal force if someone is attempting arson. Why? Because it's so destructive, right?

Because the threat of someone's life, lethal threat is downstream of arson. This is something, right, that could burn up our state. And so it makes sense that this would be something considered so serious that that's the one exception where you're allowed to use lethal force.

That helps us understand the severity of the Philistines' response here. To wreck someone's food supply, to destroy all their grain and all their olive trees, is an absolute declaration of war.

Samson has a problem with one family. He declares war on the entire nation. We see once again, Samson is a mess.

Now, I don't mean to excuse the Philistines' behavior here, but understanding that, their response begins to make sense. Verse six, they say, look, you're gonna burn our fields. You're gonna burn our olive trees.

[12 : 25] Guess what? We'll burn your wife and your father-in-law. Even worse than that, we're gonna take a step further. We are going to launch an offensive against Judah.

You come after our nation. You come after our people. We'll come after your nation. We'll come after your people. What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

Fair is fair. And it's at this point, we begin to see the main theme, the main problem of this chapter.

Verse 10, they come against the people of Judah. And the men of Judah say, hey, what's going on? Why are you here? Philistines tell them there's one simple reason that we're here, Samson.

Now, at this point, if we were earlier in the book of Judges, we would expect one thing to happen. What should Judah do at this point? Oh, the Philistines, who are our oppressors, are coming up against us to attack us.

[13 : 30] There's only one logical answer. Let's muster our troops. Right? It is time for war. It is time for us to see God at work once again and to throw off the shackles of our oppressors.

That's what we should expect Israel to do. What should we expect Samson to do? If he was like any other judge, he would show some leadership at this point. If you haven't noticed, Samson is not exactly a team player.

All the other judges were. Samson should be saying, I will lead you, right? I am the strong man. I'm even stronger than Jethro. You thought Jethro was great at war?

Wait till you see what I can do. Israel should be uniting together to fight the Philistines. And they do the exact opposite.

Oh, you're here because of Samson? I think we can clear this up. Why don't you take him? He's our judge.

[14 : 36] God raised him up. He has this incredible birth story. But you know what? None of that really matters. Things are good as they are. How about we just hand him over? You know, we say, it's all good.

We wash our hands of this. Once again, we have a sad and crushing disappointment. Once again, God's people are worse than ever before.

Israel is completely upside down. God's people should be rallying behind their judge and fighting their enemies.

Instead, they betray their judge and they're sympathetic to their enemies. Notice their words in verse 11.

Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? That's what's stated. What's unstated is this. And that's the way we like it.

[15 : 43] Don't you know these people are the ones in charge? Why, Samson? Why would you disrupt the status quo?

If you oppose your leader and you befriend your enemies, something is very wrong. Judah is not just sick.

She is really sick. Things are not just twisted in Israel. They are completely upside down. This helps us understand, by the way, what was happening in Judges chapter 14.

Remember when Samson goes out to find a Philistine wife, his parents are so upset and distraught over it. And we had that key verse, verse 4, where it said this, his father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.

Why is the Lord seeking an opportunity against the Philistines? Because Judah isn't. Why does God need to use Samson to stir the pot?

[16 : 55] Because God's people are complacent with their oppression. Israel is okay being ruled by the Philistines.

Israel is happy for a pagan nation to be in control. Israel is content to be ruled by sin.

So the point is this. Things have gotten so bad that God's people now embrace oppression.

Things are so bad that they see the wrong leaders as the right leaders. Things are so upside down that they betray their very own judge.

Remember also what was weird about chapter 14. This was the first time Israel did not cry out for God's help. What once they saw as wrong, they now see as normal.

[18 : 01] And in fact, as the book of Judges goes on, it's going to continue to go downhill. They will embrace the pagan culture more and more. Judah has made a devastating compromise with sin.

This brings out another element of the book of Judges, which is that we see the way in which evil works, the way that sin operates. Satan loves to chip away at God's people generation by generation.

Compromise in one generation becomes apostasy in the next. Laziness in one generation turns into abandonment in the following one.

Satan is willing to play the long game, and at least for a moment, it seems to be working. Remember, Judges 2, verse 19, things got worse every generation.

Every cycle, God's people go further down. There is compounding compromise that's happened in Israel.

[19 : 14] Albert Einstein once said, the most powerful force in the universe is compound interest. We might say another one of the most powerful forces in the world is compound compromise.

Israel has given in over and over. Israel is becoming worse and worse. So our passage reminds us of one of the great tensions of the Christian life, tension we already read about, Scott read to us from John chapter 17.

And the tension is this, that God calls his people to be in the world, not of the world. That's what Jesus prays for in John chapter 17.

This is on page 3 of your worship guide. In verse 11, he just says it straightforward. They are in the world. He's referring to his people. He's referring to the church. And then he gives this prayer in verses 15 and 16.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Judges 15 challenges us to examine where are we in the world and of the world.

[20 : 35] Where have we made compromises with sin? Where have the twisted parts of our culture become normal to us?

You'll see this on page 9 of your worship guide. It's easy for us to look at another culture and see how a member of God's people has sold out to the surrounding culture.

We're more unwilling to look hard at where we might have done so. Brings us back to one of the major themes of the book of Judges, the need for constant renewal and revival among God's people.

It is our default setting as we walk in this world to assume that what's normal for the culture must be normal for us.

And so we forget what it means the water around us that we swim in. So we give in to self-expression and radical individualism, which leads us to rampant divorce and isolation.

[21 : 50] We assume that the culture's level of consumption is good and right. We believe the good life is made up of materialism and sex and status.

We're desensitized to the sexual images that assault us on social media and in line at the grocery store. We adopt the tone and anger of the political discourse around us as normal for Christians to take part in.

Where have we become comfortable with the twisted values of the world around us? Where do we say don't you know that the Philistines are rulers over us and that's the way we like it?

Thankfully, Israel's betrayal does not have the last word and thankfully, God's grace really is greater than our sin.

The story does not end with Samson being defeated by the Philistines. In fact, quite the opposite. The 3,000 men who should be marching against the Philistines come instead to Samson.

[23 : 23] This is verse 11 and they bind the sacrifice that they're offering for the sake of peace. They don't just bind him, by the way.

It's not simply ropes. They are new ropes. This is verse 13. And new ropes are going to be even tighter than old ropes. They're going to be even harder to pull apart.

They know Samson's strong solution make his bonds even stronger. We're not going to get tricked or fooled. We're not going to give him or bind him in something that he can easily break out of.

No, we're going to make sure Samson, for once, is actually under control. And God once again pours out his spirit on his judge to deliver his people.

Verse 14 or 13. No, it's verse 14. The ropes that were on his hands became as flax that has caught fire and his bonds melted off his hands.

[24 : 28] Why? Because the spirit of the Lord rushed upon him. God performs another miracle on behalf of Samson.

God saves his judge once again. God keeps his promise. He will begin to save his people from the Philistines.

What does Samson do? he finds a jawbone and he wrecks the Philistines. Verse 15.

With it he struck one thousand men. Yes. Israel has turned upside down.

And yes, Israel opposes their leader and cozies up to their friends. And God remains faithful to his people.

[25 : 36] God continues to keep his promise. God continues to rescue. God uses Israel's compromise and he uses Samson's anger to accomplish his purpose.

No matter what, God still prevails. No matter what, God is still in control. No matter what, he remains faithful to his people and his promises.

God rescues his people even when they don't deserve it. Christian, God rescues you even when you don't deserve it, which is every time.

God's grace really is greater than our sin. God even after this rescue, Samson's behavior leaves much to be desired.

Verse 16 and 17, we see Samson's version of a touchdown dance. And you may have noticed verse 16 and 17, he writes a poem and this poem is exclusively focused on how great God is in his salvation for his people.

[27 : 10] Right? You see that? No. Verse 17, with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men. There's no mention of the Lord.

Samson, even as God shows him great mercy and grace, is completely full of himself. Verse 17, we find out that Samson is the one who invented the process of dropping the mic.

Except instead of dropping the mic, he tosses the jawbone on the ground. Y'all see that? I killed a thousand Philistines, I got a poem. What? Look at Samson now.

Then, verse 18, he talks to God with this little passive aggressive statement. Shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?

Just in case it's not clear, that is not the way you speak to the living God. God has no response, just provision.

[28 : 22] Verse 19, he gives Samson water. And then in verse 20, God drops the mic. and he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines 20 years.

What does it say at the end of all the other judges' reigns? It says the people had peace for X number of years. Not so here.

The Philistines are rulers over them. The Philistines continue to be rulers over them. Samson's work as a judge is compromised and incomplete.

Remember from chapter 14, he will begin to save his people from the Philistines. Samson is the worst judge.

As we come to the end of the book of Judges, we see two things that are going to stand out over and over again, and they're this. Israel is dripping with compromise, but God is dripping with grace.

[29 : 46] Israel has completely lost her way. God saves her again and again. God will do that.

The tension of the book of Judges is this. How can God do that over and over? Why is he gracious to his people who have lost the way?

Why does he give water to judges who praise themselves rather than him? God can God be just and merciful?

Of course, the answer comes in our Lord Jesus. God is able to show us mercy when we lose the plot because he showed judgment to Jesus when he was on the cross.

God is able to be present with his people in their failure and their mess because he forsake his one and only son.

[30 : 57] God's grace is greater than our sin because Jesus' sacrifice paid the price. We have a great and greater judge.

Jesus is the reason that God can show his people grace in the midst of failure. Jesus is the reason that if we lose the plot, God is still at work.

We need a faithful and true king. We need a king who can do what no human can do which is to change the hearts of men.

Samson is a failure. He'll never be the one we can rely on. Jesus, the king, we actually need.

So that's why we started this sermon with this. Great is thy faithfulness, O God my father. There is no shadow of turning with thee.

[32 : 16] God's grace is greater than our sin. 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 you are merciful and gracious to us.

Even when we live Samson lives, even when we lose the plot, even when we compromise with the world around us, that you don't give up. We ask that you would remind us of that truth again, that you would drive it deep into our hearts, that it would change our lives, our minds, our affections.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I invite you to stand for our