

Thoughts From Other Minds:

Lesson Three is that God always remains committed to His covenant promises. ... This explains what God was doing ... Through these amazing incidents of personal victory, God was holding up a mirror to His rebellious people, Israel, of what they could yet be, if only they would turn to Him. He had not deserted them. It was they who were ignoring Him....

The amazing thing is that in spite of this He never lets them down and never lets them go. Even when they want to settle down and merge with the Philistines, the Holy Spirit is always seeking a showdown, a confrontation. That is why He raises up a Samson. He will do the same in our lives whenever we compromise. The unbreakable nature of His covenant-love is that He will never leave us to our own sinful devices, however much we may rebel against Him. The love of God is literally the strongest force, the greatest power, in all the world.

Lesson Four is that this God remains constantly accessible and available to all who pray, whatever their background or situation, according to their need. He is always ready and willing to demonstrate His sovereign power for the renewal and refreshment of all those who call out to Him in faith. That is the meaning of the miraculous provision of the spring at En Hakkore.

... All too often Christian people allow their past failures to stand between them and the enjoyment of God's present provision. Certainly, unresolved conflicts with God have first to be confessed and repented of, where there is sin, so that there may be true forgiveness and reconciliation. But when the matter has been properly dealt with, it is no mark of spiritual maturity to keep resurrecting it. We are not compelled to keep reliving the lessons of history if we truly learn from them.

We should learn from Samson never to think that we predict what God can, will, or should do. Though we may question how God could use a man like Samson, that does not alter the very clear fact that He did! In fact, we find Him constantly using what many Christians would describe as "the most unlikely people" not only in the pages of Scripture, but also in the contemporary church. Your church has many of them. You are probably one yourself! There will always be an inscrutability to God's ways which we shall never be able fully to understand. The great thing is that we don't need to have it all worked out in order to ask.

When Samson was in need, he cried out to God. That is faith! And in response he did not receive an ethical lecture; he got the drink of water he desperately needed. ... God ... exactly matches the colors of His grace to the spectrum of our human need. In that confidence, we can afford to leave the insoluble mysteries we shall never be able to resolve with God, and instead concentrate our spiritual energies on the things we do know and can be absolutely sure about—the commitment of the covenant Lord to His people, in unfailing love, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to empower us in His service.

David Jackman, *Judges/Ruth*, pp. 232-234.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

24 July 2016

Sermon: "Samson – continuing the beginning of salvation" (text: Judges 15:1-20)

Scripture: Judges 15:1-20

Sermon Notes

Introduction: We continue our studies in Judges with our third study in Samson's life and works. We have seen that like Israel, the young Samson did what was right in his own eyes; he had been down to Timnah and had seen a Philistine woman, and wanted her for his wife; she was right in his eyes (14:3, 7).

1. God's people—made separate

Thinking about Samson's marriage last Lord's Day we remembered the Bible's teaching that Christians are not to be 'unequally yoked' with unbelievers. Under the Old Covenant the Law said (Deut 22:10) 'you shall not plough with an ox and a donkey together'; likewise, believers and unbelievers are not to be yoked together.

They are as different as righteousness and lawlessness, as light and darkness, as Christ and Satan, as God and idols (2 Cor 6:14) – and so it is impossible for those who believe in the Lord Jesus to be yoked together with unbelievers in close personal or business relationships without disharmony or compromise of our faith.

Samson's marriage also reminds us that we are to be separated from 'the world' - not the physical world (and so this is not the separation of isolation) but 'the world' of people who are ruled by Satan and are his kingdom; he is 'the ruler of this world' (Jn 12:31, 14:30, 16:11); the god of his world (2 Cor 4:4).

He has 'blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ'; when we were unbelievers Satan was our god, and he had blinded our minds to keep us from seeing the light of the gospel; we were 'dead in the trespasses and sins in which you walked' (Eph 2:1-2)

Often unbelievers, concerned about their prospect for eternity, resolve to turn over a new leaf and do good and be good—but we can never be saved by our good works. Only the gospel, believed and believed in, can save us from our sins.

Yet blinded to the gospel, dead in our sins, what we need is a miracle, like Jesus did, only on our souls; if we are believers, then God has done this for us (2 Cor 4:6; Eph 2:4-5, 8-10). So we are saved not by our good works, but for good works.

God has 'delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son' (Col 1:13) - and so we are to separate ourselves from our old kingdom, 'the world' and live as citizens of Christ's kingdom. This is more difficult than 'unequal yoke' separation, for it is of the heart (1 Jn 2:15-16).

This is 'the world', stripped of its veneer of respectability: 'the desires of the flesh' (from our fallen sinful nature within) 'the desires of our eyes' (from the things

outside us, covetous desires); the pride of life, in our possessions. So friendship with the world is spiritual adultery and enmity with God (Jms 4:4).

2. God's people—kept separate

What has this to do with Samson? In his day the Philistines ruled Israel; the Lord had punished them for their idolatry by giving them into their hand forty years—but they were comfortable with them as their rulers (Jdgs 15:11). But God had made them his kingdom, so he could fulfil his promised salvation through them (Gen 3:15).

God had placed enmity between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman (unbelievers and believers, Philistines and Israelites). The Philistines represented 'the world'; instead enmity the Israelites were in danger of being absorbed by them; so to prevent this the Lord was working to separate his people.

In the previous chapter we saw the Philistines persuading Samson's wife to betray him, and how when he found out what they had done, the Spirit of the Lord rushed on him and he did justice for himself by going to Ashkelon and killing thirty men to give their clothes to those who had told the riddle.

Samson, having got over his anger at his wife, went to visit her, only to discover that her father had given her to his best man. Wronged, he blames the Philistines, and sets fire to their wheat harvest and olives. But they then burn his wife and her father—and so he avenges the wrong, intending to quit the quarrel afterwards.

But the Philistines invade Judah to capture him—and so he submits to the men of Judah, who bind him with new ropes and hand him over to the Philistines. But the Spirit of the Lord rushes on him, and he kills 1000 of them with the jawbone of a donkey. What are we to make of this?

1. it was the Lord's doing; his providence prevented Samson from quitting until he had defeated the Philistines; this was 'a great salvation' (v. 18), him and his people saved from the Philistines, with him accepted as a judge in Israel (v. 20). He continued beginning to save Israel by separating them from the ungodly.

2. it reveals Samson as a man of faith. He calls himself 'a servant' of the Lord, and his salvation a gift from the Lord; he prayed for salvation from thirst (v. 18); some find fault with his prayer, but the Lord answered it.

3. it points us to a greater victory and a greater salvation—the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ; the echo of Samson's salvation in Ps 110 confirms this. This psalm is about Jesus; he said so (Matt 22:41-46—cf. also Heb 5:6, 10, 6:20); so he is the one who will 'shatter kings on the day of his wrath etc.' (Ps 110:5-7).

This is the Jesus of 1 Jn 3:8, of 2 Thess 1:7-8, of Rev 19:11-15. May this fearful prospect strengthen our resolve to be to be sure that we know that we have been saved by grace alone through faith alone by Christ alone, and help us to be separate from 'the world' unto him, so what when he treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God we may be safe from that wrath because he bore it for us on the cross.

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why might God have told his Old Covenant people not to plough with an ox and a donkey together? (Deut 22:10) Does this cast any light on the apostle Paul's teaching that Christians are not to be unequally yoked? (2 Cor 6:14).
2. Why does the scriptural teaching about 'the world' mean that it is impossible for us to be saved by any 'good works' that we might do?
3. Why do we need a miracle to 'see' the gospel as the answer to our need (cf. 2 Cor 4:4) and be alive to God? (cf. Eph 2:1-5). How can we know if God has worked this miracle for us? If not, what then? (cf. Mk 10:46-52)
4. Read and reflect upon 1 John 2:15-16 and James 4:4. Why is friendship with the world spiritual adultery and enmity with God?
5. How does this teaching about separation from the world help us make sense of Judges 15? Who is driving the action? What is he doing?
6. Read and reflect upon Psalm 110:5-7, and its possible connection to Samson; and then 1 Jn 3:8, 2 Thess 1:7-8, Rev 19:11-15. What practical use ought we make of this fearful prospect? How can we be saved from wrath in that day?