

Samson: Birth and Work

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[0:00] Well, good evening, folks. It is great to see you. Thank you so much for coming out today. What a joyous day. I've loved it. Thank you so much for your encouragement.

And the fact that you're here this evening, I know today's been a long day as well. It's going to be really good. I have really enjoyed getting into the life of Samson this week.

We're going to be looking at Samson this Sunday evening and next Sunday evening as we find him in Judges 13. You might want to turn there now and grab a Bible. This fascinating character. And it's been a real joy to walk with him this week and to think about Samson, the saviour, as we meet him in the book of Judges.

So what we're going to do, just to mix things up a little bit, is we are going to have a five-minute introduction to Samson. I'm just going to take us through some of the big things to look for, particularly as we come to the reading.

We're going to read chapters 13, 14 and 15 together. And then we're going to have a song and then we're going to come back for the rest of the sermon. Does that sound okay?

[1:09] Okay, Judges 13, that's where we are. But why don't we pray just as we come to God's words together now. Forever you are faithful.

Forever you are strong. Forever you are with us forever. Thank you, Father, that there is no shadow of change with you. And it's to you we look this evening.

And Father, we ask by your Holy Spirit you would come. And Lord, you would work in our midst. Father, that as your word is preached this evening. Father, that your voice would be heard. And most of all, Lord, you would lift our eyes to the greatness of your Son, Jesus Christ.

In whose name we pray. Amen. So I wonder when was the last time you got really excited about a birth. So in our household at the minute, our one-year-old daughter, Grace, her favorite cuddly toy is her panda.

She absolutely loves her panda. So you can imagine when we heard news of a pregnancy. Does anyone know who this is out of interest?

[2:16] It's Chan Chan who looked up. So when you heard that she was pregnant, you can imagine the excitement in our family. Sadly, the rumors were going around that she was going to have some cubs later in the year. Fascinated were our girls.

And this was a story, I don't know if you remember when it came out. It was a story that captured the hearts of our nation. Because it's something we'd been hoping for for a very long time.

I think I tweeted pandemonium. And it got a few likes. So the pandas. We were interested in the pandas. We were longing for this day to happen. We were longing for these births or births to happen.

And then it was finally announced that it wasn't going to happen. And I had to break the news to our little girls. It's not going to happen. Well, here we are in Judges 13 this evening.

And I want us to transition from a nation, from a people longing for a birth to happen that didn't happen. So here we are in Judges 13.

[3:26] And as the readers of the book up until this point, we've been accustomed to this cycle that we've seen in Judges. This cycle that's been ongoing throughout the book.

Step 1 of the cycle, the people sin against God. The people turn away from their Creator and their Redeemer. They turn away from the Lord. Step 2, slavery.

God judges the people and He delivers them into the hands of their enemies. Step 3, the people say sorry. They cry out to God. God, would you have mercy on us? God, deliver us.

And God in His grace, He hears the cry of a people who have absolutely no right to His ear. And God, step 4, saves them.

People saved. God raises up a judge who acts to save the people. Step 5, silence or rest. God gives His people rest through this judge.

[4 : 22] Well, Judges 13, we kind of have it again. And I'm thinking as I'm reading this through this week, oh, here we go again. Here we go again. We've seen this pattern before. First one, the people of Israel, looking at the screen, people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

So they sin. We've seen it before. Seen it before. Sin. God delivers them into the hands of the Philistines. For 40 years, do you notice that in the text? 40 years, that's a long time.

Long time for these people to be in captivity. Slavery. And what are we expecting next as we read this narrative? This is where I'm looking for a bit of interaction here.

What are we expecting next? Third step. Sorry. We're expecting the people at this point to cry out to God, are we not?

This is what we've seen in the cycle. People to cry out to God. God, would you save us? God, would you have mercy on us? God, would you deliver us from the hands of our enemies? But here's the question. Do you see, do we see any crying as we come to chapter 13?

[5 : 27] There's no cry. Why? Well, you see, it's not just a repeating cycle that we've noticed that we've journeyed through judges. It's a downward cycle. And I think the author is telling us here that things have got so bad in Israel that the people have actually grown accustomed to a life of slavery.

And they are blind to seeing the folly of their ways because if they saw the folly of their ways, they would turn back to God and cry out to him and he would save them. But these people aren't bothered about the situation as we step into chapter 13.

They're not crying out to God. And so it's in this context that Samson is born. To people, to a nation, not longing for a birth to happen that did happen.

So here's what we're going to do now. We're going to read chapters 13, 14, and 15. And this is the story of Samson's birth and life. And here's what I want you to do as you read through these chapters.

I want to get us thinking. I want to get us into the text this evening. So Hazel is going to come and read chapter 13 for us. And Neil is going to come and read chapters 14 and 15 for us.

[6 : 37] They're the two sections. Chapter 13, Samson's birth. Chapters 14 and 15, Samson's life. And after each reading, we're going to pause for 30 seconds.

And hopefully you've got a sermon outline. I saw Alistair handing them out on your way in. Hopefully you've got a sermon outline. And here's what I want you to think about. The question I want you to ask yourself. How am I feeling after chapter 13?

And how as a reader am I left feeling after chapter 15? If you could sum it up in one word, what would that one word be? Now here's the big question of this sermon this evening.

Here's the big question that we're asked, the writer asks us from this section of Judges. Will the talk of Samson's birth be matched by the walk of Samson's life?

So that's the big question for us this evening. The big question we're going to think about. And hopefully the big question we're going to answer as we journey through these chapters together.

Thank you, Hazel and Neil.

[7 : 50] So here we go. Will the talk of Samson's birth be matched by the walk of Samson's life? So I wonder what words you scribbled down at the end of chapter 13.

I wonder if it was something like this. Here's what I wrote down. Optimistic. Optimistic. Intrigued. Anyone? Excited. Anticipating.

All those kind of words come to mind when you read chapter 13. Now let me just help you see my thought process as I travelled through chapter 13.

There were four grounds for hope that I saw in chapter 13. Four signs that got me really excited that we could be on to a winner here with Samson. Here's the first ground for hope. The numbers.

So there's been 11 judges so far in the book of Numbers. Sorry, in the book of Numbers, in the book of Judges. 11 judges so far. Samson is the 12th judge. Now that gets me intrigued.

[8 : 50] Thinking to myself, will Samson, will he be the judge who finally, not only saves Israel from their enemies, but will he be the saviour who representatively leads Israel in worship and obedience to the Lord that Israel so far in this book have failed to do.

He's the 12th judge. And the arrival of Samson also marks the beginning of the sixth cycle in this book. Each judge thus far has delivered Israel from their enemies, brings in, ushers in a period of rest for the people.

But that only lasts as long as the judge has lived. And as a reader, I'm thinking to myself, will Samson be the judge who finally brings the nation of Israel, as it were, into the seven and bring God's people lasting and complete rest from their enemies.

He's the 12th and he's the 6th. And as a reader, I'm optimistic for Samson at this point. Here's the second ground for hope, the announcement.

We're introduced to this couple. Do you see them opening verses? Chapter 13. Manoah and his wife. Who appears to them? An angel of the Lord. An awesome messenger of God appears to this woman.

[10:12] And he delivers a message that God once again is acting by his grace to save his people, his captive people, his wavered people. God is going to act in his grace towards them.

And the angel announces to the woman that although she is barren, that she will conceive and she will bear a son. Now this barren woman pattern is something that is frequent in Scripture.

Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, after the book of Judges, we've got Hannah, we've got Elizabeth and here again is God by his grace looking upon the humble estate of this barren woman.

And we're left as readers wondering in anticipation, what exactly is this child going to turn out to be? Third ground for hope is the calling. This woman, do you notice it?

She's given clear instructions. Verse 4. What is she to do? Or rather, what is she not to do? Drink no wine. Touch no unclean thing. Presumably because if she does, and she will vicariously taint the child within her.

[11:16] And what of this boy? Two things. Do you notice in the passage? Firstly, he will be a Nazarite. Now a Nazarite was someone who would yield their life completely to God.

God, you are wholly mine. Wholly apart, dedicated to him. Wholly apart, to be focused on him. You find that vow to be a Nazarite laid out in number 6.

If you want to maybe check it out later. Three expressed things that a Nazarite had to do. Or rather, three expressed things that a Nazarite had not to do. No wine, no razors, no contact with dead bodies.

And we're excited because normally this is a voluntary vow that people make. But here, this child is being called apart, set apart by God to be wholly devoted by him. To see it, this boy will be a Nazarite.

That's exciting. Secondly, he will be a saviour. Verse 5. He'll begin to save Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

[12:18] This is what this child in this woman's womb is being called to be. And this is what this child in this woman's womb is being called to do. Oh, that's greatly exciting.

And the fourth ground for hope is the stirring. Verse 24. Feel the anticipation that the writer is creating here. Verse 24.

This woman bore a son. And verse 25. The spirit of the Lord began to stir him. And if we were to roll credits at this point, I'm sure it would say Samson, the saviour, is here.

We have four massive grounds for hope in this passage. So how, as readers, are we left feeling as we finish chapter 13, we are feeling wildly optimistic for Samson.

So back to our question. Will the talk of Samson's birth, and you've got to say it's a big talk, will the talk of Samson's birth be matched by the walk of Samson's life?

[13:23] And we move from four grounds for hope to four reasons to sigh. Now I wonder what words you scribbled down that summarized how you felt at the end of chapter 15.

Do I wrote deflated? Gutted? Disappointed? Oh, Samson, you had it all! You'll notice as we journey through chapter 14, maybe you want to scan your eyes over it just now, chapter 14.

The deliberate repetition of the word down. Now it's used five times in chapter 14, five times. Verse 1, down. Verse 5, down.

Verse 7, down. Verse 10, down. Verse 19, down. The writer's trying to tell us something, that the trajectory of Samson's life ain't going up, it's going down.

Again, really quickly, four reasons to sigh from this chapter. The first one, right? The first one is the woman. verse 1 of chapter 14, Samson goes down to Timnah.

[14:30] And what does he see? It's going to be a key word in Samson's life, his eyes. What is he seeing? He sees a daughter of one of the Philistines. And immediately at this point, in our eyes, there should be a warning light flashing.

Sometimes you get them in your car, don't you, when you need to check your oil. There's a warning sign in your dashboard. Well, this is what's going on here. The writer's just dropping in a little flashing warning sign.

God has expressly prohibited that his people marry one of their enemies. And his parents, Samson's parents, they know that. They know that.

Our little girl, Chloe, her favorite word at the minute is the word need. Daddy, I need a drink. Daddy, I need to watch Bing on CBBs. Daddy, I need to wear a dress.

And we have to educate her. You'd think she would get it by now. She's not. Chloe, that's not how you ask. It's not how you ask. What are you saying? You see it a little two-year-old mind just thinking about it. Daddy, can I please have a drink?

[15:32] Yes, you can have a drink. But there's none of that here with Samson. None of that here with Samson. Verse 2, you can slightly understand what his mom and dad are trying to do.

Samson is not one of our daughters you can marry. He's not one of our people you can marry. Surely there must have been. But no, and feel the force of the passage here, get her for me dad. I want her. I want her. I've seen her and I want her. Now not only is Samson not honoring his father and mother at this point, but he's acting like a spoiled brat.

Is he not? It's a bit like if you remember Charlie and the Chocolate Factory when we were growing up. Veruca saw, Daddy I want, Daddy I want, Daddy I need. This is Samson. What Samson sees, Samson wants and Samson normally gets.

First reason to sigh for Samson is the woman. Second reason to sigh is the lion. Verse 5, it's Samson and both his parents are on their way down to Temna.

[16:40] This young lion comes hurtling towards him, quite literally leaps out the pages like a 3D book here for us readers, roaring. And Samson, as the spirit rushes on him with no weapon in his hands but his bare hands, rips this lion in two.

I love how the writer drops in there as one would rip a young goat as if to say, you should know what that's like. But he rips this young lion in two.

Spirit rushes on him and here for the first time in the narrative we're given a taste, a taste of what Samson can accomplish when the spirit of God rushes on him and empowers him for service.

Samson continues to, verse 7, continues on with Manoah. He talks with this woman that he sees quite literally flirting with danger and we get that little phrase from the writer which I think summarizes Samson's life in a nutshell.

That he did what was right in the Lord's eyes? No. He did what was right in his eyes. And it's no great surprise then that as we read of Samson seeing the same dead lion on his return journey home that as he sees the honey that Samson does what he does.

[18:03] Now remember his Nazarite vow. What wasn't he to touch? No unclean thing. No dead bodies. And here's Samson proving that he's more interested in a little honey to sweeten his tongue than he is to obeying God's word.

Scraping it onto his hands. You see how the writer lets us know that he touched this. Scraping it onto his hands. Eating it as he went. Without a care in the world. Remember when we were growing up me and my brother one of the highlights of our holiday was going to the sweet shop.

We'd get those little flora tubs and he would fill it up with 20p mix Haribos. And we would just walk on back to the house without a care in the world eating as we went. Without a care in the world.

This is Samson eating as he goes. Not a care in the world. Not a second thought as to what he's done here. Second reason to sigh is the animal. Third reason to sigh is the party.

You see the party? Verse 10. Samson throws a feast to celebrate his marriage. Now the Hebrew word there suggests a party but one with the highest probability that alcohol is involved in this celebration.

[19:12] Again you see Samson totally blasé about his Nazarite vow happy to blend in with the Philistines round about him. And he gives his Philistine companions who come to be with him at his party gives him this little riddle.

And this riddle may seem innocent enough but do you see that it puts his wife in danger? Now she's probably thinking about I'm on my honeymoon I've just got married I'm thinking about a cruiser in the med but instead she's put in this horrible position because of Samson's pride and arrogance. Verse 15. The Philistines say to her tell us the answer to that guy's riddle tell us the answer to his riddle or else we will kill you and we will burn your father's house with fire.

They pressure her she pressures him and we see arguably Samson's weakness here exploited because he tells her the answer to this riddle. And she to save her own skin tells the Philistines. It's worth noting the detail the author gives us there at verse 17. Who does she tell? She tells her people. As if to tell us readers again where her loyalties lie.

[20 : 23] These are her people. And what does Samson call his wife? Do you see that in verse 18? You only know because you ploughed my heifer. Now there are some phrases that will never ever stop being insulting and that's one of them.

We see that Samson is not one he's not like Mr. Darcy. I'm not going home tonight and using that one with Alex. That is not a complimentary thing to say about your wife.

Here is Samson here just totally in love of himself. And they win don't they? They get the riddle right. Right. They win. Samson owes these men these Philistines 30.

I think we can assume that they're suits 30 sets of clothes. Third reason to sigh is the party and that leads us to the fourth reason to sigh and that is Samson's attitude.

Where are these Armani suits going to come from? Where are these suits going to come from?

Verse 19. Well in a rage he goes and he gets that spoil. Where does he go? He goes and he kills 30 Philistine men.

[21 : 24] And in a rage he rages back to his father's house and after he realizes his wife has been given to his best man he rages against the Philistines.

Now this guy has got some serious anger problems. Serious anger issues. And he ties 300 foxes together which is no easy thing I might add.

He ties them together with torches and he sets them loose and Philistine feels to cause havoc and devastation. It's maybe worth slowing down just a little bit here and asking Samson what are you doing?

What are you doing? We get the impression here to be not that he's toying with the Philistines. He's playing with God's enemies. Almost having a bit of fun.

He's always showing off look how great I am. That God has greatly equipped him and God has highly called him and what is he doing? He's playing around having a laugh without any regard for the consequences because there are consequences because he's playing around notice at verse 6 it costs his wife and her father their lives.

[22 : 41] Just playing around. Understandably Samson is a wanted man in the Philistine camp. The Philistines come looking for him and the men of Judah after a bit of negotiation with him they present him to the Philistines but God as the spirit rushes on Samson again defeats them quite emphatically you have to say verse 15 of chapter 15 a thousand men with a jawbone why?

Why was he able to do it? Because the spirit of God rushed on him. God through Samson won this victory against his people's enemies and Samson calls out to God verse 18 he calls out to God verse 18 give me a drink give me a drink a little irreverently perhaps but nonetheless here is Samson praying to the Lord what does he describe himself as?

Your servant. A little interesting though that he calls the Philistines uncircumcised at verse 18 all of a sudden now he's concerned as to who these people represent he wasn't all that concerned about it when he went to marry one of their daughters here is Samson the first the fourth reason rather to sigh is his attitude so how as readers are we left feeling as we finish chapter 15 well if the talk of Samson's life left us feeling greatly optimistic then the walk of Samson's life leaves us feeling greatly deflated will the talk of Samson's birth be matched by the walk of Samson's life on the whole we have to say it wasn't four grounds for hope four reasons to sigh and as we work towards a close this evening and as we reflect on his birth and his life let me give you two truths to ponder one truth to challenge us and one truth to comfort us from these verses firstly here's the truth to challenge us now here is

Samson tragically failing to live up to the calling that God had placed on his life but it's what we need to understand that it's not just Samson who is failing to live up to his call because standing behind him is a whole nation who are failing to live up to the call that God has placed on their lives so here are God's people in the place that God had promised he was going to redeem them and bring them to here are Israel here are God's people his treasured possession here are God's people the people who God had covenanted with and said you will be my people you will be my people and I will be your God what an enormous privilege incredible honour that these people are God's people but instead of being a shining light to the nations round about them instead of being a megaphone to the nations round about them that's belted out how great is our God sing with me

how great is our

God here they are living in disobedience and here they are revelling in rebellion and here they are flat out and conforming not to God's image but here they are flat out and conforming to be more like the likeness of the people round about them and undoing not what is right in God's eyes but undoing what is right in their eyes here are God's people failing to live up to their calling and presumably that is the challenge that the first readers of this book would have felt as they read this and that is the challenge that comes to us this evening as God's people as we look at the failures of a previous generation we've got to examine our own hearts live up to your calling are we living up to our calling of course where we stand in history we stand the other side of the cross God too has redeemed us in Christ in Jesus Christ

[26 : 46] God has saved us and as Christians that we are in Christ and he has set us apart to live for him in relationship with him and to live for his glory alone is the constant refrain in the New Testament dear Christian dear Christian see your calling see your calling and seize your calling 1 Peter 2 let me just read one verse 1 Peter 2 verse 9 Peter writing to his generation of God's people but you are a chosen people a royal priesthood a holy nation a holy nation God's special possession that you may declare the praises out of darkness and into his wonderful light so the first challenge of these verses is live up to your calling live up to your calling are we living up to our calling as God's people and secondly the comfort of these verses the initiative all the way through these chapters is the

Lord's this God who never changes who is the same yesterday today and forever and is full of steadfast love towards his people is why we opened with the song that we opened with the Lord the Lord the Lord the Lord the Spirit of the Lord all the way through this chapter the great and gracious and loving initiator in these chapters is the same who is the gracious loving initiator in the whole of history is this great God the Lord the Lord the one who raised up a saviour for a people who were not interested who were not calling out to him who raised up a saviour for his people it's another wonderful gospel truth for us to grasp it's exactly what we see in the Lord Jesus Christ and we'll come back to that in a minute that when we were not looking for God God came looking for us and saved us it's another wonderful thought to think about this evening that God did not wait for us to make the first move because we wouldn't have made the first move towards him but he stepped down and acted to save us the Lord who heard

Manoah's prayer the Lord who sent his spirit upon Samson time and time again to accomplish his people's deliverance and look at the very last verse of chapter 15 lives that our God is big enough he is sovereign over not just the things of this chapter he is sovereign over all of life all of life he is sovereign over our problems but the other truth is that he is near he is near he is near to us in our problems

I think it's J.I. Packer who famously called God the one who is majestic and the one who is personal that is the God that we meet here that is our God as the old hymn puts it grace grace God's grace grace that will pardon and cleanse within grace grace God's grace grace that is greater than all our sin what loving grace the Lord shows his people here what a wonderful God we have and the lesson here the big thrust of this passage to the readers is come to this God don't trust in people don't trust in yourselves don't trust in the nations round about you don't trust in anything but this God this gracious God come to him this evening come to him foregrounds for optimism four reasons to sigh two truths to ponder but as we leave this chapter this evening let me leave you with one longing to have here's our question again will the talk of Samson's birth be matched by the walk of

Samson's life here's the one longing to have what are we left longing for at the end of these chapters we're left longing for a saviour a saviour where the talk of his birth matches up to the walk of his life that's the saviour that God's people need and that's the saviour that this gracious God one day provided now I don't know how you felt as you read chapter 13 but I felt very Christmassy felt like I should be putting on my Christmas jumper getting the crackers on anyone else feel Christmassy chapter 13 striking similarities striking similarities between the two births an angelic appearance to the parents the announcement of a saviour Jesus the name meaning that God saves that's what that boy was called to do striking similarities but one striking difference

[32 : 20] Samson's mindset not your will be done God but my will be done God Jesus throughout the entirety of his life tempted in the wilderness by the devil tempted in the garden of Gethsemane and yet what was his cry not my will be done Lord not my will but your will be done and so obedient

was he that it took him to the cross where he died for our sin three days later he rose again and he rules and he reigns this is the saviour that God's people need the model Israelite the king who lives forever and the saviour who has won lasting rest for his people will the talk of Samson's birth live up to the walk of Samson's life no but will the talk of Jesus' birth live up to the walk of Jesus' life gloriously yes so we sing oh come all ye faithful joyful and triumphant come ye oh come ye to Bethlehem come and behold him born the king of angels oh come let us adore him oh come let us adore him oh come let us adore him Christ the Lord let's pray together and so father we thank you so much lord for this evening and lord we pray for the truths that we have seen in your word this evening father that they would resonate in our hearts way beyond when we leave this building this evening father may we be drawn to put our trust in the god who is above all things and know the peace of the god who is right beside us so father thank you for your words father thank you for your truth go with us now we ask because we ask in jesus name amen