

Judges 14

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Preacher: John McIntosh

[0 : 01] Would you turn with me now to the chapter we read, Judges chapter 14, and to the account of Samson's, a particular phase in Samson's life there.

Now I do think that there's relevance quite explicitly, I think, for the situation in which the people of the Lord Jesus are at this moment certainly, and of course any time too, I'm not wanting to limit scripture to having significance only in a particular situation.

Many people over the centuries have found encouragement and guidance from this passage in God's word. I'll wait a moment just while the Bible class by looks at it perhaps are just arriving. We're looking at the account of Samson's life, a particular part in Samson's life, which we find in Judges chapter 14. But perhaps I think just to get the context, we do need to think a little bit about what's in chapter 13, which we didn't actually read.

Now in chapter 13, I think there are very important themes revealed there about Samson's life and the context of the children of Israel in the particular situation when Samson was born and as he grew up and as he lived.

[1 : 18] The first thing I want to draw your attention to is this, and that's that salvation sometimes that perhaps salvation often is not actually sought by the people who are going to be saved.

That was what the case was with Israel. Israel was living under the domination, under the political control, the military control too, of the Philistines. And all the evidence is that they were perfectly content to remain under Philistine control at that point.

If you look further on in the account of Samson, you find that the children of Israel were actually positively uncomfortable with what Samson was doing and the trouble he was causing.

And they almost allied themselves with the Philistines against Samson. Now what actually happens when God's people are content to live at peace with sin is the first step in the process is that God judges them.

That's what happened here with Israel. Israel had gone astray. They were worshipping false gods apparently and so on. And God judged them by sending the Philistines to take control of them.

[2 : 28] But then he begins to work their deliverance. That's the way God deals with his people. If they're in sin and if they're comfortable with it, the first thing that happens is things start to go wrong.

And God indicates his displeasure and he produces a situation where people end up by calling upon him to help. And when they do that, then he starts to begin to work out their deliverance.

It's very interesting that even when the Lord Jesus came into the world, the Jews were in a very similar situation. They were content with Roman occupation by and large, even though they didn't like it.

And they were quite happy to work with the Romans against the Lord Jesus in a very similar way to what the children of Israel had done with the Philistines against Samson. And the sad, sad thing is that oftentimes the Lord's people are not in all that different a situation.

Is it not the case that many of us, perhaps indeed all of us today, are perfectly happy to live relatively contented with sin all around us? It is the case, isn't it, that the majority of the Lord's people, and I say this of myself every bit as much as I suggest that any of you, the rest of you should apply it to yourselves, it is the case that I think we're all too content not to be outraged, not to be disturbed by the sin that surrounds us.

[3 : 57] And this was the sort of reason I was suggesting that this passage in Samson's life has a lot of relevance today, because as I think most of us are aware, there's been new statutory regulations which seem to indicate, I'm generalising, I realise that, but it does seem to be the case that in the eyes of the government, in the eyes of the majority of parliament, it's more important to let people be free to live as homosexuals than it is to let people to be free to live as Christians. Now

that's generalisation, that's perhaps an oversimplification, but that's the sort of situation we're in. How many people have actually been praying that the legislation which has just been passed would first of all be prevented from being passed, and now that it has been, how many of us are praying that it would be overturned?

You see, it's far too easy to be quiescent, to be accepting of what God has declared to be sin. That's what's happening in Samson's case.

The second thing I think that we do notice in chapter 13, before we look at chapter 14, is that salvation is sometimes an enigma. Sometimes it's a riddle, sometimes it's a puzzle, we just can't quite see what God is doing. That's what happens here in chapter 13. There's Manoah's wife. She's barren and she's anonymous. We don't even know what her name is. And that's where God starts, with exceptional difficulties. And it's often in these exceptional difficulties that God works the most exceptional works. And therefore we shouldn't despair.

God displays his power, then his people admit that they're helpless. And it's just like that with sin too. If people think that they can deal with their sins themselves, then they're not going to deal with it.

But when they admit that they need God's help, then God starts to work and they're on the way to salvation. It's just like problems with addiction. There's no cure until you actually admit that you can't cure it on your own.

[6 : 16] Sin's just like that. If any of you are here, young people, old people, it doesn't matter, thinking that you can deal with your sins or that you need to deal with your sins before God's going to accept you.

Well, forget it. Because you need God's help to deal with sin. And the marvellous thing is that he's promised it. So salvation is sometimes strange, a puzzle, even an enigma.

And we need to remember also that prayer for salvation, salvation itself and the Lord himself, are never to be seen as routine. We must never think that we have got God summed up, that we know what he's going to do. We must never think that we know how to come to salvation because the Lord's hand is in it. We know the broad outlines, but we don't know exactly how he's going to do it. We don't know exactly how he's going to save our loved ones. We don't know exactly how it's going to be worked out. And we must never think that prayer is straightforward. It's not. It's wonderful. Salvation is wonderful.

And so too is our God. Absolutely wonderful. God, you know, is not safe. We should never feel comfortable and laid back in the presence of God.

[7 : 32] Because God is awesome. He's to be feared. We've got to get the balance between fear and joy in worship right. And then the last thing I think we need to highlight, because when you read chapter 13, you can't quite see what's going to happen.

But the last thing is that salvation is not, somebody said, is not God crisis managing. Salvation is actually purposeful. The Lord just didn't use an available delivery to free his people.

He actually raised up a deliverer. He raised up Samson specially. And salvation is like that.

Salvation is planned for every one of us in advance.

It's planned in advance before even the world began. You know, go back to Isaiah chapter 9 and verse 6. What's the very first name of the Messiah?

The very first name of the Messiah is wonderful. Wonderful. And I think we must never ever forget that. We are worshipping a God today who is wonderful.

[8 : 45] Salvation is something which is absolutely marvellous, wonderful, a miracle. Every time it happens. And God's deliverance of his people from sin, from their oppressors, is wonderful as well.

You know, when it comes to salvation, we must stand with Manoah there in verse 20 of chapter 13. What does Manoah do when he realises who's been talking to him?

As the flame blazed up from the altar towards heaven, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground.

Now, I do think that one of the things which perhaps in our day and age we tend to lose sight of somewhat, is that sense of wonder and awe which should characterise all our dealings with our God.

All these things then, by way of introduction, let's look at chapter 14 and what we find there. Well, I do want to suggest to you that the unifying theme of the chapter, I think, is this, it's to do with telling and knowing, or perhaps more accurate, it's to do with not knowing, it's to do with secrets.

[9 : 59] Verses 1 to 4, we've got the secret of the Lord's purpose. Verses 5 to 6, we've got the secret regarding the lion. Verses 7 to 9, it's the secret regarding the honey.

And verses 10 to 18, it's the secret regarding the riddle. And then in the last two verses, verses 19 and 20, it's the secret of the power of the Lord's spirit. So this is really, there's an emphasis here on the mystery, shall we say, of the Lord's working out of his purposes.

Can't get away from it. But it's also, I think, it throws light on what we might call some of the mysteries, first of all, of our own character. And the first question I want to draw out to ask ourselves today is this one.

Is your character is my character like Samson's. Well, let's look at Samson's character first of all then. First thing I want to draw your attention to about Samson is that Samson has no idea about, no concern for his calling to be a judge and a saviour of God's people.

And he doesn't seem to have any idea about the real nature of what's called the Nazarite vow. Remember, the angel of the Lord said to his parents that he wasn't to drink strong drink and he wasn't to have his hair cut.

[11 : 19] He was to be a Nazarite to God. These were vows which showed that he was a man set apart by God. And throughout this chapter, Samson seems to have no thought, no understanding, no concern about his calling at all.

He fraternises with the Philistines, which is the complete opposite of his calling. He was supposed to be set aside to God and to serve God alone and to be holy to God.

And what happens? He goes off and he fraternises, he socialises with the Philistines. And in actual fact, that embodies in the one man, Samson, what the whole nation of Israel had become.

And I think you can argue that in verse 4, it's almost suggested that it was just about impossible to prize the two communities of the Philistines and the children of Israel apart.

His parents did not know that this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines for at that time they were ruling over Israel. The Lord, if you like, had to engineer the situation so that the children of Israel would be broken away from the Philistines with all their bad influence.

[12 : 37] Not only that did he display his lack of concern, his lack of commitment to his calling in the way in which he socialised with the Philistines, he had no concern for God's regulations either and his requirements.

Law of Moses, one of the things in the Law of Moses was that the children of Israel were to have nothing to do with dead bodies beyond the minimum and after that they were to purify themselves and they weren't to eat anything which had touched or was involved with the dead body.

What does Samson do? Comes back, sees the lion that he'd killed, sees the honey in it, takes the honey in it and starts eating. And not only that, he gives it to his parents and he doesn't tell them where it's come from so that they could say no.

Really quite pernicious. So Samson's actions have little to do with his calling. He's driven by, or if you like, he follows his short-term inclinations, his short-term impulses, his short-term desire for pleasure.

One of the actual commentators actually said, Samson's driven by his glands. Well, that's about what it is. His reactions to a pretty woman, his reaction to the roar of a lion, it's all impulsive.

[13 : 55] And that's the way he is. He doesn't actually think what his responsibilities are. Now, here's why I said, is your character like Samson's? Is my character in any way at all like Samson's?

Because our characters shouldn't be. People who belong to the Lord Jesus are not to be people of short-term impulses. They are to be people who don't focus on short-term pleasures.

They are to be people who are to think about what God requires of them. We are to be people who think about how we can serve God. We are called on to remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives.

In every detail. In every detail. You know, I was, the young people in St. Columbus a couple of weeks ago, asked me to, asked me to talk about keeping the Lord's day.

And there was something which I never particularly focused on before. Remember when the Lord said, the Lord Jesus says to the Jews, the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath. Now, what does that mean?

[15 : 03] In terms of the responsibilities of the Lord's people relating to his day. Now, unless that was a totally empty, vacuous statement that the Lord Jesus made, and he didn't make statements

like that, and he prefaced it by, it's one of the Son of Man sayings, which are very, very significant, every one of them.

It means that this day is to be set aside, is to be dedicated to Christ. And everything we do in his day is something which we can say sincerely, without reservation or qualification, before God. Lord, I'm dedicating this to you. To the Lord Jesus. Now, that's the way it is with every aspect of our lives. The Lord's people are not to be people who just make short-term, impulsive judgments. We are to think about what we're doing, and how it impacts on our witness and everything else. So, there's a question for us all.

It's a question for me as well. Are there any aspects of our characters which are too much like Samson? Let's all think about that. The second thing that I would suggest, and this is not a question, this is, if you like, an exhortation, we need to identify our weaknesses.

[16:21] Every one of us. Identify our weaknesses. After seeing Samson's strength in verses 5 to 9, with the incident when he tore the lion apart, we are immediately faced with his weaknesses.

And I would highlight two weaknesses here. The first one is women. Samson apparently could never resist a pretty woman. And secondly, and this is perhaps the more deep-seated one, and perhaps in many respects the one we need to focus on, pressure from others.

Throughout his life, Samson couldn't cope with pressure from others. And that was his weak spot with regard to this woman that he married.

It was his weak spot with Delilah. It was his weak spot in every incident in which Samson was involved. He could be worn down far too readily and abandon his responsibilities.

And all too often, we are all prone to that as well. Present episode, verses 16 to 17, and his wife wept all during the wedding ceremonies, foreshadowed what was going to happen much more decisively with Delilah in chapter 16.

[17:40] The reason for failure here in verse 14, the reason for failure with Delilah in chapter 16, both the same, she pressurised him. And it's not just men that are pressurised by women.

We can be pressurised by people who don't share our faith far too often and fall into sin. Our weaknesses have consequences always for our consecration and our holiness.

You know, Samson, with his Nazarite vow, his consecration to God, had accessibility to divine power in a way that the normal is right in.

And I want to draw from that point two things. First of all, if we are compromised by sin, we may be grieving the Spirit.

Grieving the Holy Spirit. I just read you Ephesians chapter 4 at verse 30, first of all. Just throw light on that. Ephesians chapter 4 verse 30.

[18:48] Actually, we'll need to read the verses before. The whole of this passage, the chapter before, a lot of it beforehand is talking about putting off falsehood, just taking it from verse 25, speaking truthfully to our neighbours.

You know, your anger, do not sin. Don't let the sun go down while you're still angry. Don't give the devil a foothold. Don't let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what's helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen.

Then we have verse 30. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Paul in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 talks about the possibility of the Lord's people quenching the Holy Spirit because of our sins.

We don't get the blessing. That can be traced back to David the psalmist when he says, if we esteem sin in our hearts, God won't hear our prayers. You see, sin for the Lord's people is very important and very significant.

Always has consequences. And the most important consequence in general is that we can grieve the Spirit and even quench Him in our lives.

[19:58] is our witness weak because of deficiencies in our consecration, in our dedication to the Lord?

Is our church weak because of deficiencies in the congregation, in the consecration of its members? Have we really been actively separating ourselves from sin like we should have been because if we haven't been, there are consequences, no doubt about it.

And then the second thing I think that's important with Samson here is the way in which his compromise with or his union indeed with the ungodly Philistines is just plain incompatible with the character of Israel's God.

Be holy as I am holy, says God. Are we compromised by our relationships with unbelievers, whatever that might be?

You know, we're living in a society where there's temptation to, in fact, Lord, we haven't been tempted by this yet. No, there are parts of the Christian church which have been tempted to pluralism, which have been tempted into things like multi-faith worship, so-called, all sorts of things. [21 : 27] We can compromise our holy God, as it were. We can compromise him through friendships. We can compromise him through preparedness to accept practices in our business lives or our own personal lives, social lives.

all these areas can lead to compromise just like it did with Samson. So, the second thing is it's important to identify what our weaknesses are.

Samson's two were women and inability or unwillingness to resist pressure. And pressure is something which we all have in our lives from day to day.

Can I move on to the, perhaps the profounder aspects of this passage, this chapter. And I said initially that there's a stress on secrets all through it.

Well, can I suggest to you the next thing I would like us to focus on is this thought. Remember God's purposes are secret. And perhaps I shouldn't say that absolutely unqualified like that, but the way in which God works, he doesn't always reveal to us all the details of what he's about.

[22 : 49] Remember this for him, Calpher's hymn, God works in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. Paraphrase that I think by saying something like God gives us free play through our known, through our human choices but he still works in his sovereign will.

God in fact used Samson's weaknesses to bring about the relationship from which so much ill feeling was going to flow and in the process he gives Samson his supernatural strength and the first opportunities to use it.

Now, one of the commentators actually said with the lion Samson discovered his gift with Ascalon at the end of the chapter he finds its purposes.

See, Samson was doing something which he shouldn't have been doing. He shouldn't have been fraternizing with the Philistines, he shouldn't have been contemplating marrying a Philistine woman but God was using it to separate, to prise apart if you like his people from their close connection with the Philistines.

Now, that doesn't mean that Samson's parents were wrong to object to what he was planning to do. They weren't, they were quite right. And it doesn't mean that Samson's desires in some way were virtuous or his plain bullheadedness was right.

[24 : 32] That wasn't, they weren't right. But God was using them for his purposes. And we have highlighted the way that neither Samson's foolishness nor Samson's stubbornness was going to prevent the Lord from carrying out his purposes.

though Samson was terribly unsatisfactory as a judge. God was in control. And that meant that there was no need for despair.

And that's the situation we are in. As our society and as our government seems to be heading more and more in a secularist direction, we mustn't despair. God can even use these things that are happening to work out his purposes.

In fact, it's not just that he can, he is. He is. That's one of the things which I think is hugely important. Remember what the psalmist says, quoted this at the college once or twice recently, I see some students are here.

One of the, well, the psalmist says, the wicked fall into the pits that they themselves have dug. That's how God acts. out of tragedy, out of sadness, out of difficulty, the Lord brings blessing.

[25 : 55] At his very heart, shall we say, you find that this is the way God so often acts. And if you're in a situation like that, you really feel you've fallen into temptation, you're aware of it, you're sorry for it, then you can rely on the fact that God will bring good out of it.

If you've been through sadness, tragedy, even, look to the Lord to bring blessing. If you're really struggling at work with relationships with your workmates or whoever it is, the Lord will even use that for good.

That's the way he delights in work. So, that's why I say that this third thing that I want to highlight about Samson in chapter 14 is that we have to remember that God's purpose is our secret.

It's not perhaps put all that well, but that's the point I'm making. We can rely on God to surprise us. He is wonderful. Marvelous.

And the next thing, and this is the second last thing I want to say, we must learn from God's signs. Now, Samson's strength was a mystery.

[27 : 13] It's so easy, especially for young people to see Samson as some sort of Old Testament rambo, or Mr. Universe, or somebody like that. But Delilah and the others and the Philistines and even his parents, I think, they couldn't quite work out what the source of his strength was.

Well, his parents knew, of course, that's not fair to say that they couldn't work it out. But the children of Israel couldn't work it out. Philistines couldn't work it out. Even the people he was closest to couldn't work it out.

It was a mystery. And the very mystery was that it was a sign of the Lord's strength. Lion comes roaring out on Samson. The spirit, I think one of the commentators said, comes rushing on Samson. And that's emphasised three times. This particular bit in verse 6, the spirit of the Lord came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. It's again there in verse 19, then the spirit of the Lord came upon him in power. He went down to Ashkelon and struck down 30 of their men. And it's in verse 14 of the next chapter, chapter 15, as he approached Lehi, the Philistines came towards him shouting, this is if Samson had been bound by the children of Israel in order to be handed over to the Israelites.

[28 : 36] Verse 14, the spirit of the Lord came upon him in power, the ropes in his arms became like charred flax and the bindings dropped from his hand. So that's emphasised.

So if you like the mangled lion is a preview of what the Lord can do and was going to do and was going to do through Samson and that led to the Philistines being terrorised.

The Lord starts to work out his purposes. So we mustn't ignore previews that God gives us. You know there's a preview between Samson and the lion and the bear and David and the lion and the bear and then what he did to Goliath.

Think about the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus feeds the 5,000 and then you find him calming the storm. That's the way the Lord acts. That's the way we are meant to think.

We are meant in our own lives to when the Lord does something small for us. We are meant to actually see that as a sign of what more he can do for us. That's the pattern in God's ways.

[29 : 42] That's the way God deals with his people. Small episode of deliverance or a small providence it's meant to indicate to us just how adequate he is and then we'll be even more reliant on him when he places us in more difficult situations further down the line.

You know whenever some small thing goes well for you don't ever just note it and carry on. See the Lord's hand in it.

You know we're so prone not to see the Lord's hand in the small things that we're not ready to cope with the big things and if we'd read things with the indications he'd given us earlier we'd know that he was going to do bigger things for us.

I think we all need individually collectively as families collectively as a congregation of the Lord's people even looking at the worldwide people of God we are meant to be constantly on the alert for his small deliverances his small providences and then if we are like that we'll be ready for the bigger difficulties and the bigger challenges and we'll be looking for him to do greater things for us.

That's the way God works. And it's the case in tragedy as well as in situations of deliverance like this. We are always to treasure even the smallest of deliverances even the smallest of providences.

[31 : 15] It shows us that God's with us. It shows us that if he cares for us in these small things he can care for us in the bigger problems as well. We are to learn from God's sides.

One of the things that Samson didn't do, he doesn't seem to have learned from God's sides.

Children of Israel didn't learn from his sides either.

And all too often we as God's people don't learn either and more collectively bigger groups of his people, families, congregations often don't learn either.

We are to note even the smallest of deliverances and see God's sovereign hand at work. And the last thing I would derive from this chapter is this, that we are to remember that deliverance from evil is not always smooth.

Sometimes deliverance from evil is messy, it can be brutal, it can be all sorts of things which we are not comfortable with and we mustn't assume that God only works in ways that we would approve of.

[32 : 27] When you read about the hundreds of Philistines that Samson killed, it makes us uncomfortable doesn't it? We sort of say we can't really justify that.

But you can if you see what God's purposes are. And that's the way it always is. God is in the business of writing our mistakes success and using our failures as foundation for his success. And that's a huge encouragement. And can I suggest in conclusion that there's a huge amount, I think, for our present situation in our land, probably wider as well, and a huge amount of guidance and encouragement in our own lives as well.

You know the difference, spiritually speaking, between knowledge and wisdom? Knowledge is knowing what's going to happen, that God will work out his purposes, that he will do good to his people, that he will take them to be with himself with all the blessing.

And then we're all required, as Christians, those of us who are, to be constantly alert to what our part in God's purposes is.

[33 : 51] We won't see it all, but we'll be beginning to play our part if we keep our eyes open for the hand of God in our lives, doing good for us, bringing deliverance, bringing us out of sin, all these things.

I think there's huge guidance from Samson and his story here. May it be the case if we all see more and more in scripture of relevance to ourselves and our situations.