

August 13, 2023

“His Name Is Wonderful”
Judges 12:8-13:25

FCF: Confusion as to who God is

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of who God is,
(magnet) we should be prepared for surprises in our lives.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

We ask many questions over the course of our days. After all, we need answers on a host of issues - some of which are vital because the direction of our lives depends upon them. Here’s the biggest one. “Who is God?” The up close answer is, “The big man upstairs.” The far off answer is, “The One who sees and condemns all.” Both have a point but are profoundly wrong.

“Who is God?” and “Why does it matter?” The answer will determine the direction of your life. And a whole lot more. We are continuing in our series through the book of Judges. This comes after the time of Moses and Joshua, telling of these military governors raised up by God to deliver His people. We’ve looked at eight thus far. Today, it will be nine through twelve.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Judges 12:8-13:25](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Who is the GOAT? Some will declare Tom Brady, Lionel Messi, Michael Jordan, Ted Williams, Roger Federer, or Wayne Gretzky. The answer depends, of course, on the sport and the era you have in mind. But it can only be said of one per sport. You can argue about who it is, but by rule, you can only have one GOAT per sport. GOAT cannot be said of anyone else.

Which brings us to our text. We start off with these three judges mentioned. That sets the stage for the appearance of this angel with the announcement of a coming deliverer. The child’s father has questions. “Who are you?” “What’s your name?” The answer comes back. “My name is wonderful.” Meaning that, “It is beyond your understanding, too much for you. It cannot be held or taken in.” Referring not just to the verbal pronouncement of the name but who this God really is. He is wonderful, full of wonder. That is who appeared. That is who He is.

Our text is helping us to see that who He is has some significant explosive implications for us. Put another way, because of who God is, we should be prepared for surprises in our lives.

What sort of surprises? Three ways they will come. First, despite our desperation. Second, despite our expectations. And, third, despite our inclination. Because of who God is.

I. DESPITE OUR DESPERATION

First, despite our desperation. This is the background, the context of these events.

A) Settling for So Little

It starts with the people of Israel settling for so little. It starts with “we three kings.”

1. A brief mention

As you look at the end of Judges 12, we have this brief mention of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.

2. But clear trends

These are three minor judges. We don't have a lot on them but we can see some clear trends. They are taking on royal status. They are amassing their harems, forming alliances by marriage, putting on great displays of growing wealth and power. They are fixated on earthly glory.

B) Stalling of the Cycle

A settling and also a stalling of the cycle (**READ Judges 13:1**). Something has changed.

1. No mention of peace

There is no mention of peace. The common refrain in many of the accounts so far has been sin, suffering, crying out, deliverance, and "the land had rest." There was no mention of that earlier.

2. No cry for help

No mention of peace. And no cry for help. No cry for relief from misery. No repentance from sin. The people have become content in their servitude, accustomed to oppression - much like the 400 years their forefathers spent in Egypt. Do you see? Something is terribly wrong here.

The situation is that desperate. So desperate there is no cry. They need to be stirred.

Illustration:

We have several ways to do coffee in our home - percolator, Keurig, chorreador, Turkish. And the French press. For those of you unfamiliar with this, you measure out your grounds and put them into the press. You boil your water and pour that over the grounds. Then you stir the grounds. Otherwise, the coffee stays settled at the bottom. It must be stirred, moved, agitated.

That's what Israel needed. And that's what happened (**READ Judges 13:24-25**). Samson was stirred by the Spirit. He was moved, agitated, troubled, unsettled. Why? Because that's what Israel needed. They had become settled in sin. And so the LORD began with Samson.

Application:

Have you ever known the stirring of God's Spirit? Sometimes He brings not peace but disruption, not a calm but a storm, not comfort but conviction. Have you ever experienced that? Think with me here. It may not be a sign of God's absence. It may well be His living presence.

Because of who God is, we should be prepared for surprises in our lives. Even a stirring.

II. DESPITE OUR EXPECTATIONS

Which brings us to our second point. Sometimes He comes despite our expectations. We see this in the struggles of this unnamed woman at the center - Manoah's wife, Samson's mother.

A) Hopes Deadened

1. What we know

Her hopes have been deadened (**READ Judges 13:2**). She'll have no descendants, no offspring.

2. What this meant

What did this mean for her in that culture? It was a personal tragedy. It put her in a vulnerable position for, in those days, that could be grounds for divorce. And, because of the emphasis on children as a gift of God, to be barren and childless was deemed to be a mark of divine disfavor.

B) *Years Unseen*

That was all heavy enough. But then comes something implied - the years lived unseen.

1. Doltish husband

Manoah was a doltish husband, scoring very low in relational wisdom. She came with news of an angelic appearance. That's not enough for him. He wants to hear it for himself. So the angel returns but - perhaps with an affirming nod to his wife - again only to her and not to Manoah.

2. Suspicions deepened

How many years has she endured this? How long was she ignored, unnoticed, and dismissed? And what effect had this had on her? It's possibly why the narrator chose not to give us her name so as to help us feel this with her. Her suspicions are deepening. "I'm not worth hearing."

Illustration:

In the 1920's a young African American writer moved into New York City to join what became known as the Harlem Renaissance, an explosion of creativity among black artists. Through his poetry, Langston Hughes often tried to capture the common struggles and heartaches of people in his neighborhood. You can hear it in this poem simply titled "Dreams" ([READ](#)):

Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die,
life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.
Hold fast to dreams, for when dreams go,
life is a barren field, frozen with snow.

This is where Manoah's wife was. What does the LORD do? He sends the message to her of a savior that would come through her. And this is hardly the only time the Bible speaks of this.

Application:

What do we learn here? Appearances are not all that. God is not limited by our setting or experiences, our settled conclusions or our expectations. Appearances are not all that. What if you believed this? Not that you do, but just think with me. What if you did? What would that do to how you might pray this week? If God was not limited by the hopes deadened and years unseen for this woman, what might that mean for you and me? Hey, maybe it's true. Maybe all will be well. Maybe one way or the other, all really will be well. Despite our expectations.

Because of who God is, we should be prepared for surprises in our lives.

III. DESPITE OUR INCLINATION

Which brings us to the third point. Sometimes the LORD comes despite our inclination. Think of the dullness of Manoah as voiced in his desires, the requests he makes of this visitor.

A) *To Know the Rules*

1. What he's asking

He is set on knowing the rules ([READ Judges 13:11-14](#)). Manoah wants details and specifics.

2. What it meant

What he's heard isn't enough for him. We wants further instructions, a list of rules to go by. And the angel of the LORD refuses. "I've given you all you need to go on already. Be content."

B) To Have the Answers

1. What he's asking

He wants to know the rules and to have the answers (**READ Judges 13:15-18**). The "name" was connected to the person, their being. To know the name was to have a connection with them.

2. What it meant

Manoah wants an act of trust and favor. He wants the vulnerability of his visitor. He sees him as a prophet. So he seeks answers and influence. Again, the angel refuses. With apologies to Jack Nicholson, "My name? You can't handle my name! You don't know what you're asking."

Illustration:

I can relate to Manoah. I remember some time back reading the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11. You have the prayer and this scenario of the friend who comes for a favor. And this (**READ Luke 11:11-13**). I remember thinking, "That's it? The Holy Spirit? But, God, I need a solution. I need you to fix this mess." The Spirit wasn't enough. Low grade desires - much like Manoah.

But the angel gave a revelation of Himself (**READ Judges 13:19-20**). The One who was the pre-incarnate Son of God rose from the altar. And came to a manger and hung on a cross.

Application:

Manoah needed far more than he was asking for. And the LORD gave it to him. Where might that be true for you? Where are you looking for just the rules and answers? How might Jesus be inviting you to the path of growing maturity, into greater faith, hope, and trust in Him?

Because of who God is, we should be prepared for surprises counter to our inclination.

CONCLUSION:

There are many ways we greet each other. We make certain gestures. We ask particular questions. "How are you?" A common answer I hear is, "Better than I deserve." There is a humility to that - a contentment without grasping for what is not ours. There is a reality to it as well - our guilt and shame mean we are due for a whole lot worse than what we have received.

Coming back to where we started a bit ago, perhaps a good follow up question to that answer would be "Who is God? What is He like?" Let me share more of my own story here. For many years, the essence of my answer came from a place of learned education. "Who is God?" I might quote the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* to you (**READ**): "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Which is a good answer. But there's more. We need more than just learned education but learned experience. "How am I? Better than I deserve. Who is God? He is greater and better than I believe. He is greater and better than I know." I keep forgetting that. But He keeps reminding me that I might know, live, and find my life in that sweet defining deepening reality.

Because of who God is - really is - we should be prepared for surprises in our lives.

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