

BEHOLD THE WONDERFUL LORD – JUDGES 13.6-24

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⁶ Then the woman went to her husband and told him, “A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn’t ask him where he came from, and he didn’t tell me his name. ⁷ But he said to me, ‘You will become pregnant and have a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from the womb until the day of his death.’” ⁸ Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: “Pardon your servant, Lord. I beg you to let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born.” ⁹ God heard Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her. ¹⁰ The woman hurried to tell her husband, “He’s here! The man who appeared to me the other day!” ¹¹ Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, “Are you the man who talked to my wife?” “I am,” he said. ¹² So Manoah asked him, “When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule that governs the boy’s life and work?” ¹³ The angel of the LORD answered, “Your wife must do all that I have told her. ¹⁴ She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her.” ¹⁵ Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you.” ¹⁶ The angel of the LORD replied, “Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.” (Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the LORD.) ¹⁷ Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?” ¹⁸ He replied, “Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.” ¹⁹ Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: ²⁰ As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground. ²¹ When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. ²² “We are doomed to die!” he said to his wife. “We have seen God!” ²³ But his wife answered, “If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this.” ²⁴ The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him,



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

I think everybody here in this room knows the story of Samson, the strong man from the Bible. I think the stories of Samson extend beyond those who believe the Bible to be the Word of God. It’s one of those stories that shares characteristics with legends from other religions and mythologies. You have the stories of his strength – when he tore a lion in two with his bare hands, when he lost his strength after his hair was cut, how God gave him his strength back so he could bring down a temple on thousands of Philistines. Those are the well-known stories of Samson’s life. The account from our first lesson, is not so much of a familiar story.

There were only a few people in all of the Bible who were announced to come before they were even born. We can think of the obvious example in Jesus. But Samson was another person who was announced before his birth. Until this time Samson's mother was unable to have a child, and like the angel Gabriel coming and announcing Jesus' birth to Mary, the Angel of the Lord announced Samson's birth to his mother.

In this story, we certainly see the Lord's wonderful mercy upon Samson's parents, and even upon the people of Israel, but we see something else as well. We see the wonderful way the Lord calls his people to faith and service. The book of Romans talked about those who hear the message by those who have been sent, in the gospel we heard Jesus calling his first disciples to be messengers. We too have been called by the Lord – called to faith and called to service by his wonderful mercy. BEHOLD THE WONDERFUL LORD

1. Who calls us
2. Who is beyond understanding

(1)

The period during which our first lesson was set was during the time of the judges. This was a time in Israel's history shortly after they had entered the Promised Land. If you remember, they had been wandering in the desert for 40 years, waiting for the elder generation to die off, before they could enter the land God promised to Abraham. A man by the name of Joshua led the Israelites as they entered and conquered the Promised Land. After years of fighting the people of Israel conquered the Promised Land. But they didn't do everything the Lord had said.

One command the Lord had made very specifically to Joshua and the Israelites was to completely destroy all the nations living in the Promised Land. What seems like a harsh command from a loving God was in fact done primarily for two reasons. The first reason was that these nations were receiving the punishment due them for their wickedness, for their rebellion against God. The second reason was so that they might not tempt the Israelites away from the Lord with their pagan religions. It was this second reason which haunted the Israelites for the time they spent in the Promised Land.

The Israelites didn't completely destroy the nations living in the Promised Land. Some were merely put into forced labor, others were too difficult to drive out, so they let them live there. Either way, this created problems for the Israelites. This is really the whole story of the book of Judges. After Joshua died, the Israelites didn't have a united leader. Instead, "**each man did as he saw fit.**" You can only imagine how this turned out. If each person was to determine what was right in his own eyes, instead of a government enforcing laws, it can result in a lot of trouble really quickly. And that's what happened to Israel.

The book of Judges details the failings of the Israelites as a nation, and as a result, God's punishment upon Israel. God made very clear he was bringing them into this Promised Land as a result of his love and mercy. However, he warned them if they turned away from him, that he would send nations to oppress them. And that is exactly what happened in Judges. The people turned away from God and foreign nations oppressed them. Then the people turn to God for help, and God then raised up a leader, or a judge to overthrow the foreign nations, and for a time, the people return to worshiping the Lord. But then the cycle repeats itself.

This cycle had already repeated itself on a number of occasions by the time our first lesson rolled around with Manoah and his wife. It was the Philistine nation that proved to be a thorn in Israel's side at this time, and the Lord was preparing to raise up another judge, another leader to deliver his people. And he did it in an unusual way. The Angel of the Lord came to Manoah and his wife with a special message – they would have a son, and this son was to be a Nazarite – someone specially set aside for God's purpose. He was not to drink wine, and his hair was not to be cut. He would be the one to deliver God's people.

Only A WONDERFUL AND MERCIFUL LORD who calls would do this for his people. A people who had turned away from him more times than you can count. But he still calls out to his people. If we were the ones in the position of hiring employees, or picking people for our team, we would have certain standards that the people we choose or call are to meet. Even take for example the call for a pastor at Sahuarita. There are certain qualifications we would like this man to meet, an obvious one is that he be a pastor, not just a random person off the street. God doesn't work that way. God doesn't call people based on their past performance, he doesn't call people based on their future potential. THE WONDERFUL LORD calls people based on his mercy.

We have seen over the last several weeks how Jesus is the long promised Messiah – he fulfilled all righteousness in our place. But all of that would be worth nothing, if nobody knew about it. Our lesson in Romans stated, **“How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard, and how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”** So God called, not only Samson and the other judges to deliver God's people, but he calls all believers to himself, and calls all of us to be his messengers. He doesn't call us or choose us because we are anything special, or could become anything special. He calls us based on his mercy.

(2)

But God just didn't want Samson's parents to know that Samson was special and called by God. That call had a purpose. The Lord's purpose for Samson was to deliver his people from the hands of the Philistines. Samson would be sent to do something special for the Lord. Manoah, Samson's father is obviously thankful for this prophecy from the Angel of the Lord (which he thought was just an angel), but he had a little bit of skepticism. And so he wanted to know more about it. The Angel of the Lord said he had spoken everything that needed to be said. Manoah still wanted to do something, at least remember the messenger, but the messenger said, offer a sacrifice to the Lord.

And then something amazing happened. The fire was kindled, the wood burned, the offering smoked, and the Angel of the Lord stepped into the flame and ascended into heaven. This amazed Manoah at first, but then it frightened him. He had not realized it before, but he was not just in the presence of an angelic messenger, he was in the very presence of God himself, and he didn't understand, just as the angel had told him that his name was beyond understanding. So afraid was Manoah that he cried out to his wife, **“We are doomed to die! We have seen God.”**

Such is the reaction of sinful man before a holy God – that was the reaction Peter had in our gospel for this morning when he realized who Jesus was, quite similar to the reaction of Manoah. We haven't found ourselves in the presence of holiness like Manoah or Peter did – seeing God face to face. So we cannot fully understand how that would feel. But we know from the Bible that our sins make us this way, and that if we were in the presence of God, we would act the same way as Manoah and the same way as

Peter. And it's not just that we would be ashamed, but that we cannot be in the presence of holiness. An apt comparison might be getting too close to the sun – it's too bright and it's too hot to get any closer than where we are just now.

Unfortunately, we forget that this would be our reaction all too often. All too often we think that because of the way we have acted, we deserve to be in the presence of God. We don't look at our sins as the damning evidence against us that it is. And at times like those, God's Word is truly beyond our understanding. And yet we see the reaction of Manoah's wife. She said, **"If the Lord had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering."** God allowed Manoah and his wife to live, just as Jesus allowed Peter and the other disciples to live, despite their sinfulness. But it's not just that he allowed them to live in their sinfulness, but that he came about to change their sinfulness.

Another translation of the angel's words, "beyond understanding" is "wonderful." The same word is used by Isaiah – **"he will be called Wonderful Counselor."** The Angel of the Lord truly was not only beyond understanding but wonderful to Manoah and his wife. He had brought them good news about their Son, and he allowed them to live. The wonderful counselor Isaiah spoke of is none other than the Messiah, whose work would deliver from sin. Samson, along with the other judges acted to save their people from their earthly enemies. The wonderful counselor would act to save his people from their spiritual enemies.

And so this is not just a wonderful counselor, but he is my wonderful counselor. A wonderful counselor whose words I must take at face value and believe. Instead of trying to figure out the "hows?" and the "whys?" like Manoah, we must give thanks to God. Yes, there may be times where we are left scratching our heads at some of the things that go on in this world. But when we ask, he would give us the answer, "My ways are too wonderful for you, you would not understand, just trust me."

We do have a WONDERFUL LORD. He cares about you and me very deeply. That is why he sent his Son Jesus. That is why he still continues to look after you even today. Yes, there still will be questions that we have in regards to what goes on in our life. But the questions we have are not as important as the answers we know. We know that we have a wonderful Lord who calls us and who is beyond understanding. Amen.