

Introduction

To all the mothers here this morning, I wish you a very happy Mother's Day. God commands honor to mothers. And we should happily do so. Motherhood is a position of honor. It is also a position of impact. I am grateful for all the moms at Grace Community and desire the Lord's richest blessing on your lives.

With our thoughts on motherhood today, I thought it an appropriate time to give an opportunity for parents to commit themselves to godly parenting and for committing their children to the Lord. It is like when Joshua proclaimed to the Israelites, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." He was challenging the nation to commit to serving the Lord in the same way he was committed to serve. We can talk about what we ought to do and what we should do and what we need to do but fail to ever get ourselves in gear and do it. So this morning is in part about parents doing just that. We will have a time of commitment right after the sermon. If there are parents here who did not sign up, I want you to feel free to join us up front right after I am finished with the sermon.

For now, let's turn in our Bibles to Joshua 13. We will step away from Matthew this morning to spend some time meditating on a text that is quite fitting for such a day as this. Joshua 13 is where the biblical account of the life of Samson begins.

[Read Text; Pray]

The message of the life of Samson consists of two layers. On the one hand you have the narrative. There are the details of the promise of the birth of Samson all the way to his death. Many biblical and practical principles are taught through the examples of Samson and his parents. Sometimes we see great examples of what to do and sometimes of what not to do. At the same time, however, there is a deeper layer. In the deeper layer are numerous types and shadows which provide glimpses into the birth and life of Jesus Christ. So I want to address both of these layers this morning.

Most of our time will be spent gazing into godly parenting, but we will conclude with a glimpse into the glory of Jesus.

I. A Gaze Into Godly Parenting.

At the conclusion of Judges 13, we are told that Mrs. Manoah bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him. These words tell me that Samson got off to a great start. The upbringing he received pleased the Lord and the Lord used it to bless Samson and prepare him for a mighty work for God. Arising out of his upbringing, he was prompted by the Spirit for the calling for which God was preparing him. Now we know that from that point things did not go so well for Samson. He did not walk in righteousness, though at the end of his life, he appears to recover the riches of the way he was raised. He cried out to the Lord God to fulfill his calling and avenge the Philistines, and at his death he killed more Philistines than he had killed during his life. So despite the in-between years, he got a good start. He was blessed as he grew from infancy to young adulthood.

As we concentrate on Judges 13 as a whole, we find a number of marks of the kind of parenting that glorifies God. It is a blessing to children; it prepares them well for the Lord's use. As we consider Manoah and his wife, we see several foundational characteristics of godly parenting. Now if you are not a parent or if you think your parenting days are over, don't say, "Oh well this sermon is not relevant to me." There are a number of aspects of godly parents that are aspects of godly people as well. So let's dig in to see what is here.

A. First I want you to grasp that . . .

Godly Parenting Withstands Ungodly Influence

1. Notice the very first verse of the chapter. "The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years." This same old song had been sung now in Israel for generations. The cycle of the book of judges is redundant. The people of the of Israel would do what was evil in the sight of the Lord, going after other gods. And the Lord would give the people into the hands of their enemies, who would oppress them. The Lord would send a judge to

deliver them from their plunderers. They would enter a time of relief but soon thereafter would turn away again from the Lord. The land was filled with great spiritual darkness. And the people were in terrible distress. Yet they continued far from God. We come on the scene in the fortieth year of a period of darkness and distress. There was no seeming cry among the people to God, but there was a man named Manoah.

What we learn about Manoah and his wife sets them apart from the prevailing spiritual condition of the day. The days were dark spiritually and people were calling on the gods of the nations, on Baal and Ashteroth. But Manoah and his wife called on the Lord. They were withstanding the ungodly influence all around them.

It was a tough time to be alive. It was a tough time to identify with the Lord God. It certainly was a tough time to be a godly parent. But godly parents were the crying need of the hour. Israel needed parents who would raise their children to fear the Lord, children who would turn from idols to serve the living and true God. Such were Manoah and his wife.

2. Those days and our days are not much different in terms of spiritual darkness and idolatry and distress. This country has been greatly blessed by God, but it has turned far away. It has resorted to the gods of wealth and sensuality. It offers its children to the gods and goddesses of pleasure and teaches the children it does not kill to do the same. Children are largely not brought up. They are produced and they are either pushed off in a corner or they are allowed to rule the roost. Parental discipline is largely abusive or it is non-existent. People look everywhere but in the word of God to get advice for how to parent.

The need today is the same as it was in the days of the judges. The need of the hour is for parents who will fear the true God and who will resist the spirit of the age, who will dare to commit themselves to Jesus Christ and godliness and thus prepare themselves for raising their children in the fear of the Lord. Raising children well takes determination. It takes commitment and courage. It requires taking a stand and maintaining that stand against a raging current.

Godly parents need strong church families who will support and encourage those parents along the way, who will help out, and who will reinforce biblical standards. Godly parenting withstands ungodly influence.

Second, I want you to grasp that . . .

B. Godly parenting embraces the concept of stewardship.

1. In verses 2-7, we learn that the wife of Manoah was barren. The man and his wife had no children. They had experienced the pain and affliction of childlessness. I realize that Mother's Day is painful for some of you because you are in the same situation. I want to assure you God is with you. He will never leave you. And God's people are here for you. We weep with you. And we point you to the only one whose plans and ways are perfect and who heals the brokenhearted. He is the one who calls all the stars by name. He is big enough and strong enough to comfort and fulfill you.

Sometimes God overrules barrenness. He did so in the case of Manoah and his wife. The angel of the Lord appeared to Mrs Manoah and assured her she would bear a son. His instruction was that he was to be a Nazarite to God from the womb. Now this is highly significant. The Lord gave to Israel the practice of making a Nazarite vow. It was a vow of separation. For a specified time period, the person making the vow was designating himself or herself separate to the Lord. Letting the hair grow and not drinking wine or eating anything produced by the grapevine was an outward demonstration that he or she was holy to the Lord, set apart to him and for him. It was a way of saying I don't belong to me, I belong to God.

So the angel of the Lord tells Mrs Manoah that her son would be a Nazarite for a specified time—from the womb to the day of his death. He is saying that this child is holy to the Lord. He belongs to the Lord. He is God's baby. God is entrusting the child to these parents for raising. They are merely stewards.

2. Godly parenting begins with the understanding that the children God gives us ultimately belong to Him. They are not ours; they are his. We are accountable to him to bring up children God's way because they belong to

God. This is a fundamental understanding for every parent who would raise their children well. What career they will enter, where they will go is not ultimately mine or even theirs to decide but God's. The plan of God for Samson was announced that he would begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. It was God's plan for his child.

My mother tells that when I was born there was some question about my heartbeat. There was concern on the faces of those in the delivery room. She tells that in that moment she had a conversation with the Lord. She said, "Lord, he is yours." I am thankful that she raised me that way. Every mother and father who would be godly in their parenting must raise their children that way. These are not our children, they belong to God. God has entrusted them to us to train them to look to God, lean on God, seek the face of God, and to serve God.

Next, let us understand that . . .

C. Godly parenting is grounded in a strong walk with God

1. When we look down to verse 8 and following, we see a precious picture of a godly father. Manoah is in prayer, and not to the idols of the surrounding peoples but to the Lord. A man who is quick to fall to his knees is the kind of man our families need. Being strong in prayer is a prerequisite to being a godly father.

2. And Manoah was not only a praying father but also a seeking father. What do we hear him say while he is on his knees? He is crying out to God that he will send back the man who came before. And why? So that he might TEACH US what we are to do with the child. He sought to learn God's ways in order to be a godly parent, in order to fulfill the duty he had as a steward of this child's life. O, that God would mold the wills of Christian men in our day to seek his direction, to seek his guidance, to read his word and especially the Proverbs, in order to raise up his children in the way that they should go.

3. Manoah prayed. He sought. And he believed. He was a man of faith who believed the promises of God! Look back at the prayer. He wants to know what he is to do with the child . . . get this . . . who IS TO BE BORN.

They have been barren, but he is convinced God is at work here and has given them a promise he will keep. He is not like Zechariah the father of John the Baptist. When the angel appeared and told him that he and Elizabeth would bear a son, he asked for a sign. Manoah is not asking for a sign that the child will be born; he is asking for help with the child that will be born.

Godly parents believe God. They trust in his promises. Their great concern is that they might get in the way or not obey what God's directs. These three things—prayer, seeking God's direction, and believing God's promises—are part of a vibrant walk with God that godly parents pursue.

Next we need to see that. . .

D. Godly Parenting Is Teamwork.

1. It is striking how many instances we have in this text of Manoah and his wife working together. The angel first comes to her. She goes straight to Manoah to give a detailed report. He prays for the man to come back "to US to teach US what WE are to do with the child." When the angel came again, he came again to her and she ran quickly and told her husband. He rose and went after her. There is not an elimination of order in the husband-wife relationship. But there is a beautiful union of sharing responsibility and working together and living life together.

The angel of the Lord speaks to Manoah in verse 14 and says, "All that I have commanded her, let her observe." It is Manoah's wife's responsibility to obey and it is Manoah's responsibility to assist her.

We see more teamwork as the man asks the visitor to stay and share a meal. "Please let US detain you and prepare a young goat for you." Now in this preincarnate appearance, Christ directs them to make an offering to the Lord. As Manoah offers the sacrifice to the Wonderful one, who works wonders, he accepted it by fire that went up to heaven and the Lord went up in the flame. Now we behold Manoah AND his wife worshiping together. They fall on their faces to the ground.

Next they edify one another. He says, "we are gonna die because we have seen God." But she instructs him. "Oh now if the Lord meant to kill us, he

would not have accepted the sacrifice and promised us such wonderful things.”

2. Godly marriages where husband and wife honor one another and serve one another, where the two have truly become one flesh, these marriages are the fertile ground of godly parenting by which God blesses children. Here he prepares them to be receptive for the stirring of the Spirit of God.

We cannot say that godly parenting is a guarantee of producing God-seeking children. But it is the directive of the Lord. Parents, bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. And it is what parents must do so that as far as it depends upon them, they have done everything they can to point their children toward the Lord.

It is time for parents to have done with worldly parenting techniques that let children run all over their parents. Let Christian parents pursue godliness in their parenting. It is not easy. Giving birth may be painful and stressful, but that is just the beginning of an incredible responsibility that requires effort and intensity and prayer and learning and pleading with God for direction and going to his word to get that direction and exerting one's life to apply that word through instruction and training and commanding and leading like a shepherd the children God entrusts to your care. Godly parenting is hard. It involves copious time and great effort. It requires getting up off the lazy boy and getting into their lives. It requires loving patience to teach again and again, to administer discipline in the context of patience and compassion. It requires self-control and intentionality. But do not hold back! How many parents will be filled with regret when their children reject the Lord if they failed to teach and instruct and invest all they could in their children's lives. But even if children wander, if parents have done their utmost, they can continue to pray and continue to trust in the Lord to whom they pointed their children.

I plead with parents this morning still having children in your households, rise up. Rise up and give yourselves, at whatever point you may be, rise up and have done with lesser parenting! Give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the king of kings by committing yourselves to godly parenting in the power and instruction of the Lord.

II. A Glimpse at the Glory of Jesus.

There are a number of subtle ways in which the birth of Samson points ahead to the birth and work of our Savior.

A. For one thing both the birth of Samson and the birth of Jesus were miraculous in nature. Samson was born miraculously to a childless couple. Jesus' even greater birth was to a virgin who had never known intimacy with a man.

B. Both births were according to angelic promise. In both cases the heavenly messengers appeared to both the father and the mother, beginning with the mother. Matthew reports that the angel said to Joseph concerning Mary, "She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus." Judges 13 says, "And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson."

C. Both births produced Nazirites. Samson was a Nazirite from birth, set aside from conception to be holy to God until his death. Hence he was a ceremonial Nazirite. Jesus was not a Nazirite by vow and ceremony, but what the Nazirite vow represented, being separate unto the Lord, Jesus was by his very nature and constitution. As the very son of God he is holy to the Lord.

D. Both births were brought about to bring about defeat of the enemies of the people of God. Of Samson it had been said, "he will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." Compare those words with the ones spoken to Joseph by the angel. He said of Mary, "She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sin." In Samson the victory over a great and oppressive enemy was begun. But in Jesus Christ full and final salvation is brought to the people of God from their greatest and most oppressive enemies—their sin and the devil.

E. Both births culminated in sacrificial deaths in which their greatest victories were accomplished. We look to the culmination of Samson's life. Chained between two pillars in a pagan temple, he cried out to God for strength and it was given to him. With arms outstretched, he toppled the pillars. He brought the house down on himself and more than 3,000 people. The scripture says, "So the dead whom he killed at his death were

more than those whom he had killed during his life.” Samson’s greatest victory over the enemy was in his death. It was so for Jesus as well. Hung between two thieves with arms outstretched, he cried out to God into whose hands he committed his spirit and died. And by his death the enemies of sin and death themselves are defeated. In his death was Jesus’ greatest victory!

Israelites of the day shared in Samson’s victory. And believers in Jesus share in the victory of Jesus! Rejoice with me, O fellow believers, in the victory won by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And rejoice in how the scripture foreshadows that magnificent victory. May your faith be strengthened and your appreciation for his work be renewed this day. May your zeal for him be infused with fresh resolve and your determination to continue following him be invigorated!

To those who have not yet bent the knee to follow Christ and submit to him I say, repent of your sins; turn from them; deny yourself and in faith take up your cross and follow Jesus. Commit yourself to Him right now!

Conclusion

Let me conclude this morning by pointing out that the victory won by Christ is the grounding of godly parenting. What we notice about the account of Manoah and his wife is that they were not aware of the identity of the one who had come and promised them the child and had directed them as to how to bring him up until he left them. Was he a man of God? Was he an angel? No, he was THE angel of the Lord. He accepted their sacrifice by fire from heaven in which he went up out of their sight. Realizing they had seen God, they fell on their faces. This was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus! And like with the great commission of the New Testament, he commissioned their parenting and ascended into heaven, entrusting them to the task.

Every parent who is a Christ follower has received a similar commission as Manoah and his wife. As much as it depends upon parents, they are to seek to raise up little Nazirites to be holy to the Lord and serve him to the day of their death.

Parent-Child Dedication

Parents, do you commit yourselves before God and this family of faith to raise your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, to strive to work together to diligently point your children to Jesus?

We do.

Parents, do you commit your children to the Lord, acknowledging that ultimately they belong to him not you and to raise them with this understanding in mind?

We do.

Church Family, do you commit yourselves to praying for and assisting these families as they seek to bring up these children in the way they should go?

We do.

Prayer