

[the 18th commandment]

:: Judges 13 ::

This morning our passage will be the first part of Judges chapter 13.

Here we find a very interesting and very challenging Christophany.

We're going to split this chapter into 2 studies because there's a ton of stuff here and there are really 2 different focuses in the chapter as a whole. The first is this idea of the Nazarite vow and the second is the man Manoah and his response to these appearances of the Lord.

This morning we'll look at the first portion, where Jesus appears to the wife of Manoah and speaks to her concerning her future son who is to be a lifelong Nazarite.

Judges 13.1 - Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

As always, we find that the general message of the Christophany passages teach us that God desires to reveal Himself and His plan to us, His people.

Specifically this morning we will find a message about fruitfulness in our lives and how our actions play a great part in how close we are to God and how fruitful we are in His service.

We see this principle demonstrated in verse one in the negative sense.

The Children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. Thus, He delivered them to the Philistines for forty years.

A verse like this, if misunderstood, could cause us to view God in an unfavorable light. But really this situation is very simple. God's people were in abject rebellion and idolatry, so He delivered, the root word there is gave, He gave them over to the people they were going after.

This is what happens when we continually sin. We like certain aspects of sin, and so in our hearts we keep going after it, we keep demanding that God allow us to do this thing or that thing and eventually God gives us the desires of our hearts and allows us to go over to that place we were so infatuated with. We bear the fruit of our sin, rather than the fruit of God's Spirit.

The problem is that the fruit of sin is destruction and bondage and suffering. The Israelites were learning this first hand, as God gave them over to that which they were so infatuated with.

But immediately the Lord set in motion a plan of redemption and restoration.

Judges 13.2 - Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children.

There are so many stories in the Bible about barrenness. There are lots of reasons why. Let me offer 2 this morning:

First, this is simply something that occurs. Barrenness is a part of many people's lives, even in our own community and we should be mindful of that fact so that we're not saying stupid, uncompassionate things around people who are unable to have kids.

But second, devotionally speaking, the subject of barrenness is a picture of our spiritual lives before Christ.

In so many of these stories, whether it's here with Manoah and his wife or Abraham and Sarah or Jacob and Rachel or Zacharias and Elizabeth, there's a lot of devotional insight to find about our barrenness as individuals and the life-giving power of God once He comes into our lives.

In previous studies on Wednesday mornings, whether in Romans or the Sermon on the Mount or Measure of a Man or elsewhere, we learn about how bankrupt we are as people and how we have nothing within us that is worthy of the Lord. But then, we find that in that emptiness, Christ fills and overflows our lives with His fruitfulness, His life, His purpose. We find that Christ brings the only lasting satisfaction that our hearts have been longing for.

You and I are bankrupt. If we want to have spiritually abundant life, then we must receive Christ's living water, His indwelling presence, His gifting and calling and filling. He takes barrenness and produces fruit.

Judges 13.3 - And the Angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son."

As always in these Christophanies, Jesus reveals Himself to her, demonstrates His omniscience and then explains to her His plan for her life.

God is a God of revelation and we are a people of calling.

If we don't feel like we know God's calling, then we should first remind ourselves that God *desires* to reveal and then we should wait on Him to hear from Him, because He never presents Himself to us in His word as a God who doesn't want to tell us what's going on. In fact, we find quite the opposite. We find Him going out of His way to show us what He wants to do.

There was more to His message to Manoah's wife. Look at verse 4.

Judges 13.4-5 - "Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

So Jesus explains to her that she's going to have a son, but He instructs her to raise him as a Nazarite. He would be the beginning of the deliverance from the Philistines. I like that because it again shows us that God is always working, through many people and in many situations in order to accomplish His will. Through some He will work in greater degrees (from our perspective), but He is working through each of us to do what's on His heart to do. That is an encouraging thought.

Now back to this vow.

The detailed guidelines for the Nazarite vow were given in the Law of Moses, back in Numbers 6 of our Bible. It was not an easy vow to make, nor was it always lifelong in the Old Testament, but it was a part of the Law and something that all God-fearing Jews would know about.

As I said, this vow keeps popping up in the Bible. Whether with Samson or John the Baptist or the Apostle Paul, this unusual vow returns from time to time. While we are no longer under the law, it will benefit us to apply the spiritual principles we see demonstrated in this consecration. Jews were not required to take this vow. Instead it was a provision made for those people who desired to draw nearer to the Lord in a profound and powerful way.

We are people who desire to draw nearer to the Lord, so we can take what we learn about this vow and apply the principles to our own lives in order to become less entangled with the world and more embraced with the Lord.

Let's take a devotional look at these 3 prohibitions. Without getting into a slugging match over food or drink or hairstyle, we can learn spiritual principles from the prescriptions of a Nazarite life.

The purpose was to bear holiness in a person's life. That was the point.

Holiness is an incredibly important part of our walk with the Lord.

In Psalm 29 we're instructed to worship in holiness. Romans 6 tells us to present ourselves as slaves of righteousness for holiness. 2 Corinthians teaches us to perfect holiness in our lives. 1 Thessalonians says that God called us *IN* holiness.

1 Peter 1.15-16 - but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Sadly, holiness is an attribute that is all but lost in mainstream, American Christianity. However, it is a fruit that we *must* bear as healthy Christians.

So what is it?

Holiness is **not** self-righteousness. We do not become holy by simply *NOT* doing something that someone else *IS* doing. That's not holiness. That's legalism. We never want to move into legalism. We do not *attain* righteousness through any rituals or self-imposed criteria. Don't confuse holiness and righteousness.

Holiness, biblically speaking, means to be set apart, dedicated, purified for the Lord. Our passage demonstrates 3 different aspects of holiness. And we can learn spiritual principles from the prescriptions that the Lord commanded.

First, Mrs. Manoah was to be careful not to drink wine or strong drink. This speaks to us of inebriation or intoxication. Being under the influence of some chemical or substance.

Spiritually speaking, the Bible is clear that we are to be under the influence of God's word and His Spirit, not other substances.

Ephesians 5.18 - Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation (or excess), but be filled with the Spirit.

Proverbs 20.1 - Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

Holiness means being purified from those things which would intoxicate us and draw us away from the Lord and into drunkenness, whether spiritual or physical. Holiness means that we want God to direct us and excite us and that He satisfies us. Thus, we fill ourselves with Him.

Second, she was to be careful to not eat anything unclean. This speaks to us of sin and defilement.

Holiness means being men who are *purified* by God. Men who are avoiding spiritually unclean things which cause us to sin.

In Numbers 6 where God is explaining the Nazarite vow it gives examples of situations where a person could become unclean and God says, "Sorry, you need to avoid those things." It didn't matter if even your brother or sister died, you were to keep away from the defilement of death because you were set apart for something else.

This principle continues for us in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 6.18a - Flee sexual immorality.

1 Corinthians 10:14b - Flee idolatry.

2 Timothy 2.22 - Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Holiness means **avoiding** sin and dedicating ourselves to Godly pursuits. This also speaks to us of being men who are ready. We're set apart, we're not inebriated by some other substance and we're avoiding sin so that when God calls on us we are ready and prepared to go in and serve Him.

Third, Manoah's wife was to keep a razor from ever shaving her son's head.

To me this speaks of personal vanity, whether in the classic sense or in the sense of personal ambition or pride or selfishness.

Matthew 6.25 - Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

Holiness means devoting ourselves to God and placing His desires above our own. It means abandoning our own desire for power or greatness and submitting to His plan. It means that we see ourselves as God sees us. Not in arrogance, but in humility. Understanding that we are nothing without the Lord. Thus, our desire will not be for personal accomplishment, but for Godly service.

Intoxication, immorality and ambition. These are the 3 areas which the Nazarite vow addresses in our text. These were the prescriptions that would set apart God's man for God's work.

The passage continues in verse 6.

Judges 13.6 - So the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name."

One point to pause on is her description of the Lord: "His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome."

Indeed, our Lord is full of power and might and strength and glory.

Judges 13.7 - And He said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'

This boy was to be a lifelong Nazarite. Next week we'll see how Manoah responded to these visits and we'll gain some different insight.

But now let's apply these things.

While we are careful to reject legalism and to defend Biblical liberties, we must also accept the fact that there are instances in the New Testament where we find that our activity and commitment becomes a determining factor in how fruitful we are and how near to God we're walking.

This is the deal as Christians: We're saved. We cannot lose that salvation. However, God leaves it up to us how deep we want to go in our relationship with Him.

Think about when Jesus said, "these do not come out but by prayer and fasting." Or look at the qualifications for elders or deacons. Or go back and listen to any of the *Measure Of A Man* studies and we find that we're not just lifeless mannequins in this relationship with the Lord. We have a part to play. We determine how usable we are to the Lord, how pliable we are in His hands.

The Nazarite vow gives us an example of how to live our lives in a holy commitment to God. It shows us the principles of focusing our thoughts and our actions and our attitudes on Godly things. Through that devotion we avoid sin and the bondage that it brings. Not only that, but through holiness, God does wonders.

The point is not to list out what we *shouldn't* do. That misses the point. Instead, we should each take stock of our lives, individually. We should sit down with God and take a look at who we are, what we're filling our minds and our time with, what sort of pursuits are we chasing after, what our calling is. And we should each humbly look for ways where we might produce more holiness in our hearts. Because spiritual growth and fruitfulness can't happen if we're not active in this relationship. We can't grow if we're not taking in water. We can't bear good fruit if we're feeding on bad things.

If we want the kind of life that is offered us in the Bible then we need to make holiness a priority.

Why? So that God can protect us and use us. So that our lives, even in the smallest ways, will direct people to eternal life in Jesus. So that we can live in nearness to the awesome, magnificent God who we love.

We don't want to be men who settle for the bare minimum. We want to be men who go deep in the Lord. We can do this by setting apart our life for Him. By realizing that we have the choice to chase after God or to chase after something else. By believing that God will bear fruit if we receive His word and His calling and His filling.

Holiness is a mindset. It's not about being self-righteous. It's not about lists. It's about drawing near to the Lord so that we can have a great portion of His work in our lives.