

Thought for Sunday 11th April 2021

Pastor Gordon Hamilton

Judges 13:1-25 Over past few months we have looked at the life of Abraham, and the miracle around the birth of Isaac, bearing in mind that Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90, and this was their first child. Last weekend we looked, rightly so, at the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. At Christmas we looked at the miracles surrounding the births of both Jesus and John the Baptist. Today, as we look at the birth of Samson, again we see a miracle occur, verses 2 & 3; *'A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth. The angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, 'You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son.'* The angel of the Lord didn't just go off and leave this woman, who incidentally, is nameless, just referred to as woman or wife, very sad that. As I was saying, the angel of the Lord didn't just go off and leave this woman, he told her; *'see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.'* Now you will remember when the angel Gabriel visited Zechariah in Luke 1, he was told his son to be, John; *'will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.'* This time it is 'The Woman' who is told *'you shall drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean.'* Manoah's wife is given all the responsibility of what she must do, but sadly we are not even told her name. Maybe that is the way she would have wanted it to be, she may have felt, *'it's not about me, it's about the Lord.'* Whenever I have taken marriage preparation classes, and my wife knows this, as I insisted we went through the same ones before we got married. One of the things I say to any couple is; you are allowed one argument in your married life. That is that you should both want the other to be the best, it is all about you, not me! John the Baptist wasn't bothered about people remembering him, John 3:22-30 tells of John's testimony of Jesus, ending with the words in verse 30; *'He must become greater; I must become less.'* I love the way Manoah's wife goes and tells him what the angel of the Lord had told her, the N.I.V says *'he was very awesome.'* Which in today's language is maybe not the correct word, most translations say *'his appearance was like that of an angel of God, most awe-inspiring;'* we are then told that Manoah prayed to the Lord. He wanted confirmation from the Lord. These things aren't an everyday occurrence, and the Israelites had been in the hands of the Philistines for the last 40 years. They seem to make a habit of ignoring God and then turning back to God when it suits them, thankfully we have a God who responds and again he takes them out of captivity, the problem then repeats its self, they settle back into their old ways, just thinking that no matter what they do everything will be okay, they can always call out to God, knowing they are his people. It reminds me of the old fable about 'crying wolf.' It doesn't work like that; we are called to walk with the Lord, always. We in the UK can be a bit like the Israelites, everything is going fine, so we feel we don't need God, we trust in ourselves, but of course the Psalmist knew better, Psalm 118:8 *'It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.'* Even this last weekend, in Jewish households, they would have celebrated the Passover, they will have remembered the events we can read about in the book of Exodus, of how God brought them out of slavery in Egypt. But how is their faith in God now? Yes, there will be some who really put their trust in God, but for many Jews it will be just a cause for a celebration. Just over three months ago we celebrated Christmas, sadly for the vast majority of

the population of the UK, it was just an excuse for a party, for drinking and eating, and for spending money that people don't have on things that are not necessary. The real truth is that Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of the Saviour of the world. Easter is a time when we recognise that same Saviour died on a cross, albeit 2,000 years ago, but Jesus came into the world and died for every single one of us, that we may be saved, that our sins may be forgiven. John 3:16; *'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes shall have everlasting life.'* Let's come back to Judges 13:12, Manoah wanted confirmation that what his wife was saying was correct; *'When your words come true, what is to be the boy's rule of life; what is he to do?'* I'm sure Manoah thought there was to be more to this revelation than his wife having a baby and that she wasn't allowed to drink any wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean. Yes, the child would be a Nazirite, but, as he says, *'what is to be the boy's rule of life; what is he to do?'* Strangely we do not get an answer. Manoah didn't pursue it further, but in gratitude wants to give the angel of the Lord some reward in preparing a meal. That is rejected, and he is told; *'If you detain me, I will not eat your food; but if you want to prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord.'* It appears to me that Manoah's wife was the one who had the greater faith. Manoah says; *'We are doomed to die! We have seen God!'* His wife says; *'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.'* The wisdom of a woman. What is the saying? Behind every great man is a great woman. The chapter ends with the news that; *'The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him.'* We have spoken over the past few months about Abraham. How he trusted God and it was *'credited to him as righteousness.'* Hebrews 11:32 mentions Samson, but only to say that the writer did not have time to tell about him. Righteousness comes from believing and trusting in God. Manoah's wife did, how about you? Amen.

Man of sorrows! What a name
For the Son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood:
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He:
Full atonement—can it be?
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Lifted up was He to die,
'It is finished!' was His cry:
Now in heaven exalted high:
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

When He comes, our glorious King,
All His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew this song we'll sing:
'Hallelujah! what a Saviour!'