

Main Idea: It takes the grace of God to be a mom in the real world. We learn four lessons about grace from Samson’s mother in Judges 13-16.

- I. We learn about the necessity of grace (1-2).
    - A. Life was hard for Israel (1).
    - B. Life was hard for a barren couple (2).
  - II. We learn about the surprises of grace (3-23).
    - A. Mrs. M received a surprising promise (3).
    - B. Mrs. M received a surprising assignment (4-5).
    - C. Mrs. M shared the surprising news with her husband (6-8).
    - D. Mrs. M received another surprising visit (9-14).
    - E. Mrs. M made a surprising discovery (15-23).
      1. She responded with reverence (20).
      2. She responded with faith (23).
  - III. We learn about the God-honoring effects of grace (24-25).
    - A. The Lord gave Mrs. M a special son (24).
    - B. The Lord gave her son a special purpose (25).
  - IV. We learn about the sufficiency of grace for struggles in the real world (chs 14-16).
    - A. Mrs. M’s son resisted counsel.
    - B. Mrs. M’s son gratified his flesh.
    - C. Mrs. M’s son reaped the consequences of his folly.
    - D. Mrs. M’s son humbly turned to the Lord.
    - E. Mrs. M’s son died a God-exalting death.
- Take Inventory: Let’s ask ourselves two vital questions.
1. Am I living in light of grace?
  2. Am I living for the glory of the Giver of grace?

Happy Mothers Day!

*Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:8-10*

It’s not easy being a mom. I’m not just talking about the sick kids and the night feedings, as challenging as that can be. I’m thinking of a far greater weight that a mom (and dad) carries, as you pour your life into little ones who then grow up and start making their own decisions. And their inevitable independence leads you to start asking some questions. Did I do enough? Should I have done something differently? Should I do something *now*?

Several years ago a woman approached me after one of our counseling training sessions on parenting and said, “This was helpful, *if* your children are still at home. But what about those of us whose kids are now adults? Does the Bible offer any counsel for us?” Until that moment, I’d never really thought much about that question. As a parent of adult children, and with so many friends who have adult children, I think about that question a lot.

In 2010 Jim Newheiser & Elyse Fitzpatrick wrote a helpful book entitled, *You Never Stop Being a Parent*. A great title. In the intro the authors quote a couple of parents they interviewed who said:

“Somehow, we thought that when the children reached eighteen, our parenting would be pretty much over. On the contrary, we discovered that our most challenging years as parents were in the vicinity of ages eighteen to twenty-

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\*\* Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous message from this passage, see Mothers Day 2013.

three... When the children were small, parenting was simple—not easy, but simply.” Another parent wrote, “I would have never imagined it would be this hard.”<sup>2</sup>

Parenting is hard. I know a dad who said, “If I’d known how hard this was going to be, I wouldn’t have had children.” That’s an unfortunate conclusion to draw, for it’s a great blessing to be a parent, challenges and all.

So how is a mom (or dad for that matter) to do it? We’re going to find out this morning from a rather unusual Mother’s Day text. Please turn to Judges 13. It’s here that we meet a most interesting mother. We don’t even know her name. Her husband’s name was Manoah, so we’ll call her “Mrs. M.” But oh what a son she had! He was one of Israel’s judges. His name was Samson.

Samson stands alone in Judges. He’s not your typical judge, if there is such a thing. At the end of his story we’re told that he “led Israel twenty years.” Not *forty* years, which represents a full generation, but only *twenty*. We come away from Samson’s story with a nagging “what could have been” feeling, for here’s a man who for all the good he accomplished, only lived up to half his potential.

Know anybody like that? Aren’t we all like that? Every sinner misses his God-given potential. That’s what *sin* is, missing the mark. So that means that every mother knows the pain of Mrs. M, the pain of personally missing the mark as well as raising a child that misses the mark.

The solution? It’s grace. It takes the grace of God to be a mom (or a dad, or a child, for that matter) in the real world. We’re going to learn four lessons about grace from Samson’s mother.

#### I. We learn about the necessity of grace (1-2).

Life can be very hard at times. As we read Judges 13:1 we discover that...

**A. Life was hard for Israel (1).** “Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years (NIV).” Notice that first word, *again*. The Israelites did evil *again*. That’s the theme of the book of Judges. God blessed His chosen people with the promised land, but instead of serving Him with gratitude, they took Him for granted and began doing evil. They did it again and again. And again and again He let them experience the hardness of life, not because He hated them, but because of His passion for His glory and their well-being.

And every time they cried out to Him, in His grace He sent them a deliverer, a judge. He’s already sent them close to a dozen judges, like Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, and Jephthah. But now they’re in need of another, because once again, life has become hard for sinful Israel.

**B. Life was hard for a barren couple (2).** “A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan [ESV ‘tribe’] of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless.” Manoah is from Zorah, fifteen miles west of Jerusalem in the foothills. He’s from the tribe of Dan, and he has a wife facing a challenge. She’s unable to have children. Of course, Mrs. M, isn’t the only childless woman we meet in the Scriptures. Sarah felt great anguish over her childlessness. So did Rebekkah, and Rachel, and later so did Hannah and Elizabeth.

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<sup>2</sup> Jim Newheiser & Elyse Fitzpatrick, *You Never Stop Being a Parent*, p. 12.

And all of this points to the necessity of grace. When life is hard, what we need is grace, the unmerited favor and help of God Almighty. In this case, there's no indication that the grace is even sought, but still it comes. That's in scene two, with lesson two.

## II. We learn about the surprises of grace (3-23).

Grace is always surprising when you see it in action. When a prophet sees his wife become a prostitute, as did Hosea, yet keeps loving her and eventually restores her, that surprises us, but that's grace. When a father hears his cocky son demand his share of the inheritance *now* so he can live it up, and when that son squanders it all away yet returns home to the loving embrace of his forgiving father, that too surprises us, but that's grace. And when God creates a world that commits treason against Him and yet He chooses to send His only Son to save those rebels by dying in their place, that really surprises us, for that's grace at its best.

I want us to look at Samson's story from his mother Mrs. M's perspective, and as we do we're going to see five surprises of grace.

**A. Mrs. M received a surprising promise (3).** Reading from the NIV, "The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, 'You are sterile and childless.'" That's an interesting way to begin a conversation with a woman whose greatest burden in life was her childlessness. *You are sterile and childless.* But he's not rubbing it in. He's come to bring hope to the situation. "But you are going to conceive and have a son." Not maybe. Not if you do ten good deeds for God. *You are going to conceive and have a son.* The messenger gives Mrs. M a divine guarantee, a surprising, grace-saturated promise.

**B. Mrs. M received a surprising assignment (4-5).** "Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

It's actually a two-part assignment. Part one is for Mrs. M. The angel of the Lord says, "Don't drink any wine or anything fermented, and don't eat any unclean food." Part two is for the child. Make sure he never cuts his hair because he is to live as a Nazirite, "a separated and dedicated one" (that's what the Hebrew means).

We're told about the Nazirite vow in Numbers 6:1-21. Sort of a "lay your life on the altar, I'm all Yours, Lord" vow. Nothing from the grape vine was to enter the mouth, no wine, no grapes, no grape-juice, no raisins. No touching anything dead. And no cutting your hair either.

Do that with your son, Mrs. M. And make sure when he grows up, he does it too.

Of course, we know the end of the story. He didn't do as told. He didn't live a separated life, a holy life. Instead, he became a brash *I'll do what I want* young man who touched dead things and did other deadly things too.

You come away from the story asking yourself, "He's a judge?! Not what I expected. Why did God choose to use this fellow to deliver His people?" And the answer, of course, is... *Grace.*

Of course, I could just as well say of you, as you could of me, "You're a Christian?! Not what I expected. Why did God choose to use *you* to minister His saving

power to a world in need?” And the answer would be the same. It’s certainly not our merit. It’s always *grace*.

After receiving the surprising promise and assignment, thirdly...

**C. Mrs. M shared the surprising news with her husband (6-8).** That’s verses 6-7, “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. But he said to me, ‘You will conceive and give birth to 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 birth until the day of his death.’”

So she tells Mr. M precisely what happened, what the angel of the Lord did and said and told her to do. Of course, she’s not so sure about who *he* is. She calls him *a man of God*, then says he *looked like an angel of God*, although I’m not sure how an angel looked, nor apparently was she. Other than *very awesome*. She says he was *very awesome*.

In verse 8 we’re told the effect of her testimony on her husband. “Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: ‘O Lord, I beg you, 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.’”

I’m intrigued by two things, first Mr. M’s response, and then secondly, his request. His response? He *prayed to Yahweh*. That’s a good thing to do when the grace of God touches your life. *Pray to the Giver of that grace*. And notice his request. *Lord, send Your man back to us*. And why does he want the messenger to return? Because he doesn’t believe his wife and wants to hear it for himself? No. That’s not it, for he believes a son is coming. But what’s his concern? The same concern any parent has, but especially a parent who’s just been told by God’s messenger that they’re receiving a special son who’s going to bring deliverance to the chosen nation.

*Send him back to teach us HOW Lord, to teach us HOW TO RAISE THIS BOY!*

Then comes the fourth surprise.

**D. Mrs. M received another surprising visit (9-14).** Notice the first words in verse 9. “God heard Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field.” So Manoah prayed, and God heard his prayer, and the angel came again as requested. We easily gloss right over the wonder of that statement, and most of us do it all the time in our own lives. Manoah prayed, and God heard Manoah. Of course, He did. That’s what He’s supposed to do. We pray, and He listens and answers our prayer. There’s nothing special about that, is there? The fact that we think that way is just another evidence of how easy it is to lose sight of the wonder of grace.

Commenting on this text, Dale Ralph Davis describes the problem this way: “Maybe prayer is like garbage. I regard taking out the garbage as part of the daily tedium of life, and it is something I leave, whenever possible, for other household members to do. Of course, I am wrong. Taking out the garbage should be viewed as a daily sacrament, for garbage in itself is a sign of provision. Potato peelings, apples cores, and squash seeds are silent witnesses that our Father is still feeding us. So garbage is not a tedious detail but a divine blessing. We can miss that because it is so routine. I guess our problem is that we don’t think theologically about garbage.”<sup>3</sup>

Actually, we don’t think theologically about a lot of things, and that includes prayer at times. Friends, when God listens to Manoah’s prayer, or our own, forbid that

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<sup>3</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges*, pp. 162-3.

we should ever respond, “Well, why wouldn’t He?” There are hundreds of reasons why He shouldn’t, namely our sin, and only one why He would. It’s grace, all grace.

And so a second surprising visit took place, as we’re told in verses 10-14. “The woman hurried to tell her husband, ‘He’s here! The man who appeared to me the other day!’ Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, ‘Are you the one who talked to my wife?’ ‘I am,’ he said. So Manoah asked him, ‘When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy’s life and work?’ The angel of the Lord answered, ‘Your wife must do all that I have told her. 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.’”

If you’re counting, you’ll note that this is the third time in the story we’ve heard the parental instructions for Samson. We’ve heard it twice from the angel, and once from Mrs. M as she reported what the angel said to her husband. If this boy doesn’t turn out, it’s not because the assignment wasn’t clear.

Finally, one more grace-surprise.

**E. Mrs. M made a surprising discovery (15-23).** We read about it in verses 15-21, “Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, ‘We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you.’ 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.) Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, ‘What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?’ He replied, ‘Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.’ 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: 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. 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.”

In this fifth surprise of grace, Mr. and Mrs. M learn what we already suspected. This was no ordinary messenger. This was *the angel of the LORD*, an Old Testament reference that some feel identifies a preincarnate manifestation of Christ Himself. No wonder he said his name was “beyond understanding,” (or “wonderful,” as it’s translated in the ESV). We also see it in Isaiah 9:6 referring to the “wonderful counselor”.

Notice the effect this discovery had on Mr. M. Verse 22, “‘We are doomed to die!’ he said to his wife. ‘We have seen God!’” A little skiddish, isn’t he? To many today, it might seem so. Seeing God? What’s the big deal? He’s a loving deity, isn’t he? Like a really big grandpa that spoils us with goodies, right? No.

Your God is too small, said J. B. Phillips. He’s not a tame lion, to borrow a line from C. S. Lewis. Have you thought recently about what it’s going to be like when we stand before God at the judgment? Apart from the grace of Christ, we could not stand, not one of us, but would be totally undone.

Mrs. M both agrees and disagrees with her husband. She agrees with the messenger’s identity, but disagrees as to the outcome of his visit. Notice verse 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.’” Take a close look at Mrs. M, for her actions reveal the proper response to grace.

1. *She responded with reverence (20).* Verse 20 says Manoah *and his wife* fell with their faces to the ground. That kind of reverence is the appropriate response to God and His grace. *I don't deserve You. I'm a sinner and can't stand in Your presence.* But for Mrs. M, it wasn't just reverence. It was faith too.

2. *She responded with faith (23).* He's not going to kill us, she affirms. He said He was going to give us a son, and that we were to raise this son for His purposes. She believes the word of God, doesn't she?

That's what faith is. Taking God at His word. Trusting Him, not in our feelings and certainly not in ourselves, but in Him and in His word.

Most people say they have *faith*, but this kind of biblical faith is different. Let me illustrate. Do any of you remember when cake mixes first came out? Do you remember the problem that many ladies ran into? Vance Packard in *The Hidden Persuaders* tells what happened. The first cake-mix packages warned not to add milk but 'just add water.' Some housewives, however, would add milk anyway as their special touch, but then they were disappointed when their cakes or muffins fell. Some cake mixes would also prohibit adding eggs since eggs and milk had already been added in dry form by the manufacturer.

Women interviewed in depth studies were disturbed: "What sort of cake is it if you just need to add tap water?" The marketing needed to be changed. The mixes needed to tell the homemaker that she *and* the mix together could produce the cake. And so, a white-cake-mix box now proclaimed: "You add fresh eggs." The message was clear. You do have a contribution you can make.<sup>4</sup>

That's quite revealing, isn't it? The human heart does not want to believe a message that says, "You have nothing to offer." But this is God's message. He says He does not need our help. He says that we have nothing to offer Him that merits His favor. He says, "By grace are you saved through faith, and that, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, lest anyone should boast (Eph 2:8-9)."

Think carefully. Here we are this morning, hearing the very Word of God. Many on planet earth have never heard the revelation of God. But we have. We know what God says. We've just heard His message again. But what is our response? My friend, some of us keep insisting on doing it our own way by adding the milk to the mix. And it keeps flopping.

It's time to learn from Mrs. M, this woman from long ago who, by grace, exhibited faith. She believed the divine message, and rather than running from God, or remaining in paralyzing fear before God, put her trust in what He said.

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus.*

This brings us to our third lesson. Having learned about the necessity of grace, and the surprises of grace, it's time to ponder the God-honoring effects of grace.

### III. We learn about the God-honoring effects of grace (24-25).

And that's always the intended purpose of grace, God's honor. We receive the blessing, He receives the glory. The blessing is a means to His glory. That's the point of Ephesians 1, right? "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ...to the praise of the glory of his grace (1:3, 6)."

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<sup>4</sup> Story told by Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges*, pp. 161-2.

The Judges' story identifies two effects of His grace in verses 24-25.

**A. The Lord gave Mrs. M a special son (24).** “The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him.” Samson, Hebrew for “sun” (as in Sonny? probably as in, “he brightened up our lives”). This indeed is a special son, a son this once barren couple never thought they’d get to enjoy. But now they have him. A God-blessed son.

Yet as with any son (or daughter), the child’s not really theirs. He’s just on loan for a time so they can raise him for the purpose the Giver has in mind.

Which brings us to the second effect of grace, which we see in verse 25. “And the Spirit of the LORD began to *stir* him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.” The AV says “to move him.” What’s this stirring and moving all about? It’s about *purpose*, divine purpose. The Lord gave Mrs. M a special son for a special purpose.

**B. The Lord gave her son a special purpose (25).** A purpose. A task. A meaning. A reason for existence.

You see, here’s the question. It’s for every parent. If God chooses to bless us with children, *why*? Why does God give *us* children? If we don’t get this question right, we’re in for a great deal of heartache as parents, and so are our kids, especially when they turn about eighteen.

In Samson’s case, the Giver made His purpose quite clear from the outset. “He will begin the deliverance of Israel,” said the angel of the LORD to Mrs. M back in verse 5. That’s why you’re getting this son, Mrs. M. Not so you can find your security in him, and certainly not so you can worship him as if he were your source of joy. But so you can raise him to be a means of blessing to God’s people, to the glory of God Himself.

When a grace-gift comes our way, the intended effect is always the honor of God. That’s true of every expression of grace we enjoy, from our kids, to our health, to our homes, to our salvation itself. When God’s grace comes our way, the proper response is to honor the Giver.

There’s something here we must not miss, something that sets Samson apart from the other judges, and in so doing, points us to Jesus. Why does the book of Judges give us Samson’s birth story? It doesn’t for the other judges. There’s nothing like Judges 13 in the rest of the book, no other nativity story. So why does the writer single out Samson’s nativity and make such a big deal out of it?

The answer is, as commentator Dale Davis explains, “Because he wants to show that, at least in this case, Yahweh didn’t merely raise up a deliverer who was, as it were, already available (as, e.g., Othniel or Ehud, 3:9, 15); rather, he *grew* one—from scratch. It is crucial that we see this, lest we think that Yahweh’s salvation is always an ad hoc, Band-Aid affair, a piece of divine crisis management instead of a plan that Yahweh has had in view far in advance. This is exactly what staggers and gladdens us about the Greater-than-Samson who ransomed us at such cost—‘He was marked out before the world was made, and was revealed at the final point of time for your sake’ (1 Pet. 1:20 NJB). It boggles the imagination let alone the mind to think that something before ‘in the beginning’ could be for my sake. Even Judges 13 wants us to jump up and sing the doxology.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Davis, p. 167.

Dear friends, don't miss this. When Israel wasn't even looking for a deliverer, God was preparing one, and He sent him to a very surprised couple. Just like He later did with Jesus.<sup>6</sup> You see, that's grace, and if we're responding rightly to it, we'll honor Him for it.

There's one more important lesson about grace from the Samson story and I would be remiss if I didn't address it.

#### IV. We learn about the sufficiency of grace for struggles in the real world (chs 14-16).

If you know anything about the Samson story, you know this. Mr. and Mrs. M had their hands full when their little bundle of heavenly sunshine grew up. We don't have time to read the full account, but I do want to point out the highlights, again from Mrs. M's perspective. There are five scenes involved in the struggle she faced as a mother in the real world.

**A. Mrs. M's son resisted counsel.** That's in chapter 14. According to verse 1, Samson went down to Timnah and saw a young Philistine woman there. When he went home, he said to his dad and mom, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." Not exactly a model of how to honor your parents in the way you talk to them, but that was Samson, a big, strong fellow that demands what he wants, especially from mom and dad.

"A Philistine girl?" they said. "The Philistines don't worship our God, the true God. They worship Dagon. Isn't there a nice Jewish girl that catches your eye?"

"No. Get her for me. She's the right one for me," said Samson to his father in verse 3. Not to his mother this time, just to dad. Talk about a strong-willed child.

And for whatever reason, against their better judgment, Mr. and Mrs. M gave in to Samson's pressure. Verse 5 says the three of them went down to Timnah together, and Samson talked with the Baal worshipping female, and according to verse 7, "he liked her."

Sort of sounds like fourth grade love letters, doesn't it? "I like you. Do you like me? Circle yes or no, and return." She circled yes, and before long, wedding bells were playing. Of course, after his bride betrayed his confidence, Samson went home to mom and dad in a huff, and his wife was given to his best-man, and in the end, she and her family were burned alive by the Philistines.

The whole fiasco could have been prevented had Samson just listed to his parents' counsel. But no. And to make things worse, he wouldn't even ask their counsel the next time. And there would be a next time, and a next, for when it came to fifth grade love letters, Samson never did learn his lesson.

But then there is that peculiar parenthesis in verse 4, "His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel."

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<sup>6</sup> Here's another connection between Samson and Jesus. If you'll notice, there's virtually nothing mentioned about Samson's childhood. There's material about his birth, a brief mention that he grew up, and then more material about what he did as Israel's deliverer. We see the same pattern later in the Bible with the ultimate Deliverer. In Jesus' story, the Gospel record gives us valuable material about His birth, just a brief mention of his growing up years, and then focuses on what He did to bring deliverance in His final three adult years.

*This was from the Lord?* Really? What's that mean? It doesn't mean that Mr. and Mrs. M were wrong to oppose Samson for wanting to date and marry a pagan girl. Parents ought to be engaged in that decision. And it certainly doesn't mean that Samson's testosterone-driven bullheadedness was right.

"It means," as Davis explains, "that neither Samson's foolishness nor his stubbornness is going to prevent Yahweh from accomplishing *his* design. Yahweh can and will use the sinfulness or stupidity of his servants as the camouflage for bringing his secret will to pass."<sup>7</sup>

Of course, Mrs. M didn't know at the time that *this* was from the Lord. She must do what every mother of a sin-bent child must do, put her trust not in the goodness of her child, but in the certainty of the promises of her God. In this case, it's the promise the angel had given this mother twenty years earlier. *He will begin the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines.*

I don't know how it's going to happen, says Mrs. M, nor when, but I believe you Lord. You are going to fulfill Your plan for my son. I know it, and I trust You. He is yours. Have your way with him, and with me too.

As you perhaps know, the testing of Mrs. M's faith was just beginning. Her struggles are far from over. This is motherhood in the real world. Scene one, her son resists her counsel. Now scene two.

**B. Mrs. M's son gratified his flesh.** You can read the story later for the details, but suffice it to say that Samson had a weakness for women. He goes after a prostitute in 16:1. Some time later, according to 16:4, he fell in love with Delilah, apparently another Philistine gal. Not *love* as in God's kind of this is what it takes for a joyful marriage *love*. But as in, "I'm a slave to my passions" kind of love, lust is the more accurate term, the kind that takes you to an early death, as it did for Samson.

Back in chapter 14 Samson included his parents in his search for a woman. After that, he doesn't even bother to ask. He knows what he wants, and he just goes for it.

**C. Mrs. M's son reaped the consequences of his folly.** For Samson, it started with a failed marriage, but it got far worse. In the end this special gift from God is grinding grain in a prison with two hollowed out eye sockets.

It just couldn't get any worse than this, not for a Hebrew God-fearer, a judge at that. But it did get worse. The text says that one day Samson was taken from prison to a Philistine house of worship. Thousands of worshippers of Dagon were there, and Samson was forced to listen to his cocky captors boasting, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." That blasphemy, that mocking of his God, the true and living God who's been so gracious to him, lit a fire in his wayward heart. As it did in the heart of Yahweh Himself, as soon became apparent.

We don't know if Mrs. M was still living when Samson was in prison (the wording of 16:31 seems to indicate she *wasn't*), nor if she ever heard, in this life, about the work that grace produced in his life. But the text does tell us this.

**D. Mrs. M's son humbly turned to the Lord.** "O Sovereign Lord, remember me," prayed Samson as the crowd mocked him in their temple. "And give me strength just one more time (16:28)."

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<sup>7</sup> Ralph Davis, p. 171.

Have you ever talked with someone who said they'd wasted their life and were too far gone for God? It's not true. Samson had wasted so much of his life with wild living, but when he humbled himself, the Lord listened. That's grace.

Jesus went to the cross, not for the righteous, but for sinners. He died and rose again, and He will rescue *any* sinner who will humbly cry out to Him in repentance and faith. Oh, what a difference grace makes, so much so that in the end, this happened.

**E. Mrs. M's son died a God-exalting death.** What a scene it was! As the crowd mocked on, Samson grabbed those temple pillars, cried out to God, and in the end killed more God-defiers in his death than in his life. God chose him to be a deliverer, and enabled by grace, he was just that.

This isn't the last time we see Samson in the Bible. His name appears again. Do you know where? And why? Because for all his flaws and failures, in the end Samson is commended by God for his faith.

Listen to Hebrews 11:32–40, “And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—<sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,<sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.<sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.<sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.<sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.<sup>39</sup> And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,<sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”

Know anybody that's blown it? Don't give up. There's hope. Because of grace. This is good news for moms and dads living in the real world. And for everyone else too.

Take Inventory: Let's ask ourselves two vital questions.

1. *Am I living in light of grace?* If I'm living in the light of grace, I don't put my trust in myself, but in the Lord, and by His help I now live for His purposes. Does that describe you? Why not begin today?

2. *Am I living for the glory of the Giver of grace?* It's all about Him and His honor. Just ask Mrs. M.

**Closing Song:** #201 “*Grace Greater Than Our Sin*” (all four verses)

**Communion**

**This evening:** A Family Prayer Service (led by Rex Howe)