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Judges 13-16

Judges Series

Sermon 5

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Turn to Judges and let me read the story of Samson. In preparing for this, this week I listened to several sermons by several pastors and one was Alistair Begg. You guys know I like Alistair Begg—he has a cool, Scottish accent but he’s also a really good teacher and preacher. He said that when you come to a story like Samson you have to pray for a certain amount of agnosticism. Agnosticism means a lack of understanding or an inability to understand. That’s because we have these real common stories that we know so well and it’s really easy to cruise into that story just assuming that we already know the story. I was praying about how to even deliver the text—it’s a large portion of Scripture—and I was praying about how to work through it. Last week we worked through Gideon and there was a lot of Scripture and a lot of familiarity. So, we are just going to work through it. I’m going to ask God to help us understand things that are new and fresh. There’s a depth to the Word of God and I think that if we are faithful and submit ourselves to the Word of God then God is going to speak to us every time, every single time. Everybody in this room who is a Christian—there are probably a bunch of people here who are not actually Christians, who are not actually in Christ—there are probably some of us who are not in Christ—but those who are in Christ have had that experience where you’re familiar with a passage of Scripture and you’ve read it a bunch of times but then you come back to it and when you come back to it you learn something new. So, I’m going to pray that God does that tonight.

We are going to work through the story. We’re going to power through the story and we’re going to pick it up in chapter 14. In chapter 13, God visits this old couple and we’re given the man’s name but we’re not given the woman’s name. You have this parallel setup. The nation of Israel was a nation that was born out of a promise to an elderly couple who had never had a child. God came to them and said, “You’re going to get pregnant.” She was really old and God said, “You’re going to get pregnant and you’re going to have a baby.” It happened and God raised a nation, a nation of promise that came out of a child of promise. God gave that nation a law, a covenant, and He bound them to it and gave them guidelines to live by. The life of Samson parallels that. God comes to a woman who is barren in her old age and her husband and He says, “I’m going to give you a son.” He binds them to a vow called the Nazarite vow. The vow was that neither the mother, during the pregnancy, or the child would have anything to do with grapes or fruit from the vine. He would never touch any dead or unclean thing. Dead things were considered unclean in a certain capacity and there were certain rules for what was considered dead or unclean. He would never break those rules and he would never cut his hair. We know that Samson had seven big dreads, huge dreadlocks, and a big, massive head of hair. Those were the three binding rules of the Nazarite vow. So, you have this parallel between Samson and Israel. Israel often lived in rebellion to God but was a child of God’s covenant promise, and so would Samson be.

Samson is born to this couple and we get to chapter 14 and Samson is in early adulthood. At the time, we know that Israel is under the rule of a group of people called the Philistines. The Philistine people were ruling Israel. Israel, who was God’s people, was under the control of the Philistines. So, we get to 14:1 and it says,

Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines.

So, he goes to a Philistine city. He sees a pagan girl there, and she’s really hot, and he’s attracted to her. He has this issue with pagan women. Israel had an issue with pagan gods; Samson had an issue with pagan women. I don’t know what his deal is but that’s the continual theme with him.

Then he came up and told his father and mother, “I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife.”

Samson, we learn very quickly, is demanding. He’s very demanding and he’s very impulsive. He’s impulsive and demanding, “Get this woman for me as a wife!” His father and mother were like, “Don’t marry her. She’s not from our faith.” It wasn’t that they didn’t like Philistines, it’s just that they were saying, “You need to marry someone who has the same faith as us,” but he demands that they go get this girl for him as a wife.

So, in verse 4,

His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. 5 Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. 6 Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. 7 Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes.

The key component there is that she is right in his eyes. There is this pattern in Israel that we see in Samson’s life, where he is saying, “This is right for me. This is what I want to do. It feels good to me so I’m going to do it.” This is Base Human Nature 101. “It feels good to me so I’m going to do it. This is what I want so I’m going to do it.”

After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. 9 He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went.

At this point, you start to see a pattern evolve where Samson is breaking these vows that he’s made before God and that his parents made before God. This one is that he wouldn’t touch anything that’s unclean. He’s already broken the law of God by pursuing a relationship with a pagan woman and now he begins to break these specific vows that he had made to God and that he was bound by, by touching a dead or unclean animal. He gets the honey out of this lion. I don’t know what was up with the lion and I don’t know what was up with the honey in the lion’s belly. It was kind of a crazy twist in the story.

Verse 10,

His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do.

This was an Eastern cultural thing. They would do something like a seven day bachelor party. This would be like a huge keg party with lots of alcohol, lots of wine, lots of beer…a big party with people going crazy and feasting. It was a really, really worldly scene. At this point, we can infer from the story that he’s passed through vineyards, he’s touched unclean animals, and now he’s partying with the Philistines. He’s partying with the Philistines, partying with the pagans, he’s down there getting ready to marry this girl, and it’s kind of a raucous, crazy scene.

As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.

He has these buddies who are Philistines.

And Samson said to them, “Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, 13 but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes.” And they said to him, “Put your riddle, that we may hear it.” 14 And he said to them,

“Out of the eater came something to eat.

Out of the strong came something sweet.”

And in three days they could not solve the riddle.

So, he passes them this riddle. He’s cheating because he knows the riddle and there is no way they are going to know the riddle because it’s about this lion he had killed and the honey. He doesn’t play fair. Then, they start to work against Samson by going to this woman that Samson is in love with.

On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, “Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire.”

They threaten her. They say, “Get your husband to tell us his riddle. We don’t want to go to Walmart and buy him thirty pairs of Wranglers and thirty shirts. Go to your man and tell your man to tell us the riddle. If you don’t, we’re going to burn you and your daddy.” These people were crazy, y’all.

I talked to Gar about people in certain combat zones that he’s been in. He will say that there are many cultures in the world where people are very impulsive. Now, we’re an impulsive culture. I want what I want right now and if it feels good do it—but there are places where people will act in a way and it’s a cultural thing to not think about consequences.

These people were like, “We’re going to burn you alive if you don’t find out what the riddle is.” It’s a joke. They were partying, and drinking beer, and having a good time, and now people are going to get burned. It’s a really high level of intensity.

And Samson's wife wept over him and said, “You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is.” And he said to her, “Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?” 17 She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people. 18 And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down,

“What is sweeter than honey?

What is stronger than a lion?”

And he said to them,

“If you had not plowed with my heifer,

you would not have found out my riddle.”

Okay, so a couple of rules that we learn here. One, you are starting to see something else emerge in this pattern in Samson’s life. It’s not only that he has a weakness for pagan women but that weakness will cause him to compromise who he is, the conviction that God has given, and that weakness will control the decision-making process for Samson. One of the things that’s happening here is that he is simply not leading in the confines of the relationship that he’s in with this woman. He’s not leading this woman in this relationship.

The second rule—and more of an aside for you men who are not yet married—don’t ever refer to your future wife as a heifer. That’s the second rule.

Verse 19,

And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house. 20 And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.

The third pattern emerging with Samson here is that he has anger management problems. This man is hot tempered—really, really hot tempered. What happens is that when she tells him the riddle and then they say they know the riddle and tell him the riddle then he goes to Askelon. If you look at your Bible map in the back of your Bible it’s about this far. I didn’t look at the scale but it was about that far. I’m going to say it’s twenty or thirty miles. He goes there and kills thirty guys, poor dudes. These Philistine men get killed for their clothes. So, people are getting burned alive and people are getting killed for their clothes. This is straight up barbarism. But it says that God is working in the middle of all of this for Him to ultimately bring about His purpose.

There’s a biblical principle that’s very theological in the way that we understand how God works, and it’s this—it is very likely that all of us at some point in our lives make the mistake where we assume that because everything is going okay that God approves. It’s important that we understand that God is always working in this big arena that spans history, that’s historical in context, and oftentimes God is working in such a way that we feel like that we are getting away with what we’re doing, or that what we’re doing isn’t hurting anybody, or that my decisions don’t really matter to God because there are no real consequences. Samson makes one of the oldest mistakes in the book and it’s this—because God isn’t intervening and stopping me from doing what I’m doing then I can assume that God’s hand of blessing is on my actions. Listen, just because God is working in the big picture doesn’t mean that what Samson is doing is right. What Samson does here is murder thirty dudes for their clothes. Here’s a critical theological component. God calls David to slaughter thousands of people; God calls Gideon to slaughter thousands of people; oftentimes in Scripture you will see God act in a way where He commands a judge, a leader, a ruler, or a king to kill people. Always, in those instances, God is preserving His name and His holiness, purifying His people, and punishing sin all at the same time. In this act, Samson is simply acting in a temper tantrum. We don’t see God moving to purge Israel of the Philistine rule; we just see Samson acting impulsively. He’s just doing his own thing. He’s using his strength for his own glory, and his own motive, and his own power.

Samson stormed off mad so the girl that he had married, her dad gives her in marriage to Samson’s best man. Men, there’s a lesson here—choose your best man carefully. When you get married be sure that guy won’t do that to you.

Judges 15:1,

After some days, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat.

This guy is romantic. He’s a super romantic guy, “I got you a young goat, baby. C’mon, let’s dance.”

And he said, “I will go in to my wife in the chamber.” But her father would not allow him to go in. 2 And her father said, “I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead.” 3 And Samson said to them, “This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm.” 4 So Samson went and caught 300 foxes and took torches.

First off, I’m impressed that he caught 300 foxes. Have you ever tried to catch a fox? Me either. Nobody tries to catch a fox. You can’t catch a fox. Adam Bradley traps them. He trapped seven in one year. But Samson goes out and catches 300. I don’t know how he does this other than the Spirit of the Lord will come on him and he will do very miraculous things. So, he catches 300 foxes.

And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. 5 And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and set fire to the stacked grain and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards. 6 Then the Philistines said, “Who has done this?” And they said, “Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion.”

So, Samson catches these foxes, lights all the fields on fire, and burns all the fields. It’s a pretty dramatic scene. It’s a really intense scene. Now, the Philistines, in verse 6, start asking questions, “Who did this?”

And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

They come back around, make good on their original threat, and they burn this woman and her father with fire. So, what you have at this point is retaliatory action. It’s like Samson’s personal war against the Philistines and God is using it but we’re seeing some insufficiencies in the big picture. God is using this but we’re going to see in just a little bit how the story ends up coming short in terms of God’s big picture. In other words, Samson is being used by God but he’s not ultimately living inside of God’s will.

So, they come up and burn them with fire.

And Samson said to them, “If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit.” 8 And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

What that means is he killed a bunch of people. “He struck them hip and thigh” just means he tore into them. It’s kind of a slang terminology. He’s just slaughtering people left and right and he kills a bunch of people. Then he goes into a cave.

Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi. 10 And the men of Judah said, “Why have you come up against us?” They said, “We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us.” 11 Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, “Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?”

Now, earlier it said that God was going to use this as an opportunity against the Philistines. We have a moment right here where the men of Judah… I want you to think in your mind, if you know Old Testament history, how Judah was first in combat. The tribe of Judah was known for being a warring tribe of people. They were an aggressive tribe of people, they were the first to go to war, they were the first to go into combat, they were the first to engage the enemy, and they were known for their boldness and they were known for their fearlessness. Think about how some of you might have Irish backgrounds. There is sort of this stigma or personality that goes with the Irish that they are fighters and brawlers. They drink hard, they fight hard, they are rough, so don’t mess with the Irish. I think the Italians have something like that so there are different groups of people who have this sort of rough and tough fighter’s mentality. They’re warriors—they’re survivors. That’s Judah.

Now, you have Judah coming to Samson and saying, “Hey, man, don’t mess up what we have going with the Philistines.” You have this picture where God’s people of promise have grown comfortable living under the dominion of God’s enemies. Listen, if there’s a parallel to the Christian life that every one of us has walked through, that’s it. There are points, and moments, and times, and areas of compromise, where if we’re not careful we will grow very comfortable living under the dominion of sin. We saw this as a pattern in Israel’s history when we went through Exodus. They would murmur and complain and they would say, “If we could just go back to Egypt and live under the slavery of the Egyptians, at least we had food.” And God said, “I didn’t create a people to be slaves to pagans.” Jesus would say to you and me, “I did not create salvation so that you would be a slave to sin—to be comfortable in sin, to be comfortable in adultery, to be comfortable in fornication, to be comfortable in pornography, comfortable in dishonesty at work, and with your money, and with your finances. I created you to live as a nation of priests, a holy people who are being conformed to the image of God.” Comfortability in sin is a danger for every believer. We’ve got to be guarded against it. The men of Judah have grown comfortable.

So, they’re going to hand Samson over. Samson is like, “Y’all don’t kill me and I’ll let you tie me up and take me down there.” So, they tie him up and take him down. Verse 14,

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him.

The Philistines came out there and they were screaming, and hollering, and shouting, and yelling, and they were going to kill Samson.

Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. 15 And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men.

It says “a fresh jawbone”—why? Because he keeps going back into this pattern of doing what he’s not supposed to do. He picks up a fresh jawbone and in that there is the idea of an animal being unclean. There was a certain period of uncleanness after that animal had died. Now, he picks up this jawbone and he is breaking his vow. You have this really crazy twist that’s constantly ongoing in the story, where he’s sinning against God but God is still empowering him with His Spirit.

We get this really powerful picture of someone living in the flesh but still under the grace, and longsuffering, and kindness, and mercy of God. Why does God not deal with Samson harshly at this point? Because God is a gracious God, y’all. Listen, if you have lived in sin and are continuing to live in sin and you feel like you are comfortable in that place and you think that God is gracious, God is good, and you think, “God’s not going to deal with me,” listen. The Bible says that God is slow to anger, He abides in love, but Paul would warn the Romans and say this, “Should you continue in sin so that you get more, and more, and more grace? Absolutely not. You cannot continue in sin.”

So, the jawbone is picked up and he starts killing folks. It’s kind of a repeat of the hip and thigh deal. He kills a bunch of people with the jawbone of a donkey and then after he kills a thousand men he starts rapping, singing, and throwing down. I don’t know if it’s slam poetry or spoken word.

“With the jawbone of a donkey,

heaps upon heaps,

with the jawbone of a donkey

have I struck down a thousand men.”

If you break this down in Hebrew, it rhymes. It actually rhymes. He’s composed a war poem. We’ve seen this at other times and in other battles. He’s declaring victory.

As soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand. And that place was called Ramath-lehi.

This is the point where they actually name this city Lehi. So, he slays a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey, and he sings a song of victory, and he throws it down. It’s a powerful declaration of victory by Samson.

In verse 18, he’s very thirsty and this is the first time we see this with Samson, he called upon Yahweh.

And he was very thirsty, and he called upon the Lord…

This is the first time he called out to Yahweh. Let’s see what he says.

“You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant,…”

He recognizes Yahweh as the source of his victory and his power.

“…shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?”

He cries out desperately now for God to give him a drink of water.

And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came out from it. And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived.

The dude is super dramatic—he’s super, super dramatic. He’s a drama dude. He’s like, “I just killed a thousand dudes,” and he’s singing to God and throws the jawbone down and then he’s like, “My soul is vexed! Would you let me die here?” It’s so dramatic.

I remember when I was a freshman in college and I took theatre because I knew that if I took music they would make me sing. I went and asked the professor, “If I take theatre do I have to act in a play,” and he said, “No, you just have to watch a bunch of plays.” I thought, “That’s great. Most plays have movies that go along with them. This will be easy. I’ll do that.” Not true. There are a bunch of plays that don’t have movies. Did y’all know that? I had to go watch them. I remember I was struck by how intense the drama was on the stage. I would sit in the audience and feel awkward because I was so close to these people acting so dramatic. It was Shakespeare and things like that; stuff that many people enjoy. You should. It’s good if you enjoy drama and there’s nothing weird about you if you enjoy drama. You’re a normal person. I’m a normal person who didn’t feel normal watching men sing to each other in dramatic fashion.

Samson is an actor on a stage. He’s so dramatic, and impulsive, and compulsive, and hot tempered, and he’s a lover, and he’s a fighter, and he’s screaming out to God, “I killed a bunch of people with a donkey’s jawbone! And now you’re going to let me die of thirst!” He was so dramatic. But God was so gracious. You keep seeing this. God cracks the earth open, and bubbles water up, and gives him a drink. It’s a really intense scene that in the whole big story is one that often gets looked over, I think.

And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore the name of it was called En-hakkore; it is at Lehi to this day. 20 And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

We get a little glimpse into the timeframe of Samson’s rule. For twenty years he was a judge but here’s what happened. In those twenty years we don’t see what we’ve seen in the other judges up to this point. What’s happening as we’re doing this quick overview study of the book of Judges at Red Oak is that here’s where the downward spiral begins. We’ve seen God raise judges up when the people of Israel cry out to God. What will happen is that the people of Israel will be in bondage, they will cry out to God, God will raise up a judge, He will deliver them, kill their enemies, and for the lifetime of that judge He will give them freedom from their enemies. At the beginning of the story of Samson there is no cry from the people of Israel. They are comfortable living under the rule of the Philistines. It was amiable. Remember in the story of Gideon last week, we saw that for seven years, every year during harvest season the enemy would come in, rob the Israelites blind, and then leave after basically having torched all of their crops and stolen all of their livestock. They were hungry and they were in peasantry. But now, you apparently have some sort of agreement between the Philistines and Israelites where they’re okay. They’re good. They’re good with this situation they have. They’ve grown comfortable living in bondage to the Philistines. For twenty years this goes on.

So, in the big picture of the book of Judges here is where the downward spiral starts. In fact, this is the last story we will read. After this, it’s just a bunch of crazy nonsense of people doing crazy stuff. You can’t even make sense of it. Literally, after this, if you read the rest of Judges you can’t even make sense of anything. It’s insanity. These people have lost their minds. What we see here is that the last judge is raised up but the people of Israel have not cried out to God. There’s no repentance, there’s no desperation, there’s just comfort in their sin. For twenty years that’s how it is under Samson.

In chapter 16, the last chapter, we get down to the story that most of us are most familiar with.

Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her. 2 The Gazites were told, “Samson has come here.” And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, “Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him.” 3 But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

This is a pretty big deal for a number of reasons. One is because from where the gates of the city of Gaza are to where Hebron is, is forty miles, and there’s 2000 feet of elevation gain. So, Samson rips these gates up and carries them. 2000 feet of elevation gain is from right here to the top of Robbinsville Mountain in Tatham Gap. So, the gates of his city on his shoulders, he carries them forty miles and 2000 feet of elevation gain. Why is that in there? To remind us that Samson is pretty stout. He’s a pretty strong guy. It’s an impressive story.

So, he has gone into a prostitute, again continuing this pattern of going into pagan women, having sexual experiences, doing his thing. Remember, this is while he’s a judge in Israel. So, kings, prophets, judges, men in leadership, and women in leadership that God would use, He would hold certain requirements over them. As a pastor, I’m not called to be any more holy than you are but I am warned that my actions carry weight and I’ll be held responsible and accountable because of the position that God has called me to as a pastor. That’s why when men of God, when you read about it in the news that some pastor on TV has stolen millions of dollars or had a sexual affair with some woman, it really devastates the Church and it shakes the foundations oftentimes of people’s faith in those churches and those ministries. Leadership brings certain responsibility.

Samson, we’ve just been told was a twenty-year judge in Israel, and now he’s going into a prostitute. Then, the gate thing happens which is just cool.

Verse 4,

After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

Delilah is the first named woman in the story. You have Samson’s mom who is unnamed. The wife at Timnah is unnamed. The prostitute in Gaza is unnamed. But now we’re going to get to know this lady and here’s why. Delilah means “night” or “darkness.” I don’t have time to get into this. If we were doing a legit, in-depth study through the book of Judges, we would have spent four weeks on Samson’s story and we would have gone real deep into this. There’s a ton of word play in the story of Samson. One thing I wanted to point out is that her name is brought forward and her name has a lot of symbolism. It’s the idea that this is Samson going into the darkness from which he will not return. This is the beginning of the end for Samson.

After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. 5 And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, “Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver.

There were five of these men so that would be 5500 pieces of silver.

So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you.”

A couple of thoughts on Delilah right here. The amount of money that she was offered at this point would equal 550 times an annual wage. I didn’t get this—I checked this in a couple of commentaries. Comparatively, if the average annual wage for a job today was $35,000, the amount she was paid would have been just over $19million. The Philistines were out to get that dude, and they knew how to get him, and they knew what his weakness was.

See, the enemy will study your weakness. I don’t want to get too far off course here but you need to understand this. The enemy knows your weakness and will exploit that and attack you at your weakest point.

It would seem that Samson is not a man with a 30 inch bicep or an impressive squat. He’s not impressive looking. Why? Because these men begin to ask her, “We’ve got to find out where his strength lies.” If he looked like Arnold in *Conan[[1]](#footnote-1)*, if you remember that movie from the 80s, they would know where his strength lies. That guy was a freak. He was Mr. Universe. But they’re going, “We can’t figure this out.” Samson was a grungy looking dude who looked like he was a guide on the Nantahala River. He had the dreads. But why was he so strong?

They start to try to figure this out and the way they do it is they go to Delilah and give her this money. She goes and uses the same story in a different verse.

Samson said to her, “If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak.”

So, she binds him up and he breaks the bindings. Then, in verse 10,

Then Delilah said to Samson, “Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound.” 11 And he said to her, “If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.”

She does it and he breaks free and kind of blows through it. Verse 13,

“Then Delilah said to Samson, “Until now you have mocked me…”

She’s starting to get close to the truth.

And he said to her, “If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.”

Again, I don’t want to get into it, but this is a play on the story of Jael. Remember the story Rob took us through a few weeks ago where the tent peg was driven through the dude’s head? There is a lot of play on words right here, sort of foreshadowing and sort of looking back at the same time, to the condition that Samson is now in.

So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web.

She ties him up and does what he says and he breaks out of it. Verse 15,

And she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies.” 16 And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.

Remember his weakness for women? He was a dramatic dude. Samson’s whole life was like a country love song. In his mind, he was the dude in the movie, he was the dude in the song. He was so dramatic.

So, what happens right here? Watch this. Samson recognizes and articulates his Nazarite status. He says, “You cut my hair and I’ll be like anybody else.” He is identifying right here, “I know that I’ve been a drunkard, and a raging alcoholic, and I partied like a lunatic, and I wasn’t supposed to do that. I know I repeatedly touched unclean things and I wasn’t supposed to do that. But I’ve held out for my hair.” Now, was it about his hair? No, it was about the longsuffering hand of God’s grace. But listen to me, Red Oak. If you are living in defiance, if you are personally living in sin, know this—there is a day when the grace of God ends for you, and you will give an account, and you will pay in responsibility for your own defiance of God. “It’s appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment.” The Word of God says that every one of us will give an account for words, thoughts, deeds. God’s grace can create a comfort zone for us if we’re not careful or it can drive us to worship and appreciation if we are. Samson has gotten to this point where he’s like, “Here’s the deal. I’m a Nazarite. What that means is that if you cut my hair I will lose my strength.” It wasn’t about his hair, it was about his faithfulness to the Lord and the grace of God in his life at this point has run out. Throughout the story he has had complete disregard for this vow to Yahweh, his constant interaction with pagan ideology, pagan women, drunken parties, and the handling of dead things. At this point of the story, Delilah is not expressing love but only a desire to bind Samson, and he misses it completely. This desire is driven by her greed which Samson is blind to. He only hears what he wants to hear and is lost in love and what will happen soon is that love-blinding, lust-blinding attitude of Samson will drive him to his own demise. The writer has created dramatic irony that we as readers can see but that Samson, himself, cannot see.

Verse 20 is one of the saddest, scariest verses in all of Scripture. She shaved his head,

And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

He had grown so accustomed to living in sin that he didn’t know that the Lord had left him.

And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes.

The way that would work—this is a common ancient practice—is they would take hot irons and dig them into his eye sockets and then dig his eyes out with spoons. That’s what happened to Samson.

And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.

You should go do a study on that process. It’s really fascinating what they had him doing. Now, watch this. Here’s this foreshadowing of hope.

But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Here is this moment where we see that maybe there’s one good fight left in him. So, they gather together and you know the story. They have this big party to their god. They’re singing to their god, they’re worshipping their god, and the Philistines are in the temple to their god, Dagon. They’re worshipping and celebrating. It’s really sickening to read. They are praising their god for giving them victory over Samson, the servant of Yahweh. It’s about their god over our God. It’s about my god over your God. So, they march Samson out and they mock him, they bind him, they chain him to the pillars and they stretch him out in this foreshadowing of the crucifixion of Jesus that’s starting to take place. It’s a foreshadowing of the comparison of an insufficient savior to the one Savior. They stretch him out, and they’re mocking, and they’re screaming, and they’re yelling at him, and beating him.

And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, “Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.” 27 Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained.

28 Then Samson called to the Lord and said, “O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.” 29 And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested.

This is only the second time in the whole story that he’s cried out to God.

He leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. 30 And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. 31 Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years.

So, let me break this into three major points of application and we will be done.

* + - Number one, what do we learn from Samson’s life that applies personally to our life?
      * First, Samson is a reminder that my greatest enemy is the one that looks back at me in the mirror each morning. What I can learn personally from his life is that I need to guard against the same following characteristics that were evident in Samson’s life in my own life.
        + Number one, he was impulsive. People who walk in the Spirit will walk in obedience to God’s Word and not in the impulsive demands of the flesh.
        + Number two, Samson was compromising. He took the commands of God and he treated them very casually. He was very compromising in his approach to the Christian faith. Compromise is the enemy of the believer.
        + Number three, Samson was unteachable. Not once at any point in the story do we see him submit or surrender to authority or do we see him sit under anyone else. We don’t even see him surrender to God.
        + Number four is that he was a loner. Part of the problem was that he had no community and no accountability. God did not design the Christian life to be lived in solitude. He designed it so that we, as a community of believers, would encourage one another, and help one another, and hold one another to accountability.
        + Number five, Samson was demanding. He said to his parents, “I want her now.” They tried to reason with him and he said, “Get her for me, now!” He was demanding and he was spoiled. He was a spoiled baby. I’m convinced that the problem in the American Church is that most of us are just spoiled, just comfortable. We can get whatever we want. 12,000 teenagers a year come through here. Do you know the number one problem with the teenagers who come through Snowbird Outfitters? They hate me when I say this. They’re spoiled. They don’t have moms and dads who lead in the home. They don’t have dads who lead, and control, and command with the responsibility that God has given. God has not called any human being alive to live out from under authority, nobody. And the most gracious gift, as a dad, that I could do for my children is to teach them at a young age to live under authority and to maintain that authority. But to do that, I have to live under authority—God’s authority and the authority of my brothers and sisters in Christ. We’re called to submit to one another; that’s what Paul tells us in his letters to the churches in Ephesus and Corinth.
        + Next, he was selfish. He used his strengths and gifts that God had given him for his own selfish purposes. Strength and gifts should first be used to glorify God and then to serve and help others but Samson used them selfishly throughout the entire story.
        + Lastly, he was proud. He assumed that he would never lose his strength. In the end he even mocked God in a sense when he told Delilah the source of his strength. He was proud. He assumed he would never lose it.
      * The second application is this. Does Samson do anything good? He gets mentioned in Hebrews. What does he do that’s good? There are two things.
        + Number one—and we need more of this in the heart and the life of the Church—Samson is a fighter. He fights. Sometimes he fights for the wrong thing but he’s a fighter. If we could take that kind of energy and wake up every day and understand that there’s a lion that’s roaring and that wants to devour us, and understand that our fight is not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers, we need a little more of Samson when it comes to the fighter mentality. We just need to make sure that our fight is against the right enemy. He’s a fighter.
        + The other thing that Samson does that’s good is that in his most desperate moments he cries out to God. He teaches us something—it is never too late to cry out to God. In the moment of his death he cries out to God.
      * Last and third in the application, what are the theological lessons of Samson’s life? God often uses situations and methods that we cannot understand to bring about His good purposes. Samson ruled and judged in Israel for twenty years but he did not provide deliverance for the nation of Israel. Israel needed a deliverer greater than the strongest man the world has ever known. Samson was mighty in battle and powerful to defeat more people than any one individual has ever defeated. He looks to be the perfect savior, the perfect deliverer, but he had shortcomings that are as glaring and powerful as his strengths. Israel needed a great Deliverer and we need the same Deliverer. What Samson could not do, only Jesus can do. Samson’s strength faded and perished but the strength of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ conquered temptation, conquered sin, conquered death, conquered the grave, and conquered our enemies. Like Samson, Jesus was betrayed by someone He loved. Like Samson, Jesus was handed over to pagan Gentiles who tortured Him and abused Him. He was bound and mocked and made the object of public entertainment and scorn. In the moment of His death, rather than defeat, He brought about the greatest victory. So, unlike Samson, Jesus was not put into chains and bound because of His own sin but rather because of our sin. Samson was a strong man made weak because of his sin; Jesus was and is Almighty God and yet He humbled himself and took on the weakness of human flesh. For our sake, He became weak and poor so that He might save us from the chains of sin. We might be like Samson—compromising, demanding, selfish, proud, self-centered, spoiled, impulsive, rebellious, but thanks be to God that Jesus was stricken, smitten, beaten, and made the object of suffering and scorn so that I might be set free from the chains that bind me and the chains that bound Samson to those very sins. It is when I behold Jesus and see Him in His glory and recognize Him as my Savior that I can be set free to live in Christ and not in my own selfishness.

That is freedom. Jesus is greater than Samson. I can be like Samson or I can be in Christ.

What Samson is doing is he is teaching us. He’s setting up the end of the story which is this—there was no judge in Israel that could save Israel. There would be a period of kings that would come after this and the Israelites would have to learn the same hard lessons again; that there is no king that can save Israel. But there is one King, the King of kings, who can save all of us from the power and dominion of sin, and His name is Jesus. Thanks be to God that He’s done it. Amen?

Let’s pray and we will close with some songs of worship.

God, I thank you for what we can learn from Samson. I thank you from what we can learn from your Word when we open it and open our hearts, even from a story that’s very familiar. I pray that tonight that you would help us to take the familiarity of the story and appreciate you and your Word. I pray that we would pause, and stop, and reflect on the goodness of your grace to sustain Samson’s life long enough to bring about what apparently became a very powerful faith. I pray that we would learn that for those of us who are in Christ that grace has no shelf life and we are held fast by the salvation that you have given us. At the same time, your Word teaches us that those who are your true sons and daughters will receive your discipline. The scariest thing that I can imagine in my life is to live like Hell and do what I want to do and not ever face the disciplinary hand of God. I thank you that you love us enough to discipline, and chasten, and punish when we need it, and to do so that you might restore us to that which you’ve created us to be. I thank you for the lessons we learn from Samson and I pray that we would apply to our lives this week that which would enable us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross—an exact opposite of the pattern of Samson’s life—who thought that equality with God was not something to be grasped and held onto but humbled himself. God, I pray that we would be more like Jesus. For those here who may not have a true relationship with you tonight, I pray that you would, through this story, draw them into that fellowship and that relationship before it is everlastingly too late. In the good name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

1. *Conan the Barbarian* is a 1982 American film directed and co-written by John Milius. The film stars Arnold Schwarzenegger and James Earl Jones, and tells the story of a young muscular barbarian warrior named Conan (Schwarzenegger), who seeks vengeance for the death of his parents. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)