

Judges

Strength in Weakness

Sinful Choices

- Ever since I was a young boy, I have always loved the story of Samson
- It's GREAT Sunday School material for young boys
- Big, strong, manly Samson slaying Philistines left and right
- As you get older you start to scratch your head more and more over the story of Samson, and you start to wonder why God chose to work through a man who made so many sinful choices in his life
- Sure enough, we see that God is so mighty that he can not only work through people who are full of fears, people who make poor choices, but he can actually work through sinners as well
- As a matter of fact, God mainly works through Sinners
- Let's refresh a bit on our history...
- **Jephthah** only judged Israel for 6 years
- After him came **Ibzan** who judged 7 years
- **Elon** who judged 10 years
- And **Abdon** who judged for 8 years
- Add that all together and you get about another Generation...
- Yep, you guessed it...
- Judges 13:1
 - 1) And the people of Israel **again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD**, so the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for **forty years.**

- The same story unfolds as we've seen over and over
- After suffering under the punishments of the foreign country, the Israelites eventually repent and turn back to God
- They call out in prayer and ask God to deliver them
- God delivers Israel again

- Judges 13:24

24) And the woman bore a son and called his name **Samson**. And the young man grew, and the **LORD blessed him**.

- Samson starts out life in a good position... Blessed by God
- Samson was brought up a Nazirite
- Nazirites lives under three simple instructions:

- 1) Do not drink alcohol
- 2) Do not cut your hair
- 3) Do not touch a dead body

- What gave Samson his great strength?
- In Sunday School, they taught me that it was his hair...
- But, when he performs his first superhuman task of killing a lion with his bare hands, a different story comes out...

- Judges 14:6

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.

- Let's look first at thus very first incident we have recorded about Samson, and see if we can learn something about Samson
- Samson's main role in Israel, we shall see, is to ***"discomfort the Philistines"***
- And I think it discomforted his parents, as well...

- Judges 14:1-2

- 1) Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the **daughters of the Philistines**.
- 2) 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.**"

- So, what is the first event recorded in the life of this Sunday School Hero?
- He marries out of the Truth
- Not really something that we would encourage our Young People to do, is it?
- Yet, here is Samson, like an petulant, little child, “Get her for me as my wife!”
- Is he pursuing some deeper spiritual lesson that we really can’t see? Nope!
- His father does his best to try to talk him out of it
- He gently encourages him to marry in the Truth
- But, it’s not enough...
- The lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh were hard at work...
- Look at what Samson says...
- Judges 14:3

3) But his father and mother said to him, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for **she is right in my eyes.**”

- How many parents have heard this before...
- ***“She is right in my eyes!”***
- We get thinking in our own heart that something is okay, and it’s hard to be convinced otherwise
- But, now before you give up all hope on Samson...
- Look at the next verse:

• Judges 14:4

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.

- Who is the “he” in verse 4?
- I don’t think that it is Samson the verse is referring to
- I would contend that it is God

- God is orchestrating this whole situation, because his plan is to discomfort the Philistines through Samson
- Samson was being chosen as the Judge in Israel, he would surely have known the law against marrying foreign women
- The unheeded reminder of his parents shows either a high degree of willfulness, or a very strong secret purpose
- Why else would Samson’s parents have gone down to Timnath to make all of the necessary arrangements for betrothal and dowry?
- Samson approves of the woman, and returns to her for the betrothal
- They call a feast, but Samson has no friends (Israelites) with him, so the Philistines bring 30 young men to be his “guests”
- But, the guests have no gifts for Samson, so Samson proposed a solution
- He remembers the lion that he killed on his way to Timnah, and remembers seeing its rotted carcass full of bees and honey
- Judges 14:12-13
 - 12) 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.”
- They can’t figure it out... So, they try to extort the answer out of his wife
- Judges 14:15
 - 15) 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. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?”
- And so it begins for Samson...
- Like the consequences of so many of our sinful decisions, a life of frustration and emotional setbacks begins
- His wife begins to nag him...
- Judges 14:16

16) 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?"

- How many more times will he fall for the *"If you loved me, you would tell me"* routine?
- Love should never be an *"If you loved me, you would do this"* situation...
- You shouldn't use your relationship to coerce or even force your partner into doing something that they don't want to do
- You lead by displaying righteous behavior, you don't push righteousness on them
- Samson should have been wise enough to see this and avoid it...
- But, after a week of hearing her cry, he told her, and she told the Philistines...
- *"If you had not plowed with my heifer, you had not found out my riddle."*
- Huh? Doesn't make sense to you...
- That's because you didn't live 3500 years ago...
- It actually was the coarse language of prostitutes of that time
- He was saying that if they hadn't abused his wife, they wouldn't have figured it out
- So, he pays them off
- He promised them thirty changes of garments, and thirty sheets
- He didn't say whether or not he would be putting the clothes onto dead bodies, and wrapping the dead bodies in the sheets or not...
- But, that is what he does...
- Judges 14:19

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.

- Then we see something that dramatically affects the remainder of Samson's life...
- A situation so weird it seems like it's straight from a daytime TV show
- Judges 14:20

20) And Samson's wife was **given** to his companion, who had been his best man.

- Confusing? Yes.
- One of my favorite sayings is, *"When you are going the wrong way on a one way street, it's awfully hard to follow traffic laws"*
- When you start down a path of sin, things can get pretty confusing...
- So, back to the story...
- Judges 15:1-3
 - 1) After some days, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat. 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."
- Clearly, not your normal marriage, even for Old Testament times...
- *"Oh! I didn't think that you liked her, so I gave her to your friend. Isn't her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead."*
- This kind of dialog you just don't hear very often
- But, it's not that uncommon...
- This man here is so fearful of Samson that he bargains with his daughter
- Samson gets so upset that he feels justified in hurting them this time
- Remember? What is the purpose of Samson?
- **TO DISCOMFORT THE PHILISTINES**
- God worked directly with Samson's desires to achieve the result He intended
- For example, by having Samson marry this Philistine in the first place
- Look at 14:4 in a different version...
- Judges 14:4 (NLT)
 - 4) His father and mother didn't realize **the LORD was at work in this, creating an opportunity to disrupt the Philistines**, who ruled over Israel at that time.
- God also worked in the lives of those around Samson to accomplish this goal

- For example, here God had the father give away the espoused daughter
- God does the same thing with us to achieve His purpose with each one of us
- Sometimes He works with our own desires to bring about the situations that He wants to put us in
- Of course, the tricky part is that sometimes He allows us to pursue our own desires to the end result of sinning, also
- Sometimes God works in the lives of those around us to bring about His purpose
- So, Samson, feeling righteously prepared to wreak revenge on the Philistines sets about on a most “Samson-Like” challenge

- Judges 15:4

4) So Samson went and caught **300 foxes** and took torches. And he **tied them tail to tail** and put a torch between each pair of tails.

- The fox in Israel is more like a wild dog than the foxes we know of
- How do you catch wild dogs?
- They are carrion eaters
- Where did he (a Nazirite) get the dead flesh to lure them?
- Then! What kind of man can tie their tails together?

- Judges 15:5

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.

- Look at the reaction by the Philistines

- Judges 15:6

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

- Remember what his wife was afraid of?

• Judges 14:15

15) 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. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?"

- She sold out Samson in the first place, because she was afraid of being burned
- In the end, that is what happens to her anyway
- How often is THIS the case?
- We avoid doing the RIGHT thing, because we fear something painful or uncomfortable will happen to us, if we do
- Instead, we SIN, and choose a path of lesser resistance
- In the end, the thing that we fear ends up coming upon us anyway
- God wants us to do the RIGHT thing, and will influence our lives to encourage it
- So, the response of the Philistines escalates into more violence
- Samson tries to rally the people, but to no avail
- The weakness of the men of Judah in the face of this trouble is a sorry commentary on the miserable decline of morale in the Israelites during this period
- Instead of rallying around Samson, and gladly following his confident lead, they blame him for making things worse
- They try to sell him out to the Philistines
- They were willing to barter the life of one of the strongest leaders their nation has EVER produced – One who exploits were FAMOUS in Israel, and brought Incredible fear amongst their enemies – for some momentary easing of their Suffering
- This kind of helps you to understand the position that Samson was in...
- He was called as a Judge in Israel
- What does Judge mean? Deliverer
- But, the people had no will left for freedom
- The people didn't want to be delivered
- What do you do when you are in that position?

- What do you do when God is moving you to help someone out, and that person doesn't want help – that person doesn't want to change?
- The lesson we see in Samson is someone who simply does all that he can to change the situation
- You can bring a horse to water, but you can't make him drink
- Samson, at least, splashed around in the water as much as he could, hoping to show the horse how enjoyable it was
- So, Samson agrees to their request, but under one condition
- Judges 15:12-13
 - 12) And they said to him, "We have come down to bind you, that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "**Swear to me that you will not attack me yourselves.**"
 - 13) They said to him, "No; we will only bind you and give you into their hands. We will surely not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.
- Deliver me to the Philistines ALIVE, and not dead
- What kind of trust and respect did he have for his Brethren at this point?
- He had a plan
- He wanted to get near the Philistines one more time
- Judges 15:14-15
 - 14) When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. 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.
- **1,000 MEN!**
- That's hard to imagine...
- Samson knew that it wasn't his power or strength
- Look who he attributes the victory to
- Judges 15:18

18) And he was very thirsty, and he called upon the LORD and said, “**You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant**, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?”

- **THIS** is the exploit that establishes Samson divine right to lead the people
- It is at **THIS** point that he is recorded as the Judge of Israel
- Judges 15:20

20) And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines **twenty years**.

- But, notice how the people never were moved enough by his great accomplishments to rise up and overthrow their Philistine rulers
- All the 20 years of Samson’s judging, they were under the thumb of the Philistines
- Now... Samson had his problems...
- I don’t know how to interpret them
- I don’t think that they ALL were directed by God to bring about discomfort on the Philistines, but you can’t deny that he appears in Hebrews 11
- It’s interesting to note how God draws these characters of less than perfect quality
- It’s like He wants us to be able to relate to them, to be able to see ourselves in their flawed characters
- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David – The pillars of Scripture, are all recorded in their moments of weakness
- Moses is so captured by pride that he is denied entering the Promised Land
- Hezekiah gets so wrapped up in the vainglory of politics that it cost him his life
- Noah shamed himself in drunkenness
- Lot shamed himself in incest
- If you are feeling like your mistakes have removed you so far from the service of God that you will never do anything worthy
- Take a closer look at Hebrews 11, and you will see more people just like you!
- Samson continues with his questionable behaviour
- Judges 16:1

1) Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a **prostitute**, and he went in to her.

- Gaza is the capital of the Philistines, so he obviously feels emboldened enough to walk right into the capital, on his journey of sin...

- And the people of Gaza react like you would expect a people to act when their Arch-Enemy comes walking right into the middle of town

- Judges 16:2

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.**"

- And Samson reacts just you would expect the Hero of the story to react

- Judges 16:3

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.

- How big are the City Gates of the capitol city? Easily 12' x 18' – TWO of them

- God sent an incredible message through this "sinful" man of Israel

- Judges 16:4

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

- Things go bad almost immediately

- Judges 16:5

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.**"

- Let's consider for a moment how much money they gave her?

- We read in Chapter 3 that there are 5 Philistines Lords

- Each one gives her 1100 pieces of Silver, so that's 5,500 Pieces of Silver

- There are 2.5 Pieces of Silver in an ounce, so that's 2,200 Ounces of Silver

- Silver currently trades at \$15.80 per Ounce, so that's only about \$34,000
- Sure, it's a lot of money, but it's not like they offered her \$1,000,000
- They offered her about average income for a single woman
- It doesn't take much, does it?
- Judas sold out Jesus for 30 pieces of Silver
- What's your price?
- Can you bought for \$34,000?
- How about \$1,000,000?
- Does the amount really matter?
- So, for three times she tries nagging and cajoling until he tells her something
- It must have evolved into some kind of game that they played
- Did you notice what the Philistines had asked her to do?
- *"Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies"*
- What does that tell us about Samson?
- The source of his great strength wasn't obvious
- He didn't look like the cartoon character that you saw in Sunday School
- He wasn't some massive hunk of muscle
- He didn't appear to be strong, so it was confusing where the strength came from
- **REMEMBER - GOD WORKS THROUGH THE WEAK – NOT THE STRONG!**
- Consider the hell she was putting Samson through...

- Judges 16:15-16

- 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.**

- Vexed to death!
- He was done! Ready to commit suicide in order to get out of this situation...
- Samson finally gives in, and tells her:
- Judges 16:17

17) And **he told her all his heart**, and said to her, “A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man.”

- And Delilah realized he had finally told her the truth...
- Why? After lying to her three times straight, does she realize it now?
- She was a Jew, not a Philistine – She saw at once the connection between his vow, and his unique gift from God
- She would have realized that it was GOD who was giving him this strength
- And she STILL sells him down the river
- THAT is the kind of person she was
- The Philistines had given up on her, as they had been fooled (and BEATEN!) 3 times
- So, Delilah has to call them back to the deal once again...

- Judges 16:18

18) When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up again, for **he has told me all his heart.**” Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands.

- Now, the real question for me is...
- After having told her the truth, why would Samson trust her to sleep in her lap?
- Look closely at the verse: I think she drugged him
- He’s not stupid! He wouldn’t have trusted her, unless she slipped him something in his drink!

• Judges 16:19

19) **She made him sleep** on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.

- Another testament to this not being your normal sleep...
- MAYBE if I fell asleep in your lap, you could cut my long hair...
- But, calling for another man to come in, and have him shave my head...
- Look at the kind of love she really held for him:
- As soon as he was weak, she “afflicted” him – Berating him with scorn and insults to get back at him for the times he lied to her
- This time when the cry goes out, the response is the same, but the results different

• Judges 16:20

20) 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.**

- His strength wasn’t in his hair
- His strength was in his commitment to God
- His strength was in his vow that he had kept his entire life
- He had allowed that commitment to be broken

• Judges 16:21

21) 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.

- They take him back to the capitol city, where he had so fearlessly walked before
- It’s interesting to see what the first thing to happen to him is: Gouging out his eyes
- Remember the first thing that got him in trouble? **“He SAW a woman...”**
- Samson is now given plenty of time to consider how he had let his ego and his lusts lure him from his high and holy called to be Israel’s deliverer
- But, look what happens to Samson when he is down!

- He doesn't wallow in pity and consider himself damaged goods that have no further Godly purpose
- He **RENEWS HIS VOW!**
- He repents and put himself right with God again
- What a great lesson for us!
- We all sin
- Our sins can have horrific consequences in our lives
- Don't let them overtake you and simply fill your life with regret and pity
- Repent!
- Return to God!
- Renew your vow!
- Look what happens next to Samson
- Judges 16:22

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

- Why would the Philistines allowed his hair to grow back?
- Weren't they superstitious pagans who would have thought that the hair had some magical value?
- I think that Delilah must have explained to them the significance of the Nazirite vow
- And she was not a God fearing woman
- She didn't love and understand God
- She was a sinner who didn't think she could ever be forgiven
- She didn't realize that you are never cast away from God's love forever
- She assumed that Samson would be in the same boat
- She didn't realize that God loves to work with the WEAK – With the SINNER
- Look at what Samson's final prayer is for:
- Not for his release from this prison

- Judges 16:28

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.”

- Samson’s last wish is to serve God one more time, and wreak destruction on the Philistines

- And God blesses him

- God chooses to work through this weak, sinful vessel one last time

- Judges 16:30

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.**

- What a great closing

- What an amazing story

- I can’t think of a faithful man of old whose life was more riddled with sin than Samson

- And, I can’t think of another story with a great ending like that

- God worked an amazing victory through this beaten, defeated, sinful man

- Blinded, bound in shackles, in prison and grinding at a mill like a mule

- God shows forth his strength through our weaknesses... And even our sins!