

All right. Let's open our Bibles to Judges 16.

The book of Judges, we've told you now a lot of times, is really the follow-up of the book of Joshua. It doesn't stop as far as the years are concerned. It takes us from Joshua's death, and the division of the land, 338 years forward to the time of King Saul. In fact (and something that we'll look at when we get back, the last five chapters of this book), it is the longest consecutive period of history that the Bible offers to us in terms of learning. It's even a little bit longer than the division of the kingdom after Solomon's death to the fall of the southern kingdom to the Babylonians. So this is a huge portion of years that are covered here in this book; some fifteen or so judges, depending on who you'd like to label as such. But it begins with a generation that doesn't know the LORD. Joshua's generation died. Nothing was passed along to them in terms of a relationship with God or knowing His power (as chapter 2:10 tells us).

And the failure of this passing along of faith provides the platform for these first sixteen chapters - what we call the sin-drome. It is seven occasions of the children of Israel being in a place where they're blessed, and God is blessing them, which leads (in their rest) not to fellowship with God but to rebellion, often turning to the idols of the people around them. In their rebellion, God gives them retribution. He deals with them because He loves them. And sometimes it only takes a few years for them to see clearly; there are some times when it takes forty years (a whole generation) to come to their senses. But once the people turn (and they don't all turn, but when many turn, some turn), the LORD from heaven hears, and He sends a deliverer to restore the relationship of God to His people. He delivers them from their oppressors. It results in rest for a while, and then that generation dies, and the next generation picks it up.

The examples of the judges, for the most part, are godly men and women who bring the people back to an obedience and fellowship with the LORD. But the revivals that they bring almost always end with their death. It's almost like every generation needs to know, personally, the LORD themselves. And you can help that along by teaching your kids and setting a good example and reaching out to cross those boundaries of generations. That's awesome.

The Bible tells us, in a couple places in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 10:11, Romans 15:4), that the Old Testament was written for our learning so that we through the comfort of the Scriptures can have hope. And it is, for me, the most difficult book in the Bible - is this book. Because it spends so many hours and years seeing people falling on their faces. In fact, when we get back from Europe, these last five chapters are the most difficult ones; you guys have got to just be here to get me through it. Don't have me hangin' out here by myself with these five chapters.

But Samson is one of those guys, and he's really the last guy that we focus on in this regard as far as the children of Israel falling again into that life of sin. But Samson's a lesson in what not to do. He's not a good example. Or, he's a good example of being a bad example. And what not to do as a believer is something you can learn from chapters 13, 14, 15 and what we study tonight because God's Word tells us the whole naked truth. If you try to outline Samson's life, we are introduced to him in various acts. We get to hear how he supernaturally was chosen by the LORD, how the Angel of the LORD told mom and dad of his birth and of God's intention to begin to deliver the children of Israel from the Philistines. We take a quick jump forward in the next chapter (twenty years) to a place called Timnah, to a place where he was going to marry a woman that he saw amongst the enemy - amongst the Philistines. When things didn't go well, his anger (taking it out on the Philistines) became God's way of beginning to eliminate Israel's enemy. It wasn't that Samson was a participant with God; he was just mad, and God'll use whatever He wants because He's God. And so His work got done but not with the cooperation of this judge, Samson.

You jump ahead, in chapter 16, twenty more years - almost to the last part of his life. And, again, we find Samson doing what he's always done. He's looking for women in all the wrong places, and he's never found one that he didn't love - both in the Valley of Sorek, where he met Delilah, and in Gaza, where he met this harlot. If you had to outline Samson's life, you could call it supernatural calling, and then his sinful wandering (which is the only thing that we're given pictures of). He was a single-handed fighter; we told you that all of the others judges gather the troops, and they rally the troops, and they lead the people against their common enemy. But not Samson. He's not at all about leading anyone. He's all about getting even. He's driven by anger and personal slight, if you will. And then, finally, we come to this chapter which you could label the sad ending of his life. Supernatural calling,

sinful wandering, single-handed fighting, sad ending. All because of his moral failure.

So, we've looked at the first three points. We will see the last point tonight. It really is a life of "what might have been," and I know that's kind of, maybe, an often-used phrase when it comes to Samson's life. But here's a guy that had all the advantages that you could possibly want. I mean, the deck was stacked in his favor. Everything that you could have wanted from God, he had. And yet, he didn't take them up, and he wasted the potential for his life. And so I think you can learn from Samson that a good beginning doesn't necessarily guarantee a good ending. We might ask ourselves, as we read this - what more could God have done for him? And the answer is - nothing. He had godly parents at a time when most people were not. He was introduced by the LORD to his parents as a plan that God had for him to be a deliverer for Israel. He was put in a position where he had to take a Nazirite vow from the day that he was born. He was empowered by the Spirit. People around him were filled with the Spirit as well, incredibly so. I mean, you would hope great things for this man. But, unfortunately, he lives in the flesh, and he comes to the end of his life with much remorse and much regret.

We read, in verse 1, "Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her." Gaza is about forty miles or so from Samson's home in Hebron, and it is along the coast (if you don't see it in your head, you might know where Gaza is now), along the Mediterranean. But notice that here is Samson, now forty years down the road, and he's still plagued by the very thing that always has plagued his life - lust. Right? Samson's life was driven by lust, and somehow he doesn't see a conflict between having a Nazirite vow (for which he's kept his long hair - it's probably all he had left of it) and this behavior with a prostitute, this swinging kind of lifestyle. And so we meet him again, years later, in Gaza - on the same wrong road, still in enemy territory. These are people that wanted to kill the Jews and wipe them out. Still looking for love, still driven by lust, still using the power of God in his life for all the wrong reasons: to serve himself, not to serve the LORD. He's the perennial play-with-fire-and-eventually-you'll-get-burned kind of guy. It doesn't mean that God doesn't get His purposes accomplished. And I hope that you read that as you go through this. God still has His way. The Philistines are being dealt with, they're being pushed back. They won't be, really, moved out of the way until well after David's life. But for this generation, God was delivering them from their oppressors with a man that He would use that He had chosen but that wasn't very cooperative. God can use your life, but you may not get any credit for it. He

can bless your life, but you may not get any credit for it. Because that's the way Samson kind of lived out his. And sometimes the apparent victories and successes that you find in your life when you're living in the flesh can convince you that you can walk on both sides of the fence. But you can't. There is no way that it won't eventually catch up to you. And Samson had been relying on the LORD's strength for years now. He used it all the time when he fell into sin, when he rebelled against God, when there were threats against his life, when he wanted to get even; and he thought he could handle it, and tonight it catches up with him.

"When the Gazites," verse 2, "were told, 'Samson has come here!' they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, 'In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him.' And Samson lay low till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron." Now Hebron is forty miles away - I don't think he carried it all the way to there, obviously. But he took this whole gate of the city. Strong man. They're plotting to kill him. He uses his strength, again, for his own purposes. He takes this locked gate, with all of his strength, hauls it up to the hill that faces towards the place that he had come from, forty miles away, and I suspect he went home. Just left the gate sittin' on the hill, and, "See you guys later. Nice try! You didn't get me."

Verse 4, "Afterward" (just jump ahead) "it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah." Afterward. "Delilah" means dainty, delicate. I don't know how many people have used the name Delilah since this was written. I'm pretty sure she ruined the name for thousands of years. We did run into a lady in the Philippines once that was named Delilah. I am sure that this woman was beautiful. Satan has a way of seeking to package up temptation in a way that will draw your attention to it. There's a verse in James, and it says, "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:14). And I think that's what happened to Samson. The word "enticed" means to bait or to trap. It literally means to lure someone from the safety of cover and to bring one to a place where they are willing to sample something that doesn't look dangerous to them but will be dangerous to them; they just don't see it. It's kind of like covering up the hook with a tasty-looking worm. It looks pretty good till you bite into it. And temptation is the bait, isn't it? Bathsheba, bathing, was David's bait. He couldn't get enough. He watched over the fence. He moved towards this temptation. I don't think he ever thought about what adultery would do to his life

or that it would bring him to murder or separation from his family or the destruction that it would bring to everyone around him. But you see, he was enticed. He was caught. There was no thought to the consequences. And you find the same thing with Samson. Here's a warning for us - be careful when you're enticed by sin. This was a beautiful woman, a dainty woman. He fell in love with a woman who lived amongst the enemy.

Now, look, temptation is not sin. And I would say to you - you should not feel guilty for being tempted because temptation is the bait, if you will. You have a desire to eat. It's a good thing you have that desire. If you don't eat, you'll die! But that doesn't mean you have to eat like I do. (Laughing) I decided I gotta lose weight, but, man, I like eating. You like to breathe? Because you'll die. You need to drink? You'll die. If you desire sexual relationships, those are good as long as they are within the parameters of God's Word. The desires are okay. It's the timing that usually is way off when sin comes. In fact, the desires that are God-given must be God-governed.

And that wasn't the case here with Samson. Often, it is a desire from the LORD that faces the lies of the devil who tells you that "now" is the right time. It's all about bad timing. It isn't that the desire is necessarily wrong; it's not right for this place and not right for now. But it isn't the temptation that is the sin; it is the gaining of that enticement in your life.

So, here he is. Another town, another love, another Philistine stronghold, another woman. We read in verse 5, "And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, 'Entice him,' " (well, that's already happened) " 'and find out where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.' " Delilah is approached by the five Philistine lords of the five major cities of the Philistines - Ashdod and Gaza and Ashkelon and Gath and Ekron (we'll run into them a lot as we go through the Bible). But, needless to say, they're offering her fifty-five hundred pieces of silver. That's a lot of money! And I don't know how she felt about Samson to begin with, but she is looking at him differently now. Not sure she ever loved him, but they want to know where his strength lies because no one has been able to defeat him all of these years. And it was really hard for Samson to go, "I have this strength because I've dedicated myself to the LORD," as he speaks to the prostitute or to this woman in the valley of the Philistines who were dwelling within it.

Now notice, in verse 6, that, "Delilah said to Samson, 'Please tell me where your great strength lies, and with what you may be bound to afflict you.' " I think that's very honest. (Laughing) Don't you? And I don't know what kind of idiot Samson is. (Laughing) "I'd like you to tell me how we can tie you up so that you can't get loose, baby." And as she presses for answers, Samson seems (to me) to be the guy that loves flirting. He likes to play the games. Right? He likes to live on the edge. He likes to be told he's a hunk, I think. "Hey, Samson, why are you so strong?" He's just playing along with her.

But notice that the enemy is always seeking to know what the strength of your life is or what your weakness is. We read in chapter 1 of Job that, when the LORD spoke to Satan, He said, "Where have you been?" and he said, "I've been going to and fro throughout the whole earth. I've been walking back and forth in it, and I've been just checking things out." And the LORD said, "Have you ever considered My servant Job? There's nobody like him at all." And Satan had been considering Job. In fact, he has several arguments for the LORD to tell him why Job was so faithful - that He'd always blessed him; that if he was sick, he'd turn on Him; if He took his stuff away, he wouldn't follow Him. But you read the word "consider." It's a Hebrew word that means to scrutinize or to do reconnaissance. You know, one of the things that the enemy does in your life and mine is he looks for weakness. Right? And he's really good at it; he's been at this for years. He wants to find what can trip you up. And it's different for everyone. But he wants to attack your weakness.

For Samson, it was all about lust and temper. Those two things drove him nuts. His pride, his selfishness, his habits, if you will. But here's the enemy, notice, and Delilah is indeed the enemy. "Tell me. What's your strength? How can I take you out?" Verse 7, "And Samson said to her, 'If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man.' So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them. Now men were lying in wait, staying with her in the room." What is that noise in the closet?! (Laughing) "And she said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' But he broke the bowstrings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches fire. So the secret of his strength was not known." Now you might say, "Well, at least he didn't tell her." No. But, in reality, he began to compromise. It's hard for him to say where his strength comes from because he's living this kind of life. So he can't really say. He's got to make excuses.

I remember talking to a kid, years ago, who was working at a warehouse where they had a lot of parties on the weekend, and they'd ask him to come. But he had just gotten saved, and he didn't want to hang around with these bunch of drinkers, partying it up on the weekend. And so he'd make excuses, "Well, I gotta go home and do this, gotta run over here." And he says, "What do you think?" I said, "I think you just tell them you're a Christian, they'll quit asking you. Because every time you come up with an excuse, they'll go, 'Oh, maybe next week,' but they'll be back. They're going to come and ask you again." Had he just said, one time, "No, I'm a believer, I don't go to those things," that'd have been the end of it. I don't know how long you can lie and compromise before you fall. But eventually you're going to fall.

Notice that the Philistines feared Samson, but they didn't fear his God because he hadn't really told them about his God. And I don't understand. First she says, "Tell me how I can whoop you," and then she's got guys hiding in the closet.....? Come on, Samson. Really?!

Verse 10, "Then Delilah said to Samson, 'Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with.' " Wouldn't you be suspicious after a while? (Laughing) And I want to hear Samson saying, "Well, excuse me! You keep asking me about my strength, and then you bring guys into my room to tie me up." He's still not gettin' the hint. Love makes you blind, or sin makes you stupid. One or the other, you can take your pick.

Verse 11, "So he said to her," (again, as she how accuses him of lying to her and they're hiding from him) " 'If they bind me securely with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man.' Therefore Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' And men were lying in wait, staying in the room. But he broke them off his arms like a thread. Delilah said to Samson, 'Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with.' And he said to her, 'If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom.' " Now notice the play continues, or accusations continue, but he's wearing down. Look, he's talkin' about his hair now. He's gettin' closer. The secret, by the way, of his strength was not his hair. It wasn't even his Nazirite vow because he wasn't practicing that. It was the outward proof of a man whose life was committed to the LORD, but Samson's wasn't; but it was now the outward proof of a man that God would use for His own purposes but not in a willful way. So, it is only that God had decided to continue to

use him, but it's the outward evidence of a covenant that God had made with Samson even though Samson hadn't been very faithful to Him.

"So she wove," verse 14, "it tightly with the batten of the loom, and said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom. Then 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 have not told me where your great strength lies.' And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death, that he told her his heart." Samson had told this woman he loved her, as well, but she's workin' him over pretty good, wearing him down.

I like verse 16. You should write that down. Satan loves to pester us, looking for our weakness, trying to discover what it is so he can make custom-made fiery darts to shoot at you at the time of your weakest so he can take you out. I read somewhere, years ago, that some Christians sail so close to the lake of fire, they get their sails singed. And I think that's the kind of life you find Samson living. He loves to live as far away from God as he can and somehow still feel like he's in the ballgame or in the ballpark. Maybe you've had people say to you, "Hey, if I'm a Christian, can I still do that?" and then they'll tell you what it is as if somehow that was the most important thing. Rather than, "What is the will of God, where can I be right in the middle of His will? they do like this, "Can I....? How 'bout this? How 'bout now? Am I still saved? How 'bout now? Am I still saved?" And they just try to work it. "Can I do this?" Why do you want to know those things?! Why not get right where God is? But Samson's that guy that likes to live along the edges, you know? And it's that 1 Corinthians 10:12 passage about be careful when you think you stand lest you fall. Samson was fooling around in the world, and he's about to get caught. Be careful how you choose your friends. Fellowship with the world should be for evangelistic purposes. You really should get involved in the world to share the love of Jesus. You want fellowship, go to church. Hang around with God's people. You want a wife or husband, look in the church for guys and girls that are walking with the LORD. Not in the world. That's the mission field. Right? That's the fields that are white unto harvest (John 4:35). But look at this guy! Now he's in a relationship with some woman who doesn't love him; she loves fifty-five hundred dollars, and she's doing everything she can to get paid off. And it's his latest nemesis, and he's just playin' around, "It's my hair, it's the rope, it's the leaves." She pestered him, she vexed him to death.

And he "said to her," verse 17, " 'No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak; and be like any other man.' " Years of stepping away from God had led to this day. God's gift to him - a promise by the Angel - was now to be removed. Strength that the LORD promised to give him, the strength that he would get for the work that He was called to. For years, Samson had ignored the internal portion of the covenant, and yet God had been faithful. He'd only clung to the external trappings. He had a Bible and maybe a sticker on his car. That's about it. And he was about to lose the last vestige of identification with God at all. At all.

I heard a story a couple years ago I really liked, of a skylark, a little bird who was talking with his dad, and his dad said to him, "God has given you and I wings so that we can fly over the earth and escape the trouble. And we don't have to go down there." And the little skylark said to his dad, "Well there's a man down there who has worms, and for one feather, I get two worms." And he spent the entire summer going down and getting a worm or two until it was autumn, and it was time to fly away, and he was out of feathers. And he couldn't fly away. The moral of the story was he had squandered his future for the daily, present satisfaction. He'd squandered his hopes for the future for worms. And I think that's what happened to Samson. He did this as well. God used him despite him, and God gets the glory. But, man, what might have been. He trades in his future, day by day, until there's no future left. He doesn't have anything to offer now.

Well, he finally told her the truth, and he told her of the badge that he had worn, a vow that, somehow, God had honored and he had not, that He would use him to deliver Israel from the enemy, the Philistines. Well, she got it right away. In fact, notice verse 18. It says, "When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, 'Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart.' So the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand." "I've got him now. Make sure you bring your checks." Verse 19, "Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him." Isn't that just.....look at the way the enemy works. He lulls you so that he can torment you. I always thought that to be very interesting. Satan's temptation begins with, "You can do it," but he quickly turns, when you do it, to, "What did you do?" He turns it around on you. "You're free to do it," and then you go do whatever it is he says, and then he turns on you, he says, "Man,

you're such a sinner! Such a loser!" He lulls you to sleep, and then he torments you. It's the way he is. He hates you and me.

Well, verse 20, "And she said, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' So he awoke from his sleep, and said, 'I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!' But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him." Samson had presumed upon the grace of God for forty years, but now he would find himself lacking. And the anointing of God's Spirit (that strengthened him) was gone, and he didn't know it. He relied on the past; he didn't rely upon the LORD. And he's like lots of other people who have used the phrase "what God used to do." And I always worry when I say to people, "What is the LORD doing in your life?" and they want to tell you about what happened in 1995. And you go, "You know, dude, that's like twenty years ago, plus. What's He done this decade, this year, with you?" But compromise - he's so out of touch with the awareness of God's Spirit with him that he doesn't even know when God leaves him. That's blind. That's out of touch. How important that you are aware that God is with you tonight. You're aware of His Spirit. It is possible to become deceived about your own spiritual condition and not even realize what a sad situation you find yourself. When the prophet went out to see King Asa (there in 2 Chronicles 15), he said to him, "I want you to know something, King. The LORD will be with you if you're with Him. But if you forsake Him, He's going to forsake you." So, make a good choice. Make the choice daily. Samson was able to live forty years presuming, and then one day the LORD leaves, and he's not even aware of it. It's like when God eventually departs from the place of worship, the Temple. And the prophets described His leaving, but the people, for years, kept going back. They never really even realized He was gone. They went through all of the forms.

There is a spiritual blindness and a weakness when you find yourself living in the enemy's territory. And don't think that you can fool with sin without consequences. I mean Samson, isolated from God, is a very ripe target. A few chapters ago, we read about him killing a thousand people with a jawbone. Now he can't take on a couple of guys. But it's an amazing thought that Samson could lose the presence of God, the power of God, and he didn't even notice.

I have a very cool laptop. It does everything. I couldn't get along without it. It's the best appliance that I own. A couple of weeks ago, I was supposed to teach somewhere. I had my laptop with me but no plug, and it had died. And I thought the best appliance in the world is worthless if it's separated from its source, and

this great laptop, that had all of my notes on it, was dark. Now, fortunately, I knew it well enough to teach. But I didn't like it because I had worked hours on what I would like to have said. I'm sure I didn't cover all of it.

But, look, Jesus uses this great word in the New Testament, the word "abide." "Let My words abide in you. Abide in Me, and you'll bear much fruit" (John 15). And it doesn't mean to check in once in a while. It doesn't mean two Sundays a month I'm there, no matter what. It means to hang out with or to stay close to or remain or continue. It's a verb; to stand or to tarry. Don't go anywhere. Hang out with Jesus so you know where He's at, where you're at. You should stay connected with Him. It's like now you'll be a laptop that has power.

So, tragic that he wouldn't even realize that the LORD had departed from him. Well, the Philistines came. Verse 21, "Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza." (That's where he was earlier in the chapter). "They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison." Common, at least in Philistine historical standards, when you wanted to control prisoners, you just took out their eyes. They couldn't run off. The bronze - the metal of judgment in the Bible is brass. Whenever you see brass anything, it talks about judgment of sin; whether it's on the implements at the Temple or as you read them here. And his job was in Gaza. He was chained to a grinding wheel, and, being a big guy, blind, they just chained him to it, and they said, "Go in circles, and start grinding the grain." Unable to see, going in circles, his life is over. The mighty man of God he might have been - going nowhere. What kind of a picture is this? Sin blinds you. "If your eye is bad, your whole body is full of darkness" (Matthew 6:23). Sin not only blinds you, it binds you. It takes from you the freedom. What is it, it says in Proverbs 5:22? "His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin." It'll blind you, it'll bind you, it'll keep you from going anywhere. And it will grind you to nothing. It will literally take the potential in your life away.

So imagine, now, Samson whose life has been the playboy and the tough guy, and he gets what he wants, and he does what he likes. And he doesn't listen to his family, he doesn't listen to the LORD, he ignores the Spirit. Runs around, you know? God uses him to take care of some Philistines here and there, but he's not a participant. And now he is blind and bound and going in circles, and there's nothing he can do but to look at his own life from within. The life that he chose, the passing moments of pleasure (Hebrews 11:25), how important it would have been for him to

make better choices every day. But he didn't. And here's where he ends up. Horrible! There's another guy in the Old Testament who had the same choice - Moses did. We read about him in Hebrews 11:24 where it says, "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" for a season. Same situation. Moses could have had it all. Pharaoh's boy. Inherit the throne and the riches and all of the power. And, at some point, at forty years old (about the same age as we find here), Moses says, "No way. I do not want the temporary. I'll settle for the eternal, even if that means a loss of temporary gain." Samson does the exact opposite. He just looks at temporary - the girl in the window, the girl down the street, the girl they're always the girls, and he doesn't have a problem with any of them. He settles for the temporary, and he sets aside the eternal.

Now this story took place roughly 3,100 years ago today. Sounds like a pretty modern story to me. Doesn't it to you? He spends time in the enemy's camp. He compromises the truth. He shirks God's calling. He wastes his potential. He sustains himself with only an outward allegiance to God - he has the long hair, he sits in church (if you will), he has a bumper sticker on his car. Maybe that's the hair of the Nazirite. But he's on the run, and he's numb to the presence of God, and he doesn't even know that the LORD is gone. And now here's his life - he's going around, he doesn't see, he's not free, he can't move. Samson could have been, but he wasn't. And I guess you read the story, and you have to ask yourself - what are you doing with your life? And what could you be but aren't because of your commitments, somehow, to the flesh rather than to the LORD? Because there's great potential. You don't want this to be your story. And, by the way, I should tell you - I think we'll meet Samson in heaven. I'm not going to be able to say that of Saul, but I think I can say that of Samson. I think his life, at the end, came back together. But it was way too little too late. I mean, not in terms of salvation (because that's gracious) but in terms of fruit or accomplishment.

So, we have one final scene of Samson here, with his eyes gouged out, going in circles, forced to look within, and finally being able to realize who God is and who he was. We read, in verse 22, the word, "However," (the misery of verse 21) "the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven." Samson was down and out, yet the word of God's grace now changes the scenario. His hair begins to grow back. The sign of the covenant, right? The Nazirite vow. Secretly in his heart, something else was happening. He wanted the deal. For the first time in his

life, he wants the deal. And I suspect that Samson's experience led him to repent and to dedicate himself, again, to the purposes of God. I love the fact that you can go this far away, and grace can still find you. I don't want you to miss the fact that you can waste your entire life in the process - running down this road. As his hair grew, so did his desire to consecrate himself to the LORD. Though he would never be what God wanted him to be, he could say this, "LORD, take whatever I have left, and use it for Yourself. Whatever I've got, You can now have it."

And we read, in verse 23, "Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: 'Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!' When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: 'Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, the destroyer of our land, and the one who multiplied our dead.' " Here's another consequence of not walking with God - your enemies find great reason to blaspheme your God further. "Our god wins. You lose, Samson, and so does your God." And it went on for quite some time.

"So it happened," verse 25, "when their hearts were merry, that they said, 'Call for Samson, that he may perform for us.' So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, 'Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them.' Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there - about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, 'O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!' " If you've been with us for a while, let me just point this out to you. This is the first time in the history of Samson's life that he's praying. He hasn't prayed at all - all of his life. Captive, bound, weak, going nowhere in service, going in circles, being mocked by the enemy, used as an excuse, grinding the grain - and now he prays, "God, one time. Use me one time."

If there is a value to pain (and there is), then it is bringing you to the end of yourself. It's like Peter said. It's the fire that drives away the dross (1 Peter 1:6-8). Right? David said, I think three times, in Psalm 119 (verses 67, 71, 75), "I went astray until I was afflicted, and now I've learned to walk with You." There're some benefits to pain and difficulty. They're warning systems. And notice - here's a

man that has been broken and brought low, and now he's willing to cry out to the LORD, "LORD, use me."

Now, we read in verse 29, "And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life. And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years." According to Hebrews 11, Samson, in his weakness, was made strong. Anointed by God with strength one more time, he pushes, and he shoves, and thousands of the enemy are put to death - three thousand just up on the balcony alone, their lives taken. And at the bottom of the heap lies Samson who, at last, learned that serving God would ultimately mean dying to yourself. He did, literally. But it's a pretty sad story. It's an act of sacrifice that accomplished more in one minute than his entire life had produced. And yet it was only one act. He died well, but he didn't live very well. I fully expect, like I said, to see him in heaven. But because of this one act of faith, it certainly doesn't make up for the potential that God had given him in his life.

But there's this lethal combination of weakness of the flesh and the ignorance of God's counsel, and if you have those going on in your life, you're going to have a hard time making much of the things God wants you to do. Here's the solution - make a full commitment to God, use the gifts He's given you for His glory, and then, one day, you'll get a full reward. If you had to take some lessons from Samson, I would say don't play with temptation. It'll just get you. Take sin seriously. Make sure that your character is more important to you than your reputation (because Samson was all about reputation, not his character). And then, make some friends who can keep an eye on you. You might remember from last week - when Samson was going to get married, they had to go get thirty guys who didn't know him to be in his wedding party. He didn't have any friends. He was just a loner. So, sad, sad story.

Unfortunately, the next five chapters get worse. Just don't leave me hangin'.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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