

Samson - Part 2

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[0 : 00] Alright, let's read together from Judges, the Old Testament book of Judges. Chapters 14 and 15, we're going to read some sections.

So we'll read verses 1 to 4, and then from verse 10 to chapter 15 verse 13. So I'll say it again as we come to it.

So chapter 14 verse 1 to 4 to begin. Samson went down to Timna, and at Timna he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines.

Then he came up and he told his father and mother, I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timna. Now get her for me as my wife. But his father and his mother said to him, Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives or among all our people that you must go take a wife from the uncircumsticed Philistines?

But Samson said to his father, Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes. His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.

[1 : 05] At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. And then jumped down to verse 10. Samson's father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do, and as soon as the people saw him, they brought 30 companions to be with him.

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 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothes.

But if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothes. And they said to him, Put your riddle, that way we may hear it. 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. On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you in your father's house with fire.

Have you invited us here to impoverish us? And Samson's wife wept over him and said, You only hate me. You do not love me. You've put a riddle to my people. You've not told me what it is.

[2 : 20] And he said to her, Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you? She wept before him for 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. 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.

And the spirit of the Lord rushed upon him. And he went down to Ashkelon and struck down 30 men of the town. And he took their spoil and he gave the garments to those who had explained the riddle.

And in hot anger he went back to his father's house. And Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his best man. And 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 into my wife in the chamber. But her father would not allow him to go in. And her father said, I really thought that you utterly hated her. So I gave her to your companion.

[3 : 23] Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead. And Samson said to them, This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm. So Samson went and he called 300 foxes and he took torches.

And he turned them tail to tail and he put a torch between each pair of their tails. And when he had set a fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing corn of the Philistines. And he set fire to the stacked corn and the standing corn as well as the olive orchards.

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.

Samson said to them, If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you. And after that I will quit. And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow.

And he went down and he stayed in the cleft of the rock of Ytom. And then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi. And the men of Judah said, Why have you come up against us?

[4 : 27] They said, We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us. Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Ytom 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? And he said to them, As they did to me, so I have done to them. 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. They said to him, No, we will only bind you and we will give you into their hands and we will surely not kill you.

So they balanced him with two new ropes and they brought him up from the rock. This is God's holy word.

So tonight we are, we're cutting on with our, our series within a series. We're looking at judges or we have been the last few weeks. And over three weeks we are looking at Samson and the last judge in the book.

[5 : 30] And really these few chapters are just saying again, and what we have been saying the last few weeks in the middle of hopelessness. That is where God brings hope for people who think that they can escape or work out of their own trouble themselves.

God says, No, no, hope really begins with him. And, and in ways that seem impossible, that that is exactly how God comes to you and gives you what you need to.

And in some ways we're cutting on with that idea tonight. We've read parts of chapter 14 and 15 and I think, I think we're glued to this story really with every verse you wonder what is going to happen next.

What is Samson going to do now? That is the question constantly on our minds as we, as we read this story. We'd introduce to him as a very impulsive person.

He sees a woman and he wants her simple as that. That is the first thing we know about Samson. So he tells his parents to get her for him. He's going to organize this wedding feast.

- [6 : 35] And at this wedding feast, he puts this riddle to the Philistines just for his own enjoyment, just to wind them up. If they guess it, he will gift them expensive clothing that they cheat. And so he goes down, kills 30 men, steals their clothing and uses that to pay off his, if that's not enough, his wife is given away to his best man by Samson's father-in-law. So what does he do? Gets 150 pairs of foxes, ties them by the tail and sends them off with the torch between them to light up the crop. Absolutely wrecks the economy as all that Samson is doing in this chapter. The Philistines come to attack the Israelites, but they bind up Samson and they tie him up and they send him off ready to be killed by the Philistines. And we didn't read the end of the story, but it's not until right at the end, it's not until that very last verse that Samson prays. After all of this, he prays, as if he's making up for everything that's happened.
- [7 : 40] It's a humorous story in some ways when you read it. It's a very engaging story. As you'll see, it should be on Netflix, probably. As you follow Samson and watch all that he does. And yet as humorous as it is and as engaging as it is, it's probably one of the most devastating stories in the Bible. And it's one of the more devastating stories because no one in these two chapters does anything good. It's a story of action and reaction, almost everything that is done and said and all that we've read is evil. From the moment Samson lays eyes on the Philistine women. So we have the Philistines, these evil tyrants taking over the land, reeling over the Israelites. We have the Israelites, they are called to live differently to the rest of the world. You see in this chapter, they really don't want to do that. They'll do anything but that. And then you have Samson, apparently the hero of the story. He breaks just about every rule possible.
- [8 : 45] He's meant to be a judge, he's meant to be the one who saves them and yet he only operates the whole time out of self-interest. The world that we are reading about as funny as it seems, the world that we are reading about is a complete mess. And judge is 14 and 15. And yet God's answer to it all is still the same as it's always been throughout this book. God's answer is still about saving his people. God's work is still to bring hope out of hopelessness. There's so much going on here and we've missed parts of it out. We don't have time to look at every verse itself and we're going to skim through these two chapters and we're not going to think about every scene. But the clearest thing in this episode in Samson's life, the clearest thing is that God's big answer is to save his people despite their disengagement. That is the clearest thing in these two chapters. So just on that, God's answer to our disengagement, two points. How we can diagnose, how we can think about how we might be disengaged as Christians.
- [10 : 02] And then secondly, God's big answer to that. So firstly, how we can diagnose our disengagement. James in his letter in the New Testament, he gives us an idea of what this means and really he summarizes who Samson is and he says this, For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks internally as natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. To be disengaged in terms of the Christian life is simply not to love God and not to obey him like we've been told to.

And Samson is a picture of what that looks like. Samson is very much a man who could look in a mirror and walk away and forget what he looks like. He's chosen by God to be the judge, a savior to his people and immediately he walks away and all you see is he just forgets who he is called to be.

He does many things here, says many things. It's all very strange when you read these verses. But the writer, the way he lays out these two chapters, he wants us to see that Samson is doing a lot of saying and a lot of doing.

He wants us to be clear in that, that he is completely disengaged from who he is meant to be. So just a few ways the writer shows us that, becomes clearer as we work through it.

[11 : 29] The structure of these chapters, it keeps on highlighting as we've said, what Samson does, what he says, what he thinks. In such a dense story we're meant to see that he lacks control over his impulses.

So he sees a Philistine woman and immediately he just wants her. That is the first line of the story. And he demands his parents to organize his wedding.

At the wedding he tells the Philistines this riddle they cheat, so he just simply goes and kills 30 men and steals their clothes. His father-in-law won't let him see his wife, goes and burns their source of income.

Very little thought in what he is doing. There is no sense here of Samson being just in any of these actions.

He sees and he does. He has no control over his impulses. And actually what makes us harder is what he says in chapter 16.

[12 : 34] He says he's in Nazareth, which we looked at last week. He knows this strict code that he's meant to live by. He's fully aware of it. And yeah, he just goes on acting on impulse and doing what he likes.

The whole way through Judges, we've watched the Israelites become more and more used to living under the rule of the enemy. The Judges have saved them over time from that.

The first thing Samson does is he goes after the daughter of the enemy. He's very much being steered by his desire for this woman. And he knows where she is from.

And there is distrust between his people and hers, but he wants it anyway, despite all the suspicion. You know, Elvis thinks about this. He struggles to cope in a tense relationship.

And he says, we can't go on like this with suspicious minds. Samson is completely opposite. He's very happy to go on in that case. Doesn't matter if she likes his people or he likes hers.

[13 : 39] He doesn't even get the picture when her father tries to keep her from him. Samson is completely disengaged with his calling.

He's so controlled by violence and his desire that he will marry the enemy if he wants. He will stop at nothing to get the women if he wants her.

Another place we see this disengagement, and it's in verse 3 of chapter 14. His parents try and warn him that this is a bad idea. He probably shouldn't marry this woman.

And what does he say, get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.

Disengagement in the Christian life, coming away from who you are meant to be, is to act in a way that we have not been told to because it is right in our eyes.

[14 : 45] This saying is common in this book, to be right in their eyes. It's usually the writer saying that the Israelites are the ones who are doing what's right in their eyes, and the judge comes and saves them from that.

Well, in this case, it's the judge who says it. And Samson says it twice just to let us know where he really sits. Whether God wants it or not is another thing.

Samson wants it. He will behave how he likes because it's right in his own eyes. We said last week, you know, the story of his birth, it really gets us excited thinking that this is going to be the judge who's really going to make everything right.

It's devastating when you realize that he is hardly different at all to the typical Israelite. He behaves in exactly the same way. He does what he thinks is right.

It doesn't matter how God sees it. It's how he sees it. He looks in the mirror, he walks away and forgets who he is.

[15 : 52] One more place we can see this coming away from who he is meant to be, this disengagement. And it's not in Samson himself, it's in his people. It's in the Israelites.

After he gets his revenge on the Philistines for killing his wife, his own people come to arrest him and we read it just towards the end of that reading. It says in 15 verse 11, this is Israelite speaking.

Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us? You see what they are saying.

They are happy to submit. They are happy to surrender. They are more than happy to give in to the people who have captured them than trust the one who has been sent to save them.

Samson for all his faults has been chosen by God to deliver the people and they won't have it. Instead they bind them up and they send them off. In 1973, a convict on parole with one of his friends, he attempted to rob this bank in Stockholm.

[17 : 02] The two of them take these four bank employees hostage, hold them at gunpoint over the course of six days and the police are outside the whole time working at how they are going to get in, how they are going to save these people, how they are going to capture these convicts.

Over those six days, what the police aren't realizing is that the four people who are held hostage are actually beginning to form a bond with the people that have captured them.

It turns out these hostages didn't really want to be saved at all. One woman in particular who was being held hostage, she was allowed on the phone partway through these six days to the prime minister of Sweden.

She said, I'm not desperate at all. What I'm scared of is that the police will attack and cause us to die.

The captors have been very nice, she says. In the middle of them being held prisoners, they mistook these small hints of freedom for true freedom.

[18 : 07] That is the first known case of, well, it's called Stockholm syndrome. That's the first known case unless you read the Judges 14 and 15. The Israelites have gotten used to the little freedom that they have and they're willing to give up on it when someone comes.

They're willing to give up their true freedom when someone comes along to deliver them. The problem at the heart of the Israeli way of life is that they do not want to be any different from their oppressor.

In fact, they've got quite used to living underneath these people and going by their rules. In every way, they want to fly under the radar when Samson begins to disrupt this relationship.

The idols, the values that the Philistines hold, their way of life. God's people want it for themselves. In many ways, they want to get rid of the distinction between them and the rest of the world.

All throughout these two chapters, all we're saying is all throughout these two chapters that it's complete disengagement between who these people are meant to be and who they really are.

[19 : 24] It is a disaster when you read these stories. All you can do when you come to this, all you can do when you come to these two chapters is ask yourself the question, is this me?

Is there disengagement between who I am meant to be and how I really live? Do I look in the mirror like James says and then go on and forget who I really am?

Do I forget that I am meant to completely love God and obey Him, or do I go on and forget all about it?

A few ways we can diagnose that much more precisely, which we've done already in these verses. Do I act on impulse is the first question.

Are there areas in my life where I do very little to control my sin? Are there areas where I don't think I just act?

[20 : 28] You don't have to have the same desire or outbursts as Samson does, but the question is still open. Are there habits in my life that I know I have that are incompatible with my calling as a Christian?

Do I just leave them and not try to fight them? John Owen, the Puritan writer, we've heard it a million times, he says, kill sin before it kills you.

Do I act on impulse without even trying to control my faults? Do I let my failings go unchecked?

Do I do what is right in my own eyes? Other days where I do what I want because it suits me regardless of what God says about it.

Another way of wording that is to ask, do I make an excuse for my behavior? Regardless of how God sees it, I'm just being me.

[21 : 25] It's just who I am. It's fine in my own eyes. It's closely linked to being impulsive, but the difference is you're going a step further and you're justifying your behavior.

Or like the rest of the people in this story, do you compromise on your faith?

Are there ways in which I give in to the values of the world around me and give up the distinction I have as a Christian? Are there things that I am afraid to say to my friends, even if they ask me?

Are there parts of my faith as a Christian that make me so different to the rest of the world that I compromise on them to not be so different?

Or are there attitudes to work and to lifestyle and to justice and to mercy that I take on because I feel pressured to?

[22 : 34] One might say from the start of the Bible that his people are completely distinct from the rest of the world. When I'm with my friends, when I'm with my family, when I'm with my work colleagues and see the sort of freedom that they have, the sort of freedom they seem to have to do whatever they want, am I really happy to be this distinct?

Or do I compromise on it? The real judge is 14 and 15, and you see how bleak it is because it asks these questions.

And the answer is at times, most likely yes. We don't always love God like we're meant to. We see who we are in the mirror, and we come away from it and we forget.

Whether we act on impulse, whether we do what is right in our own eyes, whether we compromise on who we are and what we believe.

It's really easy, you see, to diagnose this problem. It's easy to understand their own disengagement.

[23 : 44] God's big answer to that, our second point. God's reply to that, and it's the only hope we have really in this story. It's in verse 4 of chapter 14.

His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. If you are backwards in this story, you see it all comes back to this verse.

The Philistines want Samson because he slaughtered their people. But he did that because they murdered his wife. They murdered his wife because he burnt their crop.

He burnt their crop because his father-in-law gave his wife away. His father-in-law did that because of his outbursts. He has outbursts because he doesn't get his way at the wedding.

Why is he at a wedding? Because he sets his eyes on the wrong woman. And you're right at the start of that, is this verse. God uses it all as an opportunity against the Philistines.

[24 : 47] He uses every single action in this story, as awful as every single action is. He uses all of them to keep his people separate from the rest of the world.

It says in chapter 13, we looked at it last week, Samson begins to save the people. He begins to defeat the Philistines. This is the start of what's going to take hundreds of years in the Bible to happen.

And God uses every action. The big question is over the wording of this verse. Why is it written as if God has encouraged all of this to happen?

He doesn't encourage it to happen. It's just saying that he uses the weakness and the evil that has overcome this part of history.

He has used this man who's completely neglected his calling as judge. He has used this point in history, a completely broken place, to work out his salvation.

[25 : 49] If Samson is really going to chase the daughter of the enemy, which results in all this chaos, God will work in that, he says. And what is his plan? What is his plan in all of it?

God's big plan, all you can look at in this story is God's big plan. And his big plan is to save his people, no matter the cost. His people, whether they like it or not, are separate.

They want to be like the Philistines. No, he won't have it because he loves them. He will come and even if he has to, he will use the most horrendous behavior to bring his people to himself.

Where does he show that fully? You see in Peter's sermon at Pentecost, in Acts 2, Peter says, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

The reason that you can look forward to tomorrow is because this Jesus was put on a cross and came up again three days later.

[27 : 01] And through the most evil intent of the people around him, to kill a man who did no harm whatsoever, he made it so that you could know God and understand his love.

God's purpose in the book of Judges is to save his people for himself. Even where it looks like there is no good whatsoever, he works in Samson, a man who forgets his vows, a man who only prays when he is desperate.

God works to keep his people separate from a world which is crumbling. It's mysterious. I think it's all we can say. It's mysterious, but it's the hope he gives us in chapter 14.

God's answer to your disengagement, God's answer to your failings this coming week is to bring about an end where he is at last with you and you're with him.

God loves his people. And like in the days of Samson, he loves them so much that he promises to at last save us fully even despite who we are.

[28 : 14] The writer, Dale Ralph Davis, he's a Bible commentator and his commentary on Judges, he's called it, such a great salvation.

And all you can say at the end of chapter 15 is such a great salvation. If you spend this week at times acting on impulse, if you find yourself doing what is right in your eyes, if you feel tempted to compromise just to keep the peace with the world around you, Jesus went to the cross and made it so that even at times when you are disengaged, you will one day see him and he will be with you.

That's how much he loves you. As God's big answer to your disengagement, such a great salvation is all you can say.

Couple things, just to close, couple things you can do or think about this week. We have to say in light of that. On the other side of that, we have no excuse to carry on like this.

That's not what we're saying at all. This passage doesn't say much about our freedom to do what we want. It says God is sovereign and nothing will stop him completing his plan of redeeming his people.

[29 : 41] The reality all the way through the book of Judges is that people still face the consequences for their sin. The people still suffer because they continue to worship idols.

And that theme is taken up throughout the Bible. In Hebrews it says God reminds us of our need of him by humbling and disciplining us.

So even though you know you're at end, your shortcomings, our shortcomings, don't go unchecked by God as the reality. That's one thing to remember.

The other thing to do is to pray really specifically that you would find joy in obeying God's word.

And one says that the person who lives according to God's word, the one who delights in it, the one who looks in the mirror and remembers who he is throughout the rest of the week, that person is like a tree planted by streams of water.

[30 : 37] There is stability for the one who knows their tendencies and yet who takes joy in obeying God's word.

Even in the middle of struggle, you see that that's not the case in Judges for people who do not trust in him. They struggle on, they live in fear. God gives stability even in the middle of heartache to those who take joy in obeying his word.

That is where God promises you stability until you see Jesus.