

Going To War

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to try and unpack this chapter tonight for a little while. It's entitled, Samson Going to War.

And I hope you'll stick with me in this one, and I'll try and put it again in a little bit of context for us as we've been trying to go through this story of Samson.

Okay? Can you make sense of this chapter today? Can we make sense of a chapter like this in the teaching, or what is the teaching in a chapter like this for us?

Well, I think it's important, again, that we keep reminding ourselves both of the context and of the time in which it was written, the uniqueness of the time in redemptive, historical timetable of God.

There's been no time like it since, and there was no time like it before. And when we remember the Bible as its own interpreter, that's important.

[1 : 05] But also, what I want you to remember as we look at this, and this is really key to the teaching of this chapter, is that the Bible doesn't always sanction everything that it records.

Okay? So just because it's in the Bible doesn't make it right. Sometimes the Bible is simply recording history. It's simply recording what people did.

When David got Bathsheba's husband Uriah murdered, that wasn't a right thing to do, but it's recorded in the Bible. And we need to remember that, and we need to remember the principles that lie behind teaching of any chapter in Scripture.

The context, the principles, and also praying as we open a passage like this is very important, that we look at this passage, that we study the words, and some of the hints that we get.

I'm not pretending that all the answers in this chapter, but that there are certain parts of the chapter that gives us hints. And we look at the structure of the chapter to find out what God is saying.

[2 : 16] But I want to give you two words that are very important, I think, in this chapter. One is revenge, and one is retribution. We're going to look at these two words today, tonight, for a little while.

And I want to begin by giving you an illustration of what I mean. Derek the Christian, okay? This is a story, a very short story of Derek and the Christian.

I look out my window one day, and the car is parked outside. And I have a really flash motorbike, and it's also parked beside the car. And as I'm looking out the window, somebody stops and breaks the safety chain that's on the motorbike and steals it before I can get him.

So I get in my car, and I follow him, all the way to his house in Barnton. Okay? I just said that, just to be different. And when I get to his house, and he goes inside, I know he's stolen my bike.

So I just take a brick from the side of the road, and I just plant it right through his front window. Okay? Because he's stolen my bike.

[3 : 31] And that's me getting revenge. So I come home, I'm back in the house, and half an hour later he's back. And this time he's hot-wiring the car, and he's stealing the car.

But I decide this time, instead of going to the house and getting my own back, I just phone the police because I know where he stays. I phone the police and say, this guy's stolen my bike, and now he's stolen my car.

And I involve law enforcement agencies to deal with the matter through the courts and deal with the situation. Now, that's a very silly example, but I hope a fairly simple one that mirrors a little bit, I would argue, the pattern of this chapter.

Where in one situation, Samson's involved in revenge, getting his own back. He's got the wrong things were done, but he's getting his own back. And the later part of the chapter, we see retribution happening, and God's retribution happening on the Philistines.

And so there's a difference between the two. So what I want to do, and I hope that made sense, if it didn't, you may be looking at me rather strangely, saying, what on earth is he talking about? That's fine. Okay, we'll start with Samson's revenge, okay?

[4 : 48] Because it's a difficult part of the chapter, and it's the first 12 verses of the chapter, where he goes down, remember, we looked at arranged marriages and what happens with his wife, and his father-in-law thinks he's never going to come back, so he gives his new wife to the best man, and it's all a real mess, the whole thing's a real mess, remembering the culture and what happens.

So he comes back, as it were, with chocolates and a book of flowers to meet his wife again, and when he finds out his wife's been given to someone else, he goes absolutely apoplectic with rage, and he says, this time I have a right to get even with the Philistines.

I'm going to really hurt them. So he goes down, and he involves himself in this terrible, revengeful course of action.

There doesn't seem to be in this section any sense of God being involved, okay? Samson is simply getting his own back, his own way. He maybe feels that he's God's judging.

Well, he's just going to do it anyway, and he's just going to do it his own way. There's no sense of dependence on God. There's no indication that God's spirit is with him in any way. It just seems to be hugely indisciplined, and we recognize the story in this section where he just wants to get even.

[6 : 16] Even the language isn't particularly noble for a judge, for a redeemer, as it were, of God's people, and he is calculated and brutal in his response to what the Philistines have done.

He kind of takes what happens, and he really does something absolutely horrendous. Now, I have no idea how he did what he did with the foxes or the jackals. Some commentators think that it's more likely to be jackals because they hunted in packs and they would be near to catch and things like that.

I have no idea. It wouldn't have happened just like that. There's been a calculated terrorist act using animals, brutal, ugly, horrible in many ways, and it's a clear, vicious thing he does.

He wants to harm the Philistines' economy. He wants to harm their ability to make money and to feed themselves because he burns their crops.

That's what people who study war would have talked about, the same kind of thing as a scorched earth policy. He was burning everything so that things couldn't grow and people would struggle economically with their health and with their economy.

[7 : 37] And if you see in that whole section, verses 1-12, everything spirals downwards. So the Philistines come back and look for him, and instead of getting him, they involve in a really brutal murderous thing.

They kill his father-in-law and they burn them alive. It's just horrible. It's a horrible story. And then Samson gets wild at them and he goes and murders more of them.

And then he ends up in a cave after all. It's revengeful. In verse 7 he says, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you.

And in verse 11 he's speaking to his own people who come and look for him. He says, I merely did to them what they did to me. You can kind of imagine him, can't you, with his crossed arms? Well, I'm just doing to them what they did to me.

Kind of immature, vicious brutality. I'm just getting my own back. And there's this downward cycle of revenge. And it's brutal and it seems hugely immature, as he abuses his role as a judge of God's people to take personal vengeance on the Philistines.

[8 : 50] Okay, very briefly I'm just going to apply that. That's the right interpretation of this section. Then what's the application for ourselves?

Well, surely it's taking that word, revenge, which seems so evident and obvious in this passage, and reminding ourselves that when we are wronged in our Christian lives, now I know the situations are very different.

We're not judges, we're not in the position of Samson in any way, shape or form. But revenge, that emotion, that trigger that can sometimes be...

Triggered, sorry, can think of anything else. Sometimes we let loose in our hearts is not a Christian emotion forage. It's always wrong to act, obviously, like Samson, but with the same motive as Samson, two wrongs in other words, because that's what's clearly happening here.

Two wrongs don't make a right. And it's never right for us to say, I'm going to get even with someone for what they've done for me as a Christian. That revenge isn't to be our mode.

[10:02] Do you remember this morning's reading? I mentioned it this morning that we would think about it tonight. Vengeance is mine, I will repay it, Lord. That's God's business. You know, as Christians we look at things differently, and we remember that we look through the cross.

The cross becomes the prism for everything we do and say. And therefore, when we're in a situation when we're tempted to get revenge, I was badly treated. Someone treated me really wrong, and I'm going to do the same to them.

I'm going to give them a dose of their own medicine. Have we said that as Christians? I'm going to be as mean to them as they were to me. It's a different ballgame through what Samson was doing. We know that. But spiritually, do we have sometimes that attitude where we don't understand grace? Where grace says to us, listen, love your enemies.

Do good to those who persecute you. Do things God's way. Be willing to be wronged. You know, for us it might be cheap grace tonight.

[11:09] What's cheap grace? Cheap grace is the grace that you leave with the intimations at the door, or with the Bible at the door. Cheap grace is when we leave it, when we move out of here, and we don't apply grace to our day-to-day living, where we choose bitterness, where we choose to do a wrong to someone who's wronged us.

When we choose to get even, it's simply not an option for us to choose to get even with someone in their lives. We are to be those who forgive and who love their enemies and recognize the significance of God's higher hand in the lives that we lead.

Okay. That takes us to the second section, which is God's retribution. So the first part was revenge. I'm saying it's recorded in the Bible. I'm not saying that Samson had God's imprimatur or stamp of approval to do what he did.

But then we come to verses 13 to verse 20. And I'm using retribution in the dictionary definition.

Okay. Maybe you've got a different definition of retribution.

But this is the dictionary definition. Something justly deserved. Okay. And here Samson is, I believe as we look at the chapter, he is being used by God in this instance as the deliverer of God's people.

[12:43] He's been used officially as it were in his position as judge, as a redeemer of his people, as delivered. Remember, he was set aside from birth to be the one who would begin the deliverance from the Philistines in this unique way in the Old Testament.

Imperfect, I know, but it was a unique way in which he was given responsibility to do so. And what would make me say that? What makes it different from the first part of the story?

Now, this is where you can find hints from the Bible and hints from the passage. I hope you're not, I hope it's not boring. I hope you'll find it significant, but it's not God's living word. This is the story of Job on Hill.

And there's some hints in this section from 13 to 20. Samson is not in control in this section.

He's not doing what he really wants in the first section. He's really kind of mad and he's revengeful and he's going to do whatever I'm going to do, whatever anyone else is. But here, he's been in a cave, he's maybe been a bit reflective, and all of a sudden, 3,000 of his own people come up to him and say, well, what are you doing?

[13:56] What are you doing fighting the Philistines? And they want to hand him over. I'll come back to that in a minute. So passively, he gets bound, okay? And he gets handed over to the Philistines.

And he's walking, as it were, with all his own people that he's supposed to be the deliverer of behind him. And he's facing all the Philistines in front of him, probably 5 to 10,000 of them in front of him. And he's on his own. It's not like the previous situation. And yet in verse 14, we're told that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power.

And he breaks these amazingly strong ropes that are binding him. And he, in an unusually amazing act of power and undoubtedly destruction, he uses a fresh jawbone of a donkey to slay a thousand in this battle against the people who are enemies of God, enemies of God's people, and who seek the destruction of God's people.

And therefore, as we saw in previous weeks, who would seek the destruction of the Saviour who would come from this people. Okay? So there's an underlying spiritual battle here.

[15:15] And he is led in this way with the witness of God's people, there's the lights, even though they didn't want him, they see what he is able to do in God's strength.

And it leads to, and this is often forgotten, it leads to, as we're told in the last verse, 20 years where Samson led the people of Israel for 20 years in the days of the Philistines.

So he, it's not a cycle down like a spiral, sorry, a spiral down like the last one, the revenge, I'm going to get you and you're going to get me and I'm going to get you and it's going to get worse. It's not like that. This time there's a decisive victory, it's clearly miraculous and out of this world in many ways, and it leads to peace, relative peace for 20 years, where he judges, he rules over as God's anointed ruler over God's people.

Can you see a difference? I'm not sure if you can. What is he on about? You see a little bit of a difference. We look to revenge and retribution. How can we apply the retribution bit?

[16:24] Well, I think like all of the Old Testament, and particularly maybe sections like this, it's the reminder, and we've seen this before, that God is moving towards the cross all the time, and he's reminding us that as people need delivered, and he's reminding us that either judges or kings like King David or Solomon or even prophets are not going to be good enough to redeem the people, and everything is pointing forward to a great day of victory.

There's small victories here, there's victories where God's people are protected against evil, and where God's, the womb of where Jesus is going to come from is protected so that Jesus can come, but it all points forward to the cross and the unimaginable magnitude of the battle there between good and evil.

You know, these are small pointers towards that battle, but the great battle is in the cross, and that's where Jesus wins the great battle against sin.

That's why in many instances in the Old Testament, the enemies of God, motivated even unwittingly by Satan, want God's people to be utterly destroyed.

Why? Because Satan remembered the promise from Genesis 3, from the seed of the woman.

[17:50] I will send someone who will crush Satan's head, and he knew and recognized that, and therefore Jesus Christ and the cross is absolutely central to all of these things.

And through what Jesus has done, evil is defeated for us in our lives and in our hearts when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus, because we're kind of looking at that a little bit this morning.

So, revenge and retribution. God's justice is being served here, and God's justice has been served through the role that Samson has given in defeating evil.

Okay, I just want to say a couple more things about this chapter. If you have questions about it, please speak to me afterwards, and I'll probably not be able to answer them, but we'll see how we get through.

So, a couple of things. I just want to speak briefly about Samson's tears. See, after all this event, we have Samson crying out to the Lord in verse 17, 18 and 19, because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the Lord, you've given your servant great victory.

[19:07] He even attributes this retributive action to God. God has given him this great victory. He's now dying of thirst and falling into the hands of the uncircumcised.

Then God opened up a miraculous provision of water for him. Okay, Samson, there's other instances in the Old Testament as well, and maybe even some in the New. He's drained after what he's been involved in.

Fairly naturally, I would imagine. He's exhausted, and all of a sudden he's despairing, and he's thirsty to the point of dying of thirst, what we would say, dying of thirst, after this great victory, and he cries out to God, you know, almost despair and depression, oh, after this great victory, am I going to fall into the hands of the Philistines, your enemies after all that?

There's just a couple of things about this. And the first is that there's a physical reality in this little bit which reminds us of how closely our body and souls are linked.

Here's Samson, and he's actually dying of thirst, and he's exhausted, and yet he's kind of crying out to God in spiritual despair. And that link is made in different places in the Bible.

[20:28] There are times when we think we've got spiritual issues, spiritual problems, spiritual troubles, and we cry out to God and we feel just despairing, and it might actually be simply a physical need.

God doesn't sit him down and remind him of his special calling. God doesn't sit him down and give him different texts from the Bible to remind him of who he is.

God gives him a drink of water because he's dying of thirst. And there's sometimes when you look at your own life, and maybe this time of year in November, in the prayer house, members of the

time is dark, you get up and it's dark, and you go to bed and it's dark, and you're busy at work, and people are nagging you, you've got long hours and things in a nightmare, and you think, I'm really struggling spiritually just now.

I just don't feel close to God, and I don't feel, and he's just going to go on about Samson again, and it's the last thing I want to hear about on a Sunday night, I just want to go to bed, I'm really struggling. And God might simply be saying, look, you don't have a spiritual problem, you just need to go to bed, you just need to sleep, you just need to have a nice meal, you need to rest, you need to remember that your body and soul, you just might need hydrated, you might need a holiday. That's what we are, you know, the body and soul, and sometimes it's not a spiritual problem, sometimes we're just exhausted, and God says, take a rest. It's very similar to the Elijah story, isn't it?

[21 : 59] After he defeated the prophets of Baal, and then he wants to commit suicide, and God just gives him rest and food and drink and sleep for days and days, that's what he needed, because we're body and soul, and there's a physical lesson there for us, I think, about our own lives.

Take the day off tomorrow, you don't need to go into work. The minister said so, it's okay. I'll give you permission, just don't tell your boss.

So there's a kind of physical picture, but there's also, I guess, a spiritual picture here, if you would allow me to take a spiritual application from this as well, that he's thirsty and God gives him drink and refreshes him, and for years into the future, as he's revived, that place has got a name that reminds the people that this is where God provides for his people.

And we can say, can we not take a spiritual lesson out of that, that God, spiritually also, is the one who provides for us to revive us. Physically, we sometimes need to revive, but as we go to him who's the water of life, he revives us spiritually.

There's that great picture of, in John 4, of Jesus being the one when he speaks to Samaritan women, who's the water, you know, he drinks from me, will never thirst again. And then that link to the amazing picture of the water of life, the river of the water of life flowing out of the temple in Revelation, the temple which is the picture of God, and life flowing from him.

[23 : 42] And so spiritually we see that our life, our energy, our spiritual revival and our blessing will come when we go back to God.

He's the one who, we can slake our spiritual thirst at the foot of the cross in the presence of Jesus. He's the one who satisfies us.

He's the one who changes our lives and refreshes us and renews us. Nobody else can do it. He's the one who does that. So we have a spiritual... And the very last thing I want to speak, and maybe I shouldn't finish on this because it's not encouraging.

It's not good to finish on something that's not encouraging. But maybe it'll make us just think as well about that this chapter is relevant. The tragedy of God's people in this story.

If you look at verses 9 to 14, it's really, really sad. If you know your Bible and you know the blessings that they had had. Remember they were in slavery. They were taken out of Egypt from slavery.

[24 : 46] They were promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey. The blessings of God, the people of God, forgiveness of God, life from God. All of these things they were given. And here's such a tragic...

Judges is such a tragic book. And they're completely blind. 3,000 of them come to arrest Samson and bring him to his death.

3,000 men, an army, come and they're facing the wrong way. They're facing Samson and they say to Samson, you know, why?

We've come to take Samson prisoner, they answered, due to him as he did to us. 3,000 men came from Judah, went down to the cave and said, don't you realize that the Philistines are rulers over us?

What have you done to us? What have you done to us? They are completely blind to the fact that they are God's people and that they are enslaved by the Philistines and they are compromised and they are abandoning the God who set them free.

[25 : 55] They are... They've forgotten the land flowing with milk and honey. They've forgotten that they were freedom fighters. They'd forgotten that God wanted them to be a separate people, a people that would witness to him and that would share his grace and goodness to a world of idol worshippers.

They were nimby believers, not in my backyard. I don't want the hassle. We don't want the hassle of having a God leader among us, Samson.

So 3,000 of us are coming to hand you over. We'll not kill you. My, that was decent of them. They were handing them over to the Philistines who they knew full well would kill him.

That's such a tragedy. They've completely forgotten who they were. I just apply that very quickly to ourselves.

It's easy for us also to forget who we are. To forget that we are God's people and not just God's person, but God's people together.

[27 : 08] You, the Christian tonight, are bought with a price. The price is blood of Jesus. You have divine resources. You're commanded and have been given the privilege of living a life that's set apart.

That is an example to the people around you. We're not enslaved. We're not to be compromised to the world standards. We're walking a different direction and it's easy for us to forget who we are. It's easy for us to be enticed by an easy life. Remember we looked at that at the beginning, that this time the people of God weren't persecuted by the Philistines really, but they were compromised through marriage and through economic kind of success and sharing with the economic success of the Philistines.

And we can be enticed by an easy life which says, I don't really want to be different. I like the idea of being God's people, but I don't particularly like the challenges and the holiness by grace that's required of me.

We're fighting so often the wrong battles. 3,000 of God's people go to arrest one. Spiritual leaders set over them by God Himself.

[28 : 43] 3,000 that could have come in. At no point did they come in behind Samson and say, free us from Philistine rule. There's no Braveheart moment here where they fight for the freedom of God's cause.

The 3,000 of them go and they're facing the wrong way fighting the wrong battles. Isn't that so often the case in our lives as Christians?

We're spiritually unaware of the battles that we face. We look inside the church. We fight inside the church.

For 22 years as a church leader, I've been part of the church that's fighting the wrong battles. Where we're internalizing everything. We're scared to face the real enemy which is Satan and a lost world and go out with the grace and the goodness of God to that world.

[29 : 49] And we are... If people, Christians spend so much time with their energies focused in the wrong direction, especially against their fellow Christians.

It's unbelievable that we do so much of our fighting against fellow Christians. And we do so and per the cat that's got the cream as if we're doing something good and loyal and Christlike.

We're flying the flag. We're raising a banner for justice or purity. So often it's simply because we're looking the wrong way and we forget.

Where will Satan often, if not always bring trouble on a blessed church? He will bring trouble through infighting, through causing leaders to fall or stumble, or causing Christians to fight with one another and to divide.

How often has that been the case? And here we have God's people here fighting the wrong battles, fighting Samson when they're called to fight the Philistines.

[31 : 04] And maybe this is similar, maybe to what I said earlier. These people were content with what they had, a kind of day of small things spiritually, if anything, spirits are tall.

That can often be our thinking also, that we could be content and think that this is God's will for us to just be a small beleaguered, compromised minority and there's nothing we can do about it. Somehow the Great Commission is no longer applicable. Our day has passed. The day of God's blessing is elsewhere, but not for us, we've just got to batten down the hatches and survive until the second coming, content with a day of small things where he has given us, as King of Kings, still for Jesus Christ, who has been victorious over Satan who resources us for this work of serving him and following him.

And revival in the church, or revival in the nation, will always start with God's church, and we recognise and see our need of God again. And lastly, kind of that same idea, not in my backyard faith, where we don't want necessarily to be corraled among God's people under Jesus Christ to

fight the battles, we just want to get on with our own things and we don't want a church that will make spiritual demands of us or the work of the Kingdom to take first place in our lives, but we're content with just a casual faith that is uncostly in our lives.

So the challenge is, I think the application is very up to date, for us in many ways, and the challenge for us as New Testament believers is to live by faith, to remember our Redeemer, to recognise the battle that we all have to face just for a short time, both in our own hearts and in the world, and step up to the fight, the spiritual fight, by living a life of grace and love.

[33 : 14] We've said it before, it's a very different day and generation, but we live the life of grace and we love our enemies and we bear the fruit of the Spirit and there's some link maybe between this morning and this evening, and we seek His grace, so to do.

So, wrestled to try and get some practical application to that difficult chapter, but I think there is a clear distinction within the chapter and the hints are there within God's word, between the difference between revenge and God's rightful retribution and the reality of recognising our need for God in an ongoing way in our own lives.

So we'll just bow our heads briefly before we sing the benediction. Lord God, we ask that you take your word and apply it to our hearts and consciences, that it would not be for us something we regard as irrelevant, although we know that there are lots of really difficult passages, particularly in the Old Testament, but as we try and wrestle and grapple with them, that we would find God speaking to us as part of His living and true word, His word that is there for us and given to us, and that we would hear your Spirit teaching and leading us and reminding us of the fantastic privileges we have as Christians, post-Resurrection Christians, the Holy Spirit in our lives and the victory of Jesus on the cross and the ability to overcome sin and evil, but also amazing truth of your unchanging forgiveness.

And today, each of us will come to church with different issues that we need to ask forgiveness for, from attitudes, thinking, and we may be carrying a deep burden of guilt in many different ways in our lives, so we thank you that they can be taken and we, as God's people, are free and can know your blessing and help and renew for the days that lie ahead.

So help us in that. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.