

Getting Hitched

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to turn back for a little while this evening to the story of Samson, Samson on Judges Chapter 14.

And I'm going to say a little bit by way of introduction. Because I think it's very important, I may be stressed a little bit of this already when we began our study in Samson from Judges.

But I want to speak a little bit just for a moment about our understanding of the Old Testament because it's really important. It's really important that we don't just ignore the Old Testament because like the chapter we read tonight we think, man that's weird, or that's difficult, or I can't seem to understand it, or it doesn't make any relevance to me in 21st century living.

Many people and some Christians tend to choose to ignore the Old Testament, which is a great sadness and you're losing out on so much because it's God's word and it's part of God's revealed scripture for us.

It's hugely important. Also many people misunderstand it and many people who are not Christians will take bits from the Old Testament and say, well if you're a Christian you've got this kind of vicious and violent God or whatever they say and they reject God because there's been a misunderstanding of what the Old Testament's about and we sometimes aren't able to answer that.

[1 : 38] So people reject God, they reject the Bible, they reject the Gospel because they have misunderstood the Old Testament. They're saying that we have all the answers and I'm not saying it's necessarily easy for us but I want us to think about for a moment why the Old Testament is as it is and why certain things happen in the Old Testament.

First thing I want to say is that it's a unique time. The Old Testament is unique in redemptive historical history, redemptive historical plan of God and indeed in the history of the world, it's a really unique time.

There's never been a time like it and there will be a time like it again. There will never be in this world as we know it a nation state like Israel which is God's chosen people.

As a nation state, as a geographical country like Israel was which was what the theologians call a theocracy where God was the king, where God was the ruler.

Now we know that changed as time went on and they had their own kings as well but originally they were a theocracy, God was their king and they were God's people and it was a national country, it was a geographical place.

[2 : 57] That will not happen again until heaven and then it will be very different. But also what will never happen again in this unique time is that during the Old Testament, God's Old Testament people, the Jews, the nation of Jews, they were used intentionally at various points.

They were used by God as instruments of God's judgment on the nations around them. Now that's unique. It's never happened since and it will never happen again.

They were used to be the instruments of God's judgments against some of the very, very evil and wicked nations around about them. God said at various points the iniquity of the evil that is going on has to stop.

My patience has ended with them and I will use my people to judge them and that's why they had this Old Testament kind of holy war idea. That will never happen again unless of course you think of God's people being involved in God's judgment on that great day.

But that's different. It's not quite the same. So it was a unique time. It will never be repeated. It will not be like that again. There will never be a nation state that is the nation state of God's people.

[4 : 21] I'll say a little bit more about that later. Now the Old Testament people of which Samson here was one and he was dealing with his own people here, they had a unique role in the Old Testament.

Their role was to testify to the living God. That was the role. They were God's people. They were God's people in the midst of idolatry and nations that believed in a multiplicity of God's that they'd made up.

And so they were to be God's people and they were to testify to the grace and the goodness of God among the nations. They had this unique role.

They were to reveal to other people that their God was the living God, that he was in relationship with them, that he loved them, that it was a relationship of grace and that he was a holy and a separate God.

So they had this role that they were chosen to show who God was by the way they lived, by their obedience to his commands, by their understanding of the need for forgiveness and sacrifice and they were to reveal who God was.

[5 : 37] So they had this unique role of testifying to God's goodness and grace. Now they also had a unique role because they were the nation and this is, I think this is very important.

It might not be important to people who aren't Christians, but for our understanding of the Old Testament is very important that they were the nation that God chose to be the nation through which Jesus would come.

So we find right from Genesis from the very beginning that God promised a redeemer and he promised a redeemer through the seed of the woman and that becomes clear and evident that the seed of the woman would come through this nation Israel.

And so in a sense, the nation of Israel in the Old Testament is the womb of Christ. It's the nation through which Christ would come.

Now that's very significant because it gives us a little bit more understanding of the battles and the fights and the oppression and the tensions and the difficulties that Israel faced because there was something spiritual unseen going on.

[6 : 46] We see it in a lot of different places in the Old Testament where the people of God, other nations tried to annihilate them, tried to wipe them off the earth completely, whether it was in Egypt or whether it was at the time of Esther or whether it was at the time of the captivity, there was this underlying spiritual dark battle going on because Satan knew about the seed of the woman and he knew he would come through God's people.

And so there was this ongoing battle and tension right through the Old Testament whereby the people were in this spiritual battle so that the Savior wouldn't come from them.

Okay, so they had a unique role, testifying to God's grace and they were the womb of Christ Jesus coming. And I think we also need to remember that in the Bible the revelation of God is progressive.

It develops as it goes on. So we learn more about God as the Bible goes on and we learn more about His grace and more about His purposes. And sometimes things that happened in the Old Testament are superseded and changed by New Testament teaching.

And so we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture and we must remember that these were different days. We're looking at the Old Testament in the story of Samson this evening, sitting down in 21st Century Scotland, the Western world, and we're trying to look at the story with Western 21st Century eyes and it's very difficult for us to do that.

[8 : 26] It's difficult culturally to bring our thought processes into the same thought processes as the ancient Middle, ancient Near East.

It's also difficult in terms of culture and time because our culture and our time is very different from this one. But let the Bible interpret itself and let's look at it and unravel it a little bit and find that it's still relevant for us.

It's a progressive revelation. Last thing I want to say here before we go into the story of Samson tonight is that it's a shadow of things to come. We have the Old Testament and it's pointing forward all the time.

And we have this battle of good and evil in the Old Testament. It's pointing forward to Jesus coming and to the cross. We've all these Old Testament pseudo-redeemers, as it were, and they're coming to be people who recognize that what they're doing is incomplete and what they're doing isn't going to work and that there's the need for a greater redeemer, a greater Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's a shadow of things to come in the reality that although there's no longer a nation state of Israel, there's a spiritual kingdom to which we belong.

[9 : 52] Christ Jesus is the head of that kingdom. Can I ask you to look up just so that you'll just keep awake and keep some kind of focus here to Galatians chapter 3 and verse 28, where we're reminded that there's no longer a nation state where God is going to be.

There's not a Christian nation, in other words, I'm going to say that again, there's not a Christian nation. There's never going to be a Christian nation in the way that parallels with the Old Testament people of God.

Whether we think of Britain or America or any other nation as Christian, it's not in the way that it was for Israel. And God says or Paul says through God, there's neither dune or Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you're all one in Jesus Christ if you belong to Christ, you're Abraham seed, heirs according to the promise.

So it's not about nationhood and it's not about a Christian nation. It's a spiritual kingdom we belong to. Every Christian belongs to the kingdom of God.

And it transcends national barriers and nationalism and any cultural or geographical way of thinking. Very important to understand that.

[11 : 07] I hope you would appreciate. But it's a sign of the Old Testament is a sign of things to come as well because of the battles. You know, there's a lot of these physical battles in the Old Testament, brutal battles between Israel and different nations.

Well it pointing forward to the reality of the spiritual battles that we now face. And this is also very important. Turn with me to the next book to Ephesians chapter six.

I'll not ask you to look up any more or maybe one. Ephesians chapter six and verse 12, which says, for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

That is preceded by the command to put on the armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil schemes, so we do still have spiritual battle, but it's against the devil and it's a battle that begins internally.

It begins in our own hearts with our own sinful inclinations and then moves out into the opposition that we sometimes recognize and find in our lives.

[12 : 22] But the way we deal with that is very differently, obviously to the Old Testament. But you'll find that a lot of people will argue against becoming Christians because they say, I don't believe in that God, God that would have all these holy wars and battles and everything else.

And it's religion that causes all the wars and all the fighting in this world. Lots of people say that. Lots of people use that as a reason for not believing. But we say, no, we have a God.

We are fundamentally believing in a God who loves humanity, but whom we're estranged from, as I was saying this morning, and are lost and eternally lost and heading to a lost eternity without Him.

But when we come to Christ, we are to be those who love our enemies in the same way that Christ loved His. So for St. Columba's, the free church, for the Christian faith, there's no fatwas.

There's no suicide bombings. There's no crusades. We don't believe in these things. These things are not Christian.

[13 : 29] And we need to recognize and know our Bibles and know the difference between the Old and the New Testament and know the message of Jesus as He brings it to us and uses the Old Testament.

So can I just go back for a little while to Samson? I love Samson. Samson's great. This is a great chapter. They were plowing with his heifer. Isn't that great?

He just couldn't say that anywhere else. But I don't want you to make assumptions about this chapter or about Samson here. Remember in chapter 13, we're told that he was raised up to begin the work of redemption from the Philistines to take the people out of the Philistines hand.

But what I want to do is I just want to ask some questions, four questions. I'm not necessarily going to give you answers. I'm going to make you think. I hope. And then apply this passage.

So four quick questions. Was it a marriage made in heaven? The first four verses speak about Samson and that he's grown up and his desire to marry a Philistine woman.

[14 : 41] Now, when people often read that, when we often read that, we make assumptions. We make assumptions that Samson has just been wild and undisciplined and lustful, that he's desperate for this Philistine woman and he's been disobedient to his Nazarite vow.

He's going to a people as his parents say that are not the circumcised people of God. And he's just lustful and he says, I don't care. This is what I want. I want her.

And I want her now. He's disrespectful, disobedient, lustful. And that's very often the picture that we have of Samson as he goes down to Timna for this or sees this woman and wants her to be his bride.

Well, can I just disemble that a little bit? Take it apart because look at the passage itself.

Look at the verse before this passage, the last verse of chapter 13 in the Spirit. He grew in the Lord, blessed him and the spirit of the Lord began to stir in him while he was in Manahane Dan, Tunzor and Eskel.

[15 : 47] Then he went down to Timna. So God was working in his heart. And then in the following verse, in verse 4, at the end of this little section, we're told that his parents did not know that this was from the Lord who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines.

So we need to take that into account. The spirit of the Lord was in him and what he had done was from the Lord. Okay. He went down to Timna.

Now, Timna was in Philistine territory at the time, but Timna was one of the cities that was given to the tribe of Dan as their inheritance from God when the people entered into the promised land.

They hadn't fulfilled God's desire that they take that as an inheritance. Samuel went down to Timna.

He was it to begin to claim God's inheritance for his people. Now, it's true he didn't choose a Phil... he chose a Philistine woman and not an Israelite woman.

[16 : 55] But remember at that time the Israelites were hugely compromised. They were hugely rebellious. They weren't interested in God. They weren't interested in God's ways. They had no time for God.

Maybe he didn't find anyone or see anyone and so he's decided, saw this woman, thought she was beautiful and thought she was pretty good woman generally and potentially she may have even wanted to be part of God's people.

We don't know. We can't necessarily say. His parents' annoyance. Was it spiritual? You know, why don't you go for a woman among our own people?

There's nothing to indicate it is. It's maybe much more cultural. It's much more that they'd been for years. Remember we saw last week they'd been isolated.

They'd been on their own. And now they want it just to be part of the people and Samson was going against everything. He was going to go down to the Philistines and get a wife from the Philistines.

[17 : 51] But it wasn't a desperately rebellious act to say, you know, get this woman and get her for me because they arranged marriages in these days and the parents were used to arrange marriages.

It wasn't out of the culture to do that. And then he goes down and I don't think it's just that he saw this woman that looked good from the Philistines and that he wanted her.

We're told a little bit later in that chapter that he went down and spoke with her and he liked her. He talked with her. He liked her. She was a woman of substance.

He talked with her. She was she wasn't just beautiful. If it was just absolute lust, then maybe he wouldn't have bothered doing that.

And maybe he wouldn't have been so bothered as the story goes on. I'll not say a little bit more about that at the moment. So was it a marriage made in heaven? Was he being wild and rebellious?

[18 : 47] Well, let scripture speak. I'm not necessarily sure that he's quite so rebellious as we think he might be. And who is the king of the jungle?

That's the second question as we come to this section where as he's going down towards him, he sees a lion and this lion is a young lion and violent and dangerous and he destroys it and kills it, rips it apart with his bare hands and then later on returns to it and this carcass of the lion has, you know, the famous picture of the honey in it.

And I think that's the picture in the front of Tate and Lyle even to this day. Tate and Lyle's honey as the picture of the carcass of the lion with the sweetness from it.

What's your assumption about that? Well, I'm not sure what your assumption is. Maybe you think it's just a random act of strength, a kind of a random thing that he does as he heads down towards Timnain.

Maybe wonder if there's anything in that at all. It just happens to be this amazing story of his strength. And maybe it is and maybe it's not, but you need to think about Samson.

[20 : 02] He knows who he is. He's filled with the spirit of God as he goes down towards Timnain and he recognizes his position as a judge.

And is he going down there thinking, what am I going to do when I get to this Philistine territory? How am I going to act as a judge? How can I as one person do anything against all these people that I'm going to?

Yeah, it is God. I haven't heard much from him since I became this or given this task of being a deliverer. And it could be that in the strength of the Lord, this lion that comes is assigned to him and is a reminder to him of where his strength comes.

And a reminder to him that he will overcome God's enemies in God's strength. And further now, you might think I'm just being very flowery here as we talk about the honey coming from the dead body.

But out of the deadness of the situation, something good is going to come, something sweet, something life giving and beautiful will come, which may have hints for future deliverance and the work indeed of Jesus himself.

[21 : 22] So who is the king of the jungle? And there, the third question is, as the marriage kind of ceremony progresses, was it a declaration of marriage or was it a declaration of war?

And that's the last section really of this chapter. It's very interesting. What happens is that Samson goes down later on as was custom. He would go down with his father and they would have a feast.

And really in the Hebrew, the word for feast there is what would be customary, a drinking feast. It's probably a seven day eating and drinking feast, which was customary for the bridegroom to organize for his bride a seven day thing.

And we're told here that he orders a, sorry, as he's 30, I'm going to say a little bit about these 30 people in a minute.

That maybe the assumption is that this is a drunken party and there's a strange riddle that happens and that they, you know, the guys that are there, they speak to his wife and she plots against him and he's weak and he gives in and tells her the story.

[22 : 38] And then he brings out his revenge against all these guys by going to kill 30 of their men. It's a bit raw and violent and vicious and random.

But again, there may be a little bit more to it than that. We're told that he has 30 companions or give, remember, this is Samson, he's an Israeli and he's going into Philistine territory.

He's going into enemy territory to marry a Philistine woman. So we're told that he's given 30 companions. Now it would seem to be that these weren't 30 friends.

These were 30 bodyguards. Probably something of Samson's strength and, you know, six pack was known.

He was a big strong guy and they might well have been a little bit afraid about what Samson's motives were in coming down to get a Philistine bride. So we're told that there are 30 companions and you can tell from the story that this isn't really a happy go lucky wedding.

[23 : 40] There's a little bit of tension in the air. There's a little bit of difficulty going on and probably as more and more was drunk. Now we're not told whether Samson's drinking. We're not told whether he's breaking his Nazareth vow.

There's a lot of innuendo about drink going on and also about death and he shouldn't be in touch with death. What to make of that, I'm not sure.

But it does seem that there's tension in the air. And so he gives him this riddle almost to tease, almost to tease him. But if they don't get this riddle, they are to give him 30 garments.

Now, we wouldn't know just by reading that, but it would seem to be and commentators look at that and say that these 30 garments would be like, every individual man that got a set of garments like that, it would be like an inheritance.

So if you got an inheritance, you would sometimes get a full set of clothes and it would be an indication that you'd been given an inheritance from somebody. And so it's almost as if Samson is teasing them and saying, look, you'll give me your inheritance if you can't guess this.

[24 : 50] I'll give you mine if you can. And there's maybe something political, something a bit more sinister going on that we would at first understand and read.

But we know there's tension in there and we know they're really mad by this riddle. So mad that they begin to plow with his heifer. They begin to question her and say, look here, did you bring us down here to rob us?

What's going on? If you don't get the answer to this riddle, we're going to annihilate you. We're going to burn your father to death. We're going to destroy your family. This isn't a kind of a walk in the park that's going on here.

This is something really sinister and deep. And so his bride has a terrible dilemma. Is she going to be loyal to her husband that she just has had an arranged marriage with?

Or is she going to protect her dad and family who are going to be killed here? It wasn't a case of her quickly and easily trying to dupe the truth out of Samson in order to have him defeated by these people.

[26 : 01] She was in a terrible dilemma and so she does keep on until he reveals the meaning of the riddle.

And they of course know then the meaning of the riddle. But he understands what's been going on and he understands that they have been duplicitous and they have threatened his wife, his new wife.

And so he is justifiably angry and he declares, as it were, war. Maybe it's not marriage, but he declares war and goes to their stronghold, which is Ascolon, and he kills 30 of their strongmen there and takes their clothes from them to give to these men.

And he does so, we're told, in God's strength, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power. He went down to Ascolon, struck down 30 other men.

So again, a lot of people say he acts in rage, he acts in vengeance, he acts in revenge and in anger. But we're also told that it's the Spirit of the Lord that is with him.

[27 : 24] And there may well be this underlying picture of deliverance beginning to happen. He's doing it in God's strength and he's doing it to great personal cost because he loses his wife to his best man.

He's only away a matter of time and Samson's wife was given to the friend who attended his wedding. And in the next chapter, there's this discussion between his father-in-law and him.

And then we're told later on that both his wife and family are killed by the Philistines. So it's a brutal picture.

Okay. So there's some questions there about this chapter. In conclusion, very briefly, what on earth can we learn from a chapter like this for ourselves?

I'm only going to say two very quick things. You might not agree with them, but I hope there are things that we can think about. The first is that God brings sweetness out of death.

[28 : 34] There's that whole picture, isn't there, of the carcass and the honey? And why did Samson not tell his mother and father that he'd killed the lion? And then why did he not tell them that this was the source of the honey?

I'm not sure. Because he was a bit, did he think that they would be angry with him because he'd been in touch with a dead carcass, which was against his Nazarene vow?

I'm not sure. But there's lots of different secrets that aren't told in this chapter. But we do know that that is an abiding memory from that passage, that God brings sweetness out of death.

And it may just be something that stayed with Samson for the rest of his life, even as we come to the end of his life.

And there is, you know, from his own strength, which involved his own death, deliverance came. But is it not pointing forward to Jesus Christ and to the sweetness of Calvary in the midst of the death and corruption of this world?

[29 : 52] Now, maybe you think I'm spiritualising there, and maybe I am. But we do recognise that that is how God works. It's a little bit like what we were saying this morning, that it's out of the deepest darkness and it's out of our greatest need and it's out of the bad news of the Gospel, that the good news of the Gospel comes, that sweetness comes, that life comes, that nourishment comes, that hope comes.

And sometimes for you, in the darkest and most corrupt and decaying of events and circumstances, you will pray that sweetness might come, that good might come, out of badness, out of death, out of destruction.

And we know that God can do that and we believe that God does that in our lives. And the second point is that we are just like Samson.

I really think Samson gets such a hard time from most Christians and from most commentators that regard him as a shabby judge and a fallen judge.

Now there's absolutely no doubt that he is imperfect. And we'll look at that, but we are just like Samson, fatally flawed.

[31 : 32] There's no doubt he was fatally flawed. He can't serve in his own strength, he can't do what's right in his own strength. And often he makes mistakes. There's no kind of indication of much of a relationship or a prayer life, I'm not saying he didn't, but he seems to do things sometimes in his own strength.

He's exposed often, he's quite wild and probably most of all he lacks conviction. There's times when he just gives in, he gives up because he's nagged or he's pressed to do something.

He lacks conviction. And this chapter maybe he keeps secrets when he shouldn't and then he gives away secrets when he should keep them. There's this kind of, he's a bit mixed up. There's no doubt about that.

He needed grace and he needed forgiveness. But that's like us, you know. We are not so different and much more, we are far more privileged than Samson.

We have, apart from the 2000 years of redemptive history, we have God's completed word and we have the work of Jesus on the cross and the grace of God and the Holy Spirit.

[32 : 45] And we need Christ and we have a much greater responsibility to serve Christ and not to live like Samson and not to be making excuses for our lives.

We are fatally flawed. We need grace. We need Jesus Christ. Every single one of us. But like Samson, we can be used by God.

We needn't feel that that fatal flaw, that weakness that we have, that failure that is so often indicative of our lives means that we're useless to him. He's giving, he'll not use us anymore.

It's not like that with God. You will feel, as I feel very often, rubbish about my Christian faith and understanding and trust and belief and obedience and all of these things.

But we will be used by God if we recognize that and turn to him. And he will use us, as he says in Ephesians 3.20, exceedingly above and beyond what we can ask or even imagine.

[33 : 56] And that's what we have to believe in, that with our fatal flaws, that because of grace and because of Jesus Christ, it's not about how great we are and it's not about how holy we are and it's not about how proper we are or how gifted we are.

It's about our recognition of how great God is and how great He is and how much He will use us when we give our lives to Him exceedingly above and beyond what we can ask or think.

Beyond our greatest imaginations, He'll use our short lives which are going and passing very, very quickly. He will use them for His glory. And if you're feeling this evening failed and ungifted and sinful and full of doubt and far from God, can I remind you of Samson and can I remind you of Paul, the deepest and the worst sinner of all, and can I encourage you to go to Jesus tonight so that you will know His sweetness and His grace and His effectiveness.

We can still be used by God. It's not too late. Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord, help us to be used by you. Help us to not make excuses about our badness or about our lust or about our indiscipline or about our lack of understanding.

But may we take these things to the foot of the cross and with all our fatal flaws, may we just say, Lord Jesus, forgive them and use me.

[35 : 42] Help me to be useful. Help me to be graceful. Help me to bear the fruit of the Spirit, not by trying in my own strength, but by relying on your Spirit and understanding your great love.

May we do that and may we be like that. And help us to understand the Bible is often not just as clear cut as we in our presumption think when we often add to Scripture, when we add motives and add our own thinking into Scripture.

But may we look at what it says and may we also look at what it doesn't say and may we look at what it says in the light of Jesus in the New Testament.

Help us to be scholars of the Bible, not to be cheap and think that it will all come easy. But may we open the Word and may we read and learn and be disciples and students of the Word of God and do so with your grace, with your wisdom and with your insight.

Lord God, we pray. Give us, we ask for the things we do wrong and bless us and continue to bless us in Jesus' name. Amen.

[37 : 08] Thank you.