

Flawed Heroes Part 6

Samson: The Passionate Prodigal

Judges 13-16

Memory Verses: Psalm 86:15

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

For the past 5 weeks we've been looking at the flawed heroes of the book of Judges. We've seen Ehud, the flawed left handed Benjamite deliver Israel from the oppression of the Moabites and usher in a period of 80 years of peace and revival. We've seen Deborah & Jael, two women; flawed second class citizens, deliver the people from the hand of the Canaanites. We've seen Gideon, a weak, frail, coward who consistently needed a sign to overcome his doubts, defeat Midian. We've seen Abimelech who, though an evil judge filled with selfish ambition, used by God to fulfill his purposes and defeat Shechem. And last week we saw Jephthah, a proud man who made foolish vows to the Lord. Still, God used him to win many battles for Israel and judge them for 6 years.

God no doubt uses people from all walks of life with every kind of flaw there is to do his work and fulfill his plan! If God can use these people, God can most certainly use you with your flaws and failures. Stop making excuses about why God can't use you and simply let him take your weaknesses and turn them into the strength of the Lord. When we are weak, He is strong! Despite your flaws, **Romans 8:37** reminds us that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Today we finish this series by looking at the most famous of all of the Judges. Coincidentally he is probably also the most flawed of all the heroes we've talked about. Of course, I'm speaking of Samson. Let's look at how his story begins in **Judges 13:1-7, 24-25**.

Samson is to be a Nazarite. The Nazarite vow is described in Numbers 6 and has three specific rules; don't drink alcohol, don't go near dead bodies, and don't cut your hair. Suffice to say, it was not a common vow and we only have a few examples of people who had taken this vow in the Bible, namely Samson, his parents, Samuel, and John the Baptist. The purpose of the vow was to further separate one's self for God and thus receive a special blessing from God. The point being... Samson was supposed to be specially and specifically set apart for the glory of God. He didn't know it at the time but God was preparing him to deliver the Israelites from 40 years of oppression under the Philistines. Samson was set apart by God to do some very important things for Him.

But Samson did not see himself as being set apart for the glory of God. Samson saw himself as being set apart and given great power for one purpose... his own pleasure! Instead of using the strength and skills

that God had given him to draw people to God... Samson abused this gift for his own gain. It's actually a very sad story. One who had been given so much for such great purposes squanders it on drinking, gambling, women, and revenge.

Does that remind you of anyone else you may have heard about in the Bible? Turn with me over to **Luke 15:11-16**. This is of course the story of the prodigal son who took his inheritance from his father and squandered his father's money on reckless living. When you look at the similarities between Samson's life and the story of the prodigal son, it makes sense to call Samson a prodigal son. He took God's gift of strength and he spent it on reckless living.

We've heard stories like these time and time again haven't we; people with huge potential wasting their lives on the trivial things of this world. But it's in these stories that we also see the potential for the grace of God in redemption. Of all the things we can praise God for, the fact that he gives second and third and fourth chances, has to be at the top of our lists. No matter how many times we fall and fail him and walk away from him and do our own thing. No matter how many times we reject him for this world, if we would humble ourselves and repent and turn from our wicked ways and seek his face... He is always there to welcome us home! And this is the story of Samson. We have four chapters of Samson living according to his sinful passions and then we have one verse of Samson genuinely calling out to the Lord in humility, and the Lord in his love and grace answers!

This morning I want you to look past the sinful passions of Samson the prodigal and look to the grace and mercy of our great God. The point this morning is simple... **no matter how far you fall, you're never too far from the redemption of our God!** This morning I want you to see how Samson breaks every single one of the tenets of the Nazarite vow and how God continues to give him grace and eventually redemption.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we see in the story of Samson is that... **God's Grace Extends To Those Who Eat From Dead Things**. Samson grows up and in **ch14** we really get into the story and begin to see who Samson really is. The first thing we notice is that Samson lusts after a woman. The phrase "she is right in my eyes," which is repeated twice, means that Samson only cared about how she looked. He's shallow and simply follows the passions of his eyes. Next we notice that despite the law of God to not intermarry with pagan people, and despite the pleas of his parents, Samson is determined to marry a Philistine woman, which coincidentally is the the same people they are being ruled by. Not a good start. Right at the start we recognize that Samson is willing to do whatever he must to get what he wants, whether that means betraying his family or his God.

On Samson's way to a date with his new Philistine fiance Samson

gets in a fight with a Lion. For real, a lion! And, he rips it apart like it's paper. No big deal. I'll be honest, if a little dog barks at me I might think twice about petting it. Samson, sticks his hands in the lions mouth and rips it apart. That's pretty cool. But what he does next is not. A few days later Samson goes to see his fiance for another date and sees the carcass of the lion with bees in it and instantly thinks, "honey!" I'm sorry, I don't care if there is a box of Krispee Kreme doughnuts in there; if they are in a dead carcass i'm not eating them. I'm not sure i'd grab a 100 bill out of a dead body! Samson, no problem. But actually there is a big problem; Nazarites are not allowed to go near dead things.... much less eat from the inside of them. And Samson knows this. It's as if Samson is so arrogant that he says, not only am I not afraid of breaking the vow... ill break it in epic fashion. I remember a few years ago the USA told North Korea that if they launched any missiles at all that we would consider that an act of aggression, perhaps even war, but North Korea didn't care, in fact they launched like 10 missiles the next week. They called our bluff. It looks like Samson has either completely forgot about his vow to God or he is calling God's bluff, and we know it can't be the first one because he doesn't tell his parents. Why? Cause he is conscious of the vow and he fears his parents disappointment more than he fears God. It's pretty clear that Samson has no passion for God at all... his heart for God is as dead as the lion.

Some time after Samson gets married to this Philistine girl at the wedding party decides to gamble with all of his wife's friends. He wagers 30 pairs of clothes for 30 pairs of clothes, which at the time was a very expensive bet, on a riddle about the lion. The friends can't pay the bet if they lose so in order to win they beg Samson's new wife to tell them the riddle, which she does. They win and now Samson owes 30 pairs of expensive threads to the Philistines. So what does he do? He goes and beats up 30 other philistines in another town and takes their clothes to give to the other 30 philistines he lost the bet to. The lesson... gambling usually doesn't go the way you want it to and can lead to worse things. I can't say definitively that gambling is a sin, but I can say for sure that it can be addictive, expensive, and lead to other sinful things.

Samson has broken the first tenet of his Nazarite vow along with gambling, fighting, and marrying a pagan women... surely God is done with him now, right? But notice this, in **Judges 14:19** God instead empowers Samson. Why is God allowing this, empowering this? Simple, as we've discussed over the course of this series, God is going to do what God needs to do to fulfill his plans. God uses sinful flawed people for his purposes. For this reason, God is patient and extends his grace to Samson.

Listen, we eat from dead things all the time. We give into the hunger of our flesh and eat sinful entertainment, partake in sinful

activities, have all kinds of sinful lusts. This world is dead and dying... and yet as a culture we keep consuming whatever it lays before us. **The honey of the world is poison to the soul, it is spiritual death.** And yet, praise God, He extends his grace towards us and gives us another chance to reject the world and choose Him. It's a reminder that you are like Samson; **No matter how far you fall, you're never too far from the redemption of our God.**

The second thing we see here in the story of Samson is that... **God's Grace Extends To Those Who Become Intoxicated With Forbidden Wine.** Let's pick up the story in **ch15**. Samson's wife is given to one of his friends and in response Samson ties 300 foxes together with torches and has them burn the Philistines fields and orchards. Where do you get 300 foxes, much less how do you catch them, or tie them together? This story is fox fire crazy! So, of course the Philistines seek revenge and go to battle with Judah, but something surprising happens, Judah says "we'll give you Samson if you leave us alone." Samson is clearly not highly favored among his own people, thus they have no problem betraying him. They bind him and hand him over to the Philistines, but look what happens, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson again and this time he kills 1,000 Philistines with the jaw bone of the donkey. Lion carcasses, fox tails, donkey jaw bones... can this story get any crazier? I couldn't kill 1000 mosquitoes with a flame thrower... this dude is killing 1000 people with a bone the size of a knife. Okay!

But then comes the part of the story I want us to focus on. Look at **Judges 15:18-20**. Samson is thirsty, and who could blame him, but instead of being patient and kind, in anger he demands that God give him something to drink. Why is Samson so arrogant? Because he still thinks he's doing these things within his own strength and not the strength of God. We could be tempted to think the same thing couldn't we? When God uses us despite our flaws we could be tempted to think we don't have any flaws and we are greater than we really are. We always need to remember that it is God's strength and power fueling us for his purpose.

But look what God does, he doesn't rebuke Samson, no, instead he gives Samson some water from a spring. In **vs19** it says that God revives him. Man our God is good huh? We clearly don't deserve to be revived but God wants to give good gifts to us anyway.

Samson clearly doesn't deserve it... especially because water is not the only thing Samson likes to drink... and I'm not talking about Red Bull... Nope, I'm talking about alcohol. Remember the Nazarite vow? Samson isn't allowed to drink alcohol, but then again, he wasn't allowed to eat from dead things either. Why not drink some wine?

Notice that it isn't specifically stated in this story that Samson drinks wine. Still, most theologians believe that the passage heavily alludes to the

fact that Samson not only drinks, but has a drinking problem. Look where he found his wife; the vineyards of Timnah. Look where he finds Delilah, who we meet in the next chapter; the valley of Sorek which means red grapes. Samson is frequenting places known for their wine, and that's where he's meeting his ladies. And though we will look at this in the next chapter, how is Delilah able to bind him up in his sleep twice, weave his hair with a loom in his sleep, and then finally cut off his hair in his sleep? The only way this story makes any sense is that Samson is intoxicated. Samson is drunk with alcohol. And what does that mean? It means Samson has broken the first and the second tenets of the Nazarite Vow. Surely God is through with him now, right? Wrong again. God still blesses him with supernatural water of refreshing. And God makes him judge over Israel for the next 20 years. God is using a flawed man for his plans and thus is still gracious and patient with Samson.

How does this apply to us? Well, once again, like the poisonous honey from the dead world, we have also drunk the forbidden wine. We have become intoxicated with the philosophies and teachings of this world and have been hypnotized to believe a worldview contrary to the Bible. **Colossians 2:8** reminds us to not be captivated with hollow and vain philosophies, and yet here we are. You see, **when we focus on God we are alert and awake but when we allow the ways of this world to influence us we become disillusioned**. Think of Peter walking on the water to Jesus. He sees Jesus he is focused and can walk on the water, but as soon as he takes his eyes off Jesus and looks at the waves he starts to sink. We must keep our eyes on Jesus... and we haven't. Stop drinking from the world's teachings and you'll stop being intoxicated with the world's ideology. And yet, still God is gracious to those of us who have wandered from the truth and just like with Samson, he offers us another second chance. **No matter how far you fall, you're never too far from the redemption of our God.**

And the last thing we see in the story of Samson is this... **God's Grace Extends To Those Who Let The World Take A Razor To Their Head**. Let's pick up the story in **ch16**. 20 years have passed and at the start of the chapter Samson gets himself a prostitute. He clearly has adopted the world's ways of thinking when it comes to sex. A few verses later we see that Samson falls in love with Delilah, who is most likely another prostitute because, as we see, she is so willing to be paid off for money. Samson has probably had many sinful relationships with many women... but now he suddenly finds the woman of his dreams. Delilah is paid by the Philistines to seduce him and learn the secret of his power. She nags Samson for the answer, but time and time again he lies to her until we get to **Judges 16:15-21**. Here we see that Samson finally tells Delilah the truth about his Nazarite vow and his hair knowing full well that

she will get him drunk and cut it off, which she does. Samson has now broken every last tenet of the Nazarite vow. Strike three, you're out; God's strength finally leaves Samson. Listen, God may continue to bless us even when we fall away or turn our backs on him, but sooner or later **if we continue in sin God eventually will have to remove his blessing from us in order to get our attention**. God punishes Samson, but what do you know, again God gives him another chance. Look at **vs22**; "but his hair began to grow." Now we know that the strength was never in his hair, but by putting this line in there the author is letting us know that God is not finished with Samson yet. God is doing something through Samson that we haven't seen in him yet.

Again, how does this apply to us? If the hair in this story represents the strength of God in our lives... how many different ways are we letting the world cut our hair? We've let them win the war on abortion. We've let them win the war on prayer and bibles in schools. Our mega church leaders are falling into sin almost daily and defaming God to the world. We are catering and giving into the LGBTQ agenda and our churches are ignoring the Word of God on these issues time and time again. And though God may have to do some drastic things to get the American Church's attention, he still offers us another chance at revival and redemption. **No matter how far you fall, you're never too far from the redemption of our God.**

Application

So how does the story end. In the redemption of Samson. Look, Samson has sinned and sinned and lived according to his wicked passions. He has brazenly disobeyed the tenets of his Nazarite vow. He has mocked God and then arrogantly demanded that God do his bidding. And, He has been given great gift with which to bring God glory yet he has spent them on himself. Samson is a prodigal son.

And just like the prodigal son he returns. Look at **Judges 16:23-31**. Even though this does seem like a selfish plea for revenge it's so much more than that. In **vs28** Samson recognizes that it is God who has given him his strength for the first time, and for the first time Samson humbles himself and asks God to remember him... to know him, to forgive him. He requests that God would give him the strength to bring down the Philistines, the very reason God raised him up as a judge in the first place. In essence Samson desires to finish God's mission which in return will bring God glory.

Listen, if God can restore Samson, we too can be restored to God. No matter what we've eaten out of dead carcasses, no matter what forbidden wine we've drunk, no matter who we've allowed to cut our hair... **through genuine repentance we can start over with God! No matter how far you fall, you're never too far from the redemption of our God**

Conclusion

As we close, look again at **vs29** when Samson grabbed the pillars. He had to stretch out his arms and push the pillars apart. Does this posture remind you of anyone in particular? You see, the only way we can have true redemption from our sins is through Christ who stretched out his hands like this on the cross. And just like Samson, this cost him his life. And just like Samson it brought freedom to the captives and redemption to those in bondage.

Samson gives us a lot of examples of what not to do. Samson gives us a picture of the many graces of our great God. But most of all Samson gives us a picture of our savior who through his death gave salvation to the world. You need to understand this this morning, you cannot be fully redeemed unless you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and savior, recognizing that his death on the cross is your only means of salvation. In this he wipes your slate clean, covers your sin with his righteousness, and offers you everlasting life. The grace of God only extends so far... this is the limit. If you reject Christ, you cannot be redeemed.