

Crucified By Our Loves
Judges 16:18-22

A few years ago I was part of a screening for a movie that was coming out in a few months—a major Hollywood motion picture. It had great actors, compelling writing and a story that was very interesting. It was beautifully shot and I followed the plot all the way through to the end, filled with hope about how the story was going to work out.

And then, right at the end of the movie, there was tragedy. It ended with the main characters, the ones you loved, failing. It ended in heartbreak and darkness.

And the credits rolled with no hope, no joy, no good feelings at all.

If you've ever done one of these movie screenings you know that they ask for your feedback at the end and I wrote, as did everyone I was with, "This movie needs a better ending. It's a gut punch."

And when the movie came out in the theater months later, the ending was changed to a more hopeful version.

We want that kind of thing in the stories we are told. We expect it because if we are going to write our own stories, why not make them stories of hope and triumph, stories that fill us with joy rather than despair.

We expect that in the stories we are told but why don't we expect that in our life and in world?

After all there is an Author to our story.

He has written your story, the story of this world—and despite our sin and our failures, tragedy and terror and trauma within—they are, without a doubt, stories of hope and triumph.

The Lord wrote Samson's story too.

Samson was a judge for Israel for twenty years. A judge was someone that the Lord raised up for a particular period of time to save God's people out of the hands of those who plundered them" it says in Judges Chapter Two. A judge defended God's people to set them free from oppression.

Samson's conflict with the Philistines began when they wrecked his marriage after less than a week. His marriage to the woman he loved—the woman he picked out from a couple towns over—fell apart even before the wedding cake was eaten and this woman her father were killed by the Philistines. So Samson went to war with the Philistines an entire army, a nation of people...and won because the Spirit of the Lord filled Him with strength. After that victory, Samson sat alone in cave in the land of Etam because he said, "I am done fighting."

Did this terrible turn of events leave Samson with a hole in his heart?

It is likely because Samson tried again and again to fill his empty heart. God used Samson's brokenness to fulfill his calling to set God's people free from the Philistines.

Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her. The Gazites were told, “Samson has come here.” And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, “Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him.” But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

Judges 16:1-3

The very next thing we are told about Samson, and we have no idea how much time passed, is that Samson journeyed south and west into the territory of the Philistines, to the city of Gaza, right on the shore of the Mediterranean. And there he saw a woman with a very particular profession and the Philistines used the occasion to try to trap Samson.

It didn't work.

The Philistine men of Gaza, who were Philistines set up an ambush to jump Samson and kill him at sunrise. You can see the fear in their strategy—“Rather than attacking him now, when we know he is preoccupied and vulnerable, let's wait until the morning.” That would make sense but no one wanted to attack the mighty Samson.

As the saying goes—he who hesitates is lost. Samson awoke at midnight and immediately became aware of their plans.

His retaliation for their ham-fisted plan?

Samson ripped the gates of the city from their foundations, pulled them up, put them on his shoulders and carried them forty miles straight east to the city of Hebron. This would have been a disaster for the people of Gaza because it left their city vulnerable to invasion and attack. Gaza was undefended.

In all of Samson's clashes against the Philistines he didn't just win, he left them defeated and in a much worse position than they were before—whether it was burning their entire store of crops, killing a 1000 men with the jawbone of a donkey when he was delivered them tied up from head to toe, or even exposing the city of Gaza to invasion and ruin when they had set an ambush.

It was like jiu jitsu—turning your enemy's attack against them. When God is on your side, that's what happens. God is greater than whatever your enemy wants to do to you. God uses the evil designs and wicked schemes of this broken world against it. Not only does God protect His children, not only does Jesus safeguard His purposes—He clobbers the wicked and redeems the evil they work against us.

And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the LORD. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

Jeremiah 15:20-21

As a follower of Jesus, a son or daughter of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, it is never a matter of 'if.' It is always 'when.' There is never a maybe or a might or a should. There is only a how and shall and a will.

God saved Samson's greatest reversal of fortune victory, His greatest jiu-jitsu maneuver for the end of Samson's life.

And it began, once again, with a woman. The only woman named in Samson's story—whether it is his wife or his mother or the prostitute in Gaza, is Delilah. And she betrayed him.

After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver." So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you."

Judges 16:4-6

Delilah is among the most infamous characters in the Bible.

She is nearly synonymous with betrayal, deception and scheming.

But we don't know as much as we think we do about Delilah. **(insert pic)**

In Cecil B. Demille's 1949 movie, she was portrayed as a wealthy, dark-haired, green-eyed beauty. And that's often what we see in our mind when we think of her. The Grateful Dead sang:

**Delilah was a woman, she was fine and fair.
She had good looks—God knows—and coal black hair.
Delilah she gained Samson's mind.
When first he saw this woman she looked so fine.**

Some of that is right but Samson and Delilah's relationship is subject to a lot of misconceptions.

Some Bible commentators assume Samson and Delilah were married.

The Bible doesn't say that.

Others say she was a prostitute.

The Bible doesn't say that either.

And no, we don't even know if she had black hair.

We do know she was from the Valley of Sorek, a narrow piece of land that runs east and west from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean Sea. We know she was a Philistine. Her name means delicate or dainty. We also know she was beguiling and loved money.

The rulers of the Philistines, tried four other times to defeat Samson because he threatened their power and humiliated them at every turn. They offered Delilah 1100 silver pieces or the wages for about a third of a year to betray him by discovering the secret of his strength and revealing it to them.

Remember that Judas received only 30 pieces of silver for betraying Jesus. This was how badly the Philistines wanted to destroy Samson.

And Delilah went to work.

She asked Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you?"

Samson surely realized what she was up to. The last time he told a secret to the woman he loved, his wife, she too had been compromised by the Philistines. They exercised leverage over her to learn Samson's secret and they used it against him.

Did Samson think he could outsmart them? You know of course that we can't outsmart evil. Satan is smart. He was the Lord's greatest angel and he has seen everything. He knows human nature down to the DNA. Outsmarting Satan is a horrible, no good, very bad idea. And yes, in case you are wondering, that means the Charlie Daniels song "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" is rotten theology.

We can't outsmart Satan but we can out-wise him. We are wiser than Satan because reverence and love of the Lord, of which Satan has none, is the beginning of wisdom. The Bible tells us again and again, "**The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**"

The wise thing for Samson to do would have been to pack up, tell Delilah its been real and move on down the road. Go back to his cave in Etam, reassess and marry a nice local gal. And as you read Samson's story, you practically scream at the pages, because he should know what is really happening. His story is a little like watching a horror movie where someone is being chased and rather than hop in the running car parked in the driveway and speed off to the police station, they hide in the basement of the abandoned house.

Why didn't Samson run away? Why didn't he just tell Delilah, "Hey, its been real."

Its easy. Samson loved Delilah.

And this was Samson's problem. He loved the wrong things.

Wait a second. I thought 'Love is love?' I thought "Love wins?" I thought "Love conquers all."

God made us to love. But its so important we love the right things and we love in the right order. Most of our problems in life are caused because we love the wrong things or we love the right things in the wrong order.

The African Church Father Augustine said:

Real love is to love things in the right order, so that you do not love what is not to be loved, or fail to love what is to be loved, or have a greater love for what should be loved less...

When we love the wrong things or we love the right things in the wrong order, it wreaks havoc on our life. It pulls our life apart.

Augustine said sin is the by-product of having disordered loves.

When we love ourselves more than others, we are innately selfish and egotistic and undermine all our relationships.

When our love of work overwhelms our love of family, we create brokenness.

When our love of attention on social media overwhelms our love of truth and real community, we become lonely.

When we love anything more than Jesus we worship the creation rather than the Creator.

Samson's love of Deliah overwhelmed his love of common sense, maybe even his love of his life.

But there's another reason why its important we choose our loves well.

Love, real love, is costly because we are crucified, eventually, for what we love. Love requires a crucifixion—if it really is love.

Love, any love even wrongly ordered love, causes us to sacrifice, those things we don't love as much. When we love, we do what it takes to sustain the object of our love.

If we love ourselves first, we sacrifice friendships and crucify the joy that comes from intimacy with others. If we love others more than we love ourselves, we crucify our own self-interests. If we love God we crucify our sin.

Love always requires a crucifixion of some kind. If there is no crucifixion, there is no love.

By the way, if you want to know what you love, just think of what dominates your thought life. We think about things we love. Our loves occupy our thoughts.

We know Jesus's loves because we know what occupied His thoughts. On the night of His arrest, just hours before He went to the cross—He prayed to the Father for you and me.

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

John 17:15-17

It's impossible to read Samson's story about his betrayal by someone close for the price of silver and his refusal to see the obvious and just make an escape, to not think about Jesus.

When you read of Jesus' betrayal, you want scream just like with Samson, "Run Jesus! Get away."

After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me...When he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."

From John 13

Jesus knew who was going to betray Him. Jesus knew how he was going to betray Him. Jesus knew when and to whom. And Jesus knew what it was going to lead to.

And Jesus still didn't walk away.

Why?

Because of his loves. Jesus had His loves rightly ordered. He loves the Father first. He loves you and me next. And Himself last. Jesus' loves made Him a servant.

Thank God Jesus loves Himself last. Thank God Jesus' cherishes your life and mine more than He cherishes His own.

Rather than running, when Delilah asked Samson to reveal the secret of his strength, Samson played games. Samson loved her too much to leave her.

Rather than running, Samson told her three lies about the source of his strength.

The first lie he told was that if he was bound with seven fresh bowstrings, wrapped around his bulging muscles, that his strength would vanish. The Lords of the Philistines provided Delilah with the bowstrings and she tied him up. As soon as he was bound head to toe, Delilah shouted, "The Philistines are upon you Samson!" And men who had been lying in wait inside her home rushed him. Samson snapped the strings and we assume snapped those men in two.

This pattern repeated itself twice more. Samson told Delilah if he was tied up with fresh rope and Samson told her if his long hair was woven into a man bun, then he his strength would just evaporate. And both times Delilah herself, while the Philistines laid in wait inside her home, did to Samson that very particular act that Samson said would rob him of his strength. And both times, as soon as Samson was made ready Delilah yelled out, "The Philistines are upon you Samson."

All three times, Samson easily escaped.

After the third time, Delilah plead with him to tell her his secret:

And she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies." And

when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. And he told her all his heart, and said to her, “A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man.”

Judges 16:15-17

Samson was a Nazirite, which meant he was committed to keeping three vows—not drinking wine, not touching any dead body (either human or animal), and not cutting his hair. His long hair was an external sign of his Nazirite vow and a sign of God’s glory. We know Samson had already touched dead bodies—a couple of times. And his lifestyle strongly suggests that Samson drank wine. Not cutting his hair was the last shred of Samson’s Nazirite practice.

Samson had to have known what Delilah was up to. But He loved her. His heart was with her just as she said. And day after day she plead with him and wore him down so he could take it no more. Samson had to have known that telling her would cost him his life.

But he did it. He was undone by his disordered loves and led to his capture, captivity and humiliation—his crucifixion.

When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.” Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him. And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.

Judges 16:18-21

And not unlike that movie I saw, if Samson’s story ended there, that would be a terrible ending. The mighty Samson, bound and shackled, blinded—wringing the Philistines’ bread from the sweat of his face.

No one loves a story like that. No one loves a story that ends in tragedy, heartache and pain. No one loves a story that ends with crucifixion.

Fortunately, we need not worry about that because God is the author of Samson’s story and our story too. And when God is the author, there is always a resurrection. **Judges 16:22** tells us:

But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Next week, we’ll talk about Samson’s resurrection, Jesus’ resurrection and ours.

Amen.

