

Judges 16

Good evening and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your bibles to Judges chapter 16? Last week we saw the remarkable victories and struggles of Samson, as he repeatedly broke his Nazarite vow.

And the end of chapter 15 tells us that Samson ruled for 20 years, and everything was going fine. That is until he goes to Gaza. Tonight we see the tragic end of the strongest man who ever lived, and we'll read what I believe is one of the most heart wrenching verses in all of the Bible.

The title of tonight's message is Staying plugged in

Let's pray

1 Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. We spent significant time last week talking about Samson's problems with lust. Evidently it continued. Samson was in obvious sin.

2 When the Gazites (part of the philistines) **were told, "Samson has come here!"** they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, **"In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him."** City gates in those days were serious fortifications. They were deeply imbedded, strong, and heavy. Gates were designed to resist the onslaught of an entire invading army.

So after hearing that Samson is in the lodging of a harlot, the Gazites think to themselves, "We got him! We'll wait by the gate, and when he leaves in the morning, we'll kill him."

3 And Samson lay low till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders,

and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron. **SHOW**

PIC In the middle of the night, Samson walks past the Gazites, uproots the massive gates, and carries them to a hill outside Hebron. We can't say for certain where exactly this hill is. It's estimated this hill was 4 ½ miles from Gaza.

Carrying the massive city gates on his shoulders, Samson's feat was amazing. **CLOSE PIC**

And it demonstrates a truth to us, that not even fortified gates of the enemy can stop a person when they are empowered by God's Spirit. A single person filled with the Holy Spirit can defeat an entire army.

But these verses do pose a serious theological challenge for us. Samson's life is such an enigma. He's a walking contradiction... Samson is familiar with God's power, but he's a stranger to God's purity.

Samson just sinned without remorse-he spent the night with a harlot and is still empowered by God to do this incredible feat? He doesn't walk out of a Bible study at CC, no Samson walks out of a brothel and God uses him to do the miraculous!! How can this be?

Perhaps nobody in the Scriptures demonstrates as much a contradiction between his personal life and his public ministry as Samson does. I wonder, I bet we all wonder, how can a man be used so powerfully by God, while being so unconcerned about obedience to God? There can only be one answer... it is God's mercy.

God uses imperfect vessels. He supplies all of us with on the job training doesn't He? God works in us – on us – and through us all at the same time.

But we can't make the mistake of thinking that just because God continues to use us, that it means He approves of everything we do.

We'll see in the later part of this chapter that God was extremely concerned with Samson's sin. We're going to see in chapter 16 there comes a point when enough is enough. Samson crosses a line. He goes too far, and the power he's come to expect - and believes will always be there - is suddenly gone.

The life of Samson teaches us there's a definite point - there's a line we cross and God says "enough". He withdraws His blessing. And puts folks on the shelf.

Like you, I've seen the giver of the Great Commission put folks out of commission when they cross a certain line. And here's the real challenge: nobody can say for sure where God draws that line until it's been crossed because it's different for each individual. This is why we must be above reproach!

4 Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. Notice, Samson's sin of lust led him to a valley - not just a geographical valley, but spiritually as well. Even though God used Samson repeatedly, each time Samson yielded to temptation the condition of his heart grew worse. Notice the deterioration that takes place

The first time Samson lusts for a woman at least he tries to do the honorable thing - and get married.

The second time he lusts after a woman, he settles for a one-night-stand, but it's done in secret, and it's not permanent. It's almost as if Samson still senses some shame.

But the third time, Samson throws away any restraint, and shacks up with Delilah in an open act of defiance.

Samson has a lust problem he never repents of! Samson tries to legitimize his sin, then hid his sin, until he finally gives himself fully into the sin.

The strongest man who ever lives gives up the fight for virtue, and gives in to sin.

5 And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." " History tells us there were 5 lords of the Philistines, so that's an offer of 5500 pieces of silver. In today's value that means it would \$1.3m

Delilah is about to get some life changing money if she can deliver the secret of Samson's strength. And since most theologians believe that Delilah was a harlot, a person who had sex for money, you better believe she was in love more with the money than she was Samson. And as we're about to see, Samson knows it.

So the offer is to find out where Samson's great strength lies, and this brings up an interesting point. **SHOW PIC** If Samson had possessed a muscular physique - like he's often pictured - a buff, beefy, muscle bound brute - why would anyone want to know the secret of his strength? **CLOSE PIC**

It would be obvious. Keep samson off the protein and away from the dumbbells!

But I personally believe Samson had a slight build . **SHOW PIC**. I picture samson looking like Screech from saved by the bell!
CLOSE PIC

I don't think there was a ripple in Samson's shirt - but when God's Spirit came upon him, he exuded super-human strength. This is why they wanted his secret.

6 So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and with what you may be bound to afflict you."

Delilah tells Samson she wants to bind him to afflict him. But make no mistake- Samson has already been bound for a long time-he's been bound by lust!

7 And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man."

8 So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them. What is Samson thinking?? Samson could easily see Delilah's heart by the way she immediately tried to bind him with what he said he could be bound with.

But notice too Samson lied! Not exactly a marriage built on the proper foundation right?

The fact that Samson didn't tell Delilah the truth proves that he knew she had dangerous intentions. Yet he foolishly plays around with situation. The warning to us is plain-don't play around with sin!

9 Now men were lying in wait, staying with her in the room. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he broke the bowstrings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches fire. So the secret of his strength was not known. You can imagine the excitement of the philistines-'we've got em!' Only to realize it was all a ruse!

10 Then Delilah said to Samson, “Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with.”

11 So he said to her, “If they bind me securely with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man.” It’s shocking that Samson continued in this relationship! There was no rational reason Samson stayed with Delilah or even entertained her prying into the secret of his strength.

Samson is a good example of how an ungodly relationship can warp logical thinking!

12 Therefore Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And men were lying in wait, staying in the room. But he broke them off his arms like a thread. Samson allowed this bondage because he refused to escape the situation. Many today are in similar places of sin, compromise, and bondage – and refuse to make the hard choices to escape the situation.

Laptop story...

13 Delilah said to Samson, “Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with.”

And he said to her, “If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom” It doesn’t even seem like Delilah loved Samson does it? Yet Samson’s continued commitment to her is a remarkable testimony to the power of blind, irresponsible love.

14 So she wove it tightly with the batten of the loom, and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom. Notice Samson is now speaking about his hair! He’s drifting

closer and closer to the Nazarite vow, which if you remember was a symbol of his consecration.

So imagine the scene. Each time Delilah tells the philistines that Samson is now bound. They get excited, they plot their attack, only to have Samson break free every time.

All of the ingredients are now in play for a devastating ending...

15 Then 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 have not told me where your great strength lies.”

Delilah is desperate. She pulls out the old, “if you really love me” line. How many young men and women have thrown away their virginity and integrity because of this statement, “if you really love me...”

Hey, if you really love someone you won’t ask them to disobey God. And if you really love the person asking... you’ll say “No”. Why? Because you’ll insist on God’s best for them.

Yet rooted in Delilah’s statement was the ultimate issue for Samson. She questioned him “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me?” She’s really asking Samson “where is your heart?”

For awhile - despite Samson’s failures - his heart still belonged to God.

Repeated compromise with sin takes its toll. Sinful habits chip away at the desire and devotion to God.

We see it in our verses. Where is his heart? It used to belong to God – but now in the valley of Sorek - it belongs to a harlot!

16 And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death, 17 that he told her all his heart, and said to her, “No razor has ever

come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man." Earlier Samson gave into the nagging of his Philistine wife. Now he yielded to the nagging of Delilah.

This was the one part of his vow he had kept. His long hair was the last tie between him and God. It was the last token Samson could give to prove that he cared about pleasing God, and following God. His desire for godliness was extinguished by sin.

Tragically we're witnessing the strongest man in the world weak under the power of an ungodly relationship. Again I can't help but wonder how this was possible, what Samson was thinking? Perhaps, Samson figured that because he was strong in one area of his life, he was strong in all areas. In this he was desperately wrong. **1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**

18 When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart." So the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand. We're given a detail here that we weren't given earlier. They come prepared with the money-did they not in the other times?

19 Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, pause here-Have you noticed that every time Samson is tied up, he's sleeping? Perhaps Samson was vulnerable to this kind of stupidity because he was tired. It's wisely been said fatigue makes cowards of us all!

Even for those who love God and serve Him, there is a danger in becoming fatigued, weary, tired. Isn't it when we're worn down that the voice of compromise sounds so reasonable!

Charles Stanley says HALT-Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired-beware of any of these!

This is why it's critical we renew our strength by going to the Lord.

Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Let's read all of verse 19

19 Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. Notice this time is also different. The previous times it was Delilah who did the act of attempting to bind Samson. This time she doesn't do it, but rather calls someone else to cut his hair.

Samson is snoozing while a barber comes in and cuts off his hair!

20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. A single woman did what a thousand Philistines couldn't – bring down Samson.

Now you know it wasn't that his hair made him strong, rather his hair was the symbol of his consecration, and was the pledge of God's favor to him. While his hair was untouched he was a consecrated man; as soon as that was cut away, he was no longer perfectly consecrated, and then his strength departed from him.

This verse is the most tragic in the entire book. How could Samson be so foolish? He knew Delilah was no good, he knew Delilah was setting him up. I mean, he had already seen that three times previously.

But what was happening in Samsons mind was the same thing that can happen in our minds.

Remember God had told him that, as a Nazarite, he must not touch grapes, must not touch carcasses, and he must not cut his hair. And what happened? He touched a carcass—and nothing happened. He touched grapes—and nothing happened

So, he must've thought that if he cut his hair nothing would happen.

Sometimes we can think 'maybe the Bible isn't really as strict as it sounds. Maybe it doesn't really matter if I compromise a little here and a little there. Maybe I can get away with it. Maybe it's OK.'

But it's not ok, and we won't get a way with it. **Galatians 6:17 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.**

What a shock it must have been to Samson when he suddenly found himself weak, helpless, and wiped out.

Samson led a lifestyle that built up over years – a tolerance – an accommodation with a sin that he never should've allowed. It was a cavalier attitude toward a serious problem.

Samson's life teaches us that sin diminishes our desire for God.

And notice he had no idea that God's power had left him!

Now The Philistines immediately begin to torture the man who routinely defeated them.

21 Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, (simply means chains) and he became a grinder in the prison.

This verse perfectly portrays the progression of sin. First, sin blinds. Long before his eyes were put out, Samson was blinded because he thought there would be no repercussions of his sin.

Whenever a person persists in their sin, a blinding will take place, and they'll think their sin doesn't really matter. But notice what happened to Samson, for there is a second step...

Secondly, sin binds. Just as Samson's arms were bound with fetters, sin in our lives holds us captive. We no longer experience the same joy we once experienced, the same power we once knew and enjoy the same freedom we once had. And without repentance, there's a third step...

Sin grinds. Around and around and around Samson went, grinding at a wheel like an ox grinding grain. His life literally was spent going round and round in circles. Sin does the same thing.

22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven. In other words, a fresh commitment was still possible. Samson had been shelved, but in God's grace the shelf doesn't have to be permanent!

23 Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said:

"Our god has delivered into our hands

Samson our enemy!" **SHOW PIC OF TEMPLE** They poked out Samson's eyes, and paraded him in the temple of Dagon. They gave credit to their god for delivering their enemy into their hands.

CLOSE PIC

How it had to break Samson's heart to know he'd become a trophy to an empty idol. And isn't it ironic - they pluck out Samson's eyes. Samson's problem his whole life was his wandering eyes.

24-27

24 When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said:

“Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy,

The destroyer of our land,

And the one who multiplied our dead.”

25 So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, “Call for Samson, that he may perform for us.” So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. 26 Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, “Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them.” 27 Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there—about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. On this day the place was full of celebration, and spite. Lots of philistines in attendance probably had a relative that Samson killed. They hated him with a vengeance and are pleased to humiliate him.

So Samson is now leaning against the pillars...

That's a good place for us to lean also, our pillar, our rock of Jesus Christ.

28 Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, “O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!” 29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against

them, one on his right and the other on his left. 30 Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life. **SHOW PIC** Samson's ultimate victory came as a result of his own death! And really that's true for all of us, because it's only when we die to our own selfishness and pride – and sacrifice everything we have to Jesus that we really begin to live.

Tragically Samson had to lose his eyes and become a grinder to see what life was all about. Women, pleasure no longer matter – in the end all Samson wanted was to experience the power of the Spirit, and bring glory to God... even if it cost him his life. **CLOSE PIC**

It makes me wonder how desperate I am to know the power of God?

31 And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years. If we want to be strong in the things of God, the source of strength is the Holy Spirit, and the secret of that strength lies in consecration, in choosing to say, I'm not going to compromise. I'm going to stay plugged into God, into His word, into loving His people.