

Samson: .Vengeance and Victory

Judges 15

Today we continue our study of the judge Samson. Unparalleled in both his strength and his sin, both his faith and his folly. The flesh and the Spirit both appear to be dominant in the life of this man, in the one character and personality. How can we reconcile this apparent contradiction that is the life of Samson?

First of all we need to realize that God, when He presents to us Samson and the rest of the judges here in the book of Judges, that God is not presenting to us an ideal deliverer, savior or man. In fact, the emphasis is the opposite: that God is presenting us with a series of men who are extremely weak, and it is actually their weakness that qualifies them for use in God's hand. Samson was a product of his time. In Judges 21:25 we read these words that apply right throughout this book: **"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."** Samson was a vulgar deliverer for a vulgar age, but nowhere does God ever condone Samson's behavior. In fact, as we come to the end of his story in chapter 16 we will see that Samson's behavior in the flesh led to his demise.

Second realize that God has a plan. Though God's people are indifferent, though they are hard-hearted, God will not allow His plan of redemption to fall apart. In these dark days of the judges God is working toward His Messiah. He will not let His people be extinguished by their enemies. He will not let them be completely intermingled beyond recognition. He will not let them even in the callousness of their hard-hearted ways to go all the way into their sin. But God raises up a deliverer, Samson: an imperfect deliverer, a judge unlike any that have gone before in both his ability to rescue them and his ability to reflect them.

God has had enough of Philistine oppression, even if the people of Israel have not. They may have accommodated themselves to their overlords. They may have become comfortable with their bondage. But God is not. So He raises up this walking disaster of a deliverer: Samson, an angry and vengeful man who will provoke the Philistines to fight. God, the mastermind of human history works even the sinfulness and lustful passions of Samson for his purposes.

The theme of Judges is not the ruling of the judges, but God's overruling the chaos of a society where His people continually rebel and even His own servants completely fail. It is a story of God rescuing His people by His grace and showing us Himself in spite of the compromise and sinfulness of His people.

We have already witnessed the compromise, the lust, the arrogance and anger of Samson. In chapter 14 we saw Samson lust after a Philistine woman. We saw him determined to marry this woman despite the objections of his parents. We saw him feasting with the enemy and making a wager out of a riddle. When the Philistines get the secret of the riddle out of Samson's wife he is angry. He goes to another Philistine city, kills 30 men and pays off the bet with their possessions. He went back home to stew in his anger. Meanwhile unbeknown to Samson, 14:20 says **"Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man."**

Now in chapter 15 we will see Samson's flesh manifesting itself in personal revenge. We will see the outcome of anger that is allowed to burn out of control. We will see that revenge may appear attractive when it is born in the heart, but that in the end, it becomes a very bitter thing.

How many of us here this morning would have to admit that, like Samson, there have been times in our lives when someone hurt us, and we are angry and we feel justified in getting them back for what they did to us?

Samson will take revenge and others will take revenge on him. If this episode from Samson's teaches us anything, it teaches us that revenge is a game played by fools. We will see that God gives us a better way.

Let's pray that God's Spirit will empower His word today...

I. Samson's Return (15:1-2)

1 After a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat. And he said, "Let me go in to my wife, into her room." But her father would not permit him to go in.

2 Her father said, "I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead."

Samson, who had left his Philistine wife because he was angry with the Philistines, concludes that the time has come to kiss and make up. He takes a young goat, sort of like bringing a box of chocolates, and plans to see his wife.

His father-in-law gives Samson the bad news that while he was gone, he gave his daughter to be married to Samson's best man. So he offers Samson the consolation prize of the younger sister.

But hot tempered Samson is having none of it. So we see,

II. Samson's Revenge (15:3-5)

3 And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!"

4 Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails.

5 When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves.

Samson plans to get even. The problem with getting even is that it is impossible. Samson is about to find out that revenge always escalates out of control. He is about to learn the truth that violence always begets violence.

Some people do odd things to get even. And Samson certainly does a very odd thing to get even with the Philistines because of the way that they have treated him.

Samson caught 300 foxes or jackals, tied them tail to tail, lit them on fire, and turned them loose in the Philistines fields. And for generations they would say, "What does the fox say?" "Ouch my tail's on fire," is what they say for sure.

Remember from verse 1 that it was the time of the wheat harvest. All their crops are destroyed. It was an economic disaster. Samson has his revenge. But it is far from over.

III. The Philistines Retaliate (15:6)

6 Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?" And they answered, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

The Philistines are unhinged by the loss of their crops. They ask around to see who did this and they are told that Samson is responsible. Being wicked, selfish men themselves, they are instantly filled with thoughts of vengeance. However, rather than attacking Samson to his face, they act like the cowards they are and try to attack Samson through others. They complete what they threatened to do in chapter 14. They take the woman he married and her father and they burn them to death.

This is a terrible scene, but it showcases the truth that revenge will usually escalate. Someone does or says something about us. We respond back in either actions or words. They respond back to us with even harsher actions and words. And, so it goes until lives are ruined, reputations are stained and relationships are forever shattered.

It is never God's will for us to seek revenge against those who hurt us. Most people think they have to "defend their honor". If they are attacked, they think it shows weakness on their part to just take it and let it go. Samson thought this way.

Did you know that scientists have determined that there is a part of the brain that produces feelings of pleasure and satisfaction that is stimulated when we act in revenge? Yes, it initially feels good to get revenge. That's probably why we call it "sweet revenge." Revenge is sweet to us; we find pleasure and satisfaction in getting even. It's part of our sinful human nature. It is hard wired into us and we have a hard time walking away and simply letting things go.

When Samson hears about the death of his wife and her family, he takes things to the next level. The violence just continues to escalate. Look at ...

IV. Samson's Rampage (15:7-8).

7 Samson said to them, "Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease."

8 So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

Samson's reasons for seeking revenge are purely selfish. Look at the language of verse 7. He does not mention the Lord. He does not mention the nation. He does not mention the injustices of the Philistines toward the people of God. There is no mention of the Lord's will, the Lord's glory or the Lord's name. All Samson can think of is himself. He says, "I will be avenged of you."

Here is the main problem with revenge: it has nothing to do with the Lord, it is all about us. Our pride is hurt. Our feelings are wounded. We feel the need to get even. It is all about us and how we feel about what has been done to us. That is Samson's problem, and it is the problem of every person who seeks to get even.

You never really get even when you seek revenge. All you will do is make the problem worse for you and everyone involved.

Did you know that God has a better way? It is the way of Jesus.

How much better it is to be like Jesus than like Samson. Here is what the Bible says about our Lord. **"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his**

mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth," Isa. 53:7.

- Instead of taking matters into our own hands, we are to leave them in His hands, Rom. 12:17-21.
- Instead of attacking those who attack us, Jesus instructs us to pray for them, love them and be good to them, Matt. 5:44-48.
- Instead of seeking revenge, we should thank the Lord that we have been counted worthy to suffer with Him, Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Pet. 4:12-19; Acts 5:41.
- Instead of attacking others, we should do what we have been commanded by the Lord to do. We should practice full and free forgiveness, Eph. 4:32; Matt. 18:21-35; Luke 17:1-5.)

Back to our story, we see the Philistines have not given up.

9 Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves against Lehi.

It looks like we will finally have the war between the Philistines and the Israelites. But it won't happen because in verses 10-13 we see ...

V. Judah's Betrayal.

10 And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" So they answered, "We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us."

11 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them."

12 But they said to him, "We have come down to arrest you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines." Then Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves."

13 So they spoke to him, saying, "No, but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand; but we will surely not kill you." And they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

This is the picture of the sad spiritual state of Israel. They are content to live under Philistine rule. They are happy to be in bondage and oppression. And they resent Samson for upsetting the status quo. 3000 men don't unite under the leadership of the deliverer, they stand in opposition to him. They reprimand Samson, "How dare you disrupt the comfortable oppression that we are in?"

Israel is in such a poor spiritual condition that rather than following their judge into battle, they bind him and turn him over the Philistines.

Can you think of a better use for 3000 men and Samson? He should be leading them into battle and the Lord delivering them from their enemies as He has done throughout the book of Judges. But the only person in Israel who seem to know what to do with Philistines is Samson, no one else has the stomach for it. The Judeans have long since compromised to the point of cowardice.

I am afraid there are far too many of us Christians who are a bit too much like the Judeans—Believers who are marked by apathy toward sin; believers who are content to live like unbelievers; Christians who have found comfort in compromise.

How many of us are happy with the mediocrity of a life that fits in well with the rest of the world? Does it make you uncomfortable to be around that Christian who seems to be a little too zealous for your taste? How many of us Christians prefer the slavery of our sin to the radical living that Christ demands?

It is sad to see what the men of Judah do. They seize their deliverer. They bind him. They betray him to their oppressive rulers. They prefer their submission to their oppressors over their allegiance to God's unlikely servant.

Does that sound familiar to you? If you know the gospel in your New Testament it should. Because the people of this same nation of Israel, the Judeans, will take their Savior, the perfect Son of God. And they will bind Him and hand Him over to the oppressive Roman rulers. They will betray their Messiah because they prefer the subjugation to Rome over the unlikely Nazarene who is the Savior sent by God.

John 11 tells us:

46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did.

47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.

48 If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."

49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all,

50 nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish."

But God gets the victory through His Servant anyway.

VI. Samson's Victory (15:14-17)

God in a miraculous way empowers Samson to win a victory over a thousand Philistines.

14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands.

15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it.

16 Then Samson said: "With the jawbone of a donkey, Heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men!"

17 And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place Ramath Lehi.

Finally we see

VII. Samson's Weakness (15:18-20)

18 Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the Lord and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?"

19 So God split the hollow place that is in Lehi,) and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day.

20 And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

Why was he thirsty? I believe the Lord was reminding him that without His Spirit, he was nothing! Samson hadn't got this point yet. There's one stage later in this story where he actually goes out, and he doesn't realize that the Lord isn't with him because his consecration outwardly had completely gone. He needed to realize how vulnerable he was without the Spirit of God - so the Lord let him get thirsty.

It was an act of God's mercy both to make Samson thirsty and then to quench his thirst. The Lord gave him a glimpse of himself that is going to become very important before the end of his story. Samson will not be a great man of faith until he has suffered indignity, loss of strength, and failure. He was getting a hint of it here.

Samson is headed for a great defeat. Do you know why? Because no man is strong against a foe that he secretly admires. What is it secretly in this world's system, in your flesh, that you admire? That's why you can't mortify it, that's why you can't crucify it, and it has taken you captive in your heart!

We can look back over all of Samson's life, and do you know what we find? This is the first time he prayed, do you know when the next time he prayed is? When he died in chapter 16.

Samson, yes, he was a man of courage and faith in this instance, but through this great victory and through his weakness God is warning Samson graciously: 'If you won't be completely controlled by the Spirit, rather than the flesh, it's going to all end. You need to be guided by the Spirit rather than the flesh'. God is warning him graciously, mercifully - would he listen? Will you?

Galatians 5 says,

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Where does this message find you today?

- When you are wronged are you reacting in revenge like Samson, or in forgiveness like Jesus?
- Maybe you are discouraged because it seems like you are all alone in the battles of life.
- Maybe today is the day when you would like to stand up and take your place with the Lord Jesus Christ
- If He has spoken to your heart on any level, the time to obey Him is now.