

**STORIES YOU'VE HEARD:  
SAMSON AND DELILAH  
JUDGES 13-16  
AUGUST 11, 2013**

Flawed leaders:

In our generation we've seen a president, numerous congressmen, and prominent military generals caught in sex scandals.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle so thoroughly spin things to their advantage, no one believes what they say anymore.

Business executives are caught cheating.

Pastors leading significant ministries  
have crashed and burned because of moral failures.

The reality is, God works through flawed leaders and servants.

He's got no option but to work through flawed leaders,  
because there is no other kind!

Remember that the Bible says,

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Ro.3:23)

And the New Testament Greek word translated "all" means.... ALL!

So God uses flawed people to get his work done.

For instance, Moses had killed a man in anger.

Isaiah proclaimed himself to be a sinner, a "man of unclean lips,"  
unfit to be a prophet of God.

Peter was impulsive, speak out before he thought.

But when push came to shove, and following Jesus was dangerous, he faltered.

Three times he denied even knowing Jesus.

Paul was often a prideful man.

His life was marked by high accomplishment,  
and his letters are littered with phrases like,

"We are assured," "We know," "We are sure," "We are certain."

And, of course, there's yours truly, another flawed servant of God.

If you know me, you know that's true.

And if you don't know me,

stick around awhile, and it will become readily apparent.

God uses flawed leaders and servants to do his work.

Which means, of course, he can use you.

Today we're going to trace the career of one flawed servant of God,  
one of Israel's judges named Samson.

Let me set the stage.

Moses led the people out of slavery in Egypt and through the wilderness for 40 years.

After Moses died and Joshua took over the reins of leadership,  
they crossed over the Jordan River,

God again miraculously parting the waters for them,  
and entered into the Promised Land.

There they faced seven tribes of pagan inhabitants with some of the most vile practices,  
including pagan temple prostitutes and child sacrifice.

And the pagan tribes had no intention of making room for the Israelites.  
Canaanites, Hittites, Philistines, and all the rest.

At God's command, the Israelites made war against the pagans,  
pushing them back and creating room for themselves.

But they did not eliminate the pagan peoples and their cultures.

In the book of Judges we see a repeated pattern.

All is well with the Israelites, and they faithfully worship God.

But they get complacent, forget God, and fall into sin.

God lets their pagan neighbors overtake them.

They are oppressed and afraid,  
 until they finally cry out for God's help.  
 God raises up a leader, a judge.  
 Not a judge who holds court and interprets the law,  
 but a judge who brings God's judgment on the evil pagan neighbors  
 in the form of all-out warfare.  
 God's judge defeats the pagans,  
 the Israelites are blessed with a good life,  
 and all is well...  
 until they again become complacent.  
 That cycle makes me think about where we are in our lives.  
 I wonder about how we in the west are blessed with  
 a good life, material abundance, relative ease, not much to fear.  
 And how complacent we have become about God.  
 I sometimes wonder if God is using things like  
 Islamic terrorism and the Great Recession  
 to try to shake us out of our complacency.  
 And I worry that there is  
 not much of a turn back toward God to be seen in our nation so far.  
 I worry about the possibility of a more severe wake-up call in the future.  
 But that's another sermon.

In this cycle of Israel's sinful complacency,  
 followed by their suffering, crying out to God for help,  
 and God raising up a judge who leads them back to freedom,  
 in this cycle there comes a judge named Samson.  
 He is best known for one episode of his life with a woman named Delilah.  
 But that episode is just one among many that illustrates the major theme of Samson's life.  
 The theme is that he is a seriously flawed servant of God.

Open your Bibles and let's look at the trajectory of his life.

#### **JUDGES 13:1-5**

The people are suffering at the hands of the Philistines,  
 so God will raise up a new judge.  
 A miraculous conception tells us this child is the one.  
 Those instructions that sound so strange...  
 Don't drink wine or fermented drink;  
 Don't eat anything unclean;  
 Don't cut his hair...  
 Those are all part of what was called a Nazirite vow.

If you were dedicating yourself to serve God in a special way for a period of time,  
 during that time you would observe a Nazirite vow.

This child is unique in that he is being set apart with a Nazirite vow from birth.  
 And he's not choosing it himself, but it is being put on him by God.  
 He has a unique identity and is set apart even before his birth.

#### **JUDGES 13:24-25**

He's starting well.

An angel speaks of him, God brings about his existence, and he's born to godly parents.

God's plan for him is outlined and God's Spirit is stirring him.

But starting well is not enough.

Samson's flaws are revealed in the next verses.

#### **JUDGES 14:1-9**

First, Samson had an eye for the ladies.

It didn't matter if she's one of the Philistines,

with their belief in many deities, their practices of servicing fertility deities or sacrificing babies.

It didn't matter that God would not be pleased with her.

Values, faith, beliefs, and convictions are no big deal to Samson.

If she's good looking, that's enough.

She's not a person to know,  
 but an object to possess and use.  
 His perspective on women is the standard fare of pornography.  
 She's not a person to know,  
 but an object to possess and use.

Second, Samson appears to have impulse control issues.

He sees the woman, wants the woman, and demands the woman.

Impulse control issues.

Also known as the Cookie Monster Syndrome:

"See cookie, want cookie..... right, eat cookie."

Delayed gratification, moral reasoning, cost/benefit analysis are not in his tool kit.

It is simply, "See woman, want woman, get woman."

We see the first illustration of his supernatural strength as he kills a lion with his bare hands.

But then his impulse control issue shows up, too, when he finds honey in the carcass of the lion.

He does not pause to consider this beehive and its honey  
 is located inside a dead animal's rotting chest cavity.

Ugh.

Worse yet, he does not pause to consider that eating the honey is a breaking of his Nazirite vow.

According to God's law, dead things were considered ritually unclean,  
 so the honey itself would be unclean.

But Samson sees honey, wants honey, and so eats honey.

Samson was controlled by his appetites rather than his relationship with God.

Isn't that the world we live in?

It's all about what I like, what I want, what feels so good.

Questions of the right, the good and the true are not part of the equation.

But, we're told that God will be able to use even the flaws of this flawed man to get his work done.

In verse 4 it says, "This was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines."

Samson pushes forward to marry the Philistine woman.

#### **JUDGES 14:10-11**

The Hebrew language of the text and the culture of the time together suggest not just a feast,  
 but also a drinking party.

And you can be sure that Samson was drinking along with his Philistine buddies.

He had now broken the second part of his Nazirite vow,  
 not drinking wine or any fermented drink.

As the story goes on, his wife betrays one of Samson's secrets to his Philistine buddies.

The course of events turned sour,  
 and Samson was again seized by the power of God's Spirit  
 so that he killed thirty of the Philistines.

In chapter 15 he got mad that his wife's father took her back home with him,  
 thinking Samson wouldn't want her any more,  
 and married her off to someone else.

So Samson wrought more mayhem on the Philistines,  
 including the episode that gave us the memorable phrase that he  
 "killed 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass."

Though Samson has not been mindful of God's claim on his life,  
 and he clearly has not cared about the Philistines oppressing the Israelites,  
 God still used him to weaken the grip of the Philistines.

At the beginning of chapter 16 we see Samson had a one verse stand with a Philistine prostitute,  
 (there's that impulse control issue, again)  
 and was almost captured by his enemies.

Then comes the famous episode of Samson and Delilah.

#### **JUDGES 16:4-6**

Samson fell for yet another woman,  
 woman number three (that we know of),  
 again without regard for the fact that she was a Philistine,  
 again with no thought for her values or core convictions.

Just, "See woman, want woman, get woman."  
 And it was trouble all over again.  
 She betrayed him, conspiring with his enemies.  
 Samson lied to her three times about the source of his strength and how to undo it.

Then came the fourth time she asked.

#### **JUDGES 16:15-19**

His hair was cut, breaking the third part of his Nazirite vow.

There was now nothing left of his vow,  
 and so no more strength from God.  
 It wasn't so much the length of his hair,  
 but the condition of his heart,  
 that was the problem.

There comes a point when,  
 if you consistently ignore God, or try to turn and walk away from God,  
 God will let you do life without him.  
 And when you separate yourself from God,  
 you may lose the benefits and blessings of being close to God.  
 If you don't show up for work,  
     you don't get a paycheck.  
 If you don't show up at school,  
     you don't get the education.  
 If you don't spend time with God,  
     you don't receive the same blessings as if you did spend time with him.

#### **JUDGES 16:20-21**

This great, strong man,

called and equipped by God to lead his people and defeat their enemies,  
 reduced to grinding grain like an ox turning the wheel.

All because he did not have the wherewithal to maintain his vows to God.

We live in a time when people think very little of  
 going back on their word, finding a way out of a contract,  
 breaking vows, even sacred vows.

If a married couple makes it to their ten year anniversary, people are amazed.  
 By today's standards, Jill and me being married 33 years  
 is considered almost aberrant.

But God calls his people to be promise keepers, to be faithful.

We're supposed to live in ways that reflect the character of our God,  
 which means being trustworthy, faithful, promise keepers, people of integrity.  
 We're supposed to avoid Samson's path.

He fell so far.

But God can make use of even one who fell so far.

#### **JUDGES 16:22-30**

He got the Philistines one last time.

But I have to wonder what God might have done through him if he'd taken a different route in life.

Samson became a captive and a victim of his own impulses and desires.

What desires and impulses drive you?

It could be a desire to gossip, so you feel like an insider who is in the know.

Or a desire to speak poorly of others, so you feel superior.

Maybe it's the desire to shop for more and better and newer,  
 because you find your deepest pleasure in those things.

All of us feel the pull of anger, sex, money, stuff, power, recognition, food, alcohol.

Any and all of us could fall prey to those desires, just like Samson.

Samson had the strength to kill a lion with his bare hands and fight 100 men at once,

but he's not strong enough to withstand the temptation of  
 honey in a lion carcass,  
 joining in with his drinking buddies,  
 or the attraction of a good looking woman.

Samson struggled with what might be called a “besetting sin.”

That’s an old phrase referring to  
an area in your life where spiritual warfare appears again and again.

Besetting sins are typically convenient.

They’re almost always self-gratifying.

And often they are culturally normal.

For Samson it was feeding his appetites, satisfying his desire for pleasure.

What is it for you?

Where do you struggle with temptation?

And what will you do about those temptations?

Think of the ways we try to guard against temptation in certain situations.

Those TV channels that are blocked.

The safe search setting on your internet browser.

The electric fence that keeps your dog in the yard.

The locator bug you planted on your teenager’s car.

Ooh, THAT got some young people’s attention!

We are surrounded by temptations on every side.

What will you do about them?

What CAN you do about them?

Feed your spirit on the things of God.

We’re fed a daily dose of cultural rot.

Regularly feed your spirit on the things of God.

Daily feed your spirit with prayer.

Dig into Scripture.

We’ve got new Sunday school and Bible study offerings coming in September.

How about regular time in deep fellowship with other believers?

And not just studying the Bible together,

but talking about your spiritual life,

what God is doing in you and through you,

where you are sensing his presence with you,

where you struggle with temptation to do things that dishonor God,

where you have responded faithfully to God.

Do you have relationships where you regularly talk about those things?

In September we’ll be opening up new opportunities for

just those sorts of relationships.

We’re calling it Journey Groups.

The idea is that we’re going somewhere,

heading closer to God.

And we’re doing it together with each other.

So it’s Journey Groups.

The groups will meet weekly,

different days and times of the week, in different places.

But in every case, there will be those meaningful conversations

about the spiritual dimensions of your life.

And you’ll be surprised to see how,

when you know you’re going to have those conversations,

you’ll be watching and noticing what God is doing in your life

all week long.

You’ll also be surprised to see how

God can use a group like that to help you

follow a better path than Samson.