

My Own Worst Enemy

Judges 13-16 | Samson¹

Spence Shelton, August 21, 2016

Next weekend – Kicking off a new series on relationships. This series is going to take a close look at how the gospel empowers and restores the relationships in your life. We are going to look at work, dating, marriage, singleness, friendship, parenting, and broken relationships. I can't wait! We are going to incorporate some things like family worship night, a seminar on friendship, dating, & marriage, and even a parents date night! Gonna be fun, more info on it next week. Easy on ramp to invite friends to because we all have to relate to people at some point or another.

This weekend is going to be kind of a prelude to that. We had an open week here because we want to give our college students time to move back in and join us for the start of this series. So before we spend a few weeks looking at how we relate to others I want to us to take a look in the mirror. To look at what makes us act & think the way we do. To do

¹ Without a doubt one of the most helpful messages I heard on this was J.D. Greear's sermon "When the strong become weak" preached Summer of 2015 in the "broken saviors" series. I owe anything good in this message to him.

that, we are going to walk through one of my favorite stories in the bible: the story of Samson.

Samson reminds me a lot of myself. Not for that reason, but because what you are going to see today is that Samson's greatest enemy is himself. And I've found myself so many times saying, "why did I do that!?" Anybody else ever been there?

My wedding day – I woke up and as I was thinking about the day this horrible thought came into my head. "I want to change the song for the mother-son dance." And so naturally I went about thinking how to change it. And my groomsmen - who SHOULD HAVE STOPPED ME - were more interested in seeing how this played out. So, I CALL MY BRIDE THAT MORNING. She thinks....must be an emergency. Who is in the hospital? Cause we agreed not to talk unless its an emergency. And I say "Hey I'm thinking I want to change the song me and mom dance to."AND A TIDAL WAVE OF SILENCE hit me and I instantly realized WHAT HAVE I DONE! That was followed be a barrage of "DO YOU REALLY LOVE ME? ARE YOU TRYING TO BREAK IT OFF?" That sabotage cost me \$50 dollars in flowers delivered to her and still to this day, though she has forgiven me, my friends still say, "remember that time when you called Courtney?" SABATOGE!

You ever been there? If I would have just controlled myself, just held off, just said no, or just stayed home?

See Samson has a problem. Though He has incredible physical strength, superhuman strength, internally he has a problem. He sabotages himself. And this problem turns his strength in on him and causes destruction instead of good.

The story of Samson is recorded in the book of Judges, which is an odd chapter in Israel's history. See Israel was God's chosen people. And a "judge" was someone God raised up to function not as a judiciary but as a deliverer of God's people. And Judges more clearly than any other book shows a cycle God's people went through and one that serves as a warning to us today.

Worship, Idolatry, Repentance, Worship.

Israel is God's chosen people! They have the power of God yet they sabotage themselves. In Samson's story you are going to see Israel's story and if you follow you will see your own story as well. Now this story has it all. Love, Betrayal, Fight Scenes, Flawed & fallen hero, redemption. SO SO good. But it's real. And not only is it real, it is a critical story to understanding your relationship with God.

We are going to cover 3 chapters today. Gonna be fun.

Ok we pick up Samson's life in chapter 14 and it opens with Samson seeing this hot philistine girl and telling his parents to "get her for me as my wife."

"[3] But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" This is not racial prejudice btw. This is his dad wanting Samson to obey God's law (Deut 7) that tells Israel to marry someone of the same faith. And Samson is a brash young gun who says "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."

Btw this is the first example of the underlying defect that causes Samson to sabotage himself – he is driven by self-gratification. He wants what he wants. And like Disney tells him to, he's going to "follow his heart." Which is terrible advice that is going to wreak all kinds of problems.

Then in an odd twist, the author drops verse 4

"[4] His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.

Wait, Samson's rebellion against God's law is from God? What!? This is what makes this story so intriguing and this verse is actually the theological explanation for the Samson story. See just before Samson was conceived over in chapter 13, An angel appeared to his mom and said

"[5] for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head (That's going to be important later on), for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the

womb, and he shall **begin** to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” - 13.5

The author is telling you the end at the beginning. Samson will be the next deliverer. The next judge. And what a giant point it is that he will only “begin” to save them. We’ll come back to that.

Back to the question. Is God *causing* Samson to disobey him? NO. Look again at the verse.

The Lord was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. Samson is a deliverer of Israel and at the same time a picture of Israel. The point of this comment is to say “God is in control, using even the rebellion of his people for their good.”

Remember that cycle Israel kept going through? At this point Israel was enslaved to the Philistines. That’s the end of verse 4. **At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.**

They are enslaved...but they are comfortable with it! They aren’t crying out to God for deliverance, they are just peacefully co-existing. Their children are beginning to marry philistine children and the people of Israel are facing their greatest threat yet.

The much more dangerous way the enemy works is to entice our hearts away to the comforts and pleasures of the surrounding culture. And your heart begins to drift away

from God and to those things. But God is not going to leave Israel there. He did not bring his people out of Egypt just so they could become Philistines! He brought them out so that they would WORSHIP HIM.

So if they aren’t going to cry out to him for deliverance, he’s going to stir up some trouble for them. So he sends Samson. A hot-blooded, impulsive 'roid-raging meathead. And he’s going to create some friction between God’s people and the Philistines.

Has God ever done this in your life? Has he ever used some trouble to wake you up and bring you to himself?

I read a book this week called *Street God* written by Dimas Salaberrios about his life running drugs & guns on the streets of Queens and in Winston Salem. He was in and out of prison many times, built a drug empire (which he was the street god of), & was a fugitive for years. Finally he came to a point where he realized that not only did the “street God” life fail to deliver on its promises, but it left him strung out, alone, and always looking over his shoulder. At his lowest moment, with a gun to his head, he cried out to God and God delivered him. And from there he gave his life to Christ and now, of all things, is a lead pastor of a church in Queens where he is being used by God to take the gospel to those who are on the same path he was on.

And when God unsettles your life, that can be his grace in your life! To wake you up from the dangerous slide away

from God where you were assimilating into a people who you do not belong to! And you need to see this trouble for what it is and cry out to him!

The rest of the Samson story is a series of episodes in Samson's life where God uses Samson to create a big rift between Israel and the Philistines. And they are wild.

First one: Samson is engaged. Gonna throw a killer wine & cheese wedding party so he's out in the vineyards when a lion attacks him. And one of those great lines of the bible is here:

[6] Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat.

Now, I can't find a satisfying answer to what the phrase "as one tears a young goat" means. I've been to one goat festival in the mountains of China and nothing about preparing that goat looked easy. But, apparently that was goat night in ancient Israel. Goat tearing.

A few days later he is walking by that lion carcass and notices it has a beehive in it that has made some honey. He goes and eats it. Which is very Bear Grylls and very against his Nazarite vow. And naturally thinks up a riddle to entertain his wedding guests.

So he says to his 30 wedding guests...if you can figure out my riddle I'll give you each a suit of clothes but if you can't, you each have to give me a suit of clothes. Well they can't figure out the riddle and so they ask Samson's new wife, since she is one of them, to get it out of him.

So she goes all bridezilla like "If you loved me you'd tell me your secret. Tell me! Oh woe is me." And she cries for 7 days. Well, Samson caves. She tells the philistines and they then answer him.

Then Samson looks at these guys, knowing how they got the answers and says

[18]... "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle."

Quick lesson to the guys:

NEVER call your wife a heifer

So since he lost the bet:

[19] And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house.

Isn't that odd? You "won" the bet your way so I'm going to pay up my way. Next thing they know they are holding 30 bloody coats that are missing some arms.

Seems random but it isn't. Ashkelon is a Philistine city and what Samson does here is "against" the philistines. God is using Samson to create division between Israel & the Philistines who they never should have been with anyway. See we want Samson to be a hero, but he just keeps sabotaging himself. He could be William Wallace! But he keeps giving himself over to his impulses.

Next Episode some days later

15 - [1] After some days, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat (goat tearing time obviously). And he said, "I will go in to my wife in the chamber." But her father would not allow him to go in. [2] And her father said, "I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead."

- Yeah nice try, but Samson is too proud for that. He has been humiliated and so he's going to get revenge.

[4] So Samson went and caught 300 foxes (not sure how) and took torches. And he turned them tail-to-tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. [5] And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and set fire to the stacked grain and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards.

- This is vindictive and also really creative. He's now destroyed their crops, which might as well be burning their money. This is not ok. You can't go super pyro on the whole city.
- Image: 150 fires bouncing rapidly through the amber waves of grain.
- This Israelite, who should be submissive to the Philistines like the rest of the Israelites, is instead wreaking havoc!

The Philistines retaliate by killing Samson's wife and her father.

[7] And Samson said to them, "If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit." (You called down the thunder, now you've got it!)

[8] And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam. He opened up a can on them. And they are no more.

So, now it's the Philistines turn. Here they come raiding the Israelites. They say

"We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us." [11] Then 3,000 men of Judah (cause one guy isn't going to Samson alone) went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?" - Hear that? They've settled for Philistine

rulers when God's people were never to be enslaved by others. They are worried because their comfortable, safe arrangement is getting rattled. Stop Samson! You are going to ruin everything!

And he said to them, "As they did to me, so have I done to them." - Or "HEY THEY STARTED IT!"

[12] And they said to him, "We have come down to bind you, that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." (If we give them Samson, maybe they won't kill us). And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not attack me yourselves." [13] They said to him, "No; we will only bind you and give you into their hands. We will surely not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

[14] When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. [15] And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men.

- This makes Jason Bourne look like child's play. Destroys 1000. And then he goes all boss and while still holding that jawbone writes a little song

[16] And Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men."

- Lovely song. Then it says he dropped the jawbone (mic drop) and went to hydrate.

Chapter 16

Then the story takes a turn

[4] After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. (Ever heard of her?) Her name means night, and symbolically darkness. And she's bad news. Basically a spy for the philistines. They can't overpower him, but they can leverage his weakness against him. And for Samson, one is a definitely woman. And now he is making his bed in this darkness.

[5] 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."

[6] So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you." [7] Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man."

So he lets her tie him up. She naturally had an ambush planned against him and

[9] Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire.

Basically like you would rip through tissue paper.

Why is he entertaining her? He should be like...Girl you are the enemy and I gotta go! Instead he's flirting with sin. Being in the den of the enemy doesn't scare him. Flirting with danger doesn't scare him. He's invincible, so he thinks. They go through this charade two more times and both times Samson lies, though he brings up his hair in the second one...he's so confident he will get out of it he's getting real casual with God's command about his hair.

[15] 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." [16] And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.

Sound familiar? He's been here before & been burned before. But guys are dumb. And he is still acting selfish. *This time* his desire for *harmony* between he and his girl will push him to compromise everything.

[17] 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." [18] 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. [19] 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.

Samson got so confident, felt so invincible against the enemy, he told the enemy everything and then laid down in the enemy's lap and went to sleep! And watch how God wakes him up

[20] 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.

- He didn't know! This is how sin works! Right now you are just flirting with it but one day you are going to wake up and your life is going to be a picture of self-destruction and you are going to wonder how you got there! This is what Sin does! It blinds you to its danger and then left unchecked it seizes you and destroys your life.

[21] 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.

- The effect of his sin. He's now a blind prisoner. But...

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

- I could get really excited here, we'll come back to it.

[23] Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand."

[25] And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, that he may entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. [26] And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them."

[28] Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Sovereign Lord, please remember me (Samson realizes he's here because of what he did. Finally he's looking to the Lord for salvation from his enemy. Like Israel needs to, Samson is crying out for deliverance.)...And please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes." [29] And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. [30] And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.

That's Samson's Story. Now, let me tell you what we learn about ourselves from his life.

What do we learn from Samson's life

1. We are our own worst enemy

I know we just went through a pretty long story so let me make sure you saw a few ways Samson sabotaged himself.

Samson was proud – throughout this story you see a guy who thought he could do ANYTHING. And for a while he did. So he started flirting with sin because hey, he's too strong to fall victim to it. When he defeated 1000 philistines he gave glory to...Himself! Not to God.

Usain Bolt is the fastest runner ever. In interviews he keeps talking about his legacy. He wants his name etched in history. Has he worked hard? Sure. But he didn't make himself 6'4 with legs that run like a deer. God made him and just cranked his speed up to turbo.

When you seek to make a name for yourself in this world you are like my 2 year old who, when I put her up on my shoulders says, "Mommy...look how tall I am!" Is she tall? No. The only reason she is up there is because daddy put her there and daddy is holding her there. Same with Samson and Same with you.

Pride fooled Samson. He thought HE could do anything. But his strength was always God's gift to him, never his own ability. And when he rebelled against God, his pride blinded him to the way sin had corroded his life from the inside out. Mercy is filled with talented people. Pretty intimidating and awesome at same time. God has given you those talents, put you in this college, given you this business...to make much of him & not yourself.

Samson was impulsive – Ok this one hit me the hard this week. He was driven by his lust (first wife, prostitute, Delilah), by his stomach (honey in the lion), by his anger, and by his pride.

Listen, your lack of self control will ruin your life. Ever heard of Walter Mischel? The NY times profiled him in an article a couple of years ago. He's the guy who invented the legendary "marshmallow test" about 50 years ago. The test was to put a single marshmallow in front of a 5 year old and tell him that he can eat it. BUT, if he doesn't eat it, he will get 2 in 15 minutes. It was testing the ability to delay gratification. And famously the test has repeatedly proven that children who delay gratification go on to have higher SAT scores, earn more advanced degrees, coped better with stress, & use less cocaine.² Samson is a marshmallow grabber. Follows his impulse and it leads to his demise.

² NY Times article 2014 ["Learning how to exert self control."](#)

In every waking moment you are going to be confronted with a decision. Will you be driven by God's desires or by your desires?

Here's why this hit me hard this week. I've got great kids but lately a couple of them have been testing their boundaries. And when they openly defy me, I've noticed I get angry. And I can't discipline them in anger that isn't helpful. Why do I get angry? If I was thinking about them, I'd be sad. Because I don't want to see them run from obeying their father. But when I get angry...its because I want them to respect me. Because I want to be king of my castle. And they are defying me. That's disrespect and I DESERVE RESPECT! I'm THE DAD!

And I do no good to my family when I try to make them about my glory. So I have to daily humble myself and seek to be led by the Spirit of God so I can by the grace of God shepherd my children well!

Some of you, the big step out of today is to decide if you are going to be led by the Spirit of God or led by your own desires. Samson is a picture of the latter.

Samson was casual with God's commands

I cannot stress this enough. Samson was set aside by God to be a Nazarite. Which meant, as the angel said, that in addition to the standards God had set in place for all of

Israel, he was supposed to never drink alcohol, never touch a dead body, and never cut his hair. Well, by the end of chapter 14 he's throwing a kegger after eating honey out of a dead animal. Here's what happens, he is casual and he got away with it a few times. So he starts to think it's no big deal. And all the while the enemy is luring him in for the kill. "cut my hair" nothing happened when I disobeyed the others. Must not be a big deal.

- I see this casualness all over the place within the church. According to a recent study 11% of Christian singles are waiting until marriage to have sex. Even though that is a clear command of scripture. Why? Because you've been lured by the lie it's no big deal all the while your relationship with God is corroding. And if that sounds too dramatic, that's exactly how the enemy wants it to sound.

What if your casual attitude toward God's commands in your career, your family, your friendships is what is keeping God from blessing your life? Why would you think God is going to be serious about you when you are so flippant with him?

2. We need a better savior

What an odd "savior" for Israel. The supposed hero is such a terrible role model. Hey kids, be like Samson! Wait...no... In fact in no way be like Samson. Remember how the angel talked about Samson though?

He shall **begin** to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."

Begin. "Samson was a flawed deliverer that couldn't save Israel from their oppressors. He couldn't finish. But then 1100 years later Jesus Shows up

- Like Samson his mom was visited by an angel and his birth was miraculous
- Like Samson he has strength. Power over demons, over sickness, over the wind and waves, over death itself.
- Like Samson he was betrayed by those closest to him
- Like Samson he was imprisoned, beaten, and mocked
- Like Samson he dies with his arms outstretched
- But his story doesn't end there.
- Jesus' story doesn't end in death. It ends in Jesus rising from the dead and defeating death.

See Jesus wasn't in chains for his sin; he was in chains for ours. Jesus was the strong man who voluntarily put himself in our place because like Samson we are proud, we are driven by our desires, we are casual with God's commands. We stand before God guilty deserving of punishment and Jesus comes in and he takes the chains off of us and puts them on himself!

That is the better savior. Do you know him like that? When you see that Jesus came down all the way to you, and when you had no way out he put your punishment on himself, so that you could walk away free...that changes you. 1 Cor 6 says you were bought with a price, So glorify God with your body. The price was Jesus' life.

And when you make your home in the gospel, that Jesus died the death you deserved, you will begin to live a life of grateful response to him. God's commands will not be optional; they will become sources of life and joy for you. Pride will be replaced by humility as you surrender the spotlight to the one who died for you.

3. It's never too late

"But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved" Verse 16.22

When he was at his lowest, God had not forgotten him. In fact, before Samson even knew it, God was already working in him again. Samson's hair represents the presence of the Lord in Samson's life, which is where his strength came from. And while Samson was lying defeated in prison, the Lord was stirring again. That's how God works. Before you ever realize it, God is working on you.

Some of you have sabotaged your lives so much and now you are finally sitting in the raw ugliness of the destruction you've caused. And I want you to know God is not done with you. He still wants you. You don't deserve him. But he's not done. And like Samson you need to get on your knees and pray "O Sovereign Lord.... Remember me." God I know I'm a sinner. I own it. But you say you will remember, you will save, even a wretch like me.

Listen – Samson's greatest strength came at his weakest moment. In his weakness he finally surrendered himself to

God. And God used his weakness, not his strength, to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Listen to me this is counter-intuitive but: **Your weakness before God is your greatest strength.**

Are you ready to own your self-destruction? To admit you've messed up & you need help? That's when you are ready for God to intervene.

Have you betrayed a friend? You are not too late to cry out to God. You cheat on your spouse? It's not too late. Did you screw up your job & get fired? It's not too late. Is your addiction destroying your family? It's not too late. Is your anger burning bridges with people you love? It's not too late! God can restore you!

When you are at your worst, God has not forgotten you. And he wants to use that moment to draw you to himself. You need to repent and you need to come home. Some of you need to repent of your pride, you need to repent of the casual way you treat God, you need to repent of your self-gratification. And God is waiting to welcome you home.

The next few weeks will be about how we relate to others. But you gotta see what your life is about before that can happen. Turn to Jesus!