



**Series:** Judges - Breaking the Cycle of sin

**Sermon #5:** Samson

**Passage:** Judges 13-16

We are finishing our series in the book of Judges today. I kind of hate that we are at the end of it. I've really been impacted by this book week in and week out. I know several of you have told me God is using this book to really challenge you. We've definitely saved the best, or at least the wildest story, for last. Turn in your bible to Judges 14 and let's look at the life of Samson.

Here's what you are going to see: Samson has incredible strength...but his decisions are driven by his impulses. he does what his raw emotions tell him to do in the heat of the moment. Some of you are like...Samson was a junior in high school? I know.

Listen ultimately Samson's actions are driven by his pride. He believes he can do what he wants when he wants. And sometimes he wants to do what God told him to do. Sometimes not.

that means displays of incredible strength destroying the philistines that are oppressing God's people. The next minute he's sleeping with a prostitute. He's just following his impulses without fear of consequence. I can do what I want, when I want, with who I want. This makes Samson an unpredictable, and ultimately tragic deliverer for Israel. It also makes him a depiction of Israel in one mans life. Remember week 1 we said this is Israel's problem. Ultimately they follow their own desires. Now we see it played out in one man.

And listen as you watch Samson you will be entertained in some moments. For sure. But don't be deceived. You could leave today enticed by Samson's life and even have a desire to be like Samson. That would be like reading Harry Potter and wanting to be Voldemort because you are impressed with his magic powers. If you got that from the story, we'd call you a psycho. Samson's life is a WARNING to you of the destructive power of pride and it will show you where lasting hope in a relationship with God can come from! Let's dive in and we'll see more.

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

3 But his father and mother said to him, "Can't you find a young woman among your relatives or among any of our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines for a wife? "

Samson's dad knows that God has prohibited interfaith marriage. Important: God is cool with inter-racial marriage. Always has been & will be because it

expresses such a beautiful picture of the reconciling power of the gospel. It's that this woman has a different belief system. and that is what God prohibited back in Exodus 34.

But Samson told his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me."

I told you, Samson is driven by impulse. And his pride blinds him to sin's consequences. She looks attractive to him and so he acts. After all, Disney has told him his whole life to follow his heart. The problem is...THAT'S TERRIBLE ADVICE! The heart wants what it wants...so does my stomach and yet you don't see me eating chocolate covered bacon every meal. B/c that's bad for me. And the pride that says this impulse is good for me because I feel it, so I will follow it...It's gonna be bad for Samson.

But first comes the MOST important verse to help you understand the Samson story. Ready?

4 Now his father and mother did not know this was from the Lord, who wanted the Philistines to provide an opportunity for a confrontation. At that time, the Philistines were ruling Israel. -- Judges 14:3-4 (CSB)

Does that seem a little odd at first to you? Samson's rebellion...against God's law...is from God!? That seems strange right. Ok let me explain because a deep, hope-giving truth about how God works is in here. See just before Samson was conceived over in chapter 13, An angel appeared to his mom and said

5 for indeed, you will conceive and give birth to a son. You must never cut his hair, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from birth, and he will **begin** to save Israel from the power of the Philistines." -- Judges 13:5 (CSB)

The author is telling us the end of the Samson story at the beginning. Samson is going to be the next deliverer, or judge. And listen, the point is he will "begin" to save Israel. He won't finish the job but he will start it. So we know God has a plan, that he has communicated, for Samson.

Back to the tough question. Is God causing Samson to disobey him? NO. The Lord was seeking an opportunity to pit Israel against the Philistines. Why?

Israel is in the spot of disaster! And every other time that's happened, the next thing that has happened in the book is the people of Israel have realized their helplessness and cried out to God for deliverance. But now, Israel has gotten to the point where they are enslaved and COMFORTABLE with it! They are peacefully co-existing with the philistines. Their children are beginning to marry philistine children and the people of Israel are facing annihilation through assimilation.

And listen this is the subtle but FAR more destructive way sin works. It does **just** enough to make us feel comfortable with it. We say things like "Eh, its probably not good for me, but its probably not a big deal either." And that right there... you've been round and round with and you are just done fighting...so now you are resolved that it just is a part of you...THAT is what hardens your heart to God.

Listen - If my child walks up to me and his foot is turning green because he's got some nasty gangrene because he never showers...And he says 'its no big deal dad, I barely even feel my foot anymore.' I'm not going to say "OK cool. One less thing to worry about." NO, I'm rushing him to the hospital. Because he doesn't realize it but he's becoming comfortable with something that is going to kill him.

The enemy is far more likely to slowly erode your walk with God than to try and abruptly destroy it in one fail swoop. That's what has happened to Israel. 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 a hot head with biceps 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?

We were talking this past week and two of our staff gave permission to say that they were drug users before they were believers and through getting wrecked by the consequences of drug use God brought them to himself.

And when God disrupts your life, maybe even through some destruction... that is his grace! He's waking you up from complacency in the sin that will destroy you!

The rest of the Samson story is a series of bizarre episodes in Samson's life where God uses this impulsive wild Samson to start a war between Israel and the

Philistines. So here they come. 5 episodes of Samson v. Philistines. We'll go fast and then get to what they mean.

### **Episode 1: Samson's Engagement Party**

Samson is engaged to this philistine he shouldn't be with in the first place. He's 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 the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully on him, and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he did not tell his father or mother what he had done. -- Judges 14:6 (CSB)

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 guys 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 against his Nazarite vow that says touching a dead carcass defiles you. Then he gives it to his parents to eat. This is bold open sin. Spirit of the Lord with him one moment, sinning hard against the lord the next moment.

Pastoral aside - When you are driven by impulses, & you are a Christian, your faith will look HOT & COLD like this. You'll get fired up about God one minute, and then go hard into sin the next. That's because pride is actually driving you, not the spirit of God. Carrying on.

Back at the engagement party naturally thinks up a riddle to entertain his guests. Then he says to 30 philistine men...if you can figure out my riddle I'll give you each a suit of clothes but if you cant, you each have to give me a suit of clothes. Well they can't figure out the riddle and so they ask Samson's fiancé, since she is one of them, to get it out of him. And he eventually gives in to her. And she goes and tells them. They come back and solve the riddle. Then Samson looks at these guys, knowing how they got the answers and says

If you hadn't plowed with my young cow, you wouldn't know my riddle now! -- Judges 14:18 (CSB)

Pastoral Aside to men: NEVER call your girl a cow. Now he's got to pay up right?

19 The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully on him, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men. He stripped them and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. In a rage, Samson returned to his father's house, -- Judges 14:19 (CSB)

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. That's episode 1. Point? Remember the bigger picture here: Ashkelon is a philistine city. God is using Samson to create a rift between Israel and the Philistines.

### **Episode 2: The 300 Burning Foxes**

Samson cools off and some time later returns to finally marry his fiancé. Her dad informs him that he thought Samson hated her & he gave her to another guy. Dad says "take her young sister instead. She's more beautiful anyway." Yeah nice try, but Samson is too

proud for that. He has been humiliated and he starts seeing red again. He goes on a rampage:

4 So he went out and caught three hundred foxes. He took torches, turned the foxes tail-to-tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. 5 Then he ignited the torches and released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines. He burned the piles of grain and the standing grain as well as the vineyards and olive groves. -- Judges 15:4-5 (CSB)

This is vindictive... and also really creative. In addition to killing 30 philistines in episode 1, now he's destroyed their crops, which might as well be burning their money. Imagine: 150 fires bouncing rapidly through the amber waves of grain.

**The Philistines retaliate not by attacking Samson, but by killing Samson's fiancé and her father.** Which really makes him mad.

I'll never forget the first time me and my brother exchanged punches. He hit me in the arm. I punched him in the shoulder. And we kind of looked at each other like...are we about to do this!? Who strikes next. That's what this feels like. A WHOLE nation & Samson exchanging punches. Samson is next:

7 Then Samson told them, "Because you did this, I swear that I won't rest until I have taken vengeance on you." 8 He tore them limb from limb and then went down and stayed in the cave at the rock of Etam. -- Judges 15:7-8 (CSB)

Not surprisingly, the Philistines are upset with the number of missing limbs. **Episode 3: Jawbone Hill**

The Philistines went up, camped in Judah, and raided Lehi. 10 So the men of Judah said, “Why have you attacked us?” They replied, “We have come to tie Samson up and pay him back for what he did to us.”

11 Then three thousand men of Judah went to the cave at the rock of Etam, and they asked Samson, “Don’t you realize that the Philistines rule us? What have you done to us?” -- Judges 15:9-11 (CSB)

They are uncomfortable with the idea of going to war against the more powerful Philistines. And this is so many Christians. Complacent in their sin. And God’s grace sometimes takes the form of a wrecking ball shattering your status quo. So Samson Says to them HEY...

“I have done to them what they did to me,” he answered. -- Judges 15:11 (CSB) They Started it!

12 They said to him, “We’ve come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines.” Then Samson told them, “Swear to me that you yourselves won’t kill me.” 13 “No,” they said, “we won’t kill you, but we will tie you up securely and hand you over to them.” So they tied him up with two new ropes and led him away from the rock.

They would rather betray their own rescuer than give up the compromise they’ve made with sin.

14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came to meet him shouting. The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully on

him, and the ropes that were on his arms and wrists became like burnt flax and fell off. 15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand, took it, and killed a thousand men with it. 16 Then Samson said: With the jawbone of a donkey. I have piled them in heaps. With the jawbone of a donkey I have killed a thousand men. -- Judges 15:12-16 (CSB)

An arrogant song all about Samson nothing about God. Then it says he dropped the jawbone (mic drop) and went to hydrate.

#### **Episode 4: Deceived by Delilah**

TWENTY YEARS LATER. And what becomes evident is Samson hasn’t changed a bit. Still brash, arrogant, and driven by his impulses. Things are getting worse because you never idle with God. You are either growing closer to him or running further away. Watch this

Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute and went to bed with her. -- Judges 16:1 (CSB)

This isn’t Delilah, it’s a random prostitute. Its impulse. It’s pride that following the impulse won’t matter. A few verses later he meets Delilah. Another philistine woman. He continues to rebel against God.

5 The Philistine leaders went to her and said, “Persuade him to tell you where his great strength comes from, so we can overpower him, tie him up, and make him helpless. Each of us will then give you 1,100 pieces of silver.” -- Judges 16:4-5 (CSB)

You may know this story. It’s a pretty famous one in scripture. Samson knows what is going on. He KNOWS she is a spy. But he likes flirting with destruction

because he thinks he's strong enough on his own to always conquer the Philistines. Then what you get are 3 nights together where She tries to convince him to tell her the secret to his strength. Each time he lies, she believes him & betrays him. It doesn't work & when the philistines try to jump him he breaks free.

But the 4th time it says she nagged him until he told her the truth that if his hair is cut off, he'll lose his strength. She shaves his head when he's sleeping and then...

In this way, she made him helpless, and his strength left him. 20 Then she cried, "Samson, the Philistines are here!" When he awoke from his sleep, he said, "I will escape as I did before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him. -- Judges 16:19-20 (CSB)

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

FINALLY FINALLY cries out to the Lord in honest helplessness. Samson is such a picture of Israel. He's not just the deliverer in the cycle of sin, he's going through the cycle himself. Finally he realizes the Lord was the source of his strength all along.

28 He called out to the Lord: "Lord God, please remember me. Strengthen me, God, just once more. With one act of vengeance, let me pay back the Philistines for my two eyes." 29 Samson took hold of the two middle pillars supporting the temple and leaned against them, one on his right hand and the other on his

there! This is what Sin does! It blinds you to its danger and then left unchecked it seizes you and destroys your life.

Well, the Philistines seize him, gouge his eyes out and parade him in front of everyone as a symbol of victory over Israel. In fact they even sing: Our God dagon has given Samson into our hands. Well, this whole time what they didn't notice...because they are dense also, is that Samson's hair was starting to regrow. That brings us to episode 5

### **Episode 5: Everybody Dies**

The Philistines throw a huge celebratory feast & Samson is their prize on display.

25 When they were in good spirits, they said, "Bring Samson here to entertain us." So they brought Samson from prison, and he entertained them. They had him stand between the pillars. -- Judges 16:25 (CSB)

About 3,000 Philistines are there including ALL of their leaders. Samson is humiliated more than ever in his life. He's

left. 30 Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." He pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the leaders and all the people in it. And those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life. -- Judges 16:26-30 (CSB)

What a life. I want to show you 3 take-aways from Samson's life that are really 3 take-aways from the entire book of Judges. You ready?

**Our pride blinds us to the dangers of sin**

See Samson's pride fooled him. He THOUGHT he could do anything. And for a while he did didn't he. He got comfortable flirting with sin because whenever he needed he could just escape. And The Spirit of the Lord was gracious enough to rush on him and get him out of trouble. But what we saw in his story was that he never gave God glory. He sang a song about how SAMSON destroyed thousands, not God through Samson.

And as he continued to treat life like a game without consequences, he was totally unaware that pride was corroding his soul from the inside out. This is one of the most dangerous ways the enemy attacks you. You flirt with sin that you know you shouldn't be anywhere near but you think like Samson that you'll just rise up and defeat that sin and get out just like last time. And one of the ways pride starts to reveal itself in your life is that **you are increasingly casual with God's commands.**

And I cannot stress this enough. Samson was set apart to be a Nazarite. Remember how the angel visited his mother? This meant he was supposed to never drink alcohol, never touch a dead carcass, 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 its no big deal. And all the while the enemy is luring him in for the kill. Sure Delilah... "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. In 2018 I have watched Christians I know get COMPLETELY destroyed by the enemy through this exact process. Their life is a wreck and they've hurt tons of people.

And maybe God has you here today for a WAKE UP CALL. Praise God! Actually leads me to the next take away from Samson's life:

### **It's Never Too Late to return to God**

Chapter 16 verse 22 needs to be a flickering light of hope for some of you that have found yourselves in deep darkness right now. 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. This has become a running theme in Judges: **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 do his best work in your life.

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 darkest, lowest moment, 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. Which brings us to the biggest point of the Samson Story & the Biggest Point of the entire book of Judges.

**Like Israel, we need a better Savior.**

What an odd savior for Israel. Sometimes you read a bible story and you find ways to say hey, be like this hero. When it comes to Samson...nope. He's the worst. He's Israel's savior yet he himself goes through the cycle of sin he's supposed to save them from. Samson was a

flawed deliverer that couldn't save Israel from their oppressors. He couldn't finish the job. Was never meant to. Only to **begin** to save them. 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. 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.

Come to Jesus!