

[samson]

:: judges 16.19-30 ::

Today we're going to be headed back into the Old Testament, looking at another famous prison scene involving Samson, the mighty judge of Israel. This time, the situation is a little different, and we'll see why.

Let's read our text and then get into it.

Judges 16.19-30 - Then [Delilah] lulled [Samson] 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. 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.

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

However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.

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!"

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."

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. 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." 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.

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!" 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. 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.

This isn't a happy story. I can confidently say that God's desire for Samson was not a kamikaze mission that ended his life being blind and bound. God's purpose for raising up judges during this period of Israel's history was to bring victory and freedom.

However, the end of Samson's life is the opposite. He's imprisoned, maimed and stripped of his power.

The difference between his imprisonment and the others we've seen is that his captivity was of his own doing. It was his familiarity with sin that brought him to this end, not the glorious desire of the Lord.

And so this morning, I'd like us to see 2 themes that flow out of this text: first, our relationship to sin and temptation and second, God's faithfulness to us as His people.

First, our relationship with sin.

As we open God's word we have to take an honest look at the strong warnings we're given regarding sin and temptation in this life. We can't ignore it, we can't act like sin isn't around us and within us. We're told again and again and again to be on guard against the temptations of the world around us and against the wickedness of our own hearts within us.

But, sometimes, we get a little bit cozy with sin. Maybe it's a small thing, maybe it's a personal thing. But when we allow sin to be a part of our lives, when we're comfortable with it, it takes a terrible, destructive toll.

This is a famous passage of Scripture and I had some notes in my Bible margins from another study I heard taught on this chapter and it pointed out that as you follow the progression here, you see that sin **binds**, sin **blinds**, sin **grinds**. And it all starts with the choice we make to lower our defenses and become comfortable with temptation, comfortable with unrighteousness, comfortable with things that are not Godly.

Look at Samson, verse 19:

Judges 16.19-20 - Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees...so he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as before as at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him

Samson got cozy with sexual sin. And *THAT'S* what eventuated in his imprisonment. God wanted victory for him. God wanted liberation for him. God wanted a ministry for him. But because Samson embraced his flesh and a life devoted to carnal pursuits, he became a slave and a captive.

We have to believe the warnings God has given us regarding sin in His word. Whether it's Samson or David or the Epistles or throughout the rest of the Bible, sin is a serious issue. We're forgiven. We're set apart by God. But the life we live and the choices we make actually matter. And the acts we commit before God are incredibly important because they have drastic consequences for good or for evil, both in our own lives and in the lives of those around us.

At the end of the day, we need to be afraid of our capacity to sin. It's always pointed out that David didn't just wake up one day and think, "I feel like committing adultery and murdering one of my friends today." Samson didn't think ahead and want to be a prisoner whose eyes had been bored out by a bunch of Dagon worshipers. But lifestyle choices that these guys made led them to the terrible captivity they found themselves in.

The same is true for us. We need to believe God's word and understand that small ungodliness turns into great destruction. James says your little tongue can set a whole community on fire. It can defile the whole body. It is a world of iniquity.

Jesus pointed out that our eyes can lead us into incredible amounts of sin. Certainly that is true for men who aren't guarded against the sexualization all around us in this culture.

We need to accept the fact that there's all kinds of stuff left over from our old life and our old nature that's trying to poison our spiritual water supply. And there are all kinds of influences and snares around us that want to make us captive to wickedness. And we can't get cozy with them. We can't take a fire to our hands and not get burned. But, if we're not careful, we become like moths drawn to a flame and go willingly into the destruction of sin and compromise. The result is captivity and spiritual blindness and a complete loss of usefulness in God's Kingdom, like we see demonstrated in this passage.

You see it when they bring Samson out to perform for them. As the Philistines torment him, they're blaspheming against the Lord and proclaiming the power of their own false god. Samson was meant to be a pillar and a testimony of the almighty power of the only one true and living God. But instead, his lifestyle seemed to demonstrate a life unchanged and unable to overcome temptation. When in fact, it was just his willing choice to break his vows, not devote his life to the Lord, visit prostitutes and not control himself.

We can't get cozy with sin. If we take an honest look within our own lives, we can probably identify a situation or two where we're starting to get a little comfortable with some attitude or behavior that we have no business being around. And if we don't believe that a little immorality or ungodliness is going to hurt us, then we're denying the word of God, which goes to great lengths to warn us about the captivity and blindness that sin brings into our lives.

But aside from the sinfulness of man in this passage we also see the magnificent faithfulness of God.

We have to take a moment to talk about verse 20, which says that God had departed from Samson. Before we get worried about that, we need to understand that the way God came upon His people was different in the Old Testament. During that time, there was no permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So, what God would do was come *upon* His people for various amounts of time, and then that coming upon would be lifted. When it says that the Lord had departed from Samson, it means the power that God had given Samson to do these incredible feats of strength had been lifted.

It's clear that the Lord was, in fact, *with* Samson. He was present with him, hearing him pray, bringing him hope, intervening on his behalf.

And this is a remarkable thing when you think about the way Samson lived his life. You look at his decisions and his attitude and his lifestyle in the book of Judges and you wonder if the guy was even a Believer. But then you get to Hebrews and you read this in chapter 11:

Hebrews 11.32-34,38a - And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the

prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens...of whom the world was not worthy.

So God, looking at this flawed and fleshly individual, says, “This is my son. This is a man who I love and who I want to fill.”

What Samson did with his life was terrible and it ended in complete desperation and destruction. But God was there with him, ready to do what He had always wanted to do.

This is situation we find ourselves in. We are people for whom God has an incredible plan, an incredible power and an incredible presence. Yet, He provides us with a will to choose how we’re going to live out our lives before Him. And though it breaks His heart, He will allow us to leave His plan and His provision and His protection.

The New Testament calls out some believers and says outright, “You have *left* your first love. You are outside of what the Lord wants *for* you.”

Samson, it’s clear, was not interested in living Godly. Yes, God used him, but look at how his life resulted. Blind. Bound. Tormented. And he had to endure the consequences of his sin.

Even there, in mercy and forgiveness, God was willing to interact with Samson. But the consequences remained the same.

So for us this morning I want us to take home the idea that we serve an incredibly faithful God. A God who does forgive and does pursue us, even when we’re choosing to reject Him and His plan for us.

But on the flip side, we need to understand what sin does to our lives. How it binds us and blinds us. How it makes us captives when God’s desire is victory and conquest for our spiritual lives. Our sin destroys our strength. It destroys any testimony or effectiveness that we should’ve had in the lives of the people around us and it takes us out of the place of intimacy and fullness and abundance that God so wants for our relationship with Him.

We’ve got to root out sin before it chains us down. Before the world around us is laughing at our Messiah, before we’ve missed out on what God wanted for our lives. If we find ourselves constrained, may it be for the glory of God, not for the wages of our sin.

Our God is faithful, so let us be faithful as well.