

When the Strong Become Weak, Samson #2 // Judges 14–16 // Broken Saviors #9

We are on our 2nd week of looking at Samson... one of the most colorful characters in the Bible. The story of Samson is a tale about the weak becoming strong and the strong becoming weak.

This will **come as no surprise to many of you**, but Samson has always reminded me a lot of myself... but *not for the reasons* that you think...

Samson's greatest enemy is himself.

- I had a **friend at MIT** who was putting the final edits on his senior thesis, when he said he watched the text on the screen suddenly start turning, line by line, into gobbley-gook... Have you had that happen? (BTW, there's a special spot in hell reserved for people...)
- **Samson has a virus...** his problem is not that he doesn't have the physical strength to deliver Israel... the problem is that he is **internally weak**. He has a virus that sabotages him and turns his strength into destruction.
- **That's why I feel like Samson.** Do you ever look at chapters of your life and think, "Look at what I messed up! Why couldn't I **just have controlled myself**" or "just have **held my tongue**" or "not said that"? or "What if I had **just said 'no'**," or "just **not returned** that call? Or "not hung out with that friend?" "stayed home that night?"

I want to show you this weekend that every morning when you wake up and look in the mirror you look at your own worst enemy.

Specifically today, I want to talk with you men. Honestly, there may be nothing more important that you ever hear... Some of you **have sabotaged** and **are sabotaging** your life...

And girls, don't feel like his story leaves you out... Old Testament scholars point out that **Samson was supposed to represent all of Israel**. The author of Judges definitely points out a **parallel** between Samson and Israel:

- *Both were brought into the world **through a miraculous birth** to an older couple... Abraham/Sarah; Manoah; unnamed woman*
- *For both, God took **something weak** and made it incredibly strong*
- *Both were given **a special law code** that was supposed to separate them from the nations around them.*
 - *Nazirite code; Leviticus*
- *And Samson was **drawn to foreign women** like Israel was drawn to foreign gods.*

So Samson's story tells Israel's story. And, if you listen, probably your story, too.

The **first week we looked at Samson's birth**; this week we're going to look at his life and death.

Judges 14–16

The first story of Samson's adult life opens up with him informing his mom and dad that he wants to marry a hot Philistine girl he's seen in town.

14:3 But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman... among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" "This is not racial prejudice, just that they want someone who shares his faith. **But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well."**¹**

- If I had to boil all of Samson's weaknesses down into one statement, this would be it. Samson's **primary driver** in life is what pleases him.

¹ ESV; last phrase is from NKJV.

- And he's **not going to let anyone get** in the way of what he wants. He's always going to **"follow his heart"** and "be true to himself."
- This is like a **Disney movie in reverse**—Samson rejects his parents' wisdom and 'lets his heart decide'... Except this story shows you where that way of living usually leads.

Then, vs. 4 makes a little comment that let's you see the bigger picture of what God is doing in this.

⁴ His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. Now, what does that mean? God was behind this decision?

Well, it doesn't mean that Samson's decision was righteous or wise; just that God was using it.

Let me step back for a moment and help you see **the bigger picture** of what is happening in Israel.

- **Israel has grown really comfortable in their captivity.** They are not crying out for deliverance; they don't even want to be delivered anymore...
 - This is the greatest threat they have ever faced: Elimination not by extermination, but assimilation.
 - This is **always the greatest threat** to the people of God. You see, when the enemy comes against God's people to exterminate them, we usually rally ourselves to put faith in God and he acts on our behalf.
 - But when he makes us comfortable in the world, he entices our heart away from God...
- *This is where Israel is... but God didn't save his people just to keep them alive, but to save them for him... so that they could be consumed in love with him.... and now they are comfortable in captivity to the Philistines... so what God needs to do is stir up some conflict. Enter Samson, a hotblooded, testosterone-ridden, impulsive meathead on roid rage.*

- Before I move on from this, Do you see how God sometimes does that in your life?
 - Your heart gets way too knit to this world; too enticed by popularity or comfort or money and so God stirs up some trouble?
 - This is what God always does...
- **People wonder how I feel about the Supreme Court decision to mandate gay marriage...** I think there is no question, it was a wrong decision... but I recognize that God can be in it purifying and strengthening the church.
 - **You see, we believers have grown entirely too at home in this country.** Many churches do **"God and Country Sundays,"** but when I say "God and Country" the *first* country you should think of is your heavenly one; and when I say **be thankful for freedom** the first freedom you should fall to your knees and celebrate is your freedom in Christ. Flag is the blood of Christ...
- And so **God sends stuff like this along** just to remind us who we belong to and where our real country is... that our main help doesn't come from Washington; it comes from the Lord.
 - **Church, be assured:** Just like with Samson, there is **not one stray molecule** in all the universe that God is not using for the completion of his purposes for the church.
 - **Hollywood is not the center;** *Wall ST; NYT, Washington*

The next episode in the Samson story is the lion and honey incident we talked about a few weeks ago... GOES LIKE THIS

Samson throws a **beer keg party** to celebrate his engagement, and a few days before the party, a lion attacks him and we have that great line, **"...he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat."** (*Judges 14:6 ESV*)

- (I'll tell you this... After all my extensive Hebrew word study... I still don't know what **this phrase means.** "Like one tears a young goat."

- Evidently goat-tearing was common in those days. *It was what you did on **game-night** in ancient Israel.*
- “What did you **do for the 4th**? “*The usual: Played some cornhole; set off some fireworks; tore a few goats.”*)

Well, a few days later he is passing by that same spot and he sees the carcass of the lion he killed and notices a beehive in the abdomen, which sparks an idea for a riddle...

The riddle goes like this...

“If **you can figure out the riddle within 7 days**, I’ll give each of you a suit of clothes. But if you can’t figure it out, you each have to give me a suit of clothes.”

- **Well, they try to figure out and they can’t...** so they **go to his bride** to be and say, “If you don’t get Samson to tell you his riddle and you tell us, we’ll kill you.”
- So she goes to Samson and asks and he won’t tell her so she pulls the oldest trick in the book... she cries and says, “You don’t love me... We’re starting our marriage with secrets. I’m going to take you on a talk show

So finally Samson caves and reveals the riddle to her and she tells the Philistines and they solve it. Then Samson, the hopeless romantic says,

[18] “If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle.” (What a way with words that guy has!)

[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. Why would God fill Samson with his Spirit to do something petty and vindictive? He has a bigger purpose... creating division.

15 After some days... Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat. (You know, for date night you’d get together and tear some young goats) And he said, “I will go in to my wife in the chamber.” **¹ 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?”*** What? Who cares

³ And Samson said to them, “This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm.” ⁴ So Samson went and caught 300 foxes (how did he do that?) 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 standing grain and the olive orchards.

- **Now, as far as practical jokes go**, this one is awesome. He ties foxes together and lights their tails on fire and has them go burn “Samson was here” into the cornfields.

The Philistines retaliate by killing her and her father.

⁶And Samson said... “I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit.”⁸ And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow (that’s a Hebrew way of saying that he ‘opened up a can of whoop trash on them,’), and then he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam. (which was a small Israelite town)

Well, the Philistines come to Etam and say to the Israelites there, ¹⁰ “We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us.” ¹¹ Then 3,000 men of Judah 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?” (peace)

¹² 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.” So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

¹⁴ ...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 with it he struck 1,000 men. Did the whole **hip and thigh** thing on them... **Pretty cool**, except, of course, that he is not supposed to be touching anything dead...

¹⁶ "And Samson sang, 'With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey, have I struck down a thousand men.' ¹⁷ And as soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand.

- **How cool is that...** *With the jawbone of the donkey still in his hand, he composes this song... It doesn't rhyme in English, but it did in Hebrew, and I think you have to read it more like an Eminem rap...*
 - "With the jawbone of an ass, I have piled them in a mass. I took the jawbone of an ass, and I had a blast..."
- And then he drops the jawbone like he's dropping the mic... this is pretty awesome.

[16:1] Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her. (Whoa, now he's not just with a Philistine girl, but a Philistine *prostitute*. And Gaza, btw is the Philistine CAPITAL. His sin is getting even more brazen.)

Well, the Philistines find out... [2] And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, "Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him." [3] But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

- **Now, what lesson is there here for us?** Nothing. That's just an awesome story. He ripped the city gate up and carried it to the top of a hill. When that happens you have to write it down.

[4] After this he loved a woman... whose name was Delilah. In Hebrew, "**Delilah**" sounds like the phrase "**the night**." If you go back through the opening verses of the chapter, the word "**night**" keeps recurring. Night, in Hebrew literature, represents darkness. Now Samson is lying down in "**the night's**" bed. This is the end.

[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 says 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 bind him with these bowstrings, 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. He might as well have been wrapped with toilet paper.

[10] Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound." So he says, "OK, it's actually new ropes. **So she ties** him up, and then she says, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you..." [12] But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.

Same deal... [13]... And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." Whoa, wait a minute... we're getting closer. Now he is bringing up the hair.

Well, again... she does it... she weaves his hair into a loom, and then wakes him up and says, "The Philistines are upon you!" And he wakes up with a start and rips up the entire loom and is swinging it around saying, "Where? Where?"

[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. **Hasn't Samson been** burned on this before? Why would he do this? **Guys are stupid.** He doesn't have the **strength to withstand** her displeasure. Guys want harmony in their homes, and that's good, but some want that so badly they will cave when they shouldn't.

[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.

- Do you see how **overconfident** he has grown? He has just told her his true secret, and then *he falls asleep on her lap*. **No worries...** he is **confident** that his strength will never leave him. God is **about to wake him up**.

And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head.

[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. (like Israel—didn't know he needed deliverance!)

[21] And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes (Actually, they probably would have first burned his eyes out with a heated metal prong, and then dug out whatever remained) and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.

(Samson here gives you a picture of the **trajectory of sin**. It starts fun—like I've told you, it's like the old country preacher... (It's all **strength** and **beer parties** and **practical jokes** and **prostitutes** and **Delilah**)... It just doesn't end that way.

- Country pastor: **Sin binds; sin blinds; sin grinds.** Not for cheesy SE outlines, unless you can remember them 22 years later.

[22] But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. What a great verse. We'll return to it at the very end.

[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." So at this big party, they bring out Samson. [24] And when the people saw him, they praised their god.

[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."

And Samson called out to God and said, "O Lord God, I know I've sinned... I am here for my sin. One more time; let me be avenged against the Philistines. [29] And Samson grasped the two middle

pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other.

[30] Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it (and him as well). So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.

What do we learn from Samson's life?

If Samson is supposed to represent all the people of God...

I. We are our own worst enemy.

The problem is not that God hasn't given us the grace or power or blessing... we sabotage it.

Let me break down Samson's weakness into 5 components...

1. Impulsive

- Samson is driven by his lusts... his stomach... his anger...
- This one thing will wreck your life.
 - I read this article about **texting and driving**... We know the stats... Typing on a phone while you drive makes you 23x more likely to have an accident... texting impairs your response time more than alcohol and marijuana combined... but people know that and they do it anyway. Why? Because in that moment, pleasing myself through knowing what that friend says or what they've posted is more important than the safety of my family or life of my neighbor.²
 - Main point is not just don't text and drive (though don't do that either), but a metaphor: if you don't

learn to deny yourself and obey the will of God, you are going to wreck your life.

- I've told you before about the famous "**marshmallow test**," done in the 1970s at Stanford. I recently read about a similar study done in New Zealand. Sociologists did a **massive** project—studying over 1,000 kids over four decades, putting them through all kinds of evaluative tests. The scientists said they were shocked to discover that **one factor** that mattered more than any other on your **health, material wealth, and relational harmony was impulse-control**.
- It was more significant than **social class, wealth of their family, and IQ**.

"A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls." Prov 25:28. It leaves you defenseless before the enemy...

- You have to decide if you are going to be driven by God's will or your desires.
- **What is your primary criteria in major decisions—it pleases you, or pleases God?**
- You have to decide if you are going to be **Spirit-led or desire-led**.

2. Compromising

- Samson treated the commands **God gave him casually**... He didn't mind breaking them...
- I'm sure he said to himself, "*What can this hurt?*" Cut my hair... got a way with it a few times.
- What if the harm was not in the action itself, but in driving out the presence of God from your life?
 - What if **your compromises in your career**, your family, your finances, removed God's blessing from them?
 - (This breach of integrity—is it that bad? Everyone else does it. This porn is a little harmless pleasure. Not hurting anyone. This little fling... I can get away with it.")

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/texting-and-driving-is-stupid>

- Me with finances... (not earning; but not driving out the presence of God)
- Samson shows you... **Do not take the blessing and presence of God for granted!** It can leave you.

3. Unteachable

- No one could persuade him.

This connects to #4...

4. A loner

- Did you notice that **no one is a part** of Samson's life? He's a **one-man show**; one-man **Wreck it Ralph**)
- Are people close enough to your life they can speak into it, and are you correctible?
- How do you respond to criticism?
- Would those closest to you say you are teachable?
- What areas are off limits? "Do not talk about that." That is precisely the place the Enemy is destroying you.
- **Prov 18:1, "An isolated man will always begin to serve himself."****
 - Apart from community, you'll always start making it about you.
 - Things that grow in a secret garden always grow mutant.
- There is no such thing as an **isolated Christian**. People who **get serious about Jesus** get serious about the church. The church is **God's plan A**.
- Some of you need to **act on this** and go to SP, join a small group or ministry team!
- Only listen to podcast? I'm grateful... but if it keeps you from a local church, stop listening and go to church.
 - "But there are no good churches in my area." A weak local church is better than a great podcast from far away.
 - God doesn't change you through a podcast, but through godly community

5. Proud

- **Samson was proud... 3 ways. A.** He assumed he'd **never lose** his strength; **B.** He never **gave God glory**... **C.** He **felt entitled** to use his blessings for his own purposes.
- Do you go through life thinking, "I'll always have these gifts; this health; this ability to make money..."
 - James 4: all such "boasting is evil"
 - Every breath you take...
- Do you use your gifts to direct more attention to yourself or to God?
- Do you realize your gifts and opportunities are all on loan from God to use for his purposes?
 - College: My gifts—what do you want with it?
 - Business: My business—what do you want with it?

II. The world needed Someone greater than Samson

- I pointed out that this story is the last one in the book... Samson is the last Judge... and this story **starts out so well!**
 - Samson has this **grand, miraculous birth** narrative; he's given these promises of incredible strength... We have such **high expectations** for him.
- When you are **coming up to the finale of something**, don't you get a sense of excitement?
 - I do... When I am reading a good suspense or mystery novel, and I get to the last chapter... "Alright, this is going to be good... Let's see how this wraps up..."
 - Or the season finale of a TV show... I invite friends over. (Nothing worse than a dumb season finale. Lost. What? They have been dead the whole time?)
- **Imagine being an Israelite** and reading this... That's it? You know there's got to be more to the story...
- And then, 1100 years later, Jesus of Nazareth shows up...
 - He's born miraculously.
 - He has incredible **strength**—over **demons, disease and death**.

- He, like Samson, **was betrayed** by someone who acted as a friend and **handed over** to the Gentile oppressors.
- He, like Samson, was **chained and tortured**, and put on public display to be mocked.
- He, like Samson, **dies with arms** outstretched.
- And **through that death**, when it looked like he was defeated, actually defeated the enemy.
- But **unlike Samson, Jesus was not put in chains** for his sin; he was put in chains for ours.
 - Samson was a **strong man made weak** through his own sin; Jesus was the **mighty God who voluntarily became weak** to save us from the chains of our sin.
- That's good news because we are **all like Samson**... we are all people who have been **driven** by our lusts... people who **compromise** and are **proud and live for ourselves**... but **he was wounded** for that, and when we behold that, it changes us:
 - When you see he was given for you and let him live inside you he infuses into you fortitude of character that makes you strong where Samson was weak.
 - It is **when you see that he accepted you freely**, by his grace, even though you lived as Samson, that you are freed from the power of the impulses and insecurity that made you weak.

(MUSIC)

III. It is never too late to cry out to God

When Samson cries out to God... he is as low as one can get... He is in the midst of Dagon's temple where he has been blinded and bound because of his sin.

That's why vs. 22 is so important: The hair of his head had begun to grow again... I love that.

God's mercies, like Samson's hair, grow new every morning; they persist even where sin has shorn them away.

HOMELESS MAN

- Some of you have seen the viral video...
- Art gallery in Sarasota Springs set out a piano on the sidewalk... homeless man played beautiful song (Come Sail Away by STYX)
- YouTube with 15 million views.
- Gave him a chance to tell his story... **ex-Marine** who went into depression when his **wife committed suicide** in 1998... and turned to **alcohol and drugs**... social workers **took his son away** when his son was only 3.
- With all the attention... GoFundMe: now with 60K in it which will be available when he gets out of rehab. **Reunited with his son for the 1st time** in 15 years... his old college offered him a scholarship to finish his education.
- You never know how these stories turn out... but a beautiful symbol in it. This song had never left him... always played there in the background of his heart... he just started to play it and it became the source of his new life.
- God's mercies are with you... like a melody of Amazing Grace in the background that has kept growing even when your sin has shorn it away.
 - I can't tell you where his story ends, but I can tell you what can happen with you when you turn and embrace God's amazing grace.

There are two responses to failure:

- Many people feel **remorse**. "Oh, I should have done something different... I wish I could go back." And that can be a good start... but you need to go on to repentance.
- Remorse focuses on yourself, and laments what you have done; repentance looks to God and asks him to repair it. There is hope in repentance.
- **Remorse without repentance turns into either self-loathing or bitterness.** Self-loathing, "I hate my life." Bitterness: "This is all someone else's fault."

- Repentance means you *own responsibility for what you did*. But, and this is the key, *repentance* also accepts God's grace.
- Listen: There are many things you can't undo. Sin makes a mess, and maybe it's made a mess of your life... You can't **un-sin**, but you can repent. Repentance won't change your past, but if you repent, you can keep your past from defining your future.