

Series: God is the Hero of this Story: A Study Through Judges
Message: God's Providence in Samson's Downfall / Daniel Hickinbotham / July 16th, 2023

We are continuing on in our Study of Judges this morning... but before we begin, let me ask a question

- How many of you enjoy modern country music?
 - I stopped listening to country in about 2012... it had just changed so drastically from what I had enjoyed from earlier artists, I kind of lost my taste for it...
 - Now, everytime I turn it on, I am overwhelmed by how much it has changed since the days of Roger Miller, Don Williams, Johnny Cash, even George Strait.
 - It seems like it is all about partying and getting the pretty girl and playful but indecent behavior and a general celebration of a lack of responsibility... but of course, still going to church on Sunday or saying a prayer every now and then...
 - As we have been discussing Samson over the last few weeks I have been trying to figure out exactly how to characterize him.
 - The closest analogy I can come to is that he is an ancient Israel version of a guy from a modern country song.
 - Mulletted, booze-swillin, trashy woman chasing, animal huntin', strongman prankster who thinks the big man upstairs is blessing his every move...
 - Ok, maybe he didn't have a mullet...
 - Certainly, Samson is a hero of sorts... but he is deeply flawed hero... as are almost all of the folks in this book!
 - To paraphrase Spurgeon, the book of Judges in general and Samson specifically is included in the scriptures for our instruction more than our imitation.
 - In fact, most of what we have covered so far is a warning of what not to do more than anything.
 - Still... God is working in the midst of that dysfunction and disorder!
 - Praise God that he uses deeply flawed and sinful people to fulfill his purposes in the world.
 - You and I would be without hope of participating in the Great Commission if that was not true...
 - And country song Samson may be the pinnacle of all flawed heroes, which presents a tremendous opportunity to put God's gracious rule over the affairs of fallen humanity on display.
 - Though our passage today hardly mentions God, God's character and work is revealed beautifully in it.
 - The Main Point of Judges 16 is this: God's perfect sovereignty is revealed through Samson's sinful life.
 - We will see this illustrated in three ways:
 - God's patience is demonstrated throughout Samson's escapades.
 - God's precepts are confirmed in Samson's capture.
 - God's providence is revealed in Samson's death.
 - Let's pray together before we get started....

- Point 1: God's patience is demonstrated throughout Samson's escapades.
- This chapter starts out with one of those traditional Sunday School stories... where Samson makes off with the gates of Gaza... here is how it was presented to me throughout my childhood:
 - God's appointed tough guy Samson gets surrounded by those dirty rotten Philistines, who hate our hero because of his god-given strength and good looks. In a daring midnight maneuver, our hero rips the gates of the city out of the ground and escapes Philistine clutches, hauling these massive posts and doors up a far-off hill as evidence of his amazingness. In ripping off the gates of Gaza he leaves the city of his enemy weakened and vulnerable to attack as a demonstration of his all-around awesomeness.
 - But let's set aside the flannelgraph Samson for a moment and look at what would make most Sunday School teachers a little uncomfortable discussing with children...
 - Read with me starting in verse 1 of Chapter 16...
 - 16 Samson went to Gaza...
 - Pause right there... What?
 - The Philistines hate Samson and want to kill him... Why is Samson heading into the heart of enemy territory?
 - Is he finally going to fulfill his role as a deliverer of Israel?
 - Is he mounting an assault on the enemy headquarters?
 - Like Gideon, is he finally going to *embrace* his God ordained calling?
 - The remainder of verse one presents a resounding "No" ...
- Samson went to Gaza where he saw a prostitute and went to bed with her.
 - He is not in Gaza for any noble or godly reasons...
 - Samson marched into the midst of his peoples wicked oppressors because he was a man who was MASTERED by his sinful desires.
 - He was given over to his lusts and those lusts led him into the heart of darkness.
 - It seems Samson had a taste for Philistine women... initially he tried marriage but as we heard a few weeks ago that hadn't ended well.
 - So now he is just buying them. Using them.
 - Uniting himself to them in whatever way he can
- Samson had been set apart at birth to conquer the Philistines and here he is... giving himself over to them...
 - He had been given his great strength to pursue and defeat the Philistines... not to pursue and indulge himself with them...
 - Here he is violating more of the Law of God than I have time to recount... and it is likely not the first time...
 - Clearly, he was comfortable enough to walk into the city while the gate was open and find a prostitute...
 - Clearly the Philistine guards were at least used to seeing Samson because they let him into the city...

- It seems reasonable that he had a pattern of staying the whole night with the prostitutes and leaving at dawn, behavior that the Gazites were familiar with when we look at verse 2...
- 2 When the Gazites heard that Samson was there, they surrounded the place and waited in ambush for him all that night at the city gate. They kept quiet all night, saying, "Let's wait until dawn; then we will kill him."
 - Isn't this frequently the case with our habits of sin...
 - Not only is it in defiance of our callings and giftings as redeemed image bearers... Our sin takes us into foolish and dangerous places as we pursue it...
 - Places where we find ourselves surrounded by enemies... enemies intent upon destroying our physical and mental health... or our marriages... or our children...
 - Where we have been made more than conquerors in Christ, and given the Holy Spirit to enable us to walk in holiness, our habitual sin makes us vulnerable to the very enemy we were gifted and empowered to conquer...
- And yet, God's patience with sinful Samson... with his sinful people... is demonstrated in verse 3.
 - 3 But Samson stayed in bed only until midnight. Then he got up, took hold of the doors of the city gate along with the two gateposts, and pulled them out, bar and all. He put them on his shoulders and took them to the top of the mountain overlooking Hebron.
 - Although God is not mentioned in this particular passage, remember... Samson's great strength was never intrinsically his... it was bestowed upon him by God's Spirit...
 - And here God allows Samson to use this Spirit empowered giftedness to tear a hole in the wall of his own sinful stupidity and escape its consequences.
 - This after Samson has used his strength to kill a lion and then violate his vows by eating honey from it's dead body... this after he used his strength to settle personal vendettas with the Philistine marriage guests and his father in law... this after he used his strength to tear people limb from limb after his own vindictive behavior had gotten his wife and father in law killed... this after he had given glory to himself for killing a thousand men with a jawbone (another violation of his Nazerite vow BTW) even though it was the Spirit of the Lord that had come upon him... this after he had whined about being thirsty and God provided water for him and then named the spring where the water had come up after himself...
 - After all of this, the Lord still enabled him to escape his enemy...
- God's patience is demonstrated in Samson's escapades.
 - Brothers and sisters God is more patient with our sinful foolishness than we will ever know...
 - ...because we are more sinful than the Lord allows us to see.
 - When I got married to my wonderful wife I thought I was quite the catch.
 - I was still a young man who had a calling to ministry.
 - I was well respected amongst my peers
 - I lead worship and bible studies
 - I helped people in recovery from drugs, alcohol, and sex addiction

- I thought that through all these things I had become a pretty sanctified guy...
 - And then I moved in with Kristen, bless her saintly soul...
 - The Lord used her to peel back my outer layer of godliness and reveal how arrogant, selfish, self-seeking, dishonest, fearful, and insistent upon my own way I still was...
 - And then Clementine came along...
 - And then I moved into fulltime ministry...
- At each point, the Lord revealed more and more the depths of my sinfulness...
 - Had he revealed it all at once I may well have not had the strength to face it... there are still moments when my sinful nature seems like too much to reckon with...
 - Just this morning I had to repent for my lack of dependence upon Lord in the prep for this sermon...
 - Yet he still allows me to draw breath, to exercise my giftings, to receive blessings and inherit good things, to escape the destruction that my sin deserves...
 - God's patience... his long-suffering... his gentleness in dealing with us... makes him worthy of our worship.
 - Worthy of our lives being submitted to him as a living sacrifice...
 - The entire universe will praise God for his patience with your sinful escapades... my sinful escapades...
 - And if you are in Christ, he has guaranteed to redeem both you and the consequences of your sin for his glory and your good...
 - If you are not in Christ... he continues to be patient... he continues to provide life and breath and shelter and companionship... he continues to beckon you to come to him and escape the sin and rebellion that will destroy you...
- Still... both for the Christian and the unbeliever... God's patience is not approval...
 - There is a timeless and eternal principle throughout all of scripture...
 - God will discipline those who are in Christ and he demonstrate his wrath towards those who are not...
 - And God will use the sin that we pursue to accomplish both of these purposes...
 - Which brings us to our second story and our second point:
 - Where God's patience is demonstrated in Samson's sinful escapades.
 - Point 2: God's precepts are confirmed in Samson's capture.
 - Read with me starting in verse 4
 - 4 Sometime later, he fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the Sorek Valley. 5 The Philistine leaders went to her and said, "Persuade him to tell you[a] 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." 6 So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me, where does your great strength come from? How could someone tie you up and make you helpless?"
 - Lets stop right here...

- We can already see that the close call in Gaza has had no real effect on Samson.
 - He is hanging out in Philistine territory still, and specifically in place known for its vineyards.
 - The name Sorek means “Choice Vine.” This is the Philistine equivalent of the Napa Valley...
 - As an Israeli Nazerite he has precisely NO business hanging out there...
 - And he has fallen in love with a woman of low character.
 - The name Delilah means feeble... or weak...
 - Historically, she has been identified as another Philistine prostitute, but the scriptures are not specific on that.
 - Ironically, she is the only woman in the passages describing Samson’s life that is even named...
 - Whether that name implies that she personally was weak or that she was the embodiment of Samson’s particular weakness (Philistine women) or that she was perhaps the agent through which Samson would be made weak is unclear...
 - But what is clear, is that Samson is hanging out in the wrong place, with the wrong person, for the wrong reasons...
- Young men. Young women. Listen to me...
 - Do not give yourself to the wrong people, in wrong places, for the wrong reasons.
 - You know what I am talking about...
 - Do not find ways to justify your relationship with that person you know is wrong for you, or excuse your sinful behaviors with others, or find reasons to remain in situations where temptation holds sway.
- In your flesh, you are not strong enough to withstand temptation perpetually.
 - It is why God provides a way out of temptation... not a way to REMAIN in the midst of it...
 - The scriptures tell us to RESIST the devil... but they call us to FLEE from things like sexual immorality...
 - And Samson is the pinnacle of why we are to flee...
 - He is still given over to his passions, so much so that he is devoting himself to a woman who is intent upon his destruction...
 - Notice... She immediately accepts the bribe of the Philistine leaders.
 - It is unclear how many leaders offered her 1100 silver pieces but they were presenting her a fortune... and she did not hesitate to take it.
 - This woman that Samson had intense passion for, was committed to betraying him.
 - The Holy Spirit, scripture, and wisdom MUST govern your passions... or we will love people and things that are intent upon destroying us.
 - Now, most of us know how this story in verses 7-15 plays out...
 - As Dale Ralph Davis says, Delilah starts playing the “The Philistines Are Here” game...
 - She snuggles up to him and asks him “How’d you get so strong and manly. What’s your secret?”
 - He messes with her... feeds her little bits of the truth... first he tells her to use 7 undried bowstrings to bind him and that will make him weak...

- Now remember, bowstrings were made from the sinews or guts of animals, and these are fresh undried bowstrings... which was a violation of his Nazirite commitments to never touch a dead animal...
 - This shouldn't be shocking because he has done this over and over throughout the story.
- But he is taking a small step toward revealing the real secret... that he has been consecrated to God who gives him strength...
 - So she bind him and yells that the Philistines are coming and he jumps up and tears through the bow strings like a hot knife through butter...
- So... she gets all pouty and manipulative and says "You don't love me because you aren't telling me."
 - So he messes with her again and tells her to bind him with fresh ropes...
 - So she does it... then cries out the Philistines are coming... and once again, the ropes did nothing...
- So she pouts again and really pours it on... "How can you say you love me when you won't share your deepest secrets with me."
 - So he tells her to weave his hair into a loom... again, messing with her... but getting closer to the actual truth...
 - Same thing happens when she says the Philistines are coming, he pops up and destroys the loom as he does...
- Same thing happens... Delilah leans into the pouty and wronged lover routine...
 - Then we read what it says in verse 16:
 16 Because she nagged him day after day and pleaded with him until she wore him out,[d] 17 he told her the whole truth and said to her, "My hair has never been cut,[e] because I am a Nazirite to God from birth. If I am shaved, my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man." 18 When Delilah realized that he had told her the whole truth, she sent this message to the Philistine leaders: "Come one more time, for he has told me the whole truth." The Philistine leaders came to her and brought the silver with them. 19 Then she let him fall asleep on her lap and called a man to shave off the seven braids on his head. 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. 21 The Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles, and he was forced to grind grain in the prison.
- Samson had presumed upon the Lord's patience with him... but God's precepts were confirmed in his capture...
 - On top of his violation of God's righteous standards regarding sexual behavior and becoming like the surrounding cultures...
 - He had time and again violated the no fruit of the vine and the no touching dead bodies components of his vow...
 - But he had never violated the no-haircutting component.
 - He presumed that God's longsuffering was limitless and that this last "indiscretion" would be overlooked as well.
 - He had forgotten that God, though merciful, had a standard of righteousness... that God was just... and that God had established certain terms with him...
 - In this way Samson is a type of all of Israel...

- In Deuteronomy, God told Israel that if they observed the covenant and remained faithful to him, He would remain with them... that they would possess the land and its produce, that they would prosper in all their endeavors, and that they would have peace on all sides...
 - But... God also told them that if they failed to observe the covenant, that he would remove his presence and hand of blessing, that they would be dispossessed of the land, they would be denied the results of their labors, and that their enemies would triumph over them...
 - Samson... now with his eyes gouged out... the very eyes he had used to determine a Philistine wife was what was right for him... his strength now depleted... is forced to grind grain for the very same Philistines he had so frequently enmeshed himself with...
- He is the personal embodiment of all of Israel's failures in the book of Judges... and in a way he is the embodiment of ours...
- We all hear much about the Proverbs 31 woman, but there is a warning to the Proverbs 31 man that Samson would have benefited from, and that we all should heed:
 - "2 What are you doing, my son?[a] What are you doing, son of my womb?
What are you doing, son of my vows?
3 Do not give your strength to women,
your ways to those who destroy kings.
4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
it is not for kings to drink wine,
or for rulers to take strong drink,
5 lest they drink and forget what has been decreed...
 - That passage is not just talking about illicit sex and booze...
 - It is talking about anything or person that leads you away from the path of righteousness...
 - And as Pastor Jeff laid out over the last couple of weeks ago, there are tons of other proverbs and passages that reiterate the truth distilled here...
 - Sinful living is destructive and its consequences will ALWAYS catch up to you.
 - And God's precepts will be vindicated, will be proven to be true... which should give us some holy fear...
- You see, apart from the Spirit working within us, we are prone to plunge into the places we ought not go... prone to pursue that which we ought not pursue... prone to touch that which is defiling... prone to squander our strength... and prone to think that the very thing that is betraying us to destruction is the thing that is worth clinging to...
 - I see this all the time with alcoholics and addicts...
 - Everyone in their life can look at the alcohol, or the drugs, or the porn, and say "All the destruction in your life is directly tied to that sin... that thing is your problem... that particular Delilah is betraying you..." and the alcoholic or addict can look you dead in the eye and say "No... this Delilah (be it booze, drugs, sexuality, shopping, eating, whatever) is my solution... sure I may need to manage her better... but the only problem I have is YOU thinking this Delilah is a problem..."
 - I don't have a problem with drugs, or booze, or sexual sin... YOU have a problem with my using drugs or booze or engaging in sexual sin...

- It is madness... just like Samson telling this nefarious woman the secret of his strength... its madness... but we are all prone to it...
 - In the end, whatever we pursue apart from the Lord, God will in due course, abandon us over to it...
 - Romans 1 makes it clear that this is how God has ordered the universe...
 - Whatever we devote ourselves to that is not God or of God, we will eventually be handed over to it... and it will ruin us, no matter how much we love it...
- But... just as God's righteous precepts are confirmed by Samson's capture...
- Point 3: God's providence (His gracious direction of the affairs of all creation) is revealed in Samson's death
 - Samson is shackled... blind... abandoned by God... a slave of his enemies... still we read in verse 22:
 - 22 But his hair began to grow back after it had been shaved.
 - So many hopeful statements throughout the bible start with that little word "But"... But God... But now... and for Samson, but his hair began to grow back...
 - 23 Now the Philistine leaders gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They rejoiced and said:
Our god has handed over our enemy Samson to us.
 - 24 When the people saw him, they praised their god and said:
Our god has handed over to us
our enemy who destroyed our land
and who multiplied our dead.
- Here we see the spiritual blindness of the Philistines... they think that it was their demon god Dagon that delivered Samson over to them...
 - So, they engage in this massive demonic worship service to honor this false god... they even sing a psalm of praise to Dagon...
 - Yet verse 20 makes it clear that it was the Lord's removal of his protection of Samson that caused him to be captured.
 - They are blaspheming the true God in their praise of Dagon and their "overcoming" of Yahweh's servant.
 - Brothers and sisters this is huge part of the tragedy of our sin...
 - The name of the Lord is blasphemed among the nations because of it...
 - But that is a sermon in itself...
 - However, we know it was the providence of God that delivered Samson over to them..
 - 25 When they were in good spirits,[f] 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.
 - Now there is some interesting to note here...
 - The language used is intentional and providential...

- The word translated “entertain” is the Hebrew word Sawkhak...
 - It means to laugh at or make mockery of.
 - But... if you pronounce the Hebrew letter as shin instead of sin... the word Shawkhak mean to crush...
 - Now, this pronunciation variance thing has already come up, if you remember the Sibboleth/Shibboleth event in Judges chapter 12 that Pastor Ryan preached on...
 - So read one way, the Philistines are calling for Samson to entertain or amuse them... and read in another way they are calling for him to come crush them...
- Embedded in the very word use of this scripture is a nod to God’s providence...
 - The author is reinforcing that the Philistines, in thinking they will make a mockery of Yahweh through his champion Samson, are actually calling out for their own destruction.
- 26 Samson said to the young man who was leading him by the hand, “Lead me where I can feel the pillars supporting the temple, so I can lean against them.” 27 The temple was full of men and women; all the leaders of the Philistines were there, and about three thousand men and women were on the roof watching Samson entertain them. 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 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. 31 Then his brothers and his father’s whole family came down, carried him back, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. So he judged Israel twenty years.
 - We see here God’s sovereign providence in two main ways:
 - First:
 - We see that Samson, having been delivered over by the hand of God to the enemies of God is given the opportunity to fulfill his calling to be the deliverer of Israel...
 - God had called Samson to be a deliverer and at every turn he had chosen selfish pride and self indulgence...
 - ...yet we see here that God was faithful to accomplish through Samson all that he had destined him for.
 - Bound and blinded, in a state of humiliation, Samson is brought into the inner sanctum of the pagan Philistines who no longer consider him a threat...
 - Thinking their demon god has triumphed utterly, in their drunken carousing, they neglect to take any precaution regarding Samson.
 - After killing a thousand, he is being guarded by a single young man.
 - After tearing important people limb from limb, he is given proximity to the Philistine elites.
 - After ripping out the defensive measures of the city of Gaza, he is allowed to place his hands on the structural architecture of the temple of Dagon.
 - And they reap the harvest of their blasphemous foolishness as the sanctuary of their demon god becomes the means of their destruction.
 - Samson fulfills his role at last... and delivers his people from their oppressors...

- There is second way we see God's providence:
 - God brought Samson low, in order to deliver *him* from his own selfishness and pride.
 - God allowed his servant to be humiliated so that Samson would finally call out to God in faith.
 - Throughout his story, Samson never calls upon the Lord to give him strength, never uses his strength to accomplish his God assigned ministry, only ever makes entitled demands of God, and takes the glory for every accomplishment.
 - Yet here, though it is still touched by selfish motives of revenge, Samson calls out like the thief on the cross... Remember me God... Give me strength once more... so that I may do what you set me apart to do...
 - And then he did it...
 - He gave his life in the power of and obedience to God
 - Where the spirit of lust had weakened him and delivered him over to his enemies, the Spirit of God empowered him and delivered his enemies over to him.
 - Samson is a hero for **this**... this humble dependence and obedience to God... though it cost him his life.
 - Brothers and sisters... no matter how given over to your sin you may be, in this age of grace it is not too late to repent of your sin and return to the Lord... his mercies are new every morning...
 - It is not too late to call out in faith, though your sin may have taken you places you never wished to go and kept you there longer than you ever thought possible...
 - It is not too late to abandon your foolishness and turn to the Lord...
 - God's merciful providence is revealed in Samson's death
- Conclusion:
 - So... What do we do with Samson. He led a pretty despicable life, yet he is in the hall of faith alongside some other really questionable characters.
 - We can't really look up to him in his life, though we can in his final moments.
 - Certainly he warns us of foolish living,
 - But I think mostly, we look to him as a type... Patrick talked about him as a type of Israel... Jeff talked about him as a type of a fool from Proverbs...
 - But Samson is also a type of Christ... a foreshadowing... a signpost providing information about Jesus...
 - Like Christ, his birth is prophesied by a supernatural being.
 - Like Christ, his ministry will be one of deliverance.
 - Like Christ, he was consecrated unto the Lord.
 - Like Christ, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him.
 - Like Christ, he was despised and delivered over by his own people.
 - Like Christ, he was horrifically marred and mocked by his enemies.

- Like Christ, his death brought about the destruction of his enemies, though his enemies thought they were triumphing.
 - But we see that Samson still needed to be delivered from the power of sin...
 - Though he was a strong man physically, he was as much a spiritual weakling as any of us...
 - Were we to put our ultimate hope in someone like Samson, we would only ever be disappointed...
- But... Brothers and sisters, Christ is our true and better Samson.
 - Where Samson continually violated his vows to God, Christ obeys God in all things, keeping the covenant in all things perfectly.
 - Where Samson used his position and power to pursue his selfish lusts, Christ uses his power and authority to accomplish the will of Yahweh.
 - Where Samson exploited women for sexual gratification and men for status, Christ abstains from lustful self-indulgence and treats all manner of people honorably.
 - Where Samson took revenge on all perceived slights, Christ shows mercy to those who wronged him, even forgiving those who executed him.
 - Where Samson ripped the gates of the enemy city down to escape his own foolish consequences, Christ tears down the gates of hell and opens the gates of heaven for all who believe.
 - Where Samson delivered his people for a time from the oppression of the Philistines, Christ delivers his people fully and finally from the oppression of sin and death.
- We can put our hope in Christ and find him strong enough to bear our sin, our shame, our weakness, and our dysfunction.
 - We can put our hope in Christ and find him faithful to deliver us from our enemies time and again
 - We can put our hope in Christ and find him trustworthy with our lives and worthy of our unmitigated praises.
 - Come to Him this morning and discover that Christ is no flawed hero... he is more wonderful than you hope he could be... more patient than you could imagine him to be... and more willing to rescue you than you are even willing to be rescued.