

The Savior Crushed

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[0 : 00] All right, Judges chapter 16, and we're going to read just a few verses here at the beginning, and then we'll work our way through the whole story, probably doing less reading today and more summarizing, just as you know, and I'll do my best to give the appropriate references as we go.

Okay, Judges chapter 16, let's begin reading at verse 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. And when the people saw him, they praised their God.

For they said, our God has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us. This is the gospel of Dagon, the gospel of the Philistines.

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.

[1 : 20] They made him stand between the pillars, and Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, let me fill the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.

Now, the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof, there were about 3,000 men and women who looked on while Samson entertained.

Have you ever hit a low point in your life? Like a legitimately low point in your life, and stop to ask yourself, how did it all come to this?

What went wrong for my life to be in such a mess now? It wasn't always this way. There were good days before. There were passionate days before.

There was joy before. But at that particular moment, all of that is gone. You've hit rock bottom, and you're just trying to figure out how did it all come to this?

[2 : 31] How did we get here? How did we get here with Samson? Samson, we left him at the end of chapter 13 last week as a young man, chosen, blessed, empowered by God.

But we pick up the story here in chapter 16. 20 years have passed. Samson is captured, and he's now the object of entertainment for the enemy.

And even worse, it's apparent that whatever Samson has done to get to this point has given the Philistines a reason to worship and glorify Dagon.

He is the cause for their worship. The people of God, they're supposed to declare and display the glory of Yahweh, the one true God.

Samson has given them a reason further to reject the Lord and to actually make a mockery of Him. Everything about this scene that we just read, it shows Samson as a miserable failure because that's exactly what Samson was.

[3 : 53] His life was supposed to be devoted to the Lord so that all would know that Yahweh is God, but he failed miserably, living in such a way as to bring shame to the name of the Lord instead.

And once again, it becomes clear, as we've seen so many times in the book of Judges, that this narrative really isn't ultimately about Samson fighting against the Philistines. This is about Yahweh's war against false worship, not only among his people, but in the world itself.

Well, how did it come to this for Samson? What went wrong for him to be in this position? And is there actually any hope that the situation can change and to be improved?

Whether we're asking those questions of Samson or maybe we're even asking those questions this morning of our own lives, there are answers to be found in this particular story and in these three chapters.

So what I want to do is work our way kind of quickly through the story itself to see what went wrong and then to see if any of it can actually be redeemed.

[5 : 06] And so, as I said, it's three chapters that we're going to go through. I'm probably not going to do as much reading as normal. We'll do some summarizing, but I'll note those things as we go, okay? The big thing that this boils down to, we're asking the question, what went wrong for Samson?

Is Samson essentially, at the heart of it all, resisted the call of God on his life? And that's what I want you to see in these chapters, resisting God's call. Now, one major thing that comes very clear as we read through the narrative is this.

Samson is the nation of Israel epitomized in a single individual. Samson is the nation of Israel epitomized in a single individual.

Like the nation itself, he was chosen by God from conception. He was empowered by God.

He was set apart from everyone else to be a man devoted to the Lord. God gave the nation of Israel his law. He gave Samson the Nazarite vow.

[6 : 16] Both things were to separate them, cause them to stand out as uniquely devoted to the true God. And Samson's vow was not for a limited amount of time.

His life from conception to death was to be a life that exemplified the glory of God and the zeal of the Lord. But while he enjoyed the benefits and the blessings of being God's man, Samson mostly just wanted to do what was right in his own eyes.

That's the very language of the passage. If you set your eyes on chapter 14 and verse 7, then he went down and talked with the woman for she was right in Samson's eyes.

Over and over through the story, Samson sees what he wants and he goes after what he wants, no matter what it costs him.

He just wants to do what's right in his own eyes. Fact is that living devoted to God as a sinner in a fallen world can be quite a burden.

[7 : 25] And like Israel, Samson seemed to continually resist, maybe even resent the call of God on his life.

So whenever what he wanted went against what God said, Samson, along with the nation of Israel, did what was right in their own eyes.

Let's just see it in the narrative. First, though God said not to marry the people of the land, Samson demanded that his parents allow him to marry a nameless Philistine woman.

When enjoying a bit of honey meant touching a dead animal and breaking his Nazarite vow, Samson took the honey anyways. He then again despised his Nazarite vow when he threw his wedding feast by the vineyards of Timnah, where he and his Philistine friends indulged in drunkenness as, quote, the young men used to do.

And all of that's just the first 10 verses. Samson was supposed to be the one to deliver Israel from Philistine control.

[8 : 40] But chapter 14 suggests that he much preferred to live among the Philistines and to behave like the Philistines instead. He was an Israelite who desperately wanted to be a Philistine.

And like many of us, Samson wanted to be part of the world that God had called him to separate from. But it didn't take very long for him to discover that the world wasn't nearly as interested in him as he was in it.

So after this bizarre drinking game that involved the riddle of the lion that he had killed, Samson was betrayed by his friends, betrayed by his new wife, betrayed by his father-in-law, and so he retaliated.

He went and he killed 30 men and then he tied up a bunch of foxes and lit their tails on fire in order that he could destroy all of the Philistines' crops. Now that, in Samson's mind at that point, is not zeal for the Lord.

It's zeal for his own vengeance. They had taken away his future by taking his new wife and given it to his best friend. So Samson retaliates by robbing them of their future, by destroying all of their supply of food.

[10 : 09] You can read all about it in 1411 through 158. But here's the truth about Samson. Just like Israel, Samson was on the downward spiral of apostasy, moving closer and closer and closer to fully abandoning all devotion to the Lord.

But what we find in the midst of that is that God still was abundantly merciful and patient toward his carnal servant. Even using Samson's sin as an opportunity to fight against the Philistines.

Samson doesn't care about God's zeal in killing those 30 men at Ashkelon. He doesn't care about the zeal of the Lord in destroying the crops with the foxes.

Yet God uses even his sin to fight against those people. Samson's over here doing what's right in his own eyes and God's over here even using what's right in Samson's eyes to accomplish his work, to accomplish his will in fighting against the Philistines.

But after his own people even turned against him, the men of Judah, they turned him over to the Philistines to be executed, God still empowered him to kill a thousand men.

[11 : 34] An amazing feat. Probably his greatest feat until the end of his life. And you know, God even used him as he was breaking the Nazarite vow.

He killed them all with the jawbone, the fresh jawbone, the text says, of a donkey, another carcass, another thing Samson wasn't supposed to touch to begin with.

And that's what he grabs as his instrument of war. And God doesn't say, never mind. God uses him even though he's a sinner, even though in the act of using him, he's sinning against the Lord.

But there is a bright spot here at the end of chapter 15. Look with me at chapter 15, verse 18. This is after he's just defeated those men and he's on the brink of death, physical death.

He was very thirsty and he called upon the Lord, Yahweh, and said, you have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant. And shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised.

[12 : 45] And look what God did. This is amazing, isn't it? Samson isn't repenting here. Just like Israel never repented. Samson's crying out for help. And God helps.

God split open the hollow place that is at Leahy and water came out from it. And when he drank, his spirit returned and he revived. Therefore, the name of it was called En-Hakor, which means spring of him who called.

It is at Leahy to this day. And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines 20 years. So Samson's on the brink of death and as Israel had always done when facing ruin, he cried out to God for help. And the God of grace heard his cry. It's amazing. Out of love for his chosen one, the Lord supernaturally sustained him.

Which was a crucial experience for Samson that will later influence his actions at the end of his life. We'll come back to that. Here's what God was teaching him.

[13 : 53] He was teaching Samson in that moment that if he cried out in faith, the Lord would save him. That no matter how far he'd run from God's call, the Lord would hear the prayer of faith and he would answer him and he would help him and he would restore him.

Well, chapter 16 is where Samson hits rock bottom. It begins in the first three verses by him taking a prostitute in Gaza, which was a major Philistine city.

And the people, of course, when he gets to Gaza in the night to sleep with this prostitute, they recognize him. They set a trap to kill the man who had been such a pain in their necks.

But again, even though he was there because of his own sin, God delivers him. He again strengthens him to remove the gates of the city and escape back to Israelite territory.

But still, Samson's greatest sin comes next. Look at verse 4 in chapter 16. After this, he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah.

[15 : 14] 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. That is an enormous amount of money. We've seen pieces of silver offered for wickedness once before in the book of Judges.

It was with Abimelech. He was given money in order that he could hire worthless fellows to go and fight against all of Gideon's sons. He received 70 pieces of silver.

There were five lords of the Philistines historically. Five lords of the Philistines telling this one woman, each of us will give you 1,100 pieces of silver for you to do this thing for us.

This is an enormous amount of money. Verse 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.

[16 : 20] Samson said to her, If they bind me with seven fresh bow strings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man. Then the lords of the Philistines brought

up to her seven fresh bow strings that had not been dried and she bound him with them.

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 bow strings as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire.

So the secret of his strength was not known. Now surely you would expect that any reasonable man would say, I don't think this woman has my best interest at heart.

But notice what he does. Delilah said to Samson, Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound.

And he said to her, If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man. So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson.

[17 : 34] And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber, but he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread. Then Delilah said to Samson, Until now, you have mocked me and told me lies.

Tell me how you might be bound. And he said to her, If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pen, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.

So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into a web. Can we just appreciate his ability to sleep at this moment? And she made them tight with the pen and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson.

But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pen, the loom, and the web. And she said to him, How can you say I love you when your heart is not with me?

That's ironic, isn't it? You have mocked me these three times and you have not told me where your great strength lies. And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.

[18 : 43] And he told her all his heart. And he said to her, A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazarite 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. For the first time in the whole narrative, we meet a woman with a name, Delilah.

She was in league with the Philistine rulers, but Samson gave her his heart. But Delilah doesn't love Samson. She loves money far more than she loves Samson.

And the Philistines, as I said before, were prepared to make her a very rich woman in order for her to expose the secret of his strength so that they may get some kind of advantage over the ravager of their people.

And after a few blatant yet failed attempts, Samson eventually tells her all of his heart. The truth is that his strength didn't come from his hair.

[19 : 55] There's no point in the text anywhere in the whole text until now that connects Samson's strength to his hair.

His hair didn't give him strength. God gave him strength. But Samson makes a correct theological judgment here with Delilah.

His hair was the only sign of devotion to God that he had not already violated. He's violated everything else. He's tried to marry a woman that's not Israelite.

He has, on multiple occasions, touched dead bodies, the carcasses of animals. Implicit in the text is his own drunkenness at his wedding feast.

There's nothing left for him to do in violating his devotion to God except bring a razor to his head. And he correctly makes that judgment. He knew that cutting his hair would be a final step toward apostasy.

[21 : 02] And though he didn't do it himself, and I think that's significant, he chose to drink, he chose to touch the lion and the jawbone of the donkey, he chose to go after the other woman, he does not choose to cut his own hair.

Though he does not do it himself, I think he knew full well that Delilah was going to do it. Samson's not an idiot. After three times of him telling her one thing and her immediately doing that thing, that's when he tells her the truth?

Isn't it as if he kind of wants this strength to be gone at this point? Seems that way, doesn't it? Why would he want her to do this?

I think the answer is he just, as he said, simply wanted to be like any other man. But God had not called him to be like any other man.

God had not called him to live like any other man. But all he wanted was to just be like everybody else. And his sin had deceived him such that he believed that if he could just be rid of the burden of God's call on his life, that he would then be able to find true satisfaction and true fulfillment in the way that he wanted to live and at the same time he'd be able to have the love of his life.

[22 : 33] Which was a foolish judgment. Because the pleasures of sin never live up to what they promise. And the consequences are always worse than what we ever imagined them to be.

Look at verse 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.

Make sure to bring the silver. Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands and 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. And she said, the Philistines are upon you, Samson. And he awoke from his sleep and said, I will go out as other times and shake myself free.

But he did not know that the Lord had left him. And the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, brought him down to Gaza, bound him with bronze shackles and he ground at the mill in the prison.

[23 : 52] When Samson awoke from his sleep on that night, the situation was worse than he probably ever thought it would be. sin always promises more than it can actually deliver.

It never actually comes through. The Lord had left him. He didn't even know it. He awakens knowing that he's just told her all his heart.

Yet he still expects that the strength will be there. Another sign that it really wasn't about the hair itself. Even Samson thinks he'll still have the strength but then there's no strength.

There's no strength to fight. Not because his hair was gone but because the consequences of his sin had caught up to him. So the Philistines captured him, they took his eyes and they imprisoned him in Gaza until it was time to celebrate what they thought was a victory for Dagon.

In reality, Samson wasn't the victim of Dagon's judgment but Yahweh's judgment. But there's still a glimmer of hope.

[25 : 09] Look at verse 22. But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. True to the book of Judges, though Samson sinned against the Lord again and again and again and again.

God's limitless mercy shines through here. An encouragement to those of us who live more like Samson than we do like Jesus.

Barry Webb said, Samson may want to be as other men but God won't let him be so. There in the dank, miserable, degrading prison, God reclaims his wayward child.

But we're left wondering how much more glorious of a servant of God he might have been if only he had embraced his calling rather than resisting it.

I think Samson would have quite loved to sing the song that we often sing here. When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast.

[26 : 19] When the tempter would prevail, he will hold me fast. I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path for my love is often cold.

He must hold me fast. If I will be held, it must be him that does it. The regrowth of Samson's hair is a sign of God's relentless pursuit of his people.

Although Samson continually failed the Lord, the Lord would not abandon him. And what a glorious thought that is for those who belong to God cannot out sin his grace.

It can't be done. Here is Samson doing everything he could possibly do to get away from the call of God in a similar way to Jonah and yet God's grace is still there.

He will not let him go. So his hair begins to grow again. He'll not let my soul be lost. His promises shall last.

[27 : 27] Bought by him at such a cost, he will hold me fast. That's resisting the call. Now let's look at experiencing God's grace.

Experiencing God's grace. You're in chapter 16. Now jump down to verse 28. Now we're back in Gaza. Samson has been brought out for the people to mock him and to mock the Lord.

Verse 28, then Samson called to the Lord. Remember he's done that once before? You think he learned something there? Yeah, I think he did. Because he's doing it again here.

He calls to the Lord, oh Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, oh God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.

Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on one, his left hand on the other. And Samson said, let me die with the Philistines.

[28 : 34] Then he bowed with all his strength and the house fell upon the Lord's 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.

Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtail in the tomb of Manoah, his father.

He had judged Israel 20 years. For all Samson did wrong, he understood and he acknowledged that his strength did not come from within him.

It came from God. And you have to dig through a lot of sin to get to it, but underneath all the foolishness of Samson's life was a sinner who believed God.

We can even still discern a vengeful motive in his prayer, but it was indeed a prayer of faith for God to save his people by defeating the Philistines, which is exactly why the author of Hebrews named Samson as a man of faith whose life encourages us to look to Jesus who is the founder and perfecter of our faith.

[29 : 57] That's Hebrews 11 and Hebrews 12. Samson's there. Of all the people in the book of Judges that we were to say there's no way they're saved. There's no way they made it. Samson's probably at the top of the list, and yet he made it.

Why? Not because he had his life together, but because he was a man of faith. He believed God.

He believed God. There is irony in his final cry though, isn't there?

Please remember me, Samson prayed. He asked for God to do for him what he and all of Israel had repeatedly failed to do. Remember the Lord their God.

Yet no amount of sin will turn God's ear away from the one who cries to him in faith. Though we are unfaithful to him, he is ever faithful to those who call upon him.

So Jesus says, come to me then, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. And then he says, whoever does come to me, I will never cast out.

[31 : 13] Which is why Paul is so confident to say, everyone, whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Samson shows us that salvation is not earned by what we do.

Even the good that Samson did was tainted by his sin. All of it was. Even in his dying moment, he's crying out for vengeance for himself.

It's all touched by his own depravity. And yet despite that, God is gracious. Why? Why is God so gracious?

Because salvation is received by faith in the gracious and merciful God whose steadfast love endures forever. And for us, it is through faith in the person and the work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whom the writer of Hebrews says, for the joy that was before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

God heard Samson's prayer and answered him accordingly. knowing it would take his death to deliver his own people, God strengthens Samson one final time, which just remembers, which just reminds us that we can escape the ultimate penalty for our sin, but that doesn't mean that we'll escape the immediate consequences of our sin.

[32 : 52] Samson. Don't mistake that. Samson pulled down the two pillars, resulting in the destruction of all the Philistine governing officials, which was also a clear statement of Yahweh's power over Dagon.

And tragically, Samson dies with them. he was crushed so that his people might live.

And there's beauty to the last verse there, isn't there? Samson might have died with the Philistines, but he was buried with his family. Now think about that.

Israelites buried their dead rather than burned them. They buried them as a sign of preparation for what they believed would be a future resurrection. God used Samson to deliver Israel for 20 years, but in the end, Samson's body was laid to rest in anticipation of a greater Savior who would bring him true and eternal salvation.

It's all right there. Yeah, God used him to help, but even Samson needed a greater Savior. Even Samson died.

[34 : 16] Even Samson needed a resurrection. And that Savior is Jesus, who Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15, has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are fallen asleep.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order. Christ the first fruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ.

It's an experience of grace, a grace that I believe Samson enjoys today with Jesus in heaven. How do we see Jesus through the Samson cycle?

There's a few elements of Samson's story that do foreshadow the gospel of Jesus, and of course we're always looking for that in the Bible. All of the Bible is about Jesus. It doesn't matter if we're in the Old Testament or New.

We get to Jesus in the scriptures because the scriptures are ultimately about Jesus. And the Samson story, really to be honest, is not that difficult to find the connections. There's been other stories in the book of Judges that have been much more difficult to see it.

[35 : 28] It's pretty clear here. There's a few of them. Both of their births were miracles, showing God's purpose and using them in particular to bring a salvation to his people.

Like Samson, Jesus was arrested by his own people and turned over to the enemy for execution. But of course, at the end of the day, only Jesus is Jesus.

Samson's only pointing us forward to him. Samson was a sinner like the rest of us. Jesus is the eternal God who Peter said committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

But it's Samson's death that most points us to Jesus. Both brought salvation through self-sacrificing deaths.

But there is an important distinction that needs to be made. Samson got himself into that position because he was unfaithful to God. You know why Samson was in Gaza tied to two pillars being mocked without his eyes?

[36 : 39] Because Samson blew it. That was the result of his own sin. He was crushed for his sin. Jesus was crushed for our sin.

That's the distinction that must be made. Hear the words of the prophet from Isaiah 53. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. Just like Samson.

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of all of us. He was oppressed and he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.

[37 : 44] Like a sheep that before its shearers is silent he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And as for his generation who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living stricken for the transgression of my people.

And they made his grave with the wicked. With a rich man in his death. Although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of Yahweh to crush him.

He has put him to grief. And when his soul makes an offering for guilt he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days.

This is resurrection. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one my servant make many to be accounted righteous.

And he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many and he shall divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors.

[39 : 01] Yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors. Samson was crushed for his own sin. Jesus was crushed for our sin.

And the resurrection bit is perhaps the most important bit. Death had no claim on Jesus because Jesus never sinned.

sin. How could he never sin? Because he's God who cannot sin. And his crucifixion absorbed the wrath of God that was meant for us.

He lived the life we were meant to live. He lived the life Samson was meant to live. And he died the death we deserve to die. And then God raised him.

And why did God raise him? To show that his sacrifice on the cross was sufficient to forgive our sins. And then Christ graciously, lovingly, the Lord of all creation, turns and he invites you to receive this life through faith in what he's done.

[40 : 26] Not to earn it by being the anti-Samson. To receive it in the same way that Samson received it. As a sinner with no hope.

But with faith in the one who is the true Savior. Who has done what no other Savior could ever do. And he invites us to it freely.

come to me and I will give you rest and I will never cast you out. Sin against me every day of your life.

I won't let you go. I won't cast you out. Because you're mine. Because the price that I paid on the cross was not just the price for the sins you've committed up to the moment of your faith.

But even for the sins that you commit after. And what a glorious gospel that is.