

Male & Female Samson & Delilah

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[0 : 00] Our God, we turn to your word again, and we ask that as we read the stories and encounter the characters, we may indeed counter you, our God, in the person of your Son, Jesus Christ, and you, by your Holy Spirit, will inform our minds and inflame our hearts in love for you.

Father, we may have a single desire, and that is in all the circumstances of our lives, to be unashamedly the disciples of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Well, you may know that we are today looking at Judges chapter 16.

Oh, well, it's really the whole of the story of Samson, which runs from 14 to 16 in the book of the Judges.

Now, you will know, just a quick review of history. God promised the land to Abraham and to his children, and Abraham believed God, and went in and claimed the land.

[1 : 20] Under famine, they went down into Egypt, where Joseph was second in command. They were there for a long period of time, and they came under slavery from Pharaoh, who didn't know them.

And Moses went to Pharaoh and said, let my people go. And Pharaoh reluctantly did. They crossed the Red Sea. They went into the wilderness, and they wandered there for 40 years.

And finally, Joshua led them out of the wilderness, across the Jordan River, and into the land which God had given to Abraham.

They were then, following Moses and Joshua, ruled not by a general nor by a prophet, but by the judges. And among the judges, there was the great warrior queen, Deborah.

And there was the farmer soldier, Gideon. And there was the Robin Hood outlaw, Jephthah. The last of the judges was Samuel, who crowned Saul to be king.

[2 : 33] And preceding Samuel was Samson, the man we're trying to look at today. We're looking at him in a special series, really, of talking about the relationship between a man and a woman, and the peculiar dynamic that forges history that is made out of these amazing unions.

We looked at Adam and Eve, and last week at Isaac and Rebecca, and this week we're looking at Samson and Delilah. Now, Samson was for 20 years a judge of Israel.

And that means that he was there for a long time. And he was, in spite of the fact that his exploits don't take very long, he was there for a good length of time.

And if you look at, don't, but if you did, I'll tell you what you would read. Chapter 13 of Judges begins, And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for 40 years.

So that Samson was a judge of Israel when they were subject to the Philistines. Now, this has a peculiarly appropriate application to our day and age, because what happened to them when they went into the Promised Land was that they found the Canaanites were there, and the Canaanites were good farmers and understood agriculture, and were able to reap much wealth from the land.

[4 : 16] And so they were absorbed by the culture of their times, swallowed whole, so that they really lost their identity as the people of God.

That's what, of course, is happening to the church today. We are being swallowed whole by this dynamic culture that we belong to, and we have all but lost our identity as the people of God.

We may be able to get a rally together on one issue or another from time to time, and we may be able, through the high courts of the ecclesiastical establishment, to speak thundering and profound words on some of the issues of our day.

But largely, the church has just about disappeared into the culture in which we live. And that was the case for Samson. Samson, when Samson was the judge of his people, they had the Canaanites had just about absorbed them, and the Philistines, a warrior people, had come in and subjugated them, and they had just lost about everything.

Lost all their sense of history, their sense of the Lord being their God, all their strength as the people, all their joy. It was just a shadow of what it had been.

[5 : 39] And then along comes this wonderful man, a kind of Rambo of the Old Testament, but who is to be for them the awareness of God still being their God and still able to do what he has always done.

And he picks this man, Samson. It's interesting that Samson becomes for us the great picture of strength in the Old Testament, in the whole of the scriptures, if you want.

He was a mighty man indeed. You will remember he had several exploits. I don't want to go through them all because they're too tantalizing, and you'd love to read them, and they're all right there.

And you will be scandalized by them. And so in the hope of being scandalized, I commend to you chapters 13, 14, 15, and 16, and you can read them for yourself.

But there is one incident, you know, when Samson went off and spent the night with a prostitute in Gaza. And the people of Gaza locked the city gates and said, we've got him trapped.

[7 : 02] Samson arose at midnight and took the city gates and lifted posts and all and carried them away to a near hillside and left them there for the people of Gaza to see when they woke up in the morning ready to put him to death.

He was a man of enormous strength. And what I think you need to understand is that this enormous strength of the man came because the Spirit of the Lord was promised to him before he was born.

When he was a boy, the Spirit of the Lord began to stir in him. And when he was a man, the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him.

And he was a man of singular strength whom God used. Now, when you read the commentaries on this, they're all very apologetic about Samson because he was sexually a very immoral man.

It's almost impossible, isn't it, to say anything about that without getting into trouble. That's again why I want you to read it.

[8 : 22] I mean, if I try and justify him, I'll be in trouble. If I don't justify him, I'll be in trouble. So I have to leave it to you to read. But the significant thing is that the scriptures are not fundamentally about Samson, but they're about the God of Samson and the God of Israel and how he had this perverse and disobedient people and how he worked among them by choosing this one man.

And in this one man, demonstrating his power and his continuing purpose towards his people. And he did that to Samuel.

The particular incident that I want just to emphasize on, I want to lay emphasis on, is the relationship between Samson and Delilah.

Samson and Delilah. And the relationship was that Samson had proposed to and involved in a marriage feast with one Philistine woman.

And the Philistines had betrayed him and treated him very badly, only inciting his wrath against them. He then is told, they tell the story of his visit with the prostitute in Gaza.

[9 : 56] And then it talks about the third woman in his life who was Delilah. And you had that read for you this morning. The Philistine, you see, in a sense, Samson was not like Rambo.

He didn't have guns in both hands. Everything he did, he did just with his hands, except on the one occasion when he used the jawbone of an ass to slay 1,000 Philistines.

That was the only weapon he ever used. And nobody ever helped him in the battle. He was always alone, a great champion of his people against the onslaught of the Philistines.

And so they were determined to get him. And they used his relationship to Delilah in order to get him.

And the lovely story of how Delilah bound him with bow strings and bound him with new rope and wove his head into the loom so that he was locked in there like a carpet being made.

[11 : 07] And he woke and walked away with it. And finally, after persistence, Delilah found out that the secret of his strength was because from the time he was born, he had been in a special relationship to the Lord.

And that was the source of his strength. Now, some people have wonderful physiques, and they count that to be the source of their strength. Some people are wonderfully well fed and watered, and so they have great strength, which comes out of that kind of nourishment.

But there is another kind of strength, and that is that the Lord is my strength. And it was this strength that Samson knew in a peculiar way.

And how appropriate it is, isn't it, to be talking about Samson after the Dublin inquiry is over. And we see all the most capable athletes in the country looking for a source of strength beyond their own and finding it in a bottle.

Well, I think the search is entirely appropriate, that you should look for strength beyond your own. But only if you look carefully at the story of Samson will you really discover in any depth where that strength comes from.

[12 : 44] That strength for Samson came from his relationship to the Lord. And his relationship to the Lord was marked by his abstinence from alcohol and unclean food.

And again, he wasn't very good at keeping that bargain, but the Lord honored him nevertheless. His strength came from the fact that a razor had never touched his head.

So that set him apart from other men, as indeed it still does. And as indeed it is still meant to do. I'm sure when somebody lets their hair grow, it's to give the message, in some way I recognize myself to be different.

And it may be entirely appropriate, and it may be a deception, but only the person who has the long hair knows what the answer to that is.

And the rest of us are left to wonder what it is. But that was the thing which Samson had. And that was the mark, the outward mark of his relationship to the Lord.

[13 : 58] Now his relationship then to, his relationship to Delilah, was what I would call something we know a good deal about.

It was a mutually exploitative relationship. He used her for his purposes, and she used him for her purposes.

It was to satisfy the lusts of his body that he used this woman, and she used him to satisfy the lusts she had for wealth.

For she was promised great wealth if she would betray her lover. And she seems to have single-mindedly set herself to do that. And one of the basic patterns, therefore, of our human life is something that we see a lot in human society, is mutually exploitative relationships, in which a man and a woman seek to exploit one another for their own purposes.

And if this exploitation is successful, they may last a good deal of time together, and if it isn't, they perhaps won't last very long together.

[15 : 26] Delilah was promised the 5,500 pieces of silver by the five princes of the Philistines. They gave to each other what cost them nothing, and they took from each other what cost them everything.

And that was the mutually exploitative relationship that we in our generation know a great deal about.

Well, there's one other thing about Samson. In fact, there's two other things about him. That's the thing that I want you to look at. And probably this one is, in some sense, of most practical value.

And that is this idea that strength comes from the Lord. There is a different source of strength. And I read part of the verse as we began the service this morning.

And I want to read another part of it now. Remember I began, Have you not known? Have you not heard? He gives power to the faint.

[16 : 39] Well, this is human strength, wonderfully and succinctly described in Isaiah chapter 40, when he says, Under the struggle and pressure of life, youths who are noted for their great strength and unflagging energy, the pressures are such that even youths shall fall and be, grow faint and weary.

And young men, with all the vigor of the prime of life, shall fall exhausted because the resources of their strength are not sufficient for the demands of their life.

You know what an obsession we have with accumulating physical strength. And you know how people devote hours of every day to accumulating physical strength.

And you know how it improves their outlook and their capacity and all sorts of things. But the nature of our world is wonderfully described.

Young men shall fall exhausted and youths shall faint and be weary. But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

[18 : 11] They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. Why?

Because they wait for the Lord. That fundamental reality at the base of our life, which is a relationship to the living God, is the primary source of strength that we have.

There are other sources. There is food and nurture. There is exercise and all those things. But the primary source is our relationship to the Lord.

A dishonest man cannot be strong. An immoral man cannot be strong.

The kind of strength that is needed in the demands of the society in which we live, the kind of strength that you have to have day by day in our world, is a strength which comes only, ultimately, from waiting on the Lord.

[19 : 22] Lord. And that, if you look this up through Scripture and follow it, you will be just amazed to see how consistently this is taught.

Again, Isaiah says, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength. An amazing statement.

There's a lovely statement by Paul when he talks about the care and concern he has in the work of the ministry on a day-by-day basis. And he says, our job is to declare Jesus Christ.

He says, working with every man and striving with every man that we might make everyone mature in Christ.

And he says, we do this work with all the energy which he mightily inspires within us.

[20 : 25] That's the kind of strength that's required. It's a weakness which Paul talks about.

The weakness of God is stronger than man. And in Peter, you read, my grace is sufficient. My strength is made perfect in weakness.

In our human weakness, but in the God who is the source of our strength. And that's what life is about. So that's one thing we can learn about Samson is that the male-female relationship may be mutually exploitative.

And if you want to see that, just read the story of Samson and Delilah. It puts it in very raw terms. The source of our strength is to wait upon the Lord.

There is no other source. Why do our hands hang down? Why are our knees feeble? Because we are not in touch with the source of our strength.

[21 : 42] Samson is a wonderful picture of Christ the Savior.

And that God chose to use him, I delight in. But again, I'm embarrassed by it too because he's, this ought not to be. But there it is, right in scripture.

So what are you going to do with it? But look at the ways in which this happened. In Hebrews 11, Samson is concluded among the great catalog of the heroes of faith.

So in a community and a country of lack of faith, Samson had this wonderful faith in God. and a willingness to be obedient to God in the calling which God gave him.

Samson was, in the literal sense, a Savior to his people. They, at the point of being utterly overcome, Samson came in and stood for them and beside them and fought for them.

[23 : 00] And that's what a Savior does. Samson was one man in the midst of a very perverse people, as was Jesus Christ.

The men of Judah came and took Samson and he submitted to their binding him and delivering him to the Philistines. His own people, for their own sake, betrayed him to their enemies.

is that not an echo of the life of Jesus Christ? That he was betrayed by those who were his own people?

His own people received him not. They betrayed him as Samson was betrayed. He fought alone using no weapon.

weapons. That is, Jesus fought without weapons. And, it's an important picture because his only strength, Samson's only strength, was his dependence upon the Lord.

[24 : 18] Jesus endured the cross despising the shame. And Samson was terribly humiliated. because when he was captured and his eyes were gouged out and he was forced to work like an animal at a mill.

And in those days and months in which he served in that way, God revived in him the spirit of the Lord.

as he went through that terrible humiliation, his strength was restored to him. You will remember the story of Samson's death when the Philistines in the time of their religious festival worshipping their god, Dagon, called for Samson, their chief prisoner, to be brought out in front of them that they might make fun of him and see this great man utterly humiliated.

And Samson is brought out into the temple of Dagon by a small boy who leads him because of his blindness. And as the Philistines gloat over him, Samson reaches for those pillars on which the whole temple is built and taking them in his arms, the spirit of the Lord comes to him and he crushes the pillars in and the building collapses.

And the story of Samson ends when it says the dead whom he slew at his death were more than those whom he had slain during his life.

[26 : 04] There couldn't be a more poignant echo of the great victory which Christ won at his death was greater than any he won by his life.

You see, Samson was a leader of his people and he was, in a sense, a picture of the great leader who was going to come.

And I want you to think of Samson and to think of Christ and to think of ourselves where we are as I read to you as I close these verses from the 12th chapter of the letter to the Hebrews.

Concerning strength, concerning our mutually exploitative way of life, concerning our champion and savior, Jesus Christ, foreshadowed in the dim, distant past of history by this amazing man, Samson.

Thinking of all this, hear these words. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, the sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

[28 : 00] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted in your struggle against sin.

You've not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. Have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons and daughter?

Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. The Lord disciplines whom he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as his own. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline?

If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you're illegitimate children. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respect them.

[29 : 15] Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant. Later, it yields the peaceful fruits of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, he says, lift up your drooping hands, strengthen your weak knees, make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. And see to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble.

So often that's what happens when people hear about Samson, or when people hear from the scriptures, a root of bitterness takes hold of them, and they miss the planting of the grace of God in their lives.

[30 : 50] So I commend to you Samson and Delilah, the relationship they had, which needs to be a terrible warning to us, the strength and the source of that strength, and the wonderful foreshadowing of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.