

**Message: From Left to Right**  
**By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison**  
**But... Sermon Series**  
**Judges 16:18-22**  
**June 14, 2020**

**From Left to Right** (Samson) The final verse in the Book of Judges states: *"In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* (21:25) **It was a chaotic time.** "Judges" isn't what we experience in a courtroom but were military action figures.

Samson, like Rahab, was quite a character. Someone said, *"Samson was a he-man with a she-weakness."* If we play with fire, we may get burned. **Samson had wandered so far away he didn't realize the shift.** We see again the little word, "but," as it introduces a new reality. *"But he did not know that the Lord had left him."* Actually, Samson left the Lord. What we sow, we reap. After Delilah deceived him and he fell and experienced the consequences, Samson's heart turned back to the Lord. Once again, we spot this transition in the verse with the word, *"But the hair of his head began to grow again..."* There are times when we come to our senses and turn back to the Lord. That's what happened to the prodigal son: *"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!'"* His older brother also had a "but" in the opposite direction: *"But he was angry and refused to go in."* (Luke 15:17, 28)

This is a story about repentance. When we've left the Lord, we can turn back to Him and get our hearts right. The Lord will graciously receive us and welcome us home. **APPLICATION:** I've never preached a sermon on Samson. It's hard to share a message where the hero is such a personal disaster and it results in carnage. The book of Judges is full of these stories because *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* (Judges 21:25) Like the garden party of Genesis 3, death and destruction result when people listen to the wrong voices and leave the Lord. When we become overconfident and self-sufficient, watch out. *"Anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man."* (1 Corinthians 10:12-13) One of my axioms is, *"Show me your friends and I'll show you your future."* Is there something or someone you need to avoid?

**The Bible as a Drama in 5 acts:**

1) **Creation** (Gen. 1-2) (2) **Fall** (Gen 3-11) (3) **Israel** (Gen 12-Malachi) (4) **Jesus** (Gospels) (5) **Church** (Acts 2)

**The Drama of Judges** The Israelites entered the Promised Land but had not conquered it. Judges follows. It lasts about 400 years. This is a difficult time with difficult people. These are disturbing & perplexing stories. Better days would come. God was still involved. The cycle in Judges: A) Apostasy B) Battering C) Crying D) Deliverance “Judges” were the deliverers. They were not legal judges (Judge Judy could have fit in the Book of Judges somewhere) but military figures trying to purge their enemies.

**The Drama of Samson** His (unnamed) **mom** had a problem she shared with 5 other women in the Bible: Sarai (Isaac), Rebekah (Esau/Jacob) Rachel (Joseph), Hannah (Samuel) & Elizabeth (John the Baptist). She is **barren**. “Barren” is not only being childless for an individual but symbolizes spiritual emptiness for entire nation.

An **angel** visits Samson’s parents and tells them: 1) She would have a son. 2) They are to take the **Nazaritic** vow for him. Numbers 6 describes four restrictions for someone who takes this vow: Don’t touch grapes (or wine), eat non-kosher, get a haircut or touch dead bodies. Samson will break all of them.

**Manoah**, Samson’s father, asks the angel: “**What’s his mission?**” Samson was to save the Israelites from the Philistines. He was the 12<sup>th</sup> and final judge. Judges shows the need for leadership.

His mission was compromised by his reckless behavior that cost him his life. Samson had the most potential and is also the most immature character in Judges. To paraphrase Churchill following The Battle of Britain: *Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.*” With Samson it might be: “*No one else in the Bible did so little with so much.*” (Unless it was King Saul). Samson’s story is an action movie – violence, sex, action, power, death & destruction. He is selfish, impulsive, sexually addicted & emotionally immature. Samson’s first words are: “*Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.*” (14:3) The parents, not the child, was supposed to choose. That describes Judges –*Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* (21:25)

Samson had 2 major problems: he was **IMPULSIVE** (“Get her for me!”) & **UNTEACHABLE**. It’s amazing he disregarded his parents who warned him to avoid that path.

Samson was supposed to defeat the Philistines, not marry one. This is Israel’s big problem. They were losing their identity. The Philistines easily could assimilate them. If they married the Philistines, they would become extinct as a nation in a couple of generations.

**Judges 16:18-22**

*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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.**<sup>21</sup> And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.<sup>22</sup> **But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.***

### 3 observations about this text.

- 1.) Acted **alone**. He was the Lone Ranger w/o Tonto. Adam had Eve. Moses had Aaron. Joshua had Caleb. Naomi had Ruth. David had Jonathan. Paul had Barnabas, Silas, Timothy. Jesus had Peter, James & John & the other disciples. Samson was alone. He doesn't take advice, work with others, participate or build teams. He doesn't need anybody. He is self-sufficient. He is a one-man wrecking crew. He has success. But he falls. He falls bc he thinks he will never fail. Where are his friends? How about you?
- 2.) Needed **boundaries** (*he had told her all his heart*). He should have known better. A similar story happened previously with a different woman. Delilah had proved she was not on his team. She was betraying him for material gain. Sounds like Judas' betrayal of Jesus.
- 3.) A strong **skill** set + very weak character. Diff. betw gifts/fruits. ("Doing" vs. "Being") Impressive on outside but weak on inside. A mighty warrior who was self-absorbed, sensuous and proud.

### **There are two BUTS...**

- 1.) **But he did not know the Lord had left him.** His hair was not the reality, but a symbol of God's presence. When shorn, he lost God's power & presence. *"Why Samson? Why did God use such flawed people to accomplish His will?"* As soon as I ask that Q then I am silenced bc we're ALL flawed. *"At least I'm not THAT bad"* ....when in reality, if I had the opportunity, I might even be worse. If we think we are righteous – watch out – pride leads us into danger. God works through sinners and through sinful situations. Jesus had harsh words for self-righteous.
- 2.) **BUT the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.**<sup>22</sup> This is redemption – the story of the Bible – God buying back what was lost. *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—<sup>33</sup> who through faith*

*conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,<sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were **made strong out of weakness**, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.*  
(Hebrews 11:32-34)

(4 of the 6 names are from the Book of Judges) Samson was certainly “made strong out of weakness.”

It's often our failures/weaknesses that bring us to the Lord. Judges 16:28 *Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes."*

There are tremendous differences, of course, between Samson & Jesus, but there are similarities, too. Both had angelic annunciations of their birth. Both were betrayed for money. Both were mocked & tortured & put on public display. Both died with outstretched hands. Both, in their death, crushed their enemies (the Philistines & Satan). All alone, beaten, chained, they both died - reviled and rejected.

They both ended up in prison.

Made me think of the late Chuck Colson, who started Prison Fellowship. He invited Bruce Wilkinson to speak @ a prison. BW had never been in a prison before. He was untrained as a prison speaker. He walked to the mic & told the 600 inmates gathered: “I’d like for you to step back ab 12 feet from the fence (was keeping the inmates separated from the speakers). Nobody moved. You don’t tell prisoners what to do. CC felt his stomach tighten. BW asked again. Nobody moved. CC prayed. 3<sup>rd</sup> time. “Men move back 12 ft.” Finally, the crowd cleared back from the fence separating them from the podium. BW said, “All of you who gave your lives to X today, or are already Xns, I want you to walk forward to the fence.” To CC’s amazement – 6 guys walked forward. Then 6 more. Then about 200 of the 600 came. Stood there looking with a quiet confidence. BW said, “Now all of you who stepped forward, I want you to turn around w. your backs to me. Look at the prison population. You are the church here. I want you believers to get down on your knees. I want to pray for you. The men you are facing is your mission field. Your job as Xns = to share the gospel with them. Love them. Serve them. As BW ended his prayer he asked if other inmates would like to follow Jesus. Men from all over that compound raised their hands. They were still in prison, but they were free indeed.

Humility. Courage. Community. Sharing the faith. That’s what the church is. It’s easy to forget our mission in life. HOFJ. WHERE is your mission field? Probably in

your own backyard. It's all around us. But, like S, it's easy to get caught up in other pursuits and to go "mission blind."

After hearing this message, what do you need to do?