



Rev. Frank Wang
Judges 16:4-31

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English Standard Version

Samson and His Weakness
The 4th Sermon in a topical series entitled,
Misused Stories of the Bible

1. Addressing the situation:

- a. Good morning! My name is Frank Wang. I'm one of the pastors here at Potomac Hills. Well friends, this obviously isn't how I envisioned delivering this sermon. Before we get started, I thought that I would encourage all of us as we feel acutely the loss of worship in person. For some of us in the congregation, this isn't a new feeling. But for the folks that had been worshipping in person, this week will feel a little jarring, a little disappointing, just a little less. But I would encourage you to take the time to stop, set aside our feelings of loss, and think through the privilege it is to worship, to have the Word of God proclaimed to our hearts. This week, we can clearly see the fallenness and brokenness of our world that keeps us from worship as it was intended to be. But the fact that we can worship at all is a marvelous wonder, for it is only by grace that we can worship at all. We'll be talking about that a little later on. We want to come to worship with the right mindset, starting at the right point: relying and depending on the grace of God for everything, even being able to do something as "normal"/"typical"/"expected" as going to worship.
- b. Now, our primary concern is the health of the congregation, especially the health of the Rist family. Please be praying for Mark as he continues to fight COVID. He has loved and ministered to us for so many years, working powerfully for the Gospel in each of our hearts. Let us love and care for him and his family just as he would for us.
- c. And before we start in on the sermon, a few things to note as we take measures to avoid the spread of infection. All community groups will be meeting online this week. Please talk to the elder in your community group or the community group host

to get login information. This also means that youth group will be meeting online. I'll be sending out information on that too.

- d. And finally, let's take a moment to thank God. We went 16 weeks of in-person worship without a case within the church that we know of. This is our first COVID case within the immediate church family that we know of. That's 7 whole months of wellness while the pandemic has ravaged the world. That is an immense blessing. Let us praise Him for that. And remember, that this is not unexpected. It was bound to happen at some point. And that it has taken so long to happen is such a grace to each of us.
- e. Ok, enough about our circumstances this morning. I hope that you've been going through the whole worship service with us this morning, and it's now time to turn our attention to God's Word.

2. Welcome

- a. If you would turn with me in your Bibles to the Old Testament book of Judges, we'll be in chapter 16. For those of you that are new or haven't been following along, we're in the midst of a series on the Most Misunderstood Stories in the Bible. If you remember a few years back, we did a series on the Most Misunderstood Verses in the Bible, and this is the sequel series. Our passage this morning is the very end of Samson's life, dealing primarily with his infamous relationship with Delilah. Since the passage is long, we'll be reading it as we go along. But before we dive in, let's pray.

3. Pray

4. Introduction – The Hunger Behind It All¹

- a. Parents, do you remember a time when your little child had a meltdown about something, but it was really actually because they were simply hungry? Maybe it was this morning, or maybe it was decades ago. You probably remember as if it was this morning. But when it's happening, it can be kind of hard to figure out sometimes because you've got this screaming child carrying on about who knows what. And we usually gravitate toward dealing with whatever the kid's screaming about.
- b. And so many times we get sucked into dealing with the presenting issue. It's easy and natural because that's what the issue is on the surface. But what we really need to do is to stop and think about when was the last time they ate something.
 - i. Incidentally this is true of teens, adults, and even senior pastors. When Dr. Dave gets grumpy, it's important to always have a sandwich or sub on hand to soothe him.
- c. Our passage is a little like that. The story of Samson and Delilah is really well known. The spiritual lessons that we should be learning seem to pretty obvious.
 - i. Don't give into lust.
 - ii. Don't marry outside of the faith.
 - iii. Don't squander the gifts that the Lord has given you like Samson did.
 - iv. Be strong like Samson, but don't sin like Samson.

¹ The background and exposition of this text is adapted from the commentaries Judges for You by Timothy Keller, pp. 151-165; Judges and Ruth: God in Chaos by Barry G. Webb, pp. 201-215 and from the sermons The Strength of Samson given by Dr. Tim Keller at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, on October 12, 1997 and Samson, Delilah, and Dagon by Dr. Cory Brock at First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, on July 12, 2020.

- v. Samson is a warning for what not to do. He's the cautionary tale for the consequences of sin.
- vi. Pretty easy and obvious.
- d. But like the crying child, or Dr. Dave, if we try to go for the obvious take-aways and applications, we're going to end up frustrated because that's not the real root of the issue or the main point of the passage. As with most of our misunderstood passages, we tend to focus down on the characters of the story rather than the person directing each of those characters. Samson and Delilah is not really about Samson and Delilah. Rather, it's about God saving His people through grace despite the flawed and sinful man that succumbs to pride, lust, and the temptation of Delilah. So really the story is just context for the overarching story of salvation and faith that the Lord is weaving together in and through Samson.

5. Roadmap

- a. So first, we're going to start when everyone else starts and look closely at Samson and Delilah. But we're not going to stop there. Because then we're going to look at Samson's life story and its context within the book of Judges. That will give us a wider perspective to understand how Judges 16 fits into God's overarching story.
- b. And finally, we're going to use that understanding to see how it points us to where the Bible always points us, to Jesus. So let's dive right in starting in Judges 16:4.

6. Samson and Delilah: Rejected Calling

- a. Read vs. 4-21

After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. 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." So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you."

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." Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings 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 bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

Then 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!" 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 pin, 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 the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web.

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." And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was

vexed to death. 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.”

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. 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 at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the Lord had left him. 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.

- b. So the big question is how could Samson be so dumb? 3 times she asked him the secret to his strength and used it to try to rob him of his strength! Surely, he knew what she was doing! So why does he stay? Why does he continue with her? Isn't it obvious that she doesn't love him like he loves her?
- c. I think that there's something else going on here. We are looking at this assuming that he wants to keep his strength. But what we don't realize is just how much Samson just wants to be “like any other man”, as verse 17 puts it, simply a normal man living with the woman that he loves. Samson's thinking, maybe if I tell her the truth, be vulnerable with her, then she'll love me as I love her. It's a delusion, but one that we've see time and again. Love makes us do crazy things sometimes.
- d. But it's more than that. Because Samson's desire to be with Delilah flies in the face of everything that he's supposed to stand for. He's in a sense throwing away God's call on his life because he's tired of carrying the weight of the secret, the weight of the position of judge, and ultimately, the weight of his Nazirite vow. And that Nazirite vow is the real issue here because it has shaped every part of Samson's life. Every time he brushes his hair out of his eyes, he's reminded that his whole life since before birth, really, has been set aside for God. In every waking moment, Samson is reminded that he is not his own. And he's tired of it. He simply wants to be with Delilah, like anyone else.
- e. But this trek to breaking his Nazirite vow didn't start when he met Delilah, as so many preachers would have us think. **“Beware of loose and foreign women because of the temptation that they bring.”** No, Samson had been on this road of vow breaking for a long time.
 - i. Remember, Nazirites are, according to the vows that we find in Numbers 6, supposed to do 3 things:
 1. Not drink wine or anything from the grapevine.
 2. No razor shall touch his head.
 3. He shall not go near a dead body.
 - ii. These 3 things would symbolize the person's consecration and separation to the Lord. But what has Samson done?
 1. In Judges 14, before any of Samson's conflicts with the Philistines, he was attacked by a lion which he tore to pieces with his barre hands. Later, he would reach inside the carcass to scrape some honey out of a hive that that had formed inside. Also, the jawbone he used to kill

1000 Philistines is “fresh”, meaning raw. So much for not going near a dead body.

2. Later in the chapter, Samson threw a wedding feast since he wanted to marry a Philistine woman. The word for feast here means that alcohol was present. There goes the vow to avoid wine.
 3. And now in Judges 16, there’s goes the hair. Samson has methodically broken every one of his vows in the lead up to his affair with Delilah.
- f. Plus, there’s also the call to deliver the Jews from the Philistines. How’s that going? Well, by the time we get to Delilah, he’s attempted to marry a Philistine woman at the beginning of Judges 14 and gone to the Philistine capital to spend a night with a Philistine prostitute at the beginning of Judges 16. He’s not so much trying to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines as he is addicted to their women. Now sure, he’s killed about 1000 of them, but that’s a far cry from deliverance. Plus, in Judges 15, it doesn’t seem like Samson had much of a problem with the Philistines. All the violence and conflict that he has is done out of revenge or self-defense. In Judges 15, he was asked why he was fighting with the Philistines. His responses was, **“As they did to me, so have I done to them.”** That doesn’t sound like he’s killing Philistines out of a desire to free the Israelites. Rather, it’s simple revenge.
- g. Then we can add to all of that verse 20 of our passage today.
- i. *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.*
 - ii. He thought, “I will go out as I have always done and destroy my enemies with my outrageous strength.” Verse 20 reveals so much about how Samson viewed the supernatural strength that enabled him to kill thousands of Philistines and rip the city gates out and carry them 40 miles. That’s Judges 16:3 by the way. Samson thinks of his strength as **his**. He doesn’t think of them as gifts given by God that could also be taken away. His outrageous strength has delivered him from one sticky situation to another throughout his life. And how he thinks, “How is this time going to be any different?”
- h. So why did he stay? Why was he so dumb? What we see is a self-assured, self-confident man who has broken vows left and right and rejected the call on his life to serve as Israel’s judge. He has been both captured by his lust for Philistine women and not captured by the call of God. And so he stayed because he wanted to be **“normal”**. And usually, this would be where sermons turns toward applications about following God and avoiding temptation. But that would be to laser focus on the story without considering the context. So let’s not stop here, and look at the context.

7. Transition: So let’s start at the beginning.

8. Samson and Delilah: The threat of assimilation

- a. Samson was chosen before conception to be the new judge. An angel of the LORD appeared to his barren mother to tell her to stop drinking wine and to touch nothing unclean because the child will be a Nazirite to God from the womb. That’s new. Usually, the Lord would have chosen one of the adults to rise up and lead the Israelites against their oppressors.
- b. But now, there was a different threat. The threat wasn’t that the Israelites were being oppressed. The threat was that the Israelites **didn’t seem to mind**. The cycle that we

see in the book of Judges is that the people sin against God, then God sends oppressors as discipline. Under that oppression, Israel turns back to God and cries out for help. So, the Lord sends a judge to deliver them and rule over them. Once that judge dies, the people go back to their sin, and the cycle starts again. Only this time, the people don't cry out to the Lord. In Judges 15, after Samson had started making trouble with the Philistines, 3000 men of Judah confronted Samson about his political agitation. 3000! They said, "*Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?*". They then sought to bind Samson and turn him over to the authorities.

- i. Do you see what's making them upset? Samson is rocking the boat! He's resisting and antagonizing the Philistines, the very people that the Israelites ought to be itching to get rid of. "Don't you know that they are rulers over us?" That statement alone shows us that they've given up. They've fallen into despair. They've grown accustomed and comfortable with the oppression they're suffering. So much so that they don't want to rock the boat. The threat isn't oppression; it's ***assimilation!*** They were essentially a generation away from never knowing anything other than Philistine rule. They'd intermarry like Samson tried to do, and they'd be assimilated into Philistine culture. They'd cease to be a distinctive people of God.
- c. **And so the Lord didn't just need to deliver them, but He also needed to get the people to see that they needed deliverance.** And it's worth noting that the judgeship stories seem to get worse too. While we talk about a judges cycle of sin, judgment by God, crying out, and then deliverance, we actually should be talking about the judges spiral. It's a downward spiral as things seem to get worse.
 - i. At the beginning, the judges were mighty and righteous men that delivered the Israelites from their oppressors and ***"the land had rest"***. For the 4 judges that we get including Gideon, each of their stories ends with "and the land had rest" for x number of years. For the judges after Gideon, that phrase, "the land had rest", disappears. Rather, the judges simply judge Israel, and their judgeships typically get shorter too. We even see conflicts arising within the people of Israel, not just against outside oppressors.
- d. By the time we get to Samson, who is the last judge who is mentioned by name, things were really bad. The people didn't want to turn back to God or even cry out to Him for deliverance. They were comfortable in their sin and suffering.
- e. And so, Samson becomes God's agitator between the Philistines and the Israelites, to rouse the people from their comfort and spiritual deadness. And when we look at it from a national and spiritual perspective, we can understand the final episode of Samson's life as the cosmic showdown between the God of Israel and the God of the Philistines. Let's read Judges 16:23-31.

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." 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. 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.” 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.

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.” 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. And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords 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 Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years.

- f. This was a worship service. Notice the sacrifice that was being prepared? It was supposed to be as a victory celebration of Dagon, the primary god of the Philistines, over the God of Israel. That’s verse 24. It was a chance to rub their victory in God’s face. That was why they called to bring out Samson. It was meant to humiliate him as well as to humiliate his God. It was a public declaration of the superiority of Dagon over God. And even the mill that they stuck Samson in during his imprisonment was a form of humiliation since Dagon was the god of grain and wheat. They were making Samson, the chosen judge and ruler over Israel, process the bounty of what Dagon gave to the Philistines.
 - g. But we know how the story ends. Samson pulled down the temple and killed 3000 of them, killing more in his death than he had in his life. But the real victory is God over Dagon. God’s chosen instrument destroyed Dagon’s temple, killed Dagon’s people, interrupted Dagon’s sacrifice, and shown Dagon to be impotent to stop him. The humiliated, supposedly weak, and captured Samson, who was no threat at all, utterly destroyed Dagon’s stronghold.
 - h. Samson won a victory in that Dagon was shown to be nothing in comparison to God, and in that there would be conflict between the Philistines and the Israelites until they would ultimately be delivered into the hands of the hero of next week’s passage: David.
9. **Transition:** And so, knowing that there was a cosmic conflict angle to Samson’s conflict with the Philistines and that his life was serving as a wake up call to the Israelites, we actually have an interesting situation where God is showing us a bit of His grace. Because we’ve read our whole passage, and yet, we’ve left one verse out. Verses 22. “*But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.*”

10. God’s faithful grace to sinners

- a. That line about the hair of his head growing again isn’t meant to say that the strength is in the hair. It’s magic! Long hair equals strength. The boys in the youth group are mostly all rocking some long locks of hair, but I think it is safe to say that they can’t kill thousands of soldiers with the jawbone of a donkey or rip city gates off their mountings and haul them 40 miles as we see in the verse that comes immediately before our passage.
- b. Rather it's to say that God remained steadfastly faithful to Samson despite everything he had done to reject God and God’s call on his life. Do you see the wonderful imagery of God’s steadfastness to Samson? Samson did everything in his power to

break his connection with God, that Nazirite vow. He allowed his hair to be shaved, which was the last remaining tie to the Nazirite vow, to his consecration or sanctification to the Lord. But God would not let him go, just as surely as the hair on his head grew.

- c. And why? Samson definitely didn't deserve to be God's instrument to begin Israel's deliverance nor to be granted the strength to have victory over the Philistines. He had lost the right to be Israel's judge long ago. No, he was saved and used for God's purposes **because God is faithful to the faithless.** That's the nature of grace. It comes to those that don't deserve it.
- d. And looking at the wider view of Israel as a whole, they too had lost the right to be called God's people. They were faithless, continually turning from God to idolatry. How many times have we seen the people turn from God back to idolatry? As many judges as we have in the book of Judges. And now, they're not even crying out to God. These Israelites love their sin, have gotten comfortable with it, and even protect it from God's agent, Samson. Do they deserve God's faithfulness to them when they are so very faithless? No! And yet, He is faithful to begin to save them from themselves, **when they didn't even want it in the first place.**
- e. And that's the core of the Gospel. Jesus came to save the lost. Jesus came to save people that couldn't and wouldn't save themselves. Jesus came for those who were dead in their trespasses and sins. These people were by nature, children of wrath, living in the passions of the flesh and carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. Sounds like Samson, right? And it also sounds like you and me.
- f. Friends, when we look at the story of Samson and Delilah, we are quick to condemn Samson. But when we do so, we condemn ourselves. How many of us have run from God's call on our lives? How many of us have put it off, saying, "Just not now"? Whenever we fail in our various callings, it's not just that we can't do it, but that we don't want to do it. Let me give an example.
 - i. For instance, students, the primary call on your life from God is to be a student. How many of you were and are just like me and are massive procrastinators? Or maybe you simply aren't doing well because you can't be bothered to turn in work? There's an epidemic of that going on at all levels of schooling. Or maybe there's something or someone else that's sucking up all of your time and attention. That doesn't *feel* like I'm rejecting God's call for my life, but that definitely is us holding God's call for my life at bay, keeping it right where **I** want it. God's call for my life on my terms. That sounds like Samson.
 - ii. Or parents, we're called to be gracious, patient, and attentive to the children that we are called to steward. This one is really hard. When we're at our limit and beyond, we're still called to image Christ, to die to self, and to show grace that is beyond ourselves. I'll be the first to say that I so easily run from that call straight into what I want to do, which is be angry, snap, or be distracted by my phone.
 - iii. Or what about the call to be witnesses to the grace and Gospel of Jesus? How are we doing with that call? I'll bet that we have a whole list of excuses and reasonings to justify running from that particular call. I know that I do. The list goes on and on.

- g. But as with Samson and Israel, God was not content to leave us there in our death and transgression. Rather, God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. For it is by grace that we have been saved, and He has raised us up with Him. And He has seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. I basically lifted all of that from Ephesians 2.
- h. My friends, this is the wonder of the Gospel. We are often like the characters in the Bible that are the worst. It's easy to see sin in them, and when we're honest, it's easy to see sin in ourselves. We don't deserve anything but wrath, judgment, and death. That's a 100% slam dunk, full stop. We have no hope, nothing to stand on, no chance. **Except** for the grace of Jesus. Because He is faithful to the faithless. This is why we can rejoice that we're worshipping at all this morning. Because it is only by grace that we come to worship.

11. Conclusion: What are we to do?

- a. Now, we ought to sit and dwell on those great truths for as long as we can. But we also need to apply this practically to our lives. Now that we know the Gospel of grace, what are the implications for our lives? Why do we care, and how does this change us? Well, all of the things we would say about Samson are true. We ought to embrace our callings. We ought to be faithful to the Lord. We should beware of temptation and lust. But we also need to know that we can't do it. We have a call that we cannot hope to complete. And so we should do what Samson did and what Jesus calls us to do. To come to the Lord and ask for help. The Lord is the hero of the story, the main point of it all. He's the one with the strength to turn the sinful into useful instruments for His purpose. He's the one to give grace to a sinner like Samson such that he ends up in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. And so let's end with 1 Thessalonians 5:23.
 - i. *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.”*
- b. Friends. Brothers. Sisters. We are called to be righteous and sanctified completely. That's not a high bar at all is it? That's our call. Nothing less. We don't have a hope to do it. How can we possibly keep our whole spirit, soul, and body blameless until the coming of Jesus Christ? We can't. But He who calls you is faithful; **He will surely do it.** Let us strive as hard as we can, not because we think that we can achieve something through our efforts, but because the Lord has given us the privilege of being a part of what He will surely do. He takes the lustful, arrogant, and sinful like Samson, and He accomplishes His purpose, to His glory. Do you believe that? That's something you need to pray about.

12. Pray