

O Be Careful Little Eyes . . .

Cycles of Sin . . . Stories of Grace – Part VII

Judges 16

Introduction

The story of Samson and Delilah is the tragic story of misguided love and greed. It is a story that box office hits are made of. It is a sordid picture that ends with shocking betrayal, pain, and death.

The last scene is about to be shot in the life of the rebellious judge. His leadership has spanned nearly twenty years, yet his exploits have accomplished little in unifying Israel or in bringing about repentance in the lives of the people. Perhaps this is because his own life was inconsistent and immoral.

Today, we pick up the story in Judges chapter 16, where Samson's activity, in fact, seems like old news.

Moral Corrosion at Gaza

Look at Judges 16:1.

Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.

Once again, we are given the subtle hint of Samson's problem – the weak chink in his armor. It is in this verse, as we read,

... *Samson . . . saw . . .*

Look back at Judges 14 to notice a common theme:

- Verse 1 – *Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah . . .*
- Verse 2 – *So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah . . ."*

- Verse 3b – . . . *But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me."*
- Verse 7 – *So he went down and talked to the woman; and she looked good to Samson.*

Samson's problem is not his eyesight, it is his focus. It is not the sin of observation, it is the sin of concentration.

Samson seems unable to control his lust. The scriptural record reveals his downward spiral, which left him blinded and enslaved.

The truth is, Samson was already blind – spiritually, and he was already enslaved – sensuously. It is more than ironic that his chief weakness was introduced with, ". . . Samson . . . saw . . ." and then, God will discipline him by allowing the enemy to remove his ability to see.

Notice what happens next, in Judges 16:2-3.

When it was told to the Gazites, saying, "Samson has come here," they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him." Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulder, and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron.

The weight Samson was carrying was between 4,000 and 5,000 pounds! This is about the same weight as a Buick Park Avenue!

The men of Gaza are all around waiting to attack. Samson comes to the locked gates and pulls the posts out of the ground. With a slight “hup,” he puts the gates and posts on his shoulders and walks uphill to the top of a mountain. It is no wonder that none of the men attacked him! The Gazites are left with a hole in their city walls and a major dent in their city budget!

What is happening? I will tell you – Samson has become invincible! The tragedy is that the display of his strength so closely follows the display of his sin!

Samson has been with a harlot and then, he rips the doors off the city. What has this done in Samson’s mind? It has deceived him into thinking that he is invincible. More dangerously, it has caused him to believe he is unaccountable to God or anyone else.

I am sure people clapped him on the back and said, “Wow, Samson, I heard about the city gates in Gaza! You were really something! Would you sign my Bible?!”

I would imagine no one mentioned the harlot in Gaza. Why? God seemed to be blessing in spite of it – right?!

Moral Destruction at Sorek

Samson has never been in a more dangerous position than at this time. He is a “sitting duck” for a sweetie named Delilah. He will be play dough in her hands.

Notice the very next event in Judges 16:4-5.

After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. The lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, “Entice him, and see where his great strength lies and how now we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.”

Delilah has been promised 1,100 pieces of silver by each of these lords, if she can extract Samson’s secret. Do you remember how many pieces of silver Judas got for betraying Christ? Thirty! Delilah is getting over 5,000! She will live comfortably for the remainder of her life.

Let me pause at this point, to make two observations about moral collapse:

1. Observation number one – moral failure always involves small steps.

In other words, it never happens in an instant. We never fall off a cliff morally; we go down a toboggan slope, until finally, we are going so fast that we cannot get off – and we crash.

Samson did not end up in a Philistine jail overnight. It was a process of steps that began in Judges chapter 14 and progressed downward.

I personally believe that the three women mentioned in Samson’s life were not the only women in his life. The way the scripture records his visit to Gaza is so matter of fact that it seems to indicate that it was standard fare for Samson. This was business as usual!

2. Observation number two – moral failure usually involves relevant needs.

Delilah is a Semitic or Hebrew name, not Philistine. She is the first and only Jewish woman Samson has associated with in the scriptural record. She is the only woman the scripture says he “loved”. Perhaps she is his first attempt to have a long-lasting relationship with the “proper” kind of woman.

Realize as well, that Samson, by this time, is middle aged. So get the picture of a twenty-five year old atlas out of your mind. Samson is probably around fifty years of age. He is time worn and battle weary – he is anything but sharp. He has judged Israel alone for twenty years, and he has compromised his character and sacrificed his purity openly and unashamedly. An immoral lifestyle has diluted his discernment.

Delilah represents perhaps, a final attempt to settle down. It is obvious from the scripture that they lived together. At this point in his life, Samson needs her – otherwise he would have run. He should have run, but chose to stay.

Several years ago, a young lady who was engaged to be married, came to my office. She was a believer who had fallen in love with a young man who did not care about the Lord at all. She was wanting my approval, as her pastor, and marriage counseling. In a very short period of time, the scriptures had confronted her with God’s disapproval of their relationship. I told her that what she really needed was not counseling, but courage to make a decision –

to either follow Jesus Christ or to marry the man. She put her head in her hands and wept. Then, after regaining her composure, she said, "I choose to marry him."

Let us take a look at the choice Samson made. Note Judges 16:6.

So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you."

Notice the cold, almost obvious tactic she uses on Samson. A woman in love would want to know how she could protect her loved one, but read what Delilah said in this verse again,

. . . "Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you."

Samson is so dumb that he does not see through her! Delilah's not going to win an Oscar – her acting stinks. Samson is already blinded by his lust.

What follows is a little cat and mouse game – Delilah is the cat and the strong man is the mouse. The trouble with this story is – the mouse is dumb enough to think he can play with a cat. The name of the game is called, "Let's play, 'The Philistines are coming'."

The first move is found in Judges 16:7-8.

Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh cords [bow strings] that have not been dried, then I will become weak and be like any other man." Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

These "lords" are the five kings of the five major Philistine cities. They are the ones sponsoring this game.

More than likely, Samson is asleep. Look at Judges 16:9.

Now she had men lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered.

Let me correct the typical version of this story. I always believed the Philistines rushed Samson, but nowhere in the text does it say they appeared from

their hiding places. They were simply ready in case Samson had indeed lost his strength, which would be revealed by his inability to break the things that bound him.

In other words, Samson does not know there are Philistines hiding in the pantry – he thinks it is one big game! The mouse is laughing and the cat is pouting.

The second move – binding with new ropes – is in Judges 16:10-11.

Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me how you may be bound." He said to her, "If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I will become weak and be like any other man."

The same result occurs, in Judges 16:12.

So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" For the men were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread.

The third move – weaving Samson's hair and tying it to Delilah's sewing machine – is in Judges 16:13.

Then Delilah said to Samson, "Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man."

The same result occurs again, except this time, Samson wrecks Delilah's sewing machine, in Judges 16:14.

So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web. And she fastened it with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web.

The point that troubles me about this move in the game is that Samson has come closer to revealing the truth than ever before. For the first time, he has mentioned his hair. Samson is playing Russian roulette, and the odds are mounting against him!

Erwin Lutzer, pastor of Moody Church, wrote a story that I recently read. Years ago, when Oliver Cromwell was Lord Protector of England, a circus performer was widely known as a daring animal tamer. His most famous and thrilling act was the snake act. This trainer had worked with one particular snake for fourteen years, having purchased it when it was only seven inches long – a time when with two fingers, he could have crushed it.

One night, although he did not know it, he would perform his final snake act. The tent was packed with excited people. The trainer cracked his whip, and that huge boa constrictor came crawling out of the imitation grass at the edge of the its open cage. It slithered slowly toward his feet and then began to wrap itself around the trainer until he was scarcely visible. The audience was ecstatic – they whistled and cheered. Several minutes passed and the crowd finally stopped cheering – something must be wrong.

As the arena grew hushed in terrified silence, as all the people watched, hardly daring to breath, they heard the unmistakable sound of bones breaking. To the horror of all those present, the snake had tightened its body around the trainer. Before anyone could help him escape, the massive boa constrictor, that had once been a seven inch snake, crushed its trainer to death.

At this point, Samson is a man who thinks the serpent is trained. For twenty years, he has allowed it to slide up his body. He is barely visible, but he still thinks it is a game.

Continue to the next move in Judges 16:15-17.

Then she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is.” It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, “A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man.”

Did you notice Samson’s answer? He has come to false conclusion that his strength lies in his long hair – he has forgotten the role of the Spirit of God. He has become as superstitious as the Philistines who carried charms into battle, believing that they

conveyed the power to subdue enemies. Samson’s charm was his hair.

Now notice Judges 16:18-20a.

When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in 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 called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. 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.” . . .

Now the most tragic phrase in this whole story follows, in Judges 16:20b.

. . . But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.

There is nothing more tragic than a person who loses the power of God – and does not even realize it.

If this church were to lose God’s power and presence, how long would it take for us to realize it?!

If God’s power were to slip away from you, how long would it take for you to sense the loss? Would it take one hour or one day or one week?!

“Samson, God has left you! The Philistines will take you now.”

“Nonsense! My hair is gone, but I’m still mighty Samson.”

He swings a once powerful fist against a Philistine shield and his hand crumples in pain. He is grabbed from behind and strains to free himself. He struggles and bellows. His mind is racing, panic stricken, “No, it can’t be!!”

“God’s Spirit has left you Samson – and when He left, your strength left too.”

Notice the fast motion of the biblical sequence in Judges 16:21.

Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison.

“How the mighty have fallen.”

Spiritual Restoration in Prison

Now look at Judges 16:22.

However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.

This tells us that God has not abandoned Samson; God is still available to Samson.

What happens to Samson in prison, in fact, as his prayer will prove true, is that he will come face to face with his sin. He will repent and his relationship with God will become as it should have been long ago.

Samson soon hears the chanting mob as they gather to celebrate his capture. They are giving the glory to their god Dagon, the fish god. They begin to chant, "We want Samson. We want Samson. . . ."

Notice Judges 16:25.

It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may amuse us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars.

All the dignitaries are there – the five kings and their wives. The rulers of the Philistine empire have assembled, which means that in a moment, they are going to lose their entire leadership. That would be the same as America losing, by some catastrophe, the United States Supreme court, the President and Vice President, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and all the congressmen and senators.

The Philistines are all there, amusing themselves with this blind man. They are confusing him – pushing him around; having him led by the hand by a little boy. They are saying, "This is the great Samson?! This is all that the God of Israel could come up with to defeat us?! Our god Dagon is more powerful!"

Samson has had enough. He prays a prayer – for God's honor and for his own vindication. It is only the second prayer recorded that he prayed. Look at Judges 16:28.

Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes."

This prayer reveals two changes in Samson's life. Let me give them to you.

1. First, Samson is repentant from his life of sin.

The Hebrew word "remember" is critical. It is a word linked with the forgetting of past sin. Isaiah uses the word as God Himself speaks,

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. (Isaiah 65:17)

It is the same idea used in the New Testament when the thief is hanging on the cross and says to Jesus,

. . . ***"Jesus, remember me . . ." (Luke 23:42)***

2. Secondly, Samson is dependant on the Lord for strength.

He now recognizes his source of strength is not in his hair, but in his God! Samson for the first time in scripture, can see with discernment.

I find it so intriguing that when Samson could no longer see physically, he finally sees spiritually. When everything else is stripped away, he finally understands what really matters.

Let me ask a question of you, "Is there something in your life that God must take away in order that you might fully see Him?"

Perhaps you need God to take away:

- a job;
- a mate;
- a house;
- a child;
- a promotion;
- a friend.

Is there something in your line of sight that keeps you from seeing God?! An inability to see from God's perspective means an inability to live life any other way than from your own perspective. You are going to do things the way you want to do them; you are going to make decisions the way you believe they ought to be made.

It is no coincidence that Frank Sinatra's hit song, *I Did It My Way*, has been recorded by more artists in America in the last twenty years than any other song. It is so true to our human blindness.

For twenty years, Samson has done it his way – and he ruined his life.

Let us finish the story. Look at Judges 16:29-30. Samson asks God to use him one more time.

Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life.

Samson was restored by God to some position of power, but he was not restored to the same position of power. He was supposed to be a judge!

Dear beloved, learn well that although God will forgive sins, He may not erase consequences.

Samson's hair grew back, but his eyes did not. God forgave him and used him powerfully, but Samson paid dearly in the consequences of his sin.

Samson toyed with sin for twenty years. His chief weakness was his eyes. Sexual sin is the one category of sin that the apostle Paul tells us to flee from (I Corinthians 6:18-20; II Timothy 2:22). He never suggests that we debate it, toy with it, flirt with it. No – *run* from it. Flee fornication; run from it, and in so doing, understand that you are running for your life – your integrity; your family; your character; your future!

Take it from a man who lost his life – flee from sin; run for your life! "O be careful little eyes what you see" – guard your heart.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/17/1992 by Stephen Davey.

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