



"Broken People, Faithful God..." Judges 15
by Pastor Tim Dodson at Jesus Fellowship of Believers
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Few of us will ever be in such a lonely position as Samson. Few will be so isolated and few will ever know such cultural and societal shunning...all due to Samson's passion and oft rebellion. Often amiss and sometimes even flat out wrong, Samson's troubles stemmed from being an 'unmovable man.' Such traits can be endearing and worthy of our respect...even our awe, but

misdirected and handled with reckless abandon can be equally shameful and embarrassing for those who know you. This was the picture of Samson. When he was 'on' he was *really* on, but when he was off...well, he was *really* off. Even righteous rebellion requires self control and a plan. In the end, Samson's undoing would not be due to some grand exploit or righteous advance. No...it would be something much simpler and base. Ultimately Samson will have been stopped by lust and sex, not an enemy fought on the field of battle...not a honorable death at all. Samson...like so many before and after him as well, would not, as Paul put it, "finish well."

But in chapter 15, Samson was in his glory. This was the high point of his life....the pinnacle of his being on this planet. Samson had big mo' going on here. As we said, it would not last, but that story is saved for another day. When Samson was trusting God...and God was with him, Samson moved the world! One cannot help but wonder what he could have accomplished had he lived out his heart with some help from his head.

One thing that seemed to forever characterize Samson, is he seemingly would not ever back down if there was a righteous principle at stake. He would prove his point or die trying! In the case of his marriage to the Philistine woman...something he never should have been doing anyway, things had gone terribly bad. The father of the bride figured that after Samson had stomped away in a huff after the drunken wedding party fiasco back in chapter 14, that the marriage was a "forgotten issue." So apparently not to waste all that spent wedding money, he married off his daughter to the best man! So when Samson came knocking once again, the bride was gone. Samson knew that the issue here was not a "bride with cold feet" but a Philistine family with cold hearts! Thus such would not be allowed to go down unanswered! So revenge was ordered up. In quite an elaborate plot, Samson took vengeance upon the Philistines and burnt their corn fields to the ground. He not only pulled it off, but he did so with real '*panache*.'

One might certainly question this righteousness of such an action. But it does seem that through this painful experience, God had gotten Samson's attention and there would be no more compromise and accommodation of the Philistines. The line was drawn now. Sadly, it sometimes takes painful situations in our lives to awake us to truth and redirection. But angry retaliation is almost always assured in such cases, and the Philistines countered by not directly coming after Samson but rather going after "secondary players"...in this case, the woman Samson was supposed to marry and her father too.

The Philistines were a low bunch and lacked integrity not to mention guts. And those "Philistines" are alive and well today, even if they go by other names! Ironically, in chapter 14, the woman in question caved out of fear when the Philistines threatened to burn her in her father's house. In the end...after she acquiesced to the powers that be, they *still* burnt her in her father's house! Satan runs this earthly and worldly show, and He is forever a liar. We often feel we can compromise the right thing and Satan will ask for no more. But he again is a liar and the 'father of

all lies.' (John 8:44) He runs the full scam of 'bait-and-switch' and will make promises and 'deals' and will always eventually fail to come through and throw you under the bus in the end.

Samson began a series of 'tit' for 'tat' revenge acts...each one making the situation worse instead of ending it as he supposed. Each counter attack worse than the one before it...and eventually there was no way out anymore other than to 'pay the piper.' As the Philistines moved into Judah now...with 3 to 5 thousand men to 'search out and destroy' **one man**, the options for Samson narrowed considerably. Samson's pride and his grand hubris was coming to an end. Sadly, despite Samson's mishandling of these events and allowing his pride to control the field, he was still the only one willing to stand up and fight the Philistines.

When they showed up, look at what the people of Judah did. Instead of arming up and defending their country, they instead sent a delegation to talk to the Philistines and find out what the bother was. When they found out that the Philistines were in town only to get **one guy**, they didn't move to defend Samson, but instead moved to intervene on behalf of the Philistines. It was compromise out of fear. It was acquiescence on behalf of the status quo. Better red than dead! Better a safe and calm life in bondage to an enemy than risk life and limb for freedom, right? This heart tells us much about the hearts of the people in Judah at that time. This heart tells us much about the Christians in the world and times we live in today! We want to believe that if we just compromise a little that Satan will give us a break and get off our backs. But that is the oldest trick in the book and hundreds of years of history have exposed that ruse repeatedly. So the people were not upset with *the Philistines* who had been the bane of their existence for years, but rather they were angry at *Samson* for rocking the boat! Welcome to church 2015! How often I find that the greatest battles I face, and the greatest push back I experience is not from the world at large but rather the greater church!

The fact is, people...even actual believers, can get to a place where they actually prefer slavery over freedom...especially if the latter is going to cost effort and time! This was their big chance to change things for good in their lives, but out of a false comfort and a fear of battle, they preferred to stay beaten down and never experience the life that the true God had for them. This **is** and **will be** the story of our lives for many of us! How many folks have come in to **this** fellowship...graced us with their passing presence and they '*heard*'...they '*saw*'...they '*tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come*' as Hebrews 6 tells us, and it was the greatest opportunity of their lives to break the chains of bondage...an army of willing troops were ready to go to war with them against the enemy of God and the enemy of our freedom...and yet, they turned away because like the Jews in Babylon, they had simply grew comfortable in their world, even if it is one of bondage. They don't believe things can ever be different for them so they just surrender to bondage, to the mundane, to sin, to **fear**.

The enemy essentially ignored the rest of Judah. They just wanted one man. It was Jesus in **his** day, and it's some of us **today**! I know some who have departed from the front lines of ministry and incredulously say "*things are so peaceful now! Once I got away from you people, life got so much better!*" Of course it did! When you are not fighting, it is naturally going to be have a fleshly benefit! Calm yes, but at what cost? Often it is the price of bondage or at least spiritual impotence! One must ask themselves..."what is it I am seeking to get out of this Jesus thing?" Is this about me, and safety, and stuff? Or is it about Christ, and worship, and service, and sacrifice? When a Christian throws down with Satan and commits himself or herself to serving God and fighting on the front lines, you can be sure that the enemy will come for you and generally the greater church out there will do nothing to help. No one can say that Samson failed to get the enemies attention!

There is a story of a man who walked up to a preacher and said "*who is this Satan fella? I have never met him in my life!*" And the preacher snapped back in a moment saying "*of course you haven't! You never meet someone when you are going the same way as they are. But if you turn around and start going the other way, you will meet him soon enough!*"

Three significant points need to be seen in this passage; *One*, people can become so acclimated to sin and bondage, that they are unwilling to make a stand against such if it means they might 'rock the boat' of the status quo of their lives and the comfort of such. *Two*, we can become such 'milk-toast' that the enemy hardly sees us as a threat to him at all anymore, and he leaves us to essentially live out our spiritually empty lives...lives void of the fruit of the spirit and evidence of God's presence in our midst. And *three*, we can eventually and quite inadvertently end up doing the enemies work for him. Desiring 'calm' and our willingness to dine on 'rice and beans' for the sake of that calm in our lives, we will fail to ever know the great blessings that God has planned for us. "*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*" 1 Corinthians 2:9

Perhaps Samson actually wasn't nearly the grand character that we imagine him to be. But when such a bright light is put into such a dark room, that light is going to be bright indeed! A red rose set against a black and white background is even more beautiful and even brighter red! Verse 14 tells us that the "Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson mightily" and he snapped the ropes that held him as if they were thread. Let us not fail to grasp where the power to be such a man comes from! But let us also not fail to understand where the decision to be that man originates! When these two things come together, incredible...*yes even crazy things* happen! It makes for the stuff of legends.

As the chapter approaches its end, we see Samson praying. Note the careful language as he prays..saying "you, *Father*, have given this great deliverance..." Samson knew and acknowledged where his mo' came from! He was not saying "I'm strong enough...I'm tough enough...I'm brave enough." But rather, Lord *you are all those things and have allowed me to be a part of the action... "by the hand of your servant."* However tough Samson was, he knew ultimately he was just God's "**servant**"....and that word is better rendered "**slave**." For Samson, I think there was never any question whether he would fight, because he was a slave and he was just 'doing his duty.'

Luke 17:7-10 says this: "*which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'*"

Samson would go on to rule Judah for the next 20 years. He had been faithful in the 'little things'. We may look at such and say "it didn't sound like a 'little thing' to me!" But when God is in the situation, **it is**. I cannot tell you how things will come to its eventual end in whatever you face. But any situation given over to God, and fought in the presence of His Spirit, will finish out of His will. For God is indeed sovereign! And it is these men and women that are then used for the greater things in His kingdom...like leading His people. Which is more important, more challenging, and far scarier than an army of angry Philistines! But it is also more blessed than whipping all of them...