



## "Sledding in the Dark" - Judges 16:1-21

by Pastor Tim Dodson at Jesus Fellowship of Believers  
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We have all read their stories. We have seen their lives chronicled on the evening news and on tabloid TV. Folks who had the world by the tail...who once had it all, and went on to eventually lose everything. Often fabulously public, starkly embarrassing, and so often deeply humiliating. No matter how foolish and guilty they might have been, my heart still tends to go out to them. I know, at

that moment, they would give *anything* to turn back the clock and have a "do-over."

Samson had lived life in the fast lane. He had lived large and done things his way. Invariably, when one takes this road they burn bright, but they burn fast and are gone. Samson was coming to his premature end. He had done **what** he wanted, **where** he wanted, and **when** he wanted. He had not listened to anyone, and that included his God. His lust...his emotions...his self-centered lifestyle was now going to be his undoing. Proverbs 16:18 tells us bluntly that "*Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.*" But knowing such has little value because frankly most of us just don't believe it. The response is something like this: "*YOU may fall, but I won't...*" Once we have arrived at such a point, there is nothing to do but wait for the other 'shoe to drop.' Nothing left to do but sweep up after, and turn out the lights on the way out.

Samson was not willing to deal with sin nor fight temptation. He instead tried to straddle both worlds and operate as close to the "line" as he could without falling over it! It's common practice...even within the greater church. It's an easy thing to do. To toy with the "Delilah's" of sin and life instead of "fleeing youthful lusts..." (2 Timothy 2:22). In Samson's case, it was easy to see why he not only kept going but continually "upped the ante." After all, he got away with it so many times! He defied the odds and beat the system repeatedly. By this point, Samson would have thought himself to be invincible.

What Samson faced was not too big, or too tough. Samson fell because he *played* with sin! He walked as close as he could and still not get burned! It is a story told so many times that there is a beaten path! 1 Corinthians 10:13 says "*The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.*" But such a "way" matters little if there is no desire to *get* out! The seeds that Samson had sown during his life were now coming to harvest. What would end with Delilah, surely began many years before!

The text says that Samson "went down to Gaza." But Samson had no business being in Gaza! He was hated in Gaza, as that city was a major Philistine city. And Samson had bad history with the Philistines! Yet Samson deliberately exposed himself to danger and temptation. It was incredible hubris on his part. He obviously believed that he was untouchable! Such action comes only from a break in fellowship with God, *if we ever had it in the first place.* When the 'light' has been turned off, it is only a matter of time before we fall down or run into something in the blindness of the dark. When we think we cannot fall, we are in the most vulnerable place of all.

There was no doubt that Samson 'had the stuff.' But he knew it, and thought there was no limit to what he could do. With the massive city gates locked for the night for protection against enemies, it appeared that Samson was going nowhere until morning. But no one was going to tell Samson what to do! No one was going to make Samson do *anything*, no matter how reasonable it might be. According to the account, Samson literally tore the city gates from their mounts and, if we are to understand the text correctly, carried those gates to Hebron...a 38 mile journey! There was no argument that Samson was a formidable individual... but he had power without purity. He had strength without self-control. And no matter how strong, smart, rich, or talented a person may be, a journey without God will eventually end badly. Often, *very badly*...

Admittedly, Samson had carried on for a long time, seeming untouched by consequences. Yet almost like a grand trap, such escapes only emboldened him to not only continue in sin but to actually crank it up as he went along. Seldom is sin static. Scripture refers to it as cancer, and we know what cancer does!

By the time Delilah enters Samson's life, Samson was essentially already gone. She was no doubt pleasing to the eye, and Samson entered into a sexual relationship with her. I believe the lure of sex and or relationship with the opposite sex is probably the greatest, *certainly the most successful*, temptation to sin. It has played at least a part in the demise of innumerable "successful" individuals throughout the years. And hey...if it works, why would Satan change his strategy?

There are many who hear this today and are currently in the clutches of such a situation. Yet there are very few of those who even really *want* to get out. No, once in, we tend to duck and hide and operate in the shadows. We want God and his blessing, but we really *really* want this sin too! So unless the earth begins to shake or something, we intend to stay put...attempt to hold our 'middle ground.' Or at least that position we believe to be the middle! Forgetting Psalms when it says in 66:18 *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear."* So when I am "actively" given over to a sin and refuse to come out, I have cut the communication with God. *I am alone.*

The "powers-that-be" there in the Philistine world of that day decided that Samson had to go. He had throughout his life been an irritant *at least* and *at most* destructive to the will and wishes of the Philistine people. So money was offered up to Delilah, and she agreed. That's the preeminent truth in pre-marital or extra-marital sexual affairs; *they quite simply and quite clearly say "I'm in this for me."* So such practice says a lot about the parties involved. Like "I'm selfish, I'm immature, I don't love you, and I have no self-control."

Seldom does such a state as Samson and Delilah find themselves in here, come instantly or suddenly. It comes through a series of compromises. One leading to the next, which leads to the next. Because spiritual compromise makes us vulnerable, we tend to cascade downward. The redeeming factor in that situation is that we have opportunity to repent and call out to God who says if *"we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1Jn 1:9) But once we start down that snowy sledding hill, there is nothing that can be done without drastic action! We simply move faster and faster by the gravity pull of sin, until the only way out is to *bail* out..often at the expense of some significant pain. There is no finesse here...no real philosophical discussions or moral debate, only a desperate leap. It's not pretty, and it's not easy. It's just spiritual 'tuck and roll.' Because the only time there was any wiggle room...any options, was *before you started*. Once moving, options are limited.

We need to realize now...before we get to such a situation, that sin is not ugly to our flesh. In fact, it is very appealing! Delilah was no doubt extremely beautiful. We want to believe that we would recognize such dangerous sin by its ugly fangs and red signage warning us off. But sadly, that is not the case. Satan does not offer destruction and pain. He offers that which is desirable and fulfilling. But it is *clandestine poison*. A 'bait-and-switch.' And once you truly discover this, you will be full speed half way down the hill...

The truth be told, on any level, from friendship to love to lust...hook up with the wrong person, and it will be our end. I have watched those be released from incarceration that have proven that fact over and over. Inability to break off destructive relationships are the catalyst for repeating our offenses and sins over and over again. Do our associations make us stronger...call us spiritually forward, hold us accountable? Or do they encourage and enable us to repeatedly fall into destruction and failure?

One would think that as Delilah began to mess with Samson...as she clearly exposed her heart and intentions, that Samson would have got out of there immediately. But again, Samson believed he couldn't be touched! He thought he was invulnerable. So he kept playing with her, and by doing so kept playing with fire. This is why I am always amazed when people cheat sexually on a spouse and then marry another. I mean, if the two of you cheated to get together, why, oh why, would you think the other person won't do it again with someone else and leave *you* under the bus?

In the end, Delilah got her way through her manipulative emotions and her tears. Samson folded. It was only a matter of time. It is always only a matter of time! Finally, Samson found himself a blind fool who was now a slave to the consequences of his pride and his sin. He had lost his whole world. Samson was over. And yet...despite the horror and despair, the pain and isolation, God had still not left Samson. God doesn't break *his* promises! He once told us that "*I will never leave you or forsake you.*" (Hebrews 13:5) And if we are to be undeterred in our sin, there will come a day, when that is all we will have left. Like the old school "last dime to call a lawyer," there will come a time when everything is gone...everything is lost, because we would not get off that sled. We will be left with two options...*stay down, or make that call*. And if you call, God will be there for you still. His grace will still be offered. But so often the pain is not removed. In fact, His grace is given *despite* the pain, not in *lieu* of the pain!

Hear Him call. Hear him "while it is yet day" For make no mistake, there *is* a thing as "too late." Never too late for His love...at least here in the land of the living. But certainly too late to redeem the life we once had, and wish to have again...