



## "RESTORATION" - JUDGES 16:21-31

by Pastor Tim Dodson, at Jesus Fellowship of Believers  
Menomonie, Wisconsin on Wednesday March 25th, 2015

**There is a stark truth** about our walk of faith and that is that we will indeed make a lot of mistakes along the way. We will stumble and we will no doubt sometimes fail. As long as we live in a fallen world in these fallen bodies we will fight to stay on our spiritual feet. Samson understood this...especially at this point in his life and journey. While certainly sin has its costs and, *indeed*, some trains, once they 'leave the station', there is no getting on. But God is not

finished with us unless we are finished with Him. God will not "shelf" a hungry servant forever. It really comes down to whether we will actually get back up again. Despite being kicked down beyond what most of us can relate to, Samson was going to defy all the conventional wisdom and get back up. One can almost hear the sound of the Rocky theme music playing in the background!

Many of us can relate to Samson's predicament. We made mistakes. We allowed our pride to rule our path. We refused repentance and rejected the attempted intervention of others. And we found, or perhaps *find* ourselves in the same condition as Samson, *or at least it feels the same*. But what we do next is the final word! What happens from here will be your monument...your epitaph. And it matters very little who is to blame for getting you there. Maybe it was you. Maybe it was indeed someone else. But it doesn't matter if you don't get up, because *that* part...the *final part*, will be your own, and yours alone. No one to blame, except yourself. A lot of things can knock you down, but staying down is your action alone.

**Satan loves however to kick you when you are down** and convince you that you are finished.

Washed up. No good. Out of the race. He will tell you that God can never and frankly *would* never use anyone like you. You are too much of a mess! Too much of a failure. Lacking any redeeming qualities that would translate into kingdom value.

Oh how we are inspired by the great names that are listed in the "Hall of Faith", Hebrews 11! "*That's quality. That's talent!*" Yet in reality Hebrews 11 could easily be called the "Hall of Reclaimed Failures!" Few, if any of those names fail to be attached to a personal disaster, a public shaming, or a waste of God's blessings. Anyone of those folks would likely have been benched in the worldly realm. Ah, but thankfully, God doesn't operate in that realm! He is quite famous for his stories of redemption. The pages of scripture and those of history are littered with the record of underdogs overcoming, 'nobodies' moving the world, and losers making the game winning goal. God loves that stuff apparently. Because wherever we find such dark horses, God is placing his bet...no matter if it is apparently a long shot. No matter if the world thinks they are losers!

A loser is not someone who has failed, but someone who has decided to *stay* a failure. For that is no one's act except our own. Can we embrace God's remedy for failure, or are we truly 'down for the count?'

## Judges 16:21-31

21 Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison. 22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven. 23 Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!" 24 When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, The destroyer of our land, And the one who multiplied our dead." 25 So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. 26 Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them." 27 Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there—about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. 28 Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" 29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. 30 Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life. 31 And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.

**All this is not to say that God's Word is not truth** and not genuine. He says we will 'reap what we sow,' and indeed that is a hard truth to come face to face with. Samson was *reaping* now what he had spent such a long time planting. How many of us spend even *years* fostering anger, bitterness, jealousy, and pride? And where has that taken us? Where are you now? 'Parked' no doubt. Growing in Christ has ceased. Relationships with brothers and sisters have waned. Serving is no longer joyous, (if you are doing anything at all.) It's *quiet*, and truthfully it's *lonely*.

Just like Samson, you will hear no one now. Whenever anyone tries to address the issue with you...*if they still do at this point*, you immediately knee-jerk to defend, justify, and deflect. The whole matter just makes you *mad* when people do that, right? So you have taken your seat in the back...in the cheap seats...mumbling under your breath that you are as good as them, and they don't know what they are talking about when they speak of you. Just shift the blame and transfer all your issues on to them...*that will work!*

And what about overt sin? Acts of the flesh? Samson, like many of us, justified his acts. He knew what he did was wrong in God's eyes. But like many of us, he felt he had a really good reason, or maybe he just believed that all of that stuff didn't apply to him. He was 'special.' Maybe he thought it didn't matter, or that God's grace would cover his continued surrender to sin. Today we say "*I will do this just once.*" "*I will go no further, I will stop soon, I will not get addicted, I will come back, I will only stay here for a little while,*" etc. We know the stories and the testimonies of those who have traveled these roads before us, but somehow in our pride we believe that such will not happen to us. It will be different with us.

And yet now Samson is now literally a slave...a blind shell of the man he once was. I have known men and women who have went on missions trips with me, taught bible classes, sat on elder boards and even pastored...who are now gone, now sitting life out. Angry, bitter, lashing out...spending their evenings watching

TV and eating and drinking too much...a "blind shell of the man or woman they once were." Trying to find purpose and meaning in their careers...the women or men they take home, the internet, hobbies, whatever...

These individuals, as well as Samson of old, went on to reap the whirlwind of the flesh that they fed for so long. It seems that sin makes us so very stupid! Samson's actions...*like ours*, defied any sense whatsoever. Even when it was over...when God removed His hand from Him, the saddest thing of all was that Samson didn't even know it! It was the height of arrogance and self confidence. He was blind even before the Philistines put his eyes out. He refused to discipline his life, so God did it for him.

What's even more sad was that the only reason the Philistines didn't finish Samson altogether was he served now as their clown...their amusement. He was a joke, and he amused them. He would now be their cannon fodder. Merely worth nothing more than a good laugh now. The day came when the party began and the liquor flowed and Samson was strutted out on display. The once proud man of God...now merely a shadow of what he had been. Revenge is sweet they say. And that day would have been especially sweet, to see the once mighty marched out in such weakness!

If God does indeed love us, why would He allow such events as this? Why would He allow such pain in our lives? Such humiliation? We certainly may not recognize it at the time, or acknowledge such ever, but the truth is that God's actions in times as these is a *work of grace*. Again, we may not see it as such, but it is nothing less than instrumental to God's salvation of an individual. For God sometimes has to intervene with the finesse of a bull in a china shop in order to rescue us, and seldom...when things are this far advanced, is His actions pain free for us. Sometimes God has to strip away everything from us to get us to turn around and come back to Him. And He loves us that much that He will do it. God seeks to whisper to us with the "still small voice", but if we will not listen, He will shout though the pain of discipline.

But like with Samson, God longs to not to hurt but rather seeks to restore. Let us remember that God is in this fight not just for you, but for *everyone*, and not just for this short span of 'life on earth' but for *eternity*. His discipline therefore is to bring us back, to cause us to see what the "end" of the road looks like...life without Him, the darkness of life, and the emptiness of purpose. He seeks us to go "all the way" with Him. And He will do whatever is necessary to direct us in that pursuit.

**You know, how often we miss these little words in scripture which lead to big ideas.** Note verse 22: says "however." Other similar verses in scripture say "but" ..."except"..."and then." How we can tend to think that it's all over for us! And again, Satan will do all he can to make you believe that! But the race is not over until the breathe of life is gone! While we remain, no matter how far we have strayed from the ordained path of our lives, we are never out of God's forgiveness, as well as His restoration. 1 John 1:9 says it clearly: "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

But let us make no mistake. Restoration is seldom instant! Samson was still blind and would ultimately not live. God did not give Samson back new eyes, nor his worldly status again. Often our state of life is a result of years of rebellion and there must be healing of body and mind, and a learning of new and different habits. God's forgiveness is in an instant, but the world is seldom so able or willing! Yet God *will* take you back and use you again for His pleasure and for His kingdom furthering. But if you bring parameters or stipulations to the table, you will have problems right off. This is not a negotiation! One the reasons you got into such a mess is because of rebellion and self reliance. You must be now willing to let God have control. ALL the control...even if you do not understand where He is going.

**Verse 28 gives us a glimpse of Samson's true heart here.** He had been through the refining fires. He had been tried and broken. And he now looked to the only real strength that ever had. He sought God for His forgiveness and received it. He trusted God now, no longer himself! He had witnessed where that took Him, and now it was going to be *all* God. Samson was committed.

Samson showed us that forgiveness is not contingent upon performance. We cannot earn such favor. Grace can never be purchased! It was given as a free gift. But Samson had to actually come to God. God pursued but Samson had to respond...just as we do. Samson had to surrender himself and his will. Now, ...blind, broken and humiliated, ...God would still use Samson. That's what God does, and that's who God chooses to use. Samson would end his life on a high note. Yet one wonders how much more he could have accomplished if God had remained always in the controlling position of his life.

God loves to redeem the lost and restore the broken. It seems to be one of His greatest passions! After all, He certainly spends enough time doing it! If Samson would have stayed down after he was taken by the Philistines, it would have been only his own fault. He could blame Delilah...or maybe just blame the Philistines in general. Or maybe it was the fault of his people...his family and friends for not coming for him. But in the end, he had no one to point the finger at except himself. Because the door of escape was there before him.

**Acts 3:19-20** *"Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah."*

**Joel 2:25-26** *"So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, The crawling locust, The consuming locust, And the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, And praise the name of the LORD your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; And My people shall never be put to shame."*

**Zechariah 9:12** *"Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double."*