

Trivial Pursuit
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Allen Power

Judges 16

Opening Question - Can you think of some famous people who had great potential but squandered it? What are some of the reasons these very talented, promising people BLOW it?

- It's tragic to see people who have such amazing gifts and such incredible potential just squander it all. Unfortunately, that's the LEGACY of Samson.
- Samson was the LAST of the Judges in this period of Israel's history.
- Make no mistake...he was God's man to deliver Israel...but he was FLAWED.
- If there had been TABLOIDS in that day, Samson would have been plastered all over the front pages of them!
- Samson's life is a story of LOVE, SEX, VIOLENCE, and REVENGE. But, more than that, it's a story of how someone on whom God has his hand on can WASTE it all because of SIN.
- We may shake our heads at Samson, but any one of us could go off track in the same way unless we stay CONSECRATED to God's will for our lives.
- Let's talk about that word CONSECRATED. Question: What does it mean to be CONSECRATED? Anyone know? Consecration is *"The devoting or setting apart of anything to the worship or service of God."* (Easton's Bible Dictionary)
- In Judges 13:5 an angel of the Lord came to Samson's parents and said:
 - *5 because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines.*
- Samson was CONSECRATED as a Nazirite, set apart to God, from birth, to DELIVER Israel from the Philistines.
- What is a Nazirite? Numbers 6 tells us:
The vow of a Nazirite involved these three things, (1) abstinence from wine and strong drink, (2) refraining from cutting the hair off the head during the whole period of the continuance of the vow, and (3) the avoidance of contact with the dead. (Easton's Bible Dictionary). Usually this vow was for a temporary period. For Samson it was for LIFE.

Judges 13:24-25

24 The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the Lord blessed him, 25 and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him...

- Question: What do you think it means "the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him"?
- The Lord not only GREW Samson, and BLESSED Samson, His SPIRIT literally MOVED and DIRECTED Samson from the time he was a little boy.
- Even though God's hand was on him, we see that Samson had a mind of his own and he allowed his own DESIRES and WEAKNESSES to RUIN his POTENTIAL for God.

- Our lesson text jumps ahead to the story of Samson and Delilah. To get the full picture it's helpful to read chapters 14, 15, and 16. We don't have time to do that this morning. But, I think it's helpful to review some of Samson's "exploits" to paint the picture of HOW he got off track.
- In Chapter 14 Samson told his parents: "I've spotted a young Philistine woman in Timnah that I want to marry. Get her for me!" They objected, but he persisted.
- Question: Why would they not have wanted him to marry her? Philistine = enemy.
- Though this woman was a part of the ENEMY, Samson's lust was engaged and HE WANTED WHAT HE WANTED. By the way, though this seems misguided, God was at work according to 14:4. (*His parents did not know that this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines...*)
- On the way to get his Philistine bride we see Samson's first show of physical strength.
- A lion attacks him but "*the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power*" and he tore the lion limb from limb with his BARE HANDS.
- When he came back for the wedding, that lion's carcass had become a HIVE for a swarm of bees, and it was filled with honey. Gotta have some of that!
- But, Samson, one of your three vows is not to touch anything that's dead.
- I WANT WHAT I WANT and right now it's FRESH HONEY.
- Samson went on to the wedding celebration. And while at his BACHELOR PARTY where he was no doubt drinking the WINE he was never to consume...he gave a RIDDLE to his 30 companions, and made a BET they couldn't solve it.
- They persuaded his wife to pry the answer from him and THEY won the bet.
- Samson was furious with them and his wife, so he killed 30 Philistines and took their clothes to pay off the wager. (Touching more dead bodies, by the way).
- Then, Chapter 15 tells us...In an act of REVENGE Samson tied three hundred foxes together and sent them running with torches destroying all the grain of the Philistines.
- Later, the "Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power" and he killed a thousand Philistines with the "fresh jawbone of a donkey"
- Now, Samson didn't just do the crazy things we've just heard...
- 15:20 tells us: "Samson led Israel for twenty years..."
- Now, Samson's LUST was still a BESETTING SIN, an ongoing problem in his life.
- He went to Gaza to a prostitute. Word got out that Samson was in enemy territory and they surrounded the house to kill him.
- But, Samson slipped out in the night, and to "rub their nose in it" he tore down the city gates and carried the doors to the top of a hill. Those doors were two stories tall!
- Samson not only a great strength...he had some kind of EGO!

Then in Chapter 16, verses 4 and 5 tell us:

Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. 5 The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels[a] of silver."

- That Hebrew word "subdue" him really meant "AFFLICT" or TORTURE him. Delilah knew what she was handing Samson over to them for.

- Three times Delilah tried to persuade him to tell her the SECRET to his strength. And three times he TRICKED her. (Fresh leather cords; new rope; weave my hair into a loom with a pin in it).

15 Then she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you won’t confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven’t told me the secret of your great strength. ” 16 With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death.

17 So he told her everything. “No razor has ever been used on my head,” he said, “because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man.”

19 Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him.[d] And his strength left him.

20 Then she called, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!”

He awoke from his sleep and thought, “I’ll go out as before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

21 Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison.

- Samson's sins were SPECTACULAR! Consorting with evil women; destroying the grain of a city; killing thousands single handedly while bent on revenge.
- It would be easy to say, "I'm sure glad I'm not like Samson!"
- Would we be safe in saying that? Why? Why not?
- There’s a lesson for us in Samson’s “ROAD TO RUIN”. Let’s look at it.
- We saw in verse 25 that even as a boy “the Spirit of the Lord began to stir” Samson
- Samson started out his life CONSECRATED *FOR* God, and EMPOWERED *BY* God.
- So, how did Samson begin to get off track?
- Look back at Chapter 14 verse 13. When Samson wanted that Philistine wife what did he say to his parents? “Get her for me, for [WHAT?] she is right in my eyes.”
- The first way we begin to SLIP into SIN is when we get focused on what is “right” in OUR OWN eyes instead of what is right in God’s eyes. This was not only Samson’s problem. The final verse of the book of Judges shows that Samson’s problem was all of Israel’s problem:

Judges 21:25

25 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.

- What else led Samson down the road to ruin? We know about Samson’s STRENGTH what about his weakness?
- Question: It’s been said that Samson was a “he man with a she weakness. ” That’s accurate, but Samson’s REAL weakness was the SIN that CAUSED his weakness with women. What was it? LUST. Samson wanted what he wanted when he wanted it!

- Samson's mission in life became "scratch any itch", fulfill any appetite, take what you want!
- That led to another stumbling block. Samson began believing his own "press clippings."
- Question: What do we mean when we say someone thinks they are "bullet proof"?
- Samson became convinced that because of his God-given strength he was "untouchable". In his mind he was above the law and answered to no one!
- He forgot that without God's POWER he was NOTHING!
- Here's another stumbling block for Samson...
- When we see how Delilah repeatedly tried to trick Samson, we have to ask "How could Samson be so naive?" What do you think the answer is?
- Verse 4 of Chapter 16 reveals something interesting...
In that verse what does it say about Samson's feelings for Delilah?
- Samson's conduct with his wife, and his use of a prostitute show a cavalier attitude toward women. However, verse 4 says he fell in LOVE with Delilah.
- Though Delilah was clearly PURE EVIL...Samson LOST HIS HEART to her.
- That's another stumbling block on the road to ruin, "misplaced affections"

Proverbs 4:23 says

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

- It's not just than Samson LOVED the wrong woman.
- In Revelation 2:4 Christ said to the Church at Ephesus: "4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your ----- first love."
- Samson LOVED the WRONG WOMAN but worse than that he FORGOT his FIRST LOVE --- loving God.
- Samson not only gave into LUSTFUL DESIRE, he was blinded by MISPLACED AFFECTION.
- Speaking of BLINDNESS. We read a moment ago that Samson's captors brutally GOUGED out his eyes. Some scholars speculate they BURNED them out.
- Once Samson began to live by what was "right in his own eyes"; and to fulfill his DESIRES and LUSTS at any cost...once he felt BULLET PROOF and gave his HEART to MISPLACED AFFECTION...he developed a blindness worse than losing his eyes.
- In verse 20, that last time Delilah said, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But (WHAT?) he did not know that the Lord had left him.
- If we live a life based on a PATTERN of SIN before long we won't even know when God has withdrawn his HAND on our lives and has taken His POWER away.
- Samson's tragic end wasn't caused by Delilah cutting his hair.

J. Vernon McGee writes:

"Samson's strength was not in his arms, although he killed a thousand Philistines with those arms. His strength was not in his back, although he carried the gates of Gaza on his back...a remarkable undertaking. And, Samson's strength was not in his hair,

although he was weak when it was cut. Samson was strong only when the Spirit of God was moving him."

- Samson had MISUSED this gift of strength God gave him. And lost it when God removed his hand.

The ending to Samson's story is sad...yet it reminds us that even when God's man has slipped into MAJOR SIN...God is still available to provide POWER.

22 But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

23 Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands."

25 While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, 26 Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." 27 Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. 28 Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." 29 Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, 30 Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

It's believed he killed between five and ten THOUSAND along with himself. A tragic end to a man with SUCH POTENTIAL.

So, What's The Takeaway?

- We may not have Samson's STRENGTH but we could all share in his WEAKNESSES
- It all starts when we trade what's right in God's eyes for what is right in our own eyes
- We can slide deeper when we become focused on fulfilling our desires at any cost
- Soon, if we're not careful this can lead to feeling we're BULLET PROOF and UNTOUCHABLE. We can forget that without God's POWER we're NOTHING!
- We could easily MISPLACE our affections from God and his will to the WRONG object of those affections
- And before we know it, we've drifted so far we don't even SENSE it when God's HAND and POWER are removed from our lives

Charles Stanley's In Touch Magazine reminds us:

Before he died, Samson lost everything: his strength, eyesight, and honor. The man who once led his country mightily became a slave to his enemies (vv. 18-25).

What is your weakness? Is it lust, insecurity, fear, greed, gossip, or pride? Personality flaws can be a powerful motivation for good or ill, depending on our response. A proclivity for sin can ruin your life—as it did Samson’s—or drive you to utter dependence on God. The outcome is up to you.