

Title: Blind, But Now I See pt.1
Text: Judges 15-16
Theme: Living for self is the worst tragedy.
Series: Judges
Prop Stmt: Don't get to the end and wonder what may have been, get to the end and wonder at all that God did.

When I meet a young man who is tall, or is tall for his age, I often will say to him, "God has made you tall and with that comes responsibility to use it well for others. The day will come when you will need to help your mom wipe off the top of the refrigerator, clean the top of the door frames or change light bulbs in the ceiling. You will also need to defend members of your family who are smaller than you. I want him to see that being given a gift is a blessing if you use it for its intended purpose. Living for self and wasting your gift is such a head-shaking tragedy. As we come into the final days of Samson, we get to the end and wonder what may have been. Every battle he fought, he fought alone. He thought he didn't need anyone. I do not want you to get to the end of your life and wonder what may have been. I want you to get to the end of your life and wonder at all that God did.

Read Text: Judges 16.21-24

Were you ever in class with a kid who never had to study and yet, aced everything? Were you ever on a team with a kid who was so talented that she could get by without much practice? Did you ever have a friend who was so smooth, so suave that he could talk himself out of anything? Smart people, athletic people, smooth-talking people, popular people, people with connections, with money, are often treated differently than anyone else.

But, it is so easy to trust the gift instead of the Giver. What are you supposed to believe when everyone cuts you some slack? It is so easy to assume that you really are better than others. With some notable exceptions, the history of Christianity has been advanced on the shoulders of average people and yet, we are so tempted to think that we will finally make a difference in this world if we get the smart ones, the strong ones and smooth ones on our side.

Samson was all three, and apart from the story of Lucifer, I do not think that there is a greater tragedy in the Bible than him. He begins with such promise, but early on it becomes obvious that he is not humbled by his calling and therefore does not feel the weight of his ability. He lives as he fought; all alone. And therefore, he acts as if he is a law completely unto himself. Chapter 14 ends with him angrily storming out of his own wedding reception and going back to his parent's house. His wife was given to his best man. That sets up the final two chapters which are comprised of four related scenes. Each scene is tragic. The first scene is laid out in chapter 15. Throughout this chapter Samson appears to be oblivious to the long-term consequences of his choices. Samson was blind long before his eyes were gouged out. So, as we look at chapter 15, we have to ask ourselves...

I. Am I doing anything, seemingly blind to its long-term consequences? (15.1-20)

At the time of the wheat harvest, Samson decides to go visit his wife, apparently unaware that when he stomped out of the reception that his father-in-law gave her to his best man. Now, Samson shows up at the door with a young goat, assuming that this will make amends and that he will just, as he puts it, “go in to my wife in the chamber.”

There is so much that is wrong in all of this. Where do you begin? The text is clear, that she is his wife. Her dad, gave her to another man. She is married to Samson but has been given to another man yet is still at her father’s house. The Philistines know that she is married to Samson. Now, the dad stops Samson from going to his daughter, but instead offers Samson the girl’s younger sister and points out, in case Samson hadn’t noticed, that she is actually prettier than her older sister anyway. His final words are, “Please take her instead.”

Samson lives without any concern for anyone other than himself. He does not care about the consequences of his actions.

He did not care about how his choices would affect his parents.

He did not care about how his treatment of the guests would affect his wife.

He did not care about how his actions would shame his father-in-law and result in his wife being given to another man.

He publicly called his wife a heifer at the reception and this term is just as disgusting and offensive in Hebrew as it is in English. Then...

He showed up at the door with a young goat as a gift (I’m guessing he stole it on the way to Timnah) presuming that there would be no hard feelings. Now, before you laugh at the young goat gift, one scholar’s study concluded that bringing a young goat was equivalent to bringing a box of chocolates today.

Samson is so angry at his father-in-law for giving her to another man (notice how it ALL someone else’s fault) that he decides to “get even” at least that is how he sees it. Notice v.3.

“This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines.” Now you won’t Samson! But now, the significance of v.1 comes into play, *“at the time of wheat harvest.”* The Philistine farmers were in the process of harvesting the wheat. Some of it was still in the fields and some of it was stacked up in piles and was drying out. Samson, ingeniously and incredibly captures 300 (probably jackals since jackals run in pairs, while foxes are solitary creatures. It is the same Hebrew word) and ties their tails together in pairs, sets them on fire and the result is the torching of all of the wheat in the entire area. He was thinking, if you hadn’t forced her to tell the riddle, in the first place, then all of this wouldn’t have happened. Samson, if you hadn’t compromised your calling as a follower and judge of Yahweh, this wouldn’t have happened. The ironies continue. So, what happened at the end of chapter 14? Samson did not get his girl. Now what happens? She and her father are killed. He still doesn’t get his girl. He burned their fields and wheat, they burn his wife and father-in-law. This is barbaric. This is how the Philistines lived. In chapter 14, when the men at the wedding could not solve the riddle, they blackmailed Samson’s wife. If you do not get the answer for us, we will burn you and your father’s house with fire. So, she gets the answer for them in order to save her life, but this sets events in motion that result in her and her father being burned with fire. And now, we have the making of a world war. Revenge is breeding revenge. Neither side will back down.

Samson goes on a terror and kills many of the Philistines in response. V.7 sounds like he kills the men who burned his wife and her father. Now, the Philistines gather a small army in order to finally deal with Samson and they track him down in Israel. The Israelites want to know what the problem is. The Philistines say, it is Samson. So, in an effort to keep the status quo, 3,000 Israelites confront Samson. Look at v.11, “Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us?” This is how things work Samson. This is the arrangement. This is our place. They are the lords and we are the slaves and you are messing up the system. Why are you doing this? The very people that he is supposed to be rescuing have turned on him. He hasn’t inspired their loyalty. He hasn’t ingratiated himself to them. He’s fought every battle by himself. He doesn’t need anyone – right? And when you look at Samson’s encounters with the Philistines, it is not that he is trying to deliver his people. He fights when he is offended. He fights when he is attacked. The text paints a very consistent picture of this man. He cares only for himself. No wonder the men of Judah were not willing to defend him. And yet, the men of Judah do not look too good in this either.

What does this say about them? Imagine going home and telling your little boy that you just helped capture Samson and you turned him over to the Philistines. No one is a hero in this chapter. It’s all a mess. Don’t associate us with that guy. He’s not one of us. This is a personal issue between you guys, leave us out of it. But that is exactly what God is arranging. He wants Israel to stand up and trust him and rule their own land. This scene is pathetic. Samson is concerned that his own people will kill him, which makes me think that Samson at least will not fight his own. They assure him that they won’t. They will only bind him and turn him over to the enemy to do that. The result is, Samson is “captured” by his own, is bound with ropes, and is delivered to the Philistines, but now, it’s the Philistines who need to be delivered, because Samson, after finding the jawbone of a donkey goes on a rampage and kills about a 1,000 of them. He commemorates his victory with a song that sounds like Gaston from Beauty and the Beast. There is no credit given to God. This little rap is a play on Hebrew words that shines all the light of glory on Samson. Verse 14 makes it clear that the men of Judah (3,000 of them?) witnessed Samson’s God-given ability. But instead of rallying these men to follow and break the yoke of the Philistines. Instead of challenging them to care about the glory of God being sullied in the land, Samson makes a poem about his greatness and then pitches a little temper tantrum about being thirsty, so God provided water for him. And yet, we should note that in v.18, we see, for the first time, Samson praying. The chapter ends with the statement, that “he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.”

Wow! That is telling isn’t it? Look at that again. For 20 years Samson was a judge, but how does he describe those 20 years? They are the “days of the Philistines.” The days of the Philistines describes the time when the Philistines ruled over Israel. In other words, in those 20 years, basically, nothing changed. There was no relief. Israel received no benefit from Samson. No wonder the people of Judah were willing to turn him over to the Philistines. He hadn’t made life any better for them. He lived for himself and made impulsive decisions in the moment that brought long-term consequences on himself and everyone around him.

Here is Samson. Does it sound like you? I do it my way. I make my own rules. I am a loner. I don’t need anyone. Other people slow me down, get in my way, and box me in. I know what I am doing. I don’t need to explain myself. You can’t possibly teach me anything. I know better.

God is lucky that he has me. Good riddance to all of you. I don't need this. What have you done for me anyway? The relational glue in this guy is not very sticky.

What an incredible contrast this is to Christ. Christ is the only One who really does not need anyone else. Yet, when he came to this world, he chose to pour his life into 12 men, who were, obviously very frustrating at times. When we think of the love of Christ, we think of the cross – as we should. But the love of Christ was also displayed in his patient living with, teaching, encouraging, and accommodating the disciples. The relational glue of Jesus is very sticky. How about you? What kind of a hole would you leave in the hearts of others if you were suddenly gone?

II. Am I doing anything that, if known, would cause others to confront me? (16.1-3)

Chapter 16 begins in a similar way that chapter 14 does. Samson is back in Gaza. This would be a good place to say, “are you kidding me?” And yes, it involves a girl. But this girl is only good for a night, (actually not even a night – as he leaves at midnight) he has no plans on marrying her. There are some questions that we have. This girl, like his wife from Timnah and like his mom, is not named. Why is he in Gaza? And yes, this is the same region known today as the Gaza strip. Thousands of years later, Israel is still having problems with this territory.

Samson, what are you doing? But, nowhere in the story does there appear to be anyone who is even around Samson. The guy is presented as a complete loner. He's going to Gaza. Like no one there would notice? Of course, they would notice and the text is clear about it. He sees a prostitute and he hires her. And this is Israel's judge. This is the leader of God's people.

The Philistines plot an ambush, though they have to be a bit nervous. They plan to kill him in the morning, but before they get a chance to do that, he decides to leave the town and since the city gates are closed and locked, he simply lifts the gates, puts them on his back and takes them all the way to Hebron. Hebron? That is 40 miles away if he walked there in a straight line. Why Hebron? Perhaps Hebron could use them. Of course, when a guy is capable of doing something like that, it has a way of discouraging anyone from trying to fight him. But, when you look at this account, Samson is no hero. Oh, he is strong, physically, but what's the point? His strength does not compensate for his weakness. In fact, his strength gives him a false read on how weak he really is. What is now clear is how the writer makes no mention of God now. Clearly, Samson was given strength from God to do these things, but we are getting the sense that God is being written out of the story.

Samson's actions look like someone who was never told “no.” But, the story of Samson is more than an opportunity to learn some lessons on how not to parent. Samson is Israel. And as we have seen over and over in Judges, Israel looks a lot like us. Like a Michigan pot hole that we can't seem to avoid hitting and doing great damage, Samson and Israel just keep sleeping with the enemy. Gaza is as far away from Israel (in Philistine territory) as one can get. And there is Samson, sleeping with a prostitute. But, this story is actually a preview for the next. And here things change. In the next scene, the woman is named. Everyone knows about Delilah. But Delilah was only the last woman out of three. There were probably more, many more that Samson had. But, here is my point. Samson went Gaza, he slept with a prostitute, he was facing

the consequences of his sinful actions, and he was able to escape – again. What did he learn? Nothing, other than, (as Bobby said last week) the rules do not apply to me. If you do something and you do not get caught. The worst thing you can do is assume that the rules do not apply to you. Samson desperately needed to see his life for what it really was. He desperately needed to know that he was blind to the reality of his own sin. He needed to be rescued from himself.

Is there anything that you are doing that, if others, who love you, knew about, they would confront you? Are you abusing yourself? Cutting yourself? Starving yourself? Harming yourself? Are you pursuing a relationship in secret that is only going to cause great harm? Are you lying, hiding information, living a secret little life where you think you can indulge in your desires? Know this. It will come out. Living with your life known to others, is such a gift from God. Living without secrets, without hidden closets, means living without shame and without duplicity. If there is something that you are doing that if known would cause others to confront you, I pray that you will trust that to a good friend who could get in your way and say, “No. You’re not going to Gaza. You are not hiring a hooker. You are not going to waste your life. Had Samson been a friend, he might have had a friend like that. Instead, the gate in Gaza which was no match for his strength, led to Delilah whose ways revealed what a weakling Samson really was. We see it clearly. Samson was blind, long before he had his eyes gouged out.

III. Am I forfeiting my calling as a Christian for immediate gratification? (16.4-21)

The story of Samson and Delilah is the longest of the stories within the larger account of Samson. Samson not learned his lesson nor heeded the warnings of God from his previous encounters with women he had no business being with. On his way to Timnah – a lion! The aftermath of that was a mess that seemed to never end. Then in Gaza, he allowed himself to be surrounded by the enemy. But, he always got out. He always got away with it. He was always able to talk his way out of getting the ticket, or getting the teacher to pass him, or getting his mom to give in. He could always bend the rules – right? So, in one of the most classic cases of “sin causes brain damage” Samson absolutely does the unexplainable. He not only goes after another Philistine girl, but he tells Delilah the “secret” to his strength. Now, keep this in mind. Each time she asked him what it was, and he made something up, she tested to see if it was really true. Men were literally hiding in her bedroom in order to kill Samson and he still trusted her. What was he thinking?

But, the whole picture is where things come together. Samson is playing with her, and she is playing with him. Samson who is using her is being used by her. Wait a minute, doesn’t the text say, that he “loved her?” Yes, but don’t forget, this is the “love” that is given by a self-worshiper. He “loves” her because of what she does for him. What is sweeter than honey and stronger than a lion? It is Samson’s love (lust) for women.

The relationship of Harry and Meghan, garnered international attention. Samson and Delilah almost did the same. Word of this relationship caused the “lords of the Philistines” (that is the leaders of the 5 city/states) to have a national conference as to how they ought to take advantage of this. They each contribute 1,100 pieces of silver (5,500 in total) to give Delilah to find out what the secret of his strength is. 5,500 pieces of silver is a huge amount of money! You could buy a slave for 30. These lords were desperate and Delilah was about to be filthy rich. Tie me

with fresh bowstrings. Nope. Tie me with unused ropes. Nope. Tie up the locks of my hair. Nope. Like watching a slow-motion train wreck, we find ourselves pleading with the story and saying, “no Samson. No. Don’t betray your vow this badly. Even though it is obvious that she cannot be trusted, his weakness for her ultimately rules any common sense he may have had. Delilah is like cocaine (or sin for that matter). The promise of the pleasure seems greater than the obvious threat of death. Delilah literally nagged him to death, and he allowed it.

V.17 is very telling. On the one hand, Samson knows his calling, but on the other hand, he doesn’t treasure it. He is willing to forfeit what is truly divine for what is altogether so worthless. Delilah gets what she wants and Samson gets what he has given away. His hair is shaved, and this man oblivious to the fact that the LORD will not be toyed with, is now to be toyed with. The Philistines probably wanted to kill him. But, he was worth more to them alive than dead. They gouge out his eyes and enslave him. He goes down to Gaza again. This time it is not for a girl, but to grind the mill in the prison. Remember all that wheat he burned earlier? So do they, apparently.

The ironies are tragically displayed. The man who was called to save Israel, did not know that the LORD had left him. Samson was a picture of his own nation. He traded the favor of God for pleasure and that pleasure betrayed him. Now, instead of rescuing Israel from those who held them captive, Samson is being held captive. Instead of plowing his own field and taking care of his own people, Samson is the grinding the grain of another. The man who mocked others is now mocked. This is his life. He cannot see. He is completely at the mercy of others. He looks like he is “proof” that God is not legitimate and his life is the occasion for others to praise Dagon. But now, the worst thing that could have happened is actually the best. Samson’s capture was the mercy of God and became the occasion for Samson to turn to God.

Conclusion:

If you are living as if you get to make the rules, as if God’s Word does not apply to you, it is easy to conclude that when your life blows up, that things are really bad. But the worst thing is for you to live your entire life for yourself, only to die and go to hell. It is a mercy of God to allow us to face immediate consequences for our sin otherwise we will face ultimate consequences for our sin, and we can’t pay for that.

Last year a 15-year old boy was hanging out with a group of friends in Oregon. They were all messing around, but he lit a smoke bomb and threw it into a canyon. That smoke bomb started a fire that burned 47,000 acres, a size about one half of the entire city of Detroit. This week he was sentenced by a judge and ordered to pay \$36 million in restitution. How could he ever do that?

Do you realize that if you had to pay for your sin, it would cost more than that? The cost of your sin is too high for you to pay. You need to know that, so that you will run to Christ who is the only one who can pay it. But, if you never face the immediate consequences for your sin, you will never see the need to run to Jesus.

I knew a dad who always bailed his son out of trouble. I pleaded with him to stop. Let your son feel the consequences so that he will realize his need. The dad said, I do this so that he would love Jesus. I said, he doesn't need Jesus, he has you to save him.

It is a mercy of God that we feel consequences so that we will turn to him in repentance and trust in Christ, and there find how deep his mercy really is.