

Samson Part 2: “She is Right in My Eyes”

Scripture Readings: JUDGES 14:1-20; Acts 2:22-24; 3:17-21

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Congregation of Christ: In our last study in Judges Chapter 13, the writer introduces Samson, his father Manoah and his mother, and the announcement of his birth by the Angel of the Lord. The Messenger revealed to his parents that they will have a son, but God has ordained him to be a Nazirite from conception. A Nazirite has three vows: to abstain from wine or any produce from the vine; stay away from dead bodies; and leave his hair uncut.

Today, we continue with Samson now as a young man who becomes infatuated with a Philistine woman. Because of this infatuation, he broke the Nazirite vows. He also committed acts of disobedience and vengeful murder, even if it was against God's enemies. But we also learn from our text, and in the next two chapters, that in spite of his rebellion and violent acts, God still used him to deliver Israel from their oppression by the Philistines.

So our theme today is “**She is Right in My Eyes,**” under three headings: first, **So He Broke the Nazirite Vows;** second, **So He Was Vengeful;** and third, **But God Still Used Him.**

So He Broke the Nazirite Vows

Our text, Chapter 14:1-20, is actually a portion of the first of two accounts of Samson's exploits. The first account, which continues into Chapter 15, is an account of his misadventures during his marriage to an unnamed Philistine woman. In Chapter 16, we read about his exploits when he was involved with two other Philistine women, a prostitute and a woman named Delilah, leading to his tragic death. Both of these accounts ended in the slaughter of Philistines.

But as soon as he became a young man, a woman from the city of Timnah, not the Spirit of the LORD, stirred him as his male hormones became active. The fruit of this normal male inclination was his eyes were fixed upon the beauty of this Philistine woman at Timnah, four miles downhill from Zorah. He was so infatuated with the woman that he demanded from his parents, “*Now get her for me as my wife!*”

This was a most unlawful demand for a couple of reasons. First, the Law of Moses prohibits marriage with unbelieving foreigners (Exo 34:16; Deu 7:3). Second, marriages were traditionally arranged by the parents, as when Abraham arranged Isaac's marriage with Rebekah (Gen 24:1-4; 38:6). So obviously, Samson's parents were not just disappointed, but devastated. They waited so long for a child, and now this child who was ordained by God to deliver Israel from the Philistines is not turning out to be what God has promised! They ask him, “With all the beautiful women of Israel around you, are you now going to marry a pagan, uncircumcised Philistine?” (1 Sam 14:6)

But Samson is not to be swayed. He's operating more from his overstimulated glands rather God's command and human logic. Just like many in our culture today, Samson wants instant gratification. They want *everything*, and they want it *now!* Just look at all followers of the prosperity gospel: they want paradise now—health and wealth—and they can't wait for Jesus to return from heaven to establish his perfect kingdom.

And Samson says something that most Israelites in his day say, “*she is right in my eyes.*” The only thing that mattered to him was I, me, my desires, my pleasures. Away with God's commands! Away with respecting and honoring parents and traditions! Today, all kinds of authorities are ignored, disrespected and dishonored. Parental wisdom is ignored. School administrators and teachers are disrespected. Civil authorities and police officers are dishonored and even violently attacked. Even in the church, there is disregard for orderly worship and discipline by the elders.

So it was that Samson's words are a mere foreshadow of Israel's state during the time of the judges. “*Everyone did what was right in their own eyes*” is the main theme of the book, written four times (Jgs 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). In stark contrast is God's command to Israel to be right in the eyes of the LORD to receive his blessings. After they left Egypt, the LORD commanded them to “*diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes*” (Exo 15:26). After 40 years in the wilderness, when they arrived at the gates of the Promised Land, the LORD repeated his promise of blessing, “*And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may go well with you*” (Deu 6:18).

We too are commanded to do what is right and good in the eyes of the LORD. Pastors build up the church by preaching and teaching, for “*it is in the sight of God*” (2 Cor 12:19). Praying for governing authorities is “*good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior*” (1 Tim 2:3). Doing good even when suffering is “*a gracious thing in the sight of God*” (1 Pet 2:20). The hidden, inner beauty of a woman's “*gentle and quiet spirit... in God's sight is very precious*” (1 Pet 3:4).

Samson's parents are devastated that their only child, their only son, would disobey their counsel and God's laws because of a beautiful, pagan woman. What did we do wrong? We have taught him, prayed for him, and loved him with all their heart. But one thing they didn't know. We read in verse 4, “*that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.*” Even Samson's disobedience and lust were part of God's plan to deliver Israel.

Finally, the parents acquiesce to Samson's pressure, and travel with him to Timnah. On the way, Samson got separated from them, and at the vineyards, a lion attacked him. The Spirit of the LORD “*rushed upon him,*” so that he tore the lion in pieces with his bare hands. It was the first demonstration of the strength of the LORD that was given by the LORD to Samson. There will be many more such displays in Samson's short and wayward life. After seeing the woman again, he returned home to his parents.

After a few days, he traveled back to Timnah to take the woman as his wife. On his way, he passed by the dead lion and saw a swarm of bees on the carcass, with a lot of honey. He scooped the honey from the carcass and ate it as he went. Now, he violated one of his Nazirite vows, and he was also unclean from touching a dead body. He even took some to his parents to eat, not giving a care that he was making his parents unclean as well.

At Timnah, Samson threw a wedding reception for the woman and her family. Wedding feasts usually lasted for seven days, and they were surely not free of wine from the vineyards. So there, Samson violated a second Nazirite vow.

So He Was Vengeful

The people also gave him a bachelor's party for 30 men, and Samson was licking his chops at the prospect of upgrading and expanding his wardrobe by 30 suits. So he made a bet against the 30 men through a riddle, a riddle which referred to his recent exploit against a lion and the sweet honey from its carcass.

Of course, who would even know what this exploit was? So the 30 men discussed and discussed what the answer might be, but Samson was just too smart for them. On the fourth day of the wedding feast, the 30 men agreed that the wife is the key to his secret. So they threatened to burn her and her father's house if they lost the bet. So her tears before Samson became a downpour, saying, "You don't love me anymore!" Until finally, just like most men, Samson caved in to her seduction, tears and all kinds of things a woman does to get what she wants.

The answer from the 30 Philistine men also came in a riddle, "*What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?*" Of course, Samson knew that they were insulting him because he had no power against seduction of the sweeter and stronger wife! But Samson would not be defeated quietly, telling the Philistine men, "*If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle.*" Which means, you cheated because you messed with my wife!

Seething with rage, he went down to faraway Ashkelon, about 30 miles away, and killed 30 Philistine men and took their garments, which he gave to the cheaters. This was the second display of the strength given to him by the Spirit of God rushing upon him. The last verse is an ominous prelude to the coming attraction, "*And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.*" Still burning with fury, Samson went home to his parents.

The cycle of violence and retaliation has just begun. This cycle will continue in the next two chapters.

But God Still Used Him

But let us go back to verse 4, "*His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.*"

This doesn't mean that God approved Samson's sins, or that his parents were wrong in disapproving his desire. What it means is that God will use even Samson's ungodliness to fulfill his purpose. None of his godless motivations will prevent God from delivering his people. We have seen this in the life of Jephthah before Samson. He was manipulative and vengeful, even slaughtering fellow Israelites in his pride and anger. And he made a sinful vow to manipulate God, resulting in the burning of his own daughter. But God still used Jephthah to deliver Israel from the Midianite oppressors.

When Peter preached his first sermon in Jerusalem on Pentecost Sunday, he condemned the Jews for crucifying Jesus, saying, "*you crucified and killed [him] by the hands of lawless men.*" But he said that in this crime committed against our Lord, he was "*delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*" (Acts 2:23). From eternity past, God ordained his Son to come down from heaven and assume human flesh and blood to be a sacrifice for all the sins of his people. Like Samson's parents, the Jews and Romans did not know about this plan. They did not know that their sinfulness and unbelief were part of God's eternal decree. This is why Peter said in his next sermon, "*I know that*

you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:17-21).

Even these ugly stories in the Bible are our comfort. Today, when we look at all the lawlessness, violence, rebellion and civil disobedience against authorities around us, we despair and lament over what's happening to our nation. We sometimes wonder if God is judging our unbelief and rebellion against God. Who knows if God is working things out to send a wake-up call to Christians in America, calling us to repent of our sins and return to him?

When our children turn away from God after we raise them in the faith; when we get the bad news of a terminal illness; when we can't make ends meet; we despair and question God's goodness. We lose sight of the promise of Romans 8:28, *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* God works all things out, including our own evil and sinful works and motives, to fulfill his purpose. The secret things of the Lord may turn out to be our comfort and blessing.

Dear friends, there are both warnings and comfort for us in the story of Samson's wayward life. Our motivations and actions ought to be right and good in the eyes of God. We are often driven by what is pleasing to our senses, not what is pleasing to God. Many live their lives as if there is no God, like fools who say there is no God.

Second, disobeying our parents and other authorities almost always lead to disaster in our lives. Most of us have children and grandchildren, and we know that many of those who have ignored our godly counsel and wisdom have turned away from the Christian faith. This rebellion has often resulted in troubled lives.

Third, be mindful that there are many “secret things” belonging to God alone. All that we need for our salvation and godly living are revealed to us in the Scriptures. So we are not to be dismayed and in despair when our lives are on the rocks, because these momentary afflictions will turn out to be our comfort, “blessings in disguise.”

In our troubles and afflictions, our greatest comfort is that we can go to God's throne of grace in fervent prayer, *“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed the same prayer to his Father on the night he was betrayed, *“Not my will, but yours be done.”* He willingly suffered for his mission from eternity to save his people from all their sins. It didn't matter to him that he knew he would suffer and die at the hands of wicked people. Unlike Samson, Jesus fulfilled his eternal vow to his Father to perfectly obey all the Law.

Today, we commemorate his once-for-all sacrifice for all our sins as we partake of the bread and wine. To obey this remembrance ceremony is pleasing in God's sight. His sacrifice on the cross for us is not a secret, as it was during the time of the judges. It has been fully revealed to us for the forgiveness of our sins. This is our great comfort. Amen.