

A Failed Leader Judges 16:1-31

Friends, the Republican Party in the United States is currently looking for someone to lead them against the Democrats in the upcoming Presidential elections. And it been fascinating to watch the contenders come and go.

Each month there has been a star candidate who seems poised, confident, and has the potential to connect with the masses and for a while they are popular and attractive

but then something happens to them on the campaign trail and they trip up... and end up looking like a fool and they are no longer the candidate of choice.

The most recent example was Herman Cain's awkward attempt to respond to a question about foreign policy involving Libya.

And it really wasn't so much the content of his answer as much as it was how he verbally fumbled and stumbled around with his words.

He came off looking like someone who was incoherent and thus incompetent, and now it his bid for leadership in the Republican Party is finished.

And Friends it's never pretty to watch a leader crash and burn, but it happens... and as we finish off the story of Samson all we can do is watch as the Judge – who out of all the heroes in the Book of Judges had the most potential – all we can do is watch as he trips up in his relationships with women and orchestrates his own demise.

And so the forth chapter opens up with Samson going down to the city of Gaza, where He sees a woman and decides to spend the night with her.

Why does he do this? The text doesn't give us a straight answer on it, but take note that it happens because **“he saw”** the woman.

In other words the phrase that we've heard over and over in the last couple weeks - that phrase which describes the state of the nation of Israel during the time of the Judges - *“In those days*

Israel had no king and each person did what was right in their own eyes...” - that phrase applies to Samson too.

He does what is right in his own eyes – he sees a woman and decides that he’s going to sleep with her. And this signals to us that Samson’s forthcoming demise is inevitable

Not so much because of any particular consequences to this action, or because sexual relationships are somehow dirty or wrong, but because according to Ancient Wisdom literature – like the book of Proverbs, to have sex with a woman *who was not your wife* was to play the fool.

*“For the lips of the **adulterous** woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave.” (Prov 5:1-5)*

Why? Because in the ancient world the fidelity of a monogamous relationship was seen as being representative of one’s ability to be faithful and monogamous in terms of one’s covenant relationship with God.

And to leave that relationship with God or to cheat on him by worshiping another god was to risk destroying the relationship that gave you your life.

Not that we’ve ever seen Samson portrayed as being super-close with God, he’s motivated by self-interest, lust, revenge – not by a close intimate relationship with God

But, for all his self focus when it comes down to it He knows that his life and strength come from God. Last week we saw him pray to God because he is dying of thirst after his battle with the Philistines and he acknowledges that it is God who gave him the victory as he asks for water.

But this decision to sleep with this woman he sees shows us that Samson is moving into a point in his life where He might be willing to risk the relationship with God which gives him his life and strength.

And sure enough as the story progresses we see that he is, because He falls in love with Delilah, and she urges him to put

aside that which God has called him to do and become like any other man.

And Delilah does this to Samson because she too is an Israelite who is doing what seems right in her own eyes as well. And in having a relationship with Samson she sees an opportunity to make a ridiculous amount of money, \$15 million dollars by today's standards – all she has to do is find out Samson's secret.

So her strategy is to ask Samson to choose her over his strength. *“How can you be bound and subdued Samson? I don't want to share you with anyone else!” How can I get you all to myself, how can I overcome you, you're so big and strong – but there must be a way, right? Tell me what it is!*

And at first Samson toys with her by giving false answers, but after the third false answer she pulls out the big guns – she says *“You don't really love me – if you did you would tell me how I can overcome your strength”*

But Samson does love her – the text plainly says that, and he can't stand the false accusations that he doesn't love her – so

eventually he is driven to prove that he does by choosing her over his calling – so he tells her how he can be made like any other man –

If I cut my hair, my strength would leave me, and I would become like any other man. This is how you could overcome me and bind me up; this is how you could have me all to yourself, this is how you could tame me and make me settle down. I'm willing to give up my calling as a Judge to build a life with you.

And with this admission Samson gives to Delilah what had been an intimate part of the relationship between God and himself. He believes that he is giving himself to someone who loves him, not suspecting that she is planning to use this intimate knowledge to betray him for her own profit.

Now why is Samson willing to give this up? Maybe he was tired – tired of being different, tired of being used by God to harass and fight the Philistines, tired of always having the Philistines harassing him. Maybe he's tired of being so self-focused and he wants to live for something other than revenge.

Maybe he wants to give himself to someone else, to live for someone other than himself – love does that to us.

And to Samson’s eyes Delilah seemed like the right person to give himself too. But Samson did not know that she was simply a “silver-digger”! That behind the feigned affection and desire there was nothing but a cold calculating opportunist who cared nothing for him.

So Samson was a fool, a fool for choosing to give himself wholly to Delilah instead of wholly to God, a fool for not realizing that he was being deceived.

So just as Proverbs 5 warns – a smooth talking woman led him away to his destruction. He crashes and burn, the mighty Samson is reduced to a blind slave grinding grain in a Philistine prison.

And friends, there is a very clear warning in here for us as well.

Because, we live in an age where God’s absolute truth no longer reigns and rules over the lives of people. Instead it is

said that all paths lead to God, and what’s important is that you take the path that seems right in your eyes.

And friends, this siren song of our age whispers seductively to us, it teases and pleads for us to agree with it – to conform to it, and thus give up our calling to share Christ with everyone as the only way to God.

If at first we don’t then eventually it will accuse us of being intolerant, it will cry that we do not have society’s best interests at heart, that we don’t really love others.

And we can’t stand that, because we know that the message of Christ is all about love, we know that it is best for society, in fact it was Christians who pioneered the concept of tolerance – because God is slow to anger and full of grace and compassion.

And so it gets hard, so difficult to live day after day with this nagging, it wears us down and we are tempted to trade in our faithfulness to Jesus Christ and to God’s truth for some peace and quiet and so that it is easier to live and work in our society – so we can be like any other person.

Little do we know that once we trade in our faithfulness to Jesus Christ as the only way to God, we lose our spiritual life and strength.

Jesus warned us about this when he said *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

Friends, if we trade in our faithfulness to Christ, we lose our spiritual strength and vitality. The enemy will overpower us and enslave us and that has implications for every area of our lives.

It might mean that we will give in to adultery – to sex outside of marriage and all the risks to our health and safety and our relationship which that can entail.

It might mean that we can get addicted to drugs or alcohol because we need something else to make us strong enough to deal with life’s challenges

It might mean that our anger issues, our selfishness, our perfectionism, our criticalness, our cynicism, will get the better of us and wreck our relationships, steal our joy in life and make us bitter people.

Or perhaps worst of all – we will think that we are still strong because we’ve not committed adultery, we’re not addicted to anything and we manage our character flaws pretty well – and we don’t realize we are blind to our pride and our own self-righteousness, we don’t think we even need a path to God.

Friends Samson suffered the consequences for his unfaithfulness – he was captured and humiliated and in the end he died a kamikaze death among his enemies, a sad ending for a hero with so much potential.

And even though God granted him his last request – and he killed many of his enemies, he was not free... and he did not set Israel free – they were still oppressed.

And the point is this - the real problem wasn't political oppression, it wasn't physical blindness, or being held in prison.

The real problem was and still is that human beings are oppressed by sin, they are spiritually blind, and our hearts are not captive to Christ.

Friends, I know this isn't what we want, so let us learn from the story of Samson and Delilah.

Don't trade in your faithfulness to Jesus Christ as the only way to God – Christ is the source of forgiveness, of life, of strength - he is the one that sends us the Holy Spirit who works his mighty power in our lives to counteract all the awful things that we can be enslaved by.

So remain in Christ, remain faithful to Christ and instead of adultery, addiction and anger and pride there will be good fruit, the fruit of the Spirit – *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...*

And friends, think what having more of this fruit in your would mean for your relationships, for your health, for your life!

More love for your spouse and family, more patience and kindness at work or school, goodness towards our neighbors, gentleness towards other drivers on the road, self-control so that we overcome those character flaws and bad habits

And friends you know better than I do how the Fruit of the Spirit can help your lives become excellent and God honoring.

So let us do as Hebrews 12:2 says. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith”

So no matter what comes our way...hang on to Christ, be faithful to Christ.

And as we're hanging on, remember this - Christ's grip on us is always greater than our grip on Christ.

Amen.