

**A Failed Leader
Judges 16:1-31**

Brothers and sisters, it's never pretty to watch a leader who had so much potential crash and burn, but it happens... and so this morning as we finish off the story of Samson, we see him flame out in a most spectacular fashion.

Samson – who out of all the heroes in the Book of Judges had the most potential to deliver and lead Israel with his incredible God-given strength... we see the great Samson tripping himself up through his weakness in his relationships with women, orchestrating his own demise and ultimately failing in his calling as a Judge.

And so as we heard this morning - the forth chapter of Samson's story begin with Samson going down to the city of Gaza, where He sees a Philistine woman, and decides he's going to spend the night with her.

And because we know who Samson is supposed to be and what He is called to we immediately wonder why in the world

is Samson doing this?? Now the scripture doesn't give us an explicit answer for Samson's action, but we should take note that the bible says it happens simply because Samson "**saw**" this woman.

So in other words the phrase which you've heard me state repeatedly over the last couple of weeks, the phrase which scripture gives as the closing statement to summarize the book of Judges, the phrase which describes the state of the relationship between the nation of Israel and Yahweh, this phrase also characterizes the actions of Samson as well...

And that phrase is *"In those days Israel had no king and each person did what was right in their own eyes..."*

Samson does what is right in his own eyes – he **sees** a woman, and he likes what he sees and so he decides that he's going to sleep with her.

And this signals to us that Samson's forthcoming demise is inevitable – in fact when the people of Gaza hear that Samson

has decided to “stay the night” in their town they set an ambush and trap him, waiting for dawn to come so they can kill him. And its only because Samson is exceptionally strong that he is able to break out of the city and avoid the consequence of his decision to spend the night there.

Samson uses his God given strength to avoid the consequences of his actions instead of using it to lead God’s people back to faithful obedience to God.

Brothers and sisters when we use the Lord’s power for our own agendas – we have started down the road that will lead to our eventual demise.

Similarly, when we use God’s created gift of human sexuality for our own agendas – we are starting down a road that will lead to our demise as well, and this is something that the book of Proverbs makes abundantly clear.

In the ancient world for a man to have sex with a woman *who was not his wife* was to play the fool.

Proverbs 5:3-5 says “*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.*”

Why is this so?

Because brothers and sisters the ancient world know, in contrast to our modern misunderstandings about sexuality, that the fidelity of a monogamous relationship was seen as representing your ability to be faithful and monogamous in your covenant relationship with Yahweh as your God.

And to leave that relationship with Yahweh or to cheat on him by worshiping another god was to risk destroying the relationship that gave you your life, and that was just stupid – it was foolish.

So engaging in any sort of sexual activity outside of a male-female marriage relationship – was also an indicator of your unfaithfulness to God.

You couldn't keep your heart faithful to Yahweh while it was lusting after another man or woman, and especially since the worship of Canaanite idols involved ritual sex. Sexual intimacy outside of a male-female marriage kills your life-giving spiritual intimacy with Yahweh.

Not that we've ever seen Samson portrayed as being super-close and intimate with Yahweh up to this point in the story - he's motivated by self-interest, lust, revenge - he's not driven by a close intimate relationship with God and God's purposes.

But, in spite of his narcissistic tendencies when push comes to shove Samson knows that his life and strength come from God. After his battle with the Philistines when he was about to die of thirst, he cried out to Yahweh for water and in doing so acknowledges that it is God who gave him the victory.

But this foolish decision to go and commit adultery with this woman he has seen, shows us that Samson is moving to a point in his life where He is willing to risk the relationship with God which gives him his life and his great strength for lust.

And sure enough, as his story progresses, we see that Samson is not only willing to risk his relationship with God for lust, but he is willing to trade it in for "**love**" when he falls in love with Delilah.

Now we might think at least this is a bit more noble than falling in lust right? But in spite of the fact that love is indeed more noble than lust it is still foolishness on the part of Samson as his love only leads him to shack up with Delilah and not to offer her his hand in marriage. There is nothing redemptive about human love which somehow sanctifies sinning against God's intentions for human sexuality brothers and sisters.

Now, if Samson had proceeded to ask Delilah to be his wife it might have revealed her character to him before it was too late, because Delilah, like Samson, is also an Israelite who is doing what seems right in her own eyes.

When the Philistine rulers found out that Samson was in love with her they realized this was a weakness that could be

exploited – and we don't really know if Delilah was responsive to Samson's romantic advances before they visited her, but upon being offered a ridiculous amount of silver, over \$15 million dollars in today's value, she sees an opportunity in having a relationship with Samson that can make her rich!

All she has to do is leverage her feminine wiles and find out the secret of Samson's strength and report it to the Philistines.

So Delilah's delicate-ness, because that's what her name means in Hebrew – is going to ensnare and overcome Samson's great strength... how??

Since she knows Samson loves her, she will ask him to choose her over his strength. *"How can you be bound and subdued Samson?"*

In other words, Delilah plays on his affections and love for her. 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 really does love her – the bible plainly says that, and he can't stand the false accusations that he doesn't love her – so eventually he is driven to prove his love by choosing her over his calling – and 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 the only intimate part of the relationship left between God and himself and the strength of the Lord leaves him.

Samson foolishly believes that he is giving himself to someone who loves him back, not suspecting that she is planning to use this intimate knowledge to betray him for an opportunity that she has seen to make a huge profit.

Now why is Samson willing to do this?

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 that 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 will do this to us.

It's too bad that Samson couldn't have loved God in that way... that he wasn't able to see that living for Yahweh's plan would be something greater that he could fully give himself to.

However, in Samson's eyes Delilah seemed like the right person to give himself to. 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 5:3-5 informs – a smooth talking woman led him away to his destruction. He crashes and burns; the mighty Samson is reduced to a blind slave grinding grain in a Philistine prison.

And brothers and sisters, there is a very clear warning in here for us as well – not only personally but as Christ's Church.

Brothers and sisters, once again 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 to you – so in these days Canada does not recognize Christ as King and everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

And indeed, brothers and sisters – even for us as Christians and the Church – it looks right in our own eyes to do what is right in our own eyes does it not???

Let me say that again, it seems right to us that we should each be able to do what seems right to us – after all isn't that why we have become Christians, because it seems right to us??

So brothers and sisters, this chapter of the story of Samson is a warning to us of how seductive and captivating it can seem to us to do what is right in our own eyes – even to the point of viewing our inclusion in the body of Christ and our calling to go make disciples of all nations as something we decided for ourselves. In spite of the fact that Jesus plainly says in John

15:16 *“you did not choose me – I chose you... to go and bear fruit!”*

Furthermore, those who do what is right in their own eyes seem attractive to us don't they, and thus this siren song of our age whispers seductively to us, it teases and pleads for us to agree with it – to conform to it, to give ourselves over to it and thus give up our calling as Christians and the Church to make disciples of all nations and give up the strength of the gospel that Christ is the only way to salvation with God.

And we might resist at first, but then eventually we will be accused of being intolerant and hateful, the ideologies of our age will cry out that we do not have our society's best interests at heart, that we don't really love others.

And we can't stand that brothers and sisters, because we know that the message of Christ is all about God's divine Love, and we know God's Love is what is best for our society, in fact our concept of tolerance and human rights came about because of the influence of Christianity and the Church in our

society – because as we see – even in the Old Testament - God is slow to anger and full of grace and compassion, and he tolerates our sinfulness in order to bring about His plan of salvation and allow us the opportunity to repent.

But it gets so hard, so difficult to live day after day, month after month, year after year with this nagging... putting up with these false accusations that we are not loving, that we are homophobic, that we are intolerant and narrow minded...

It wears us down and we are sorely 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 get on with our lives and work within our society – so we can be like any other person.

Brothers and sisters, be warned...

Once we trade in our faithfulness to Jesus Christ as the only way to God, once the Church shaves away message of our sinfulness that requires as savior - we lose our spiritual life and

strength and the enemy comes and binds us up and enslaves us.

Jesus warned us about this in John 15:5 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.”*

Brothers and sisters, hear this clearly! If we, as individuals or as a Church, trade in our faithfulness to Christ, to the Word of God, we lose our spiritual strength and vitality – and what scripture says in 2 Timothy 3:5 will become true in our lives – we may have a “form” of godliness, but we deny its power.

So instead, 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 – that we give our approval and indulge in all the various shades of sexuality that our culture practices outside of male-female marriage,

along with all the risks to our health and safety and our relationship with God which that can entail.

It might mean that we can get addicted to drugs or alcohol because we no longer have the power of the Holy Spirit working in us – so 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 – because we still have a form of godliness, we’re moral tolerant accepting people who say “love wins!” We fight against racism and homophobia and do our part to reduce our carbon footprint and so on... we’re good Canadians... And while we respect the right of each person to choose whatever path to

God seems right in their own eyes, we don’t think we even need a path to God - because we’re so woke!

But... we don’t realize we have been blinded, our eyes have been gouged out and we are not able to see our pride, our own self-righteousness, our false religion until we stand before the Lord on the day of judgement and we see the truth about ourselves – a moment too late, and we reap the consequences for foolishly trading in our calling as the Church of Jesus to become people of this world.

Brothers and sisters, 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 – and if we understand this then it will be God’s grace for us that helps to keep us faithful and a message we can share with those who call themselves Christians who are in danger of foolishly doing what seems right in their own eyes... the point is that the real problem for Israel and Samson wasn’t political and military and economic 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.

Brothers and sisters, I do not believe that being oppressed and captive to Sin is what we would want for ourselves, for our families, for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, or for anyone - so let us learn from the story of Samson and Delilah this morning.

DO NOT give into the temptation to do what seems right in your own eyes – instead submit yourself to and put your trust

in the Word of God. As Psalm 119:115 says *“your Word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path”*

And DO NOT foolishly trade-in your faithfulness to Jesus Christ as the only way to God. Hold fast to the profession that 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, brothers and sisters 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 Sprit, fruit that will last – *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...*

And friends, think what having more of this fruit 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 especially any sense of self-righteousness that we might have.

And the strength of the Lord and the incredible transforming power of the Holy Spirit will continue to work through us as we remain faithful. As the Apostle Paul teaches us in Eph 1:19-20 it is an incomparably great power for us who believe. It is a power which is the mighty strength of God which the Father exerted when he raised Christ from the dead!

And it is a power strong enough to keep us faithful and to transform the hearts of those who do what is right in their own eyes to repent and do what is right in God's eyes.

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

So, brothers and sisters no matter what comes our way... no matter what might seem right to us in our own eyes, no matter how much nagging and persuading might come our

way - hang on to Christ, be faithful to Christ, stay strong in Christ.

And as we're hanging on, remember this - Christ's grip on us is always greater than our grip on Christ, We did not chose Him, but He chose us.

Amen.