

**A Failed Politician
Judges 15: 1- 20**

Well brothers and sisters, that was a great reader's theatre presentation of the 3rd chapter in the story of Samson wasn't it, and it has me feeling a little bit disappointed that we couldn't have presented it in live action format as we typically would for Breakfast Theatre.

We've been doing Breakfast Theatre for such a long time now that we've had the opportunity to do many of these great stories for a second time now and as we've done them we've upped the production value a bit more – if you remember pre-pandemic we did the story of Daniel again and put together an amazing set design inspired by the gate of Ishtar.

So, this week's chapter in Samson has me wondering what creative ideas we might have been able to come up with for having the foxes burning down the crops or how we could have made Samson's one-man battle against the Philistines extra epic.

Which has me thinking that overall, the story of Samson would make for a great action movie – now maybe I'm thinking that because I've been watching a lot of action movies lately... I never did see any of the Fast and Furious movies in the theatre and so I have been catching up on them so that I'm up to speed to go see the latest one in the theatre.

And from what I've seen in the Fast and Furious movies, the story of Samson seems to have all the right ingredients to be an epic action flick. There's an underdog hero with special rules for his life, a ruthless enemy that he must fight against, a beautiful woman who is his love interest– and of course lots of action.

Now, I've mentioned that Samson would make a good action flick before, back in 2011 the very first time we presented this story for our Breakfast Theatre. And I believe I described the battle in chapter 3 in the following manner.

It would be a "slow-mo battle scene showing Samson effortlessly turning aside the spears and swords of the

Philistine, his muscles bulging, his long hair is flying about, expertly delivering killing blows with nothing but the jawbone of a donkey..."

And then in 2018 lo and behold this movie came out... let me show you a brief clip.... Its like someone was reading my description of Samson as an epic movie!

But, the challenge when you translate something like Samson's battle against the Philistines into a visual format like a movie is that you risk making it just another action flick.

It's perspective is focused on all the things that appeal to human nature – our sinful human nature - and it is difficult to keep the focus on the purpose of why the scriptures tell us these stories, which we find in 2 Tim 3:15-17 *"the Holy Scriptures....are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."* And *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

So, what are we to get out of this 3rd chapter in the story of Samson beyond being impressed by his superhuman exploits? Well... let's start by looking at what goes wrong in this chapter.

It starts when Samson decides that he's going to go back down to Timnah to be with his wife. So, in spite of how things had ended the last time he was down in Timnah for the wedding, Samson decides he wants to go see his wife. So he gets a goat to bring to her – perhaps this was the Philistine equivalent to chocolate and flowers – and goes down as if nothing had happened to romance the woman that he believe is still his wife.

But of course something had happened; Samson had stormed off from the wedding and left his bride behind, and her father had figured that Samson didn't want her anymore and so he had given her to the best man instead.

Of course – as we have been reminded each week, this is all taking place with-in the larger context that the nation of Israel

was being oppressed by the Philistines because they were not being faithful covenant partners with God.

So, when Samson discovers his wife has been given away to another he is insulted and angry and he plots his revenge which will start an escalating blood-feud between himself and the Philistines. One thing going wrong just keeps leading to another and another...

Now they say revenge is a dish best served cold, but Samson decides to BBQ it instead and sets fire to the Philistines crops.

This delivers a crushing blow to their economic and agricultural production – and to draw once again on our action movie example this is like when the hero of an action movie strikes back at a drug cartel by burning their cocoa fields and their production facilities...

The Philistine's strength and ability to oppress Israel will be considerably weakened with their food and economic resources having been destroyed.

Now before you get all worried about animal cruelty, Samson was using an animal that was considered to be vermin and was already hunted as a pest in the vineyards. Song of Songs 2:14 says that foxes ruin the vineyards and scholarly opinion is that they would wreck the produce by eating the grapes off the vines. But again – if we're worried that this story glorifies animal cruelty, we're falling into the trap of thinking that stories in scripture are moralistic tales as opposed to the account of how God worked in spite of human sinfulness.

So in retaliation for the burning of their crops, the Philistines do what any self-respecting group of villains do – they kill the people who are connected to Samson – not his parents, but the woman he loved and her father. *(Again - the irony here should not be lost on us that Samson's wife betrayed him to avoid being burned to death and ultimately this was her fate regardless)*

And whenever the bad guys mess with the one the hero loves in any action movie, you know what is going to happen next right? Watch out... because all hell is about to break loose.

And sure enough we read in 15:7-8 Samson says *“Since you’ve acted like this, I swear that I won’t stop until I get my revenge on you.” He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them.*”

So, with Samson standing up to the Philistines and taking apart their operation left right and center you would think that it would inspire his fellow Israelites to rise up and attack them as well, since its evident they have been weakened.

You would think so... but in fact what we see happen is that the locals come to Samson and say *“Hombre, are you loco???* *You can’t do this to the Philistines, they will make trouble for us and we don’t want no trouble”*

Samson’s fellow Israelites are so intimidated by the Philistines they would rather hand over one of their own to their enemy than stand up to them and take advantage of what God has started through Samson, so they can be obedient to conquer all of the Promised Land.

In spite of the fact that Samson has just killed a thousand Philistines soldiers in front of three thousand of his countrymen – the men of Israel only see an extraordinarily strong vigilante, but they can’t see what the Spirit of the LORD is doing and they are not roused from their apathy to rise up against their oppressors.

So there is no deliverance - for all his feats of strength Samson failed to politically motivate and organize his people, he’s just a lone wolf, self-interested, self-absorbed, reactionary and only interested in personal revenge. After all that happens in this chapter Israel still remains oppressed and the Philistines continue to rule over them for another twenty years.

And so this chapter closes with a disheartening sentence – It says for twenty years Samson ***judged*** Israel... in the days of the Philistines. Now the NIV version that we used this morning says he “led” Israel, but judged is actually a better translation, and I will tell you why.

“Samson *judged* Israel” – I can’t help but read this statement as an indictment that Samson’s failures a reflection of the state of the weakness and failures of God’s people and their faith and trust and their relationship with Him.

The one God has set apart to deliver the people never rises above them, instead he reflects the worst of who they are.

Now brothers and sisters, there has been much written since 2016 about how the political leadership in the U.S. but also here in Canada... how it has been a judgement, an indictment upon who we are as democracies – electing leaders who reflect the worst of who we are and do not lead us above the division and self-interest that plagues us.

But, just as it was in Samson times, this is less of indictment of any given political arrangement but a reflection of how we have become content to live our lives co-existing with how Sin oppresses us – personally and as a society.

Brothers and sisters this is an abusive relationship – and the actually reality of abusive relationships is a good example and a concrete manifestation of how the abused person puts up with the abuse, even excuses it and stays with the abuser.

This is the reality of our relationship with Sin.

And for most of us – it is a reality in our lives that has to do with what we might call “our guilty little pleasures.” You know those things which we know are wrong but we do anyway...things that we call our “character flaws” or “bad habits.”

Like watching movies which glorify violence or sex outside of marriage – or some form of pornography...

Like participating in the gossip that goes around our workplace or school or on our social media feeds...

Like stretching the truth or telling white lies...

Like venting our rage by flipping the middle finger at the driver who cut us off...

Or maybe its more along the lines of going along with the status quo in our society today.

Like believing the lie that it's up to us to decide what's right and wrong and how we should live and ignoring God's laws and His design and intentions for His creation...

Or giving into the temptation to believe we are weak, worthless, that we're not enough, that we have to work harder to impress people and have our stuff together...

It's all various ways in which Sin oppresses us, abuses us and we have become so familiar with it that we are apathetic about it, we continue to put up with it... justify it... excuse it... and go back to it again and again...

Even though we may know all about Jesus and who He was...

Even though we may have learned that He taught us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul and mind and strength,

Even though Jesus demonstrated how to love our neighbor as ourselves...

Even though he performed miracles – turning water to wine, feeding four thousand, calming a storm, and casting out demons...

And in spite of celebrating his sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins and his resurrection over death each year at Easter...

We remain comfortable with Sin in our lives, and we put up with its oppression. It's a lot like Samson and the nation of Israel, isn't it?

But brothers and sisters as I've said before, the stories in the bible are written to reveal the true nature of God to us. And no matter what goes wrong in the story, and however that plays out in people lives - the good news is that God always comes in to save the day.

And from the start of this story God has been working behind the scenes to set-up a confrontation between Samson and the Philistines to demonstrate his power and to show how their gods are powerless, so He can save Israel from them – and from their own apathy.

So When the men of Judah fail to rally behind Samson, the Spirit of the LORD takes over and through Samson - God himself is fighting the Philistine army, and this battle is a study in contrasts: one man versus a thousand or more, long hair versus clean shaven, a primitive bone club versus forged iron swords and spears, an undisciplined raw strength against trained military tactics.

Because this is often how God works isn't? As the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:25 *"the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."*

So Samson, one man with a bone club defeats one thousand trained armed soldiers.

And when he is finished, he is literally almost finished. He is exhausted and almost dying from dehydration He cries out to God and God provides water to quench his thirst and restore his strength.

And as we learned last week, God's actions always seem to foreshadow what He will do in the future and again we see indications of what Jesus will be like, as we look at Samson.

For example – in this chapter Samson was hiding out in the cave of Etam, which is only a short distance from the town of Bethlehem, where Jesus was born – in a shelter for animals that scholars believe was built into a cave.

Samson is rejected and betrayed by his countrymen because he is overturning the status quo and standing up to the Philistines, Jesus is rejected and betrayed by his countrymen because he stands up to the sinful self-righteousness which was oppressing God's people and claimed to be God's son – the messiah!

And perhaps the most significant allusion in the story of Samson as to what was coming in the ministry and work of Jesus Christ is how God uses Samson's failures as a new kind of judge, one that doesn't rely on political skill, military strategy or forged weapons to free Israel from their oppression.

You see in the person of Jesus Christ; God has a new solution to the age old problem of human sinfulness, and it's not a political solution, it's not a legal solution, it's not an economic solution, it's not a rational solution, it's not an emotional solution...

It is a heart solution – one that gets at the place where our thoughts, our feelings, our actions flow out of... at the core of our human existence in who we are. In Jesus Christ God has freed human nature... at its heart - from the oppression of Sin.

And how did Christ fight this battle, not politically or militarily – but through dying a criminal's death on a cross – an amazing victory achieved in such a lowly way, a contrasting way.

As the bible says *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."* (1 Cor 1:18)

Brothers and sisters God is working in our world, he is working in our lives to save us – to save us from the oppression of Sin.

And when our hearts are freed from Sin, we are enabled to give up that desire, that predisposition we all have to determine what is right and wrong for ourselves – that's the root of our Sin, the root of all our problems – personally, socially and politically, just like the book of Judges says *"In those days Israel had no King and each person did what was right in their own eyes"*

But Freedom from Sin means that we give the prerogative to decide what is right and wrong, back to whom it rightfully belongs - we give it back to Jesus Christ, our Savior, our Lord, our King! And we follow and obey him instead of ourselves.

And this has implications, it has economic implications, it has political implications, it has implications for every aspect of our lives and society, and for the entire creation!

Think about William Wilberforce, for whom following Jesus as Savior meant that he campaigned to end the slave trade in the British Empire.

Think about Martin Luther King, for whom following Jesus as Lord meant fighting for civil rights for African Americans in United States,

and think about Tommy Douglas, for whom following Jesus as King meant working to establishing a healthcare system in Canada so basic healthcare was available to everyone.

Brothers and sisters once we are no longer comfortable with Sin in our hearts, we can no longer be comfortable with the ways that Sin oppresses others and manifests itself in things like poverty and famine and food shortages, abortion, human

trafficking, corruption on Wall St, or with actual cases of environmental destruction (*not simply climate hysteria*).

Ironically the growing propensity to diagnose what is ultimately wrong in our society through a Marxist definition of power and oppression, and attempt to remedy said oppression through cancel culture and critical race theory is also a manifestation of Sin and an example of how it oppresses and abuses us.

Now, since we're following Jesus and obeying Him and we're no longer comfortable with letting sin oppress us or others in these forms - and we're motivated to rise up and do something about it – don't go and occupy downtown Calgary, or demand that someone ought to be cancelled... protesting isn't the solution brothers and sisters... blessing others and doing evangelism is!

We need to share the good news, the truth of how Christ can free each of us from the Sin that is lodged in our hearts and invite and assist people to confess their sin and repent of it.

Freedom from oppression comes through confession, and confession to Jesus brings grace and mercy and forgiveness and absolution – something that Marxism, cancel culture, and critical race theory cannot offer.

When you confess Sin to Jesus – He frees you from it and He becomes your King.

And when Christ is King in the hearts of CEO's they make business decisions that steward the environment not ravage it, and when Christ is King over the lives of stockbrokers and investors they make investments to share the wealth not hoard it for themselves or rip people off... when Christ is King in the hearts of people who have oppressed others – they don't renounce their power, instead they use it to empower others, protect them, correct them and lift them up... things get better! You get the picture.

So today's chapter in Samson is more than just inspiring material that we could make into another action flick.

What we learn about God's character and humanities sinfulness is a call for us to wake up and stop being so comfortable with the way in which Sin oppresses us.

And it's an invitation to take advantage of what God has done in Christ so that you and I can be free... from that oppression.

And this should inspire us to go out and bless others in Jesus name by sharing how they can be freed from that oppression as well.

So, brothers and sisters - what are we waiting for? Listening to this story of Samson might make us think of an action movie – but it doesn't have to be a movie, it can simply be us taking action to be obedient to our Lord.

May the Lord move us to do so.

Amen.

Let's pray!