

## A Failed Wedding Judges 14: 1- 20

Well friends as far as wedding day disasters go this one ranks up there with the best of them. We might criticize Kim Kardashian for having such an extravagant wedding and then filing for divorce seventy-two days later, but this relationship never makes it past the reception! I'm sure this was all over the tabloid headlines back in ancient Israel...

Samson's riddle solved- he loses bet! Wife gives answer away! Samson goes on murderous rampage!

What went wrong friends? And to answer the question all we need to do is look at the last sentence of the book of Judges – in which we find Samson's story.

The last line summarizes the whole entire book in one sentence – it says *“In those days Israel had no king; and each one did as they saw right in their own eyes”* (Judges 21:25)

One sentence, two issues:

First, Israel had no King – which really means that they did not recognize their true King – God.

Second, since no one recognized God's rule - everyone felt free to make up their own rules.

Which meant that God had allowed the Philistines to rule over Israel instead - with the expectation that the oppression would cause Israel to turn back to him. However as we learned last week that had not happened.

And so God decided to take action, because whether Israel knew it or not and whether they believed it or not – **God had plans for Israel and those plans were going to happen one way or another.**

Deut 14:2 reminds us that *“Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen Israel to be his treasured possession.”*

Later on the Prophet Isaiah would reveal what God had intended to do with his treasured possession *“I will keep you*

*and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles”*

But...given the current state of Israel's unfaithfulness to God and their attraction to worship the gods of the Philistines they were not a beacon of light to anyone. God needed to do something so that they would free to be faithful to Him and they could show His truth to the nations around them.

And God had determined that He would begin to achieve this through Samson.

So the Spirit of the LORD starts to move in the life of Samson and he falls in love!

And to his parents dismay he doesn't fall in love with an Israelite woman he goes and falls in love with a Philistine woman!

Now friends we can't let the irony of this escape us. You see intermarriage was one of the principle ways in which the Israelites disobeyed God's commands and were enticed into idolatry.

Yet here is God implementing his plan, working towards re-establishing his rule over his chosen people so they can be an example to the gentiles by having Samson fall in love with a Philistine girl, it's a bit ironic.

The one who had been set apart as a Nazirite in service to God appears to have **to engage the very things he was set apart from** in order to take the lead in delivering Israel.

What do I mean? Well look at what happens to Samson in this chapter...

As we mentioned Israel was set apart as God's chosen people and they were not supposed to marry the nations around them...

But Samson is moved by the Spirit of the LORD to want to marry a Philistine woman,

A Nazirite was set apart for service to God and was not supposed to touch a dead body...

But on the way down to arrange the marriage a lion comes out and confronts him, the Spirit of God overpowers Samson and

He in turn overpowers the lion and tears it apart – touching a dead body.

A Nazirite set apart for God was supposed to refrain from drinking any alcohol...

But when Samson goes down to formalize the marriage He throws a wedding feast – which undoubtedly involved drinking wine.

As an Israelite under the law of Moses, Samson was not supposed to kill or steal – that’s right in the ten commandments...

But when Samson realizes that the Philistines have cheated in solving his riddle by threatening his wife, the Spirit of the LORD moves him to kill thirty Philistines and take their clothes to pay the bet.

He has to engage the very things he is supposed to be set apart from in order to begin the deliverance of Israel.

And so the story of Samson is often confusing because on the surface it appears that God is rewarding someone who is being disobedient to Him.

Samson consorts with Philistine women, He breaks most of the Nazirite vows, he keeps secrets from his parents, he drinks, he gambles and kills and steals...what’s going on???

Is God taking the route of “the ends justifying the means?”

Well friends, it seems God is being a bit clever here with His own rules – you may recall that the only stipulation for Samson was that no razor would ever touch his head; it was his mother who was instructed not to drink alcohol or eat anything unclean.

So Samson gets by on a technicality – yes he is a Nazirite, set apart to God, but it appears that the majority of the vows a Nazirite would take were fulfilled by Samson’s mother and He only needs to be concerned with not cutting his hair.

But what about Samson's breaking of the Law of Moses in marrying a Philistine and in killing thirty Philistines and stealing their clothes?

Well friends, remember – the story tells us that *“the LORD, was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.”* (Judges 14:4)

You see, just because God had allowed them to rule over Israel in order to teach Israel a lesson didn't mean that God somehow now approved of their cruelty, their oppression and their idolatry.

Listen to what God said about them in Deuteronomy 12: 31 *“they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods”*

This is why God had instructed Israel to destroy the nations that were living in Canaan when they entered into the Land.

Now I realize this is very hard for our modern minds to understand and we might think that this makes God a bit of a

monster – because He's angry and vengeful and judgmental - but in fact that's not the truth.

The truth is that hundreds of years before this point God had said to Abraham that he was delaying the punishment of the nations who lived in Canaan because their sins had not reached their full measure.

In other words, God was giving them time to repent of the things they were doing, they most likely wouldn't and eventually things would get so bad that God would have to do something about it – he would destroy them when he gave Israel the Promised Land - but He would wait a few hundred years until that point.

As Numbers 14:18 says *“He is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished”*

So, now God is using Samson to punish the Philistines for all their idolatry and cruelty. And for their arrogance of believing that their god “Dagon” was more powerful than Him, a lie

which they believed because they held power over Israel for forty years.

So, In a demonstration of His superiority over the Philistines, God doesn't rally an army- instead He has one man - Samson - walk twenty four miles into their country, right into the heart of their strength – the city of Ashkelon – noted for its thick walls and tough defenses – and single handedly takes out what amounted to an elite fighting unit – thirty men.

This is a message to the Philistines that the God of Israel is back in town and He's coming for what rightfully belongs to Him - the nation of Israel - and the Philistine's power will not stand against Him.

So Samson, in the service of the Spirit of the LORD, does not commit murder and theft – He is administering God's justice, and in the end He doesn't take a foreign wife either, she is given away to the best man – tension resolved.

But while this might clarify things for us a bit, we might be left wondering **what the moral of the story is**, what does it teach us?

But friends, stories in the bible were written not so much to teach us a moral lesson about what's right and what is wrong.

Stories in the bible are there to highlight the main character – God - so that when we read these stories **we get to know all** about Him, so we begin to understand who He is, what He is like, and what He is all about.

So in this story we get to know God as incredibly faithful to his people who are incredibly unfaithful,

we get to know God as someone who will take action against injustice and idolatry – even if we won't,

we get to know God as someone who works through people in order to accomplish His purposes....

and we get to know God as someone whose current actions always seem to foreshadow His future plans.

You see friends; Samson wasn't the only one who was set apart for service to God who had to **engage the very things He was set apart from.** Consider what the scripture says about Jesus Christ

*“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” ( 2 Cor 5:21)*

Friends, God is perfect and holy and He can not tolerate our rebellion, our Sin – and yet God became one of us in Jesus Christ – taking on and engaging our sinful human nature in order to deliver us from it and give us a new redeemed human nature

Friends, God has always existed, and always will exist – life itself comes from Him – and yet God in Jesus Christ went through death, and he overcame it.

And Jesus described overcoming death in this way *“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions*

*are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.” (Luke 11:21-22)*

Just like Samson overpowered the Lion and the thirty Philistines, Jesus has overpowered the devil and sin and death. He has defeated them and has robbed them of their power over us. So now we all belong to Him.

And Before, God had always told his Chosen people that they were to be separate from the other nations – but now Jesus Christ instructed his disciples to go and make more disciples of all nations...

His disciples were to engage those whom from they had been previously been set apart, so that they too might be delivered from Sin by Jesus and have everlasting life...

And so here we are – people from nations all over this world who have been delivered... and are being delivered - from the oppressive power of sin that has ruled over our lives,

People who have been set free by the love and grace and mercy of Jesus Christ and who are overpowered by gratitude,

People who have been given something of far greater value than thirty sets of clothes, Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit, a down payment, a deposit which guarantees us that one day we will be totally delivered from all our sin – we'll be made perfect.

Until then 2 Tim 1:7 says that the Spirit fills us with *“power, love and self-discipline.”*

We have Self-discipline so that we can engage and minister in this world without being tempted and lead astray by it...

We have Love to compel us to reach out to those who do not have faith in Christ and to be with them so they can see Christ at work in our lives...

And we have Power to overcome doubt, unbelief, and the spirit of rebellion and to give us faith that our ultimate deliverance is on its way.

**Faith that one day Jesus will return** and deliver the entire world from oppression, from sin and evil and He will make all things new!

Faith that He will come and take us to be with him – like a groom coming to get his bride,

And friends that will be a wedding that does not end in a train wreck, instead we will be together with Christ in the new heavens and earth for all eternity.

Friends this is no sensational tabloid headline – it's the truth!

And it's not a riddle that you need to figure out, God acted then and God is acting now, and God will act in the future.

You just need to believe it, trust it, and in the Power of the Spirit...live your life by it. Amen.