

A Failed Wedding Judges 14: 1- 20

Brothers and sisters, there's something strangely irresistible about a wedding day disaster isn't there... and in this day and age of being able to catch everything on video it's not unusual to see people posting things on social media where something goes wrong at a wedding.

There's the classic wedding cake collapse, or someone in the bridal party tripping, falling or fainting up at the front, or the bouquet being tossed – right up into the ceiling fan!

And we can't forget the bridezilla meltdowns, or the meddling mothers or monster-in-laws, or that awkward speech given by the drunken uncle at the reception afterwards...

Watching a wedding-day disaster unfold is something that we hate to see happen but at the same time we just can't look away from it – we watch it unfold with a horrified fascination, and so this morning we see Samson's wedding unfold in a disaster that ranks up there with the best of them.

And while we are accustomed to the relatively short life-span of celebrity marriages – remember when Kim Kardashian married Kris Humphries in a 10 million dollar wedding and then divorced him just 72 days later?? - Samson's marriage never makes it past the end of the wedding feast!

I'm sure this wedding-disaster was all over the social media posts back in ancient Israel... Samson's riddle solved- he loses bet #Wifegivesansweraway, Samson goes on murderous rampage in Ashkelon and steals clothing from victims and so on...

And the question everyone is wondering about in these kinds of situations is "what went wrong?" And in this situation just like in so many others, we'll be tempted to take sides on that answer.

Some will lay the blame on Samson for setting the stakes too high with his riddle, some will lay the blame on the guests who resorted to intimidation and threatening Samson's wife to get

them the answer, others will blame the wife for not telling Samson what was going on and betraying him.

But while each bears some degree of responsibility for this wedding day disaster – what really went wrong is described for us in the very last verse in the book of Judges – chapter 21 verse 25.

This last verse summarizes the entire context of the 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 not only means there was no one ruling as a monarch over Israel, but it also means that they did not recognize their true King – Yahweh, their living Covenant God.

Second, since no one recognized God’s rule - everyone felt free to make up their own rules as they saw fit and as it benefited them.

So, since Israel was not being faithful to their Covenant responsibilities with Yahweh, God had allowed their enemies to conquer and oppress them.

And as we learned last week, this would typically result in Israel crying out to God for deliverance and then God would send someone to deliver His people and lead them.

And for as long as this judge was alive and leading the people, they would stay faithful to worship Yahweh and obey His laws, but as soon as the judge died – they reverted back to idol worship and covenant unfaithfulness to Yahweh, becoming even worse than they were before.

So that even the judges whom God raised up to deliver Israel became successively less godly and thus as we see this

morning – we end up with Samson, the last judge and the worst of them all.

Additionally, by the time Samson came around – Israel had fallen so far that they were not even crying out for deliverance from their oppression any more.

And so God had decided to take action, because whether Israel knew it or not and whether they believed it or not – God had plans for Israel and He was going to make certain those plans happened... one way or another – and what were those plans??

Well we read about this in Deut 14:2 where it says that *“Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen Israel to be his treasured possession.”*

And in the book of Isaiah it is revealed 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”*

However... given the current state of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God and their propensity 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 then 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 – no, he goes and falls in love with a Philistine woman!

Now brothers and sisters we can’t let the irony of this escape us. You see intermarriage with the surrounding nations was one of the principal ways in which the Israelites disobeyed God’s commands and were enticed into idolatry and became unfaithful to Him.

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 – and He’s doing it 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 as Judge 14:4 reveals 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 – thus 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 – those are two of the ten commandments...

But when Samson realizes that the Philistines have cheated in solving his riddle by involving 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" with accomplishing His plans?

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 only 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 brothers and sisters, 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. (***we always focus on God’s anger and judgement but we never ask why God is angry! And if we don’t understand why God is angry – we don’t grasp the severity of our sin and the depth to which we have perverted God’s intentions for us and His creation)*)

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, even though they wouldn’t – because sin leads to more sin and an insensitivity to sin, just like we are seeing happen to Israel in the book of Judges.

So eventually things would get so bad that God would have to do something about it – he would bring their judgement upon

them for the evil they had committed and destroy them when he gave Israel the Promised Land - but He would wait a few hundred years until that point, so no one could accuse Him of being capricious on the matter or waiting to see if just maybe... things would have turned out differently with them.

Because 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. And it was easy to believe this lie which because they had held power over Israel for forty years – what they didn’t know was that God had allowed this for His own purposes, not because Dagon was superior.

So, In a demonstration of His superiority over the Philistines’ god, Yahweh 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.

Samson thinks he's taking revenge on his wedding guests, but God is using Him for His own purposes.

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?

That's a good question brothers and sisters but it's not the right questions. You see the stories in the bible were written not so much to teach us a moral lesson about what's right and what is wrong but to highlight the main character – Yahweh 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 who think they are carrying out their own scheme, 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

Brothers and sisters, 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. We are not our own but we were chosen to be Jesus' possessions...

And under the Mosaic Law, 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. So we can know that in spite of

whoever is in power, ruling over us, setting out their agendas and carrying out their schemes – it will all play into God's plans and it is all part of God's plan – for our ultimate good.

We can have 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!

We can have Faith that He will come and take us to be with him – like a groom coming to get his bride. And brothers and sisters that wedding will not end in a disaster, at least for those who are forgiven in Jesus Christ - instead we will be together with Christ in the new heavens and earth for all eternity.

And this is no click-bait social media post – it's the truth!

And it's not a riddle that is vague and puzzling that you need to figure out, it is being explained and proclaimed to you so that you can clearly understand it... and you can believe it, trust it, and in the Power of the Spirit... live your life by it.

All because God is a God who is faithful when we are unfaithful and takes the initiative to save us – thank God He is who He is.

Lord Jesus come soon – your church, your bride is waiting for you – prepare us and use whatever is going on the world right now to make us ready for that wonderful day.

Amen.