

You Really Need a King:

Samson: Right in His Eyes (Judges 14:1-15:20)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on October 30, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ Back when Jay Leno was hosting *The Tonight Show*, he had a popular segment called Jaywalking where he'd walk around the street asking random people questions. There was one episode where he asked people to name one of the Ten Commandments, and it might shock you (or maybe not) but the most popular response given was: *God helps those who help themselves*.
 - ▶ According to a Barna poll taken back in 2000, when presented with the statement, "*The Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves*", 53% of Americans strongly agreed and 22% somewhat agreed. That's 75%. Three out of four Americans believed that's in the Bible. And that was 16 years ago. I don't think our society has grown more biblically literate. Who knows how popular this idea is today.

- ❖ Now I assume most of you know that's not one of the Ten Commandments. That it's not a Bible verse. But before you congratulate yourself, ask yourself a few questions. As we've been going through the book of Judges, especially here in Samson's story, **have you been troubled by the fact that God is using such flawed characters to accomplish his purposes?**
 - ▶ As you read about these judges and their weaknesses, their foolish choices, their sinful desires, their violent actions – **have you been left puzzled?** Look at Samson. He's brutal. He's ruthless. He slaughters a lot of people, all in a hot rage, out of vengeance. And he's the one God is using to deliver his people?
 - That doesn't make sense. **Shouldn't God only use good people to do his will?** Shouldn't God only work through those who have the right beliefs and right behaviors? Why would he choose to use Samson?

- ❖ But the moment we start thinking like that, the minute we embrace that logic, **we're suggesting that God is a God who merely reacts.** Who responds. Who works in response to our good works. Or in other words, who helps those who help themselves.
 - ▶ **So maybe we're bright enough to know it's not in the Bible, but in many cases we still react as if it were true.** We have trouble understanding how someone like Samson could be used by God. We don't expect him to be perfect, but we do expect him to at least try. Put in a little effort to serve God, to honor God, to please God. But Samson seems to just serve himself and please himself. Why would God use him?

- ❖ But do you see what's being lost here? We're losing the concept of a God who freely acts according to his divine prerogative. Who takes divine initiative to move first. **What we're losing is the doctrine of grace – where God is free to act first before we get our act together.** We can't lose these things. God's prerogative. God's initiative. God's grace. These concepts are supplanted if God only helps those who help themselves.
 - ▶ So let's look at our passage and let it confront our preconceived ideas of who God should help and what kind of person God should use to accomplish his will. Last week we studied chapter 13 and Samson's birth narrative.

- ❖ Now we're in chapters 14 and 15, which cover a collection of related events where he stirs up trouble with the Philistines. I want to point out three portraits being painted: 1) A portrait of a Spirit-gifted man who bears no fruit. 2) A portrait of a set-apart people comfortably coexisting with sin. 3) A portrait of an all-sovereign God working in all things for good.

A Portrait of a Spirit-Gifted Man

- ❖ The first thing we're introduced to in our passage is a **Spirit-gifted man who bears no fruit**. We saw last week how Samson is born with every spiritual advantage going his way. His miraculous birth is announced by the angel of the LORD twice. He's set apart from his mother's womb under a Nazirite vow, meaning he's been consecrated to the LORD – to be in his service, to accomplish mighty things in his name.
 - ▶ And at the end of chapter 13, in v25, the Spirit of the LORD is stirring inside Samson. **Then throughout our passage, on three separate occasions, we see the Spirit of the LORD rushing upon him empowering him to accomplish mighty feats.**
 - In **14:6**, the Spirit enables him to tear apart a lion with his bare hands. In **14:19**, the Spirit enables him to strike down thirty men. And then in chapter **15:14**, the Spirit enables him to singlehandedly strike down 1,000 Philistines.
- ❖ **There is no denying that the Holy Spirit is working in and through this man. And yet we can't deny that this is one deplorable man.** Samson is a reprehensible, regrettable figure. There are very few redeeming qualities about him.
 - ▶ Chapter 14 begins by painting a portrait of impulsive, rude, demanding child. He's more of a young man by this point, but just look at how disrespectful he is towards his parents. Look at the way he demands a bride in v2, "*I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife.*"
 - We couldn't imagine speaking to our parents that way or our kids speaking to us like that. It's totally out of line. But in their day, in their culture, where fathers arranged marriages, it was even more unimaginable that a son would speak so disrespectfully towards his parents and make such a demand.
- ❖ And consider what he wants. He wants to marry a daughter of the Philistines. His parents still remember what the angel of the LORD predicted about their son. "*He shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.*" (13:5) **They expected him to grow up to one day deliver them from the Philistines not to marry one of them.** Imagine their disappointment!
 - ▶ In v3, they advise him to marry a fellow Israelite. Must you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines? Now don't misinterpret Samson's parents. They're not being racist. **They're not against interracial marriages.**
- ❖ The key word is "*uncircumcised*". Circumcision was a sign of the OT covenant. It signaled that this person, this family, was part of the family of God – was in a covenant relationship with the LORD. **So his parents were not so much concerned with Samson marrying a person of another race but a person of another faith.**

- ❖ The prohibition against marrying the sons and daughters of surrounding nations has a theological concern. In Deuteronomy 7:3-4, it says, *”³You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, ⁴for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods.”*
 - ▶ So there is nothing unbiblical or wrong with interracial marriages. They’re biblical and quite beautiful actually. **But the reason why we discourage Christians (the NT covenant people of God) from dating and marrying non-Christians is because of the same concerns in Deuteronomy 7:4.** For the non-believing spouse may turn you away from following the LORD to serve other gods – the false gods of comfort, entertainment, money, career, etc.

- ❖ But such sound, biblical counsel is quickly dismissed by Samson. He says, *“Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.”* (14:3) That phrase gets repeated again in v7, and it prepares us for the last section of Judges where chapter 17 (v6) begins and chapter 21 (v25) ends with the phrase, *“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”*
 - ▶ Samson is a good representative of the Israelite people. **His personal storyline is like a microcosm of Israel and the nation’s storyline.** Tremendously blessed and gifted by the LORD, set apart to uniquely serve him, and yet total failures because they’re driven by merely what’s right in their own eyes and care very little about God’s eyes, God’s standard, God’s law.

- ❖ **Just consider how flippant Samson is about his Nazirite vow.** If you recall, being under a Nazirite vow – which means you’re set apart for mighty service for the LORD – requires you to avoid a) anything from the grapevine, especially wine, b) cutting your hair during the duration of the vow, and c) contact with a dead body.
 - ▶ But notice how in v5 Samson is attacked by this lion while he was in the vineyards of Timnah. That immediately raises eyebrows. What is a Nazirite doing in a vineyard? That’s like an alcoholic saying I’m just going to hang out in this bar. I’m just drinking water. Not smart. And then after he slew the lion, visited his future bride, then went back home, in v8 he takes another trip to Timnah to marry her, and along the way he detours to see what became of the lion’s carcass.

- ❖ And behold, what does he find but a swarm of bees making honey. Bees don’t normally live inside dead carcasses. **You’d expect to find flies and maggots but certainly not bees. That means this is a supernatural work of God.** This is a test from the LORD.
 - ▶ A test that Samson tragically fails. He casually approaches the carcass and comes in contact with a dead body – violating his vow (Num. 6:6) and making himself ceremonially unclean.

- ❖ And to top it off, not only did he scoop out honey to satisfy his own cravings, he offered some honey to his parents without informing them of its source. Thus making them ceremonially unclean. **So not only does Samson dismiss his parent’s counsel, he disregards their holiness** (14:9).

- ❖ And then in v10 we're told he prepared a feast to celebrate his marriage. The word for "feast" refers to a multi-day festival marked by lots of revelry and drinking. It was a bachelor party of sorts. So his close association with a drinking festival again paints him in a very bad light. He seems to care less about his Nazirite vow.
- ❖ **So not only is Samson disrespectful towards his parents and disregarding towards his vow, we also see portrait of a man driven by his fleshly senses.** He's so impulsive. He doesn't think before he acts. If he feels it, he'll do it. Whatever feels right to him. He feels passionately about this woman. He feels in love with her. Then that's all that matters. **He'll defy his parents, defy his vow, defy reason, and defy the LORD himself – because he's driven by his feelings, by his senses.**
 - ▶ That's actually what his thirty companions are getting at in their riddle to him in v18. Prior to that, he challenged them with a riddle where thirty sets of clothes were up for grabs. He tells the riddle in v14. He says, "*Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet.*"
 - The answer is a lion and honey. But because there were no witnesses when he killed the lion, there's no way they can get it. So the companions threaten his betrothed and pressure her to pry the answer out of him.
- ❖ And she does. She turns on the tears, and by the last day of the festival, he caves in. For those of us who are aware of what happens in chapter 16 with Delilah, we know this doesn't bode well. **Samson's weakness is clearly his love for women.**
 - ▶ His opponents know it, and they teases him for it in their riddle in v18. They give him the right answer, but in so doing they pose to Samson a question of their own, "*What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?*"
 - Answer: The love of woman. Not only is it stronger than a lion, it's strong enough to break the will of a man who bested a lion. That's the point they're getting across. **Samson is a man driven by his senses, his passion, his love (lust?) for women.**
- ❖ Now after striking down thirty strangers to take their clothes and after giving it to the companions, Samson storms off in a huff and goes back home. The father of the bride assumes he's abandoned the marriage and gives his daughter to another. But Samson eventually cools off, and in chapter 15 he returns to Timnah to get who he thinks is still his wife. He shows up at her door with a young goat, which apparently is the ancient equivalent of a box of chocolates or a dozen roses.
- ❖ But when he finds out what the father-in-law did, he vows revenge. He catches 300 foxes, ties their tails together, sticks a lit torch between each knot of tails, and sets them loose in the wheat fields and olive orchards.
 - ▶ The Philistines respond by blaming the father-in-law for inciting Samson, and they end up burning him and his daughter to death. Samson then responds by exacting more vengeance, killing the Philistines who killed his former lover.

- ❖ **All of this to say, Samson is a Spirit-gifted man. But he's a deplorable man.** He manifests gifts of the Spirit, but he does not bear any fruit of the Spirit. And that's something we need to understand. We need the categories to make that kind of distinction. **Apparently it's possible to be spiritually gifted but lack spiritual fruit.**
 - ▶ It's the same problem the Apostle Paul warns about in 1 Corinthians 13. He says you can be so gifted by the Spirit so as to speak in the tongues of men and angels, but if have not love (the fruit of the Spirit) then you're just a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. It's possible – to be gifted by the Spirit but lack the fruit of the Spirit.

- ❖ That is a needed warning for the Church. **In the church, we can easily fixate on a person's gifts and totally overlook their character.** People can have lots of spiritual gifts that enables them to do lots of things in ministry, but they gain nothing – they are nothing – if there is no spiritual fruit in their lives (1 Cor. 13:3). The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Clearly they were not evident in Samson's life, even as the Spirit was using him to do big things.
 - ▶ Let that be a warning. We could be doing big things for God, but all the while our inner life could be a mess. **I'm confronted with the reality that I could be growing this church but not be growing myself in the fruit of the Spirit.** Just like with Samson, God could still use me (use you) as he so chooses, but it's our loss. We gain nothing. We end up as another tragic story of lost potential and disappointment.
 - If you feel like you've been busy lately using your spiritual gifts but to the neglect of bearing spiritual fruit, then I hope Samson's story is a wake-up call. To confess, to repent, to focus more on your inner life and not just the external life, activities, and ministries that other people can see.

A Portrait of a Set-Apart People

- ❖ So the first portrait was of a Spirit-filled man who bears no fruit. The second portrait is of a **set-apart people comfortably coexisting with sin.** You would think that once they hear about Samson's exploits, his fellow Israelites would be grateful to God for raising up another judge. But we said last week that one thing missing in this cycle is the typical cry for help. Usually Israel would be oppressed and it would lead them to cry out to the LORD.
 - ▶ **But this time around, Israel seems to be comfortable coexisting with their oppressors.** There's no crying out. There are no pleas for help. In fact, when the Philistine army comes looking for Samson, we're told that the people of Judah don't rally behind their judge.

- ❖ No, they try to hand him over. They're comfortable with the way things are. They don't want to upset the apple cart. So they send 3,000 men to find Samson. Not 3,000 potential soldiers to fight with him. But 3,000 captors to arrest and betray him to their enemies.
 - ▶ Notice what they say in v11, *"Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?"* Listen to that. **They accept Philistine rule. They're the rulers. We're their subjects.** It's sad. There's no more fight in them. They've accepted the status quo.

- ❖ But their efforts to keep the peace are thwarted by God. His Spirit rushes upon Samson. He breaks the ropes they tied him up with, and he's empowered to kill a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. A fresh jawbone, by the way, implying it was another fresh carcass he was touching. But that's besides the point by now.
 - ▶ **The point is that there is no way to keep the peace with the Philistines.** No matter how comfortable they are being loyal subjects, the status quo won't last. Why? Because God won't allow it. **Because God is committed to stirring things up.**

- ❖ We skipped over a very important verse back in chapter 14. Look at chapter 14:4 again, "*His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.*"
 - ▶ The Israelites only see this selfish, brash, hothead making a mess of things as he's carrying out his own personal vendettas. **But little did they know that behind all of it is God's providential hand seeking an opportunity to incite conflict with the Philistines.** The LORD is disrupting the peace. Escalating the trouble. All for the sake of separating his people from sin and idolatry. All in order to sanctify them, to make them holy, as in set apart.
 - They're supposed to be a set-apart people who witness to the holiness of God, but by accommodating and assimilating to Philistine life, they've fallen short of the glory of God. And God cares too much to not do something about it.

- ❖ Church, here is another warning for us. If we get too comfortable with the enemy, if we make peace with our sin, if we settle for the status quo of living in disobedience (or disregard) to the Word of God – **don't be surprised if he exercises his divine prerogative and takes some divine initiative to disrupt your peace and stir things up.**
 - ▶ Maybe some of you are experiencing a bit of turmoil right now. I want you to consider the possibility that the providential hand of God is behind it. Maybe he's disrupting the peace you've made with your sin. He's breaking up that truce.

- ❖ Instead of looking for a scapegoat, for someone or something to blame for your troubles, take a moment to look within. And consider the possibility that you've grown too comfortable co-existing with certain sins in your life. **There are certain sins we too easily tolerate.** We still consider them sins, but they're considered acceptable (or at least understandable) sins by most Christian communities – worldliness, anxiety, discontentment, envy, unthankfulness, pride, selfishness, impatience, a lack of self-control, etc.
 - ▶ These are the kind of sins we too often make peace with. We comfortably co-exist. **So if the LORD is actually disrupting your peace with these enemies within, then thank him. It's a severe mercy he's showing you.** Don't resist. Just repent. And know that he stands ready to forgive, and his Spirit is ready to empower you with the strength you need to change.

A Portrait of an All-Sovereign God

- ❖ So far we've seen a portrait of a Spirit-filled man who bears no fruit and a set-apart people comfortably coexisting with their sin. The third and final portrait we're given in these chapters is of **an all-sovereign God working in all things for good.**
 - ▶ The sovereign freedom of God has been on display throughout these chapters. Just think about it. Samson is described as a free spirit. Someone who does whatever looks right in his eyes. **He's the kind of person who does whatever he wills – and yet in the end he's doing God's will.** Remember chapter 14:4. Samson was being driven by his senses, like a love-sick puppy, to want to marry that Philistine girl, but v4 makes it clear that this ill-fated romance, *“it was from the LORD.”*

- ❖ There seems to be a paradox here. **Throughout these two chapters there are multiple human actors acting willfully, in ungodly ways, doing what seems right in their own eyes.** No one is off the hook. Everyone is responsible for what they did. Samson is accountable for all of the vengeful violence committed by his own hands. For all the men he slew in a fit of rage. He's responsible for all of it.
 - ▶ And yet throughout these two chapters, the Spirit of the LORD keeps rushing upon him and giving him the supernatural power to carry out these feats of strength. **God is able to work out his good will and redemptive plan *in spite* of Samson's sin – and even *through* Samson's sin.**

- ❖ **What's being demonstrated in these chapters is a theological concept called divine concurrence.** The word concurrence means “to run or flow together” like when two or more currents flowing concurrently in one river. **So divine concurrence is the idea is that God is able to work his hand in all things without forcing human hands against our will and without excusing human hands from our responsibility.**

- ❖ The story of Joseph and his brothers is a great example of concurrence. If you recall, his brothers were guilty of their own treachery, but Joseph recognized the hand of God working through them. So he says to them in Genesis 50:20, *“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”*
 - ▶ **There were many currents of human intent involved in Joseph's story.** The current of his brothers' evil intent. The current of the slave traders's actions. The current of Potiphar's wife's deception. The current of Pharaoh's decision. And not once did God violate human freedom and force someone to act against their will. **But in the end, all these various currents flowed seamlessly together in the one river of God's providence.**

- ❖ **And the greatest example of divine concurrence in all of Scripture would, hands down, be at the cross.** In Acts 4:27-28, the disciples are praying together and they say, *“²⁷for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”*

- ▶ So we've got multiple actors here: Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the peoples of Israel. All of them acting against Jesus in their own particular way. Mocking him. Betraying him. Abandoning him. Torturing him. Executing him. Nobody forced their hand. **Nobody made them do what they didn't want to do.** And yet in the end, they were all doing whatever God's hand and God's plan had predestined to take place.

- ❖ **If God couldn't use bad people to accomplish his good will, then we'd all be without hope.** But the good news of the gospel is that God used bad people to make salvation in Christ Jesus an accomplished reality. And he freely applies this salvation to bad people like us – people who turn from our badness and trust in Christ for his goodness.

- ❖ Friends, know that the LORD is an all-sovereign God who works all things for good – for those who love God, who have been called according to his good purpose (Rom. 8:28). He uses his divine prerogative to take divine initiative.
 - ▶ **So you can take comfort in knowing that God doesn't have to wait for us to shape up and get things together before he can act and move in our messed up lives.** He doesn't just respond to our good works. He doesn't just help those who help themselves. God is able to work out his good purposes in our lives in spite of our sinfulness – even through our sinfulness. Hallelujah, what a Savior!