

{un}faithful - Judges 13-16

Samson

Over recent weeks we have been looking at the book of Judges {un}faithful. The Bible does not read like a fairy tale and most certainly the Book of Judges does not. The book is fairly gruesome, and ‘happy ever after’ for the Israelites only seems to last for a few years before they end up in a complete mess again.

Today we look at the story of Samson, and yes Samson does not appear end with a “happily ever after” either.

Let’s face it, from what we have read in Judges, we might not expect to see Samson, nor many of his mates written about in Judges, in heaven, but the writer to the Hebrews tells us differently. As David read out last week, Samson is listed among those who are included in the hall of faith in Hebrews 11, and faith pleases God.

Obviously it is not me that makes these decisions, but as I read Judges I’m thinking that probably Samson does not seem to come to any real faith until maybe the final moments of his life! Never was Samson weaker than when he stood between the two supporting columns of that Philistine “temple of doom” in Gaza. His eyes had been gouged out, and he was probably shackled in chains. Here is the time when Samson really “gained strength in [his] weakness.”

I’m getting ahead of myself, but I do want us to keep in mind as we go through this story, in spite of his many flaws, he is part of the family of God. I wish a few prematurely judgemental Christians in the world today would remember this fact.

Back to the beginning

Remember that it is important to understand that Judges is a story within a story. The Bible is the story of the one true God gathering a community of worshippers from within a rebellious world. Judges is set when God’s people are effectively leaderless and just doing what is “right” in their own eyes. Although what they think is “right” is usually wrong, so God raises up “judges” to save them from the mess they get themselves into—after a time of peace, usually one generation, the cycle starts again – Sin, slavery, shout, salvation.

The next four chapters of Judges (13 – 16) focus in on a deliverer, sent by God, named Samson. The name Samson conjures up the image of this herculean hero, a Jewish-Superman, ripping apart lions with his bare hands, fighting armies with jawbones, and always getting the girl. He is pictured as a buff, smooth, good looking, and very hairy stud. Something like me with longer hair!!!!

The truth is Samson is a tragic story of a man who abuses all the gifts that God blesses him with. Yes he is a gifted leader, a mighty warrior, and a charismatic figure—but if you read the story honestly, you will see that he is deeply broken. And yet, God is bigger than Samson’s failures and accomplishes his mission through his brokenness.

This morning we are going to skip through the 4 chapters pretty quickly so hold on to your hats.

God who is gracious

When you read though Judges it is hard to grasp hold of the timeline. Since Gideon (I spoke about him two weeks ago), 6 chapters ago, about 70 years has passed, and since that time God has been silent. We think something is wrong if we don’t sense God every week at church!! The last time God is recorded speaking to Israel is when an angel visits Gideon.

It seems like over time Israel has become comfortable in their enslavement. They have come to accept their oppression and their idolatry as the ‘new normal’. They do not cry out to God because their sin no longer bothers them—they are content living in the world. We need to fear being that comfortable with our sin.

This is the setting in which God decides to break the silence. Our unfaithfulness is always the beginning of the story—it’s where God works best. He enters into a situation that only he can resolve. Up to this point, God has raised up men (and a couple of woman)—calling them out of winepresses and onto battlefields. Instead of “raising up” a living deliverer, he decides to grow one from scratch. The Angel of the LORD tells a barren woman she will have a son.

Judges 13:3-5

³The angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah’s wife and said, “Even though you have been unable to have children, you will soon become pregnant and give birth to a son. ⁴So be careful; you must

not drink wine or any other alcoholic drink nor eat any forbidden food. ⁵You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and his hair must never be cut. For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. He will begin to rescue Israel from the Philistines.”

Not only does the Angel of the Lord tell her that she will bear of son, but she tells him this son shall be devoted to the LORD, a Nazirite, with a specific mission—to begin to save Israel from the Philistines.

Samson appears to be the only judge that comes from a stable home with seemingly “good” parents. His mother goes to tell her husband, Manoah, what has happened. She tells him that she met a man who looked like an angel—very cool. She repeats everything the angel said but Manoah doesn’t trust her so wants to verify it for himself. Manoah sounds a bit like an unspiritual git who refuses to listen to the wisdom of his spiritually discerning wife. Sounds like a normal marriage.

Despite Samson’s Dad not picking up on the spiritual stuff particularly quickly, his parents appear to be godly people who sincerely desired to raise their son in the fear of the Lord.

At the end of Chapter 13 we read:

¹⁹Then Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and offered it on a rock as a sacrifice to the LORD. And as Manoah and his wife watched, the LORD did an amazing thing. ²⁰As the flames from the altar shot up toward the sky, the angel of the LORD ascended in the fire. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell with their faces to the ground.

²¹The angel did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Manoah finally realized it was the angel of the LORD, ²²and he said to his wife, “We will certainly die, for we have seen God!”

²³But his wife said, “If the LORD were going to kill us, he wouldn’t have accepted our burnt offering and grain offering. He wouldn’t have appeared to us and told us this wonderful thing and done these miracles.”

²⁴When her son was born, she named him Samson. And the LORD blessed him as he grew up. ²⁵And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him.

As we read this story our hopes are pretty high after an impressive beginning, however the author quickly dispels any illusions about Samson's piety. In chapter 14 Samson is now a young man. We are told that Samson saw a Philistine woman in Timnah and he decided that this was the woman he wanted for his wife. In spite of his parents' objections, Samson insisted. The whole wedding thing was a miserable failure. The week-long wedding celebration ended on a bit of a sour note when because of a bet that Samson made with 30 of his Philistine guests, and his Philistine bride-to-be betraying him, he was obliged to kill 30 random men, giving his guests their clothing. Samson then went home in anger.

When his anger subsided (and his passion for this good looking woman revived), he took a young goat and set off to visit his bride to consummate their union. Samson was shocked and enraged to learn that his wife had been taken by his best man. This prompted Samson to set the Philistines' farmlands ablaze by the use of 300 foxes with their tails dipped in oil and set alight. In retaliation, the Philistines burned Samson's "bride" and father-in-law to death. Then Samson felt justified to attack an unspecified number of Philistines and kill them.

And so it goes on until in his thirst and fatigue caused Samson cried out to God to save him in 15:18,

¹⁸Samson was now very thirsty, and he cried out to the LORD, "You have accomplished this great victory by the strength of your servant. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of these pagans?"

This was Samson's first call out to God and God answered him by creating a spring in the rock from which he (and many others after him) could drink.

What a shambles! Samson, a man chosen by God, to be devoted to God, and to fight the Philistines for God. But how can one man get it so wrong?

As we go on through the story, we need to take note; When we read the story of Samson (or any story in the Bible) we must be careful not to focus too much attention on what the unfaithful man is doing, and not lose sight of what the faithful God is doing through him.

Read Judges 16:4-22

16 ⁴*Sometime later Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the valley of Sorek. ⁵The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "Entice Samson to tell you what makes him so strong and how he can be overpowered and tied up securely. Then each of us will give you 1,100 pieces of silver."*

⁶*So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me what makes you so strong and what it would take to tie you up securely."*

If have never read the whole story, do that later, but three times Samson tells her the wrong thing and we pick it up in verse 15.

¹⁵*Then Delilah pouted, "How can you tell me, 'I love you,' when you don't share your secrets with me? You've made fun of me three times now, and you still haven't told me what makes you so strong!" ¹⁶She tormented him with her nagging day after day until he was sick to death of it.*

¹⁷*Finally, Samson shared his secret with her. "My hair has never been cut," he confessed, "for I was dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as anyone else."*

So Delilah, chopped off Samson's hair, called in the Philistine rulers who tied him up, and then she woke Samson.

When he woke up, he thought, "I will do as before and shake myself free." But he didn't realize the LORD had left him.

²¹*So the Philistines captured him and gouged out his eyes. They took him to Gaza, where he was bound with bronze chains and forced to grind grain in the prison.*

²²*But before long, his hair began to grow back.*

The truth is, Samson gets exactly what he deserves; the man was a Nazirite from birth and he knew it. He was not supposed to touch dead stuff, but he grabs a lion carcass and a jawbone of a mule. He was not supposed to drink, but he throws a seven day party. He was not supposed to cut his hair, but he gives it all up for a seductive woman. He did what he thought was right in his own eyes and, even though God uses his choices to accomplish his will, they

were still unfaithful choices. Samson denied his call. Samson abused his gifts. Samson disobeyed God...just like Israel.

Though Israel have done everything to disconnect from their relationship with God. And though God appears to have left them, he has not abandoned them. Verse 22 injects hope for a future redemption.

²²But before long, his hair began to grow back.

Israel may be devastated, their hero may appear defeated, but God is not done with them. Samson is not becoming more devoted as much as God is rebuilding him.

Let's read on

²³The Philistine rulers held a great festival, offering sacrifices and praising their god, Dagon. They said, "Our god has given us victory over our enemy Samson!"

²⁴When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying, "Our god has delivered our enemy to us! The one who killed so many of us is now in our power!"

²⁵Half drunk by now, the people demanded, "Bring out Samson so he can amuse us!" So he was brought from the prison to amuse them, and they had him stand between the pillars supporting the roof.

²⁶Samson said to the young servant who was leading him by the hand, "Place my hands against the pillars that hold up the temple. I want to rest against them." ²⁷Now the temple was completely filled with people. All the Philistine rulers were there, and there were about 3,000 men and women on the roof who were watching as Samson amused them.

Samson is brought out of prison to entertain the five lords and over 3,000 men and women. He is not doing feats of strength or telling them clever riddles. He is made a spectacle like an animal at the zoo. Samson is being mocked, an object of shame. AS they say pride comes before the fall, and Samson has fallen hard.

Of course, in their partying, they fail to realize that Samson's hair has grown and Samson has a plan.

28 Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "Sovereign LORD, remember me again. O God, please strengthen me just one more time. With one blow let me pay back the Philistines for the loss of my two eyes." 29 Then Samson put his hands on the two centre pillars that held up the temple. Pushing against them with both hands, 30 he prayed, "Let me die with the Philistines." And the temple crashed down on the Philistine rulers and all the people. So he killed more people when he died than he had during his entire lifetime.

This is the second prayer to God. The first time Samson cried out for life—God answered that prayer. The second time, Samson cries out for death—and God answers that prayer too.

Samson's death is not heroic; it is as tragic as his life. His prayer reveals that his sacrifice is motivated by personal vengeance. Yet God still uses his selfish intentions to accomplish his mission. And what is God's mission? - To gather a community of worshippers from within a rebellious world.

What can we take away from this story?

It is tempting to be sympathetic toward Samson and begin to believe that he doesn't deserve to be imprisoned, he doesn't deserve to be humiliated, he doesn't deserve to die. He does, Samson gets what he deserves.

In some ways Samson represents each one of us. Left to ourselves, we will love the world, and end up blind, bound, and in bondage our sin. Unless we turn from our sin, we will die in them, because the wages of sin is death and God is faithful to his promises to be just.

But God is also faithful to his promise to bless. God is merciful and gracious—he withholds what we deserve and gives us what we don't. Even though humankind, yes even you and I, have cut off our devotion to God, God has not and does not abandoned us.

On the contrary, God pursued us by sending his Son Jesus Christ—the ultimate saviour, the true Samson to save us.

LIKE Samson, Jesus was strong. UNLIKE Samson, Jesus was meek.

- Samson possessed great strength and wisdom, but used it to serve himself.

- Jesus possessed the infinite strength and wisdom, but used it to for others. He took the form of a sacrificial servant.

LIKE Samson, Jesus was set apart from birth. UNLIKE Samson, Jesus remained devoted.

- Even though he knew he was chosen, he knew God had a mission for him, he knew he was devoted to the Lord—he didn't remain devoted to God, he lived for himself.
- Jesus remained devoted to God's will. Though he was tempted to abandon his call, tempted to abuse his giftedness, and tempted to seek for his own glory by Satan himself, he remained true.

LIKE Samson, Jesus went into the world. UNLIKE Samson, Jesus went into save it.

- Samson entered into the darkness of the Philistine world. Though he was empowered by the Spirit, it was all about him, making a name for himself.
- Jesus, also empowered by Spirit, went to make a name for God. Samson loved the world, and wanted to be like it. Jesus loved the world, and wanted to change it to be like him.

LIKE Samson, Jesus was humiliated. UNLIKE Samson, Jesus did not take vengeance.

- Samson played the innocent victim, taking vengeance on those who had hurt him
- Jesus was an innocent a victim, and forgave those who hurt him.

LIKE Samson, Jesus died. But UNLIKE Samson, Jesus gave his life to give us life.

- Samson's death was a revenge-fuelled suicide. He was not concerned with his mission, only in punishing those who had hurt him.
- Jesus died with sinners unlike him, not between two pillars but two thieves. And Jesus did not die to punish sinners, but to take punishment for sinners.

But the story doesn't end there.

³¹Later his brothers and other relatives went down to get his body. They took him back home and buried him between Zorah and

Eshtaol, where his father, Manoah, was buried. Samson had judged Israel for twenty years.

Jesus was also taken by family and friends and laid in a tomb. The difference was that Jesus didn't stay in his tomb—three days later he rose again and is alive right now. Jesus doesn't just save us from unrighteousness, by his Resurrection, he saves us to righteousness.