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Sunday Evening Service
Series: Judges
Community Baptist Church
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HOW CAN GOD USE UNCONTROLLED LUST AND FAITHLESS HEIFERS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL?

Judges 14

The “elephant in the room” all through the story of the judges is “Why did God use people like Samson?” Even more confusing to us might be the reality that God used the actual sins of these very fallible people to accomplish His will. We know that God cannot ever possibly sin. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit alone in all creation is incapable of sinning. Furthermore, we know that God will never tempt anyone to sin. Through James, God affirmed, *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire (James 1:13-14).*

On one hand, if God only used completely righteous people to bring about His will on earth, His will would never be brought about. On the other hand, the fact that God uses some very wicked people teaches us a handful of important lessons. First is the fact that God is powerful enough to do whatever He chooses to do with whomever He chooses to do it. He does not always require our cooperation. Second, that God chooses to use unrighteous people ought to awaken them to His power, grace, and mercy. Third, if God uses an unrighteous person, that does not indicate in any way that God condones the person’s unrighteousness. Fourth, God often uses the consequences of sin to accomplish His desire to show His creatures that sin has serious consequences.

Samson is an enigma. He is one of those judges who God raised up, used to deliver His people, and yet who in many ways did not demonstrate godly character. But more enigmatic is the fact that he

is found listed as an example of faith in Hebrews 11 right alongside Gideon and Jephthah, keeping company with people like Rahab the lying prostitute and Barak the chicken-hearted.

Obviously, these people did express faith in God alone to be their Savior and Deliverer. It is likely that Rahab showed great faith after she ceased being a liar and prostitute. Gideon revealed glimmers of faith before he fell into idolatry. Jephthah showed faith in God when he committed the battle against Ammon to Him. And Samson definitely revealed faith in God when he repented in the Philistine prison and brought down the house of lords.

The stories of the judges reveal that when man does what is right in his own eyes, the result is a disaster. The stories teach us that God is in control of all things all the time. And the stories remind us that we need one, ultimate Deliverer from sin, who is God Himself in Jesus Christ our Savior. The Samson story demonstrates God’s amazing power and grace to deliver His people from oppression in spite of a wayward human deliverer.

Samson’s Request Was From the LORD (vv.1-9).

Samson sinned, but the LORD would use it to accomplish His will (vv.1-5a). He fell into the same pit all sinners fall into with the lust of the eye, lust of the flesh, and pride of life. In Samson’s case (as we shall see repeatedly), a woman was the object of his lust. The story tells us that Samson saw and lusted. *Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. Then he came up and told his father and mother, “I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife” (vv.1-2).*

It is hard for us to believe when we read those words that this was the man on whom the Spirit of God was moving. At the end of the previous chapter we read, *And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol (Judges 13:25).* We do not know to what extent or how obvious this work of the Holy Spirit was. But this was the work of God the Spirit in His chosen people, and it will have an affect just as the same kind of work by the same Holy Spirit affects us. Paul taught us, *For it is God who*

works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

But even when the Spirit of God is at work in us, it really matters where you live. Samson lived near the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol which were part of the tribe of Dan. In other words, Samson grew up living among “God’s people” whatever that was worth. However, his town was right on the border with the land occupied by the Philistines. Timnah was only a couple of miles away. That is where he got in trouble.

In Timnah Samson saw and desired. He experienced the same temptation his original parents felt when they looked with desire on the forbidden fruit. He experienced the same kind of feelings and desires we all experience. John warned us, *For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world (1 John 2:16).*

Those desires are part of our human nature. They are intensified when the people around us (the world) practice lusts and call them normal. Samson lived very near people who were virtually unaware of God. They intentionally served false gods. Therefore, we can safely assume they lived to satisfy their fleshly cravings. Though Samson was born according to God’s promise, was a Nazarite committed to God, was in a family that feared God, and lived among people who claimed to be God’s people, his life was not much different than the worldly folks in Philistia and Timnah.

Samson gives us a vivid picture of the lives of many professing Christians. They say they are born again through faith in Christ. They know to say this because they grew up in Christian homes, Christian churches, and Christian schools. However, their lives look just like the lives of the “Timnah” kind of people they live around. They never read their Bibles and they seldom pray. They attend preaching/worship services when it is convenient. They pursue the same pleasures the godless people pursue. They look, act, talk just like the godless people. In word, they are followers of Christ. But in practice, they are followers of self, just like everyone else in their world. Therefore, when the temptation comes to be linked up with folks from “Timnah,” they have zero defense to keep them out of that unholy alliance.

Samson looked and lusted; and when his parents tried to reason with him, he refused sound judgment. *But his father and mother said to him, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes” (v.3).* At least Mom and Dad knew something about God. They had met and talked with the angel of the Lord (Jesus). They tried to follow the instruction of the Lord because they feared Him in a good and mature sense. Therefore, they recoiled when their adult son made a horrible choice.

Mom and Dad understood that it was God’s desire for Samson to be dedicated to Him. They knew that God’s plan was for Israelites to marry Israelites to keep the nation pure. God’s plan was for His people to be identified by circumcision, an outward sign of an inward dedication to Him. They were fully aware that God’s desire was for His people to remain distinct from the rest of the world that was not identified as His people.

Samson decided that God’s desires were too restrictive. Maybe he didn’t want to be distinct, unique, separated from the acceptable people of the world. Maybe he thought he could win the lass from Timnah over to be a God-fearer. That is very unlikely, but it does sound like the excuses young adults offer today for their penchant to become yoked with unbelievers.

The fact was that Samson wanted to do what Samson wanted to do. Listen to his words to his parents: *“Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes”* That request makes me want to ask, “Samson, What is your standard of right? What makes you think she is right?” A somewhat literal translation of his argument proves that Samson’s standard of right was “she is pleasing to my eye,” or “she looks good to me.” In modern vernacular Samson said, “Get her to be my wife because she is exactly what I have been looking for. She has dark hair, high cheekbones, beautiful dark eyes, a broad white smile and a perfect body.” But does she love God?!

In his reply Samson demonstrated the attitude that characterized the people during the judges’ period: *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25).* Samson demonstrated the attitude of our culture that is so far from fellowship with God. He reminds me that when I serve and

worship myself, I act like I am ignorant of God's wisdom principles — one of which is: *“The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing” (Ecclesiastes 1:8b)*. And those were the words of the man who had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

What a mess. Surely Manoah and his wife were wringing their hands and crying out to God for help. The strange thing is that God was already helping. God turns human sin for His glory. *His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah (vv.4-5a)*.

Wait! Are we saying that Samson's lust for an ungodly pagan woman was from the Lord? Samson's sin was altogether Samson's doing and possession. But God was going to use Samson's sin to judge the Philistines who rejected Him and to deliver His people. It was not God's will for the Philistines to rule over His people, and He was in the process of changing that.

The next step in God's plan was really remarkable. We discover that even a lion attack was from the LORD to accomplish His will (vv.5b-9). It gave opportunity to reveal miraculous strength from the Holy Spirit. *And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done (vv.5b-6)*.

This part of the story generates several questions. At the outset of this scenario, we might wonder why Samson was alone? Obviously he was separated from his parents when this lion jumped out of the vineyard to destroy him. If he was a modern teenager or young adult, he would have been walking out of sight of his parents because he would have been ashamed to be seen in their presence when he approached his worldly friends.

Whatever the human reason, it was of the Lord that no one witnessed this event because God was going to use it later. A parent who witnessed his or her son ripping apart an attacking lion with his bare hands would certainly post it all over social media. For God's

plan to work, God needed to get Samson alone so that no one would witness this miracle.

Furthermore, if we understand animals, we might wonder why the lion attacked Samson. Typically, animals in the wild are afraid of humans and avoid them. They generally attack only if they feel threatened. Or, in this case, they will attack if their Creator tells them to attack. God used this animal just like He uses people. And it cost the animal its life which would really upset members of PETA, and they would no doubt boycott God for being cruel to animals.

Third, did Samson understand that God the Spirit provided this unusual strength? One would think that in the aftermath Samson would wonder how in the world he was able to do that. Did he ever remember that he was a Nazarite separated unto God? Did he ever stop to think about God's will in his life? Do you ever wonder what God wants to do through you, how He wants to use you?

And a final question is, “Why didn't Samson tell his parents?” It would seem quite normal if he would have run to find his parents and blurt out, “You would not believe what just happened!” And surely when he arrived at Timnah everyone in town would have heard this amazing story. If the miracle happened in our setting, anyone else would have posted it all over social media with pictures. Samson kept it a secret because God the Spirit was working in him in spite of his sinfulness.

God still needed to put some pieces in the puzzle. Therefore, the Holy Spirit created a miraculous situation. *Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes. After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion (vv.7-9)*.

Still convinced that the unnamed Philistine woman is right to satisfy his desires, Samson returned to Timnah to marry her. Along the way he happened upon a remarkable situation. He stepped over into the vineyard at some point to see what became of the lion. The lion's carcass was still lying where Samson had killed it. That in itself is unusual because the beasts of the night should have consumed it or

carried it away by then. Even more remarkable is that a swarm of honey bees had built a honeycomb in the carcass. Bees don't inhabit decaying carcasses – flies and maggots do. Did Samson stop to wonder why they were “breaking their vow of purity”? The word *swarm* is more accurately “community” to picture the miracle of life in the environment of death. Did Samson see God in any of this?

All of this is the result of the Lord leading. The Lord created the whole scenario in order to use the riddle that resulted from this miracle as the channel for punishing the Philistines. So Sampson, breaking his Nazarite vow to abstain from touching dead carcasses, gathers a handful of honey from the dead lion for himself and his parents. In fact, if an Israelite touched a dead body, they were to be considered ceremonially unclean. So Samson also secretly defiled his parents who had sanctified him to God. The man's wickedness was either through gross rebellion or gross ignorance. There is little difference between the two. And yet God was doing His work through this evil man.

Samson's Riddle Was the LORD's Instrument (vv.10-20).

The LORD would use an unholy alliance to pour out His judgment (vv.10-16). In reality, it appears that Samson was in a typical situation. It was typical for pagan Philistines, but the Nazarite should not have been found in this setting. *His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do. As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him (vv.10-11).* The Hebrew word for feast in this verse is not the same as the word God used to describe the celebrations (*khawg*) through which His people were to worship Him. Here the word specifically involves drink or strong drink (*mish-teh*).

Ancient records indicate that this was a week-long stag party involving drinking and drunkenness. That is not the kind of situation a Nazarite should have been involved in. The townspeople were even kind enough to provide thirty companions to help eat Samson's food and drink his wine. What kind of companions were they? The word is the same Hebrew word used to describe the Midianite whose dream Gideon overheard (Judges 7:13). Hmmmm, that's interesting. It almost looks like the leaders of the town quickly conscripted thirty

soldiers to serve as a guard to surround Samson and keep him from causing trouble. After all, this guy was notoriously weird with the long hair, the Nazarite vow stuff, and something about the Spirit of his God empowering him.

The Nazarite broke so many vows in order to fit in with the idolatrous neighbors. In a questionable situation, the Nazarite posed a foolish question. *And Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Put your riddle, that we may hear it." And he said to them, "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet." And in three days they could not solve the riddle (v.12-14).*

Not fearing his appointed guards, Samson decided to make sport of them. He proposed a riddle that would prove Samson to be brilliant if his guards could not solve it. This ruse would also get him thirty new suits of clothes. Because he gave the guards seven days to solve the riddle it appeared to the guards that they would easily win the contest. But after three days of wrong answers, they were getting frustrated.

Finally, the wicked men resorted to manipulating Samson's wife. *On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?" (v.15).* Notice that in their conversation they already considered Samson to be the husband of the Philistine wife. Being nice people the way there were, the guards threatened to kill the wife and burn her father's house. You will notice that the more a culture rejects God's truth, the more wicked they become, and they lose all sense of moral and ethical boundaries. When God's truth is rejected for relativism, there are no rules or boundaries that prohibit one person from rioting because they are unhappy and burning and looting the stores of innocent merchants.

The LORD used interpersonal conflict as the channel for judgment (vv.16-20). It was part of God's plan for Samson's “heifer” to manipulate him. She pressured Samson. *And Samson's wife wept*

over him and said, “You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is.” And he said to her, “Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?” (v.16). What husband can ignore a weeping wife? Her appeal was not logical, analytical, or even a forthright explanation of the facts. Her argument was not, “Samson, if you don’t reveal the answer to the riddle, these guys are going to kill me.” Instead of telling the truth, the wife made Samson look like a real heel. “You only hate me; you do not love me.” How so, sweetie? “You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is.” True, but Samson hadn’t told anyone.

A husband can stand only so much of that kind of pressure. In time, Samson crashed. *She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people* (v.17). Samson had to know what had happened with the guards. Therefore, he made the conscious decision to spill the beans knowing full well it meant he had to come up with thirty suits of clothes.

Well the wicked men “miraculously” discovered the answer to the riddle. *And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, “What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?” And he said to them, “If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle”* (v.18). Samson calling his wife a “heifer” is as bad as it sounds. There is no secret meaning in the Hebrew word. Obviously, he had no respect for the Philistine companions nor for his Philistine wife. It looks like his wife was at fault for prying the answer from him – and she was. It looks like the companions are at fault for threatening his wife – they were. But all these interpersonal conflicts and struggles were simply evidence of God doing His will.

Now that the time was right, circumstances arriving where God intended for them to arrive, the Spirit of the LORD took control of Samson. *And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him* (v.19a). It was time for God to gain vengeance on the God-rejecting Philistines. God gave somewhat ordinary Samson super-ordinary strength. The Holy Spirit caused Samson to kill thirty men and steal their garments. *And he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the*

riddle (v.19b). He marched twenty miles southwest to Ashkelon, one of the major Philistine cities. He killed thirty Philistines and took their garments and probably weapons. He gave the booty to the sneaky snakes in Timnah and went home – mad as a wet hornet.

Samson was angry and we can pretty much sympathize with him. *In hot anger he went back to his father’s house* (v.19c). The Philistine father compounded the conflict. *And Samson’s wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man* (v.20). The story was not over yet because God still had some judgment to pour out on the Philistines. The Philistine father did what one might expect. Maybe the daughter and best man were in love all along. Yes, but legally the daughter was Samson’s wife. God was also in charge of this foolish decision.

Often life looks like it is unraveling with people making foolish decisions, people getting angry, people offending people and all the rules seeming to melt away. And yet, we fail to see that God is the power orchestrating these things. The next time you feel like asking “What in the world is going on?”, stop to consider if God is not working out His will for His glory. We must not forget that God’s judgment against sin and sinners is also for His glory.